

GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL DIMENSIONS OF WESTERN SAHARA'S PROTRACTED DECOLONIZATION

When a Conflict Gets Old

Edited by

**Raquel Ojeda-García,
Irene Fernández-Molina,
and Victoria Veguilla**



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Raquel Ojeda-Garcia • Irene Fernández-Molina • Victoria Veguilla
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With this edited volume, we intend to publicize the results of our research in all its complexity, with rigour and consistency, aiming to contribute to fill in the gap that still exists in the academic literature on Western Sahara. Palgrave’s interest in our project also provided an opportunity to expand its thematic scope and our original team in order to include other internationally renowned experts. This represented a step further on previous collective publications in Spanish such as the 2013 special issue “Actores, procesos y políticas en el Sáhara Occidental” edited by Raquel Ojeda-García and Victoria Veguilla in the *Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas (RIPS)* and the book *Sáhara Occidental 40 años después* edited by Isaías Barreñada and Raquel Ojeda-García with Los Libros de la Catarata. We would like to thank the RIPS in particular for their generosity in granting us permission to republish in English a part of the special issue. On the other hand, the new multilevel analytical framework—going from the global to the local dimensions of the conflict—on which this book is based was streamlined in an international seminar that was hosted by the universities of Granada and Jaen in October 2015.

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Introduction: Towards a Multilevel Analysis of the Western Sahara Conflict and the Effects of its Protractedness

Irene Fernández-Molina

The Western Sahara conflict is getting old. Having turned 40, which is quite an advanced age for a conflict, it is increasingly showing signs of ageing—wrinkles, changes of shape and fatigue—alongside its still-apparent genetic inborn features. *Protractedness* seems to be ubiquitous in its usual portrayals: a late, zigzagging and protracted decolonization procedure that was reluctantly launched by dictatorial Spain in the 1970s degenerated into a protracted annexation of the territory by Morocco and a protracted conflict between the latter and the pro-Sahrawi independence Polisario Front, which in turn have entailed a protracted refugee situation¹ as well as a protracted conflict resolution process fruitlessly led by the international community for more than three decades. These efforts—which should more accurately be described as conflict management—have been epitomized by the United Nations (UN)’s Settlement Plan, which both Morocco and the Polisario Front accepted in 1991 along with a ceasefire declaration. Like the Oslo Peace Process for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this UN plan had the unfortunate fate of being

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“dismembered” “from comprehensive ‘agreement’ to a step-by-step process” (Mundy, this volume) and eventually failed to be implemented due to the parties’ insuperable disagreement regarding the electorate entitled to vote in the envisaged referendum for Sahrawi self-determination. After ill-advisedly attempting to find “technical solutions to resolve what were essentially political problems, which the [UN] Secretariat was unable or unwilling to address” (Theofilopoulou, this volume; Jensen 2012), in the early 2000s the UN put forward a series of “political solutions” combining a temporary autonomy formula (under Moroccan sovereignty) for the disputed territory and a referendum to determine its final status. Yet the so-called Baker Plans I and II, named after the UN Secretary-General’s personal envoy for Western Sahara James A. Baker III (1997–2004), also fell short of achieving the consent of both parties. The architecture of the UN peace brokering process virtually collapsed in 2007 when it became diluted into the new blurred approach of “negotiations without preconditions” (Theofilopoulou 2010), which lasts until today.

This book examines the actual traces of the passage of time on the Western Sahara conflict. This means that it is more concerned with aspects of conflict perpetuation (“what keeps the conflict going now”) than with the primordial conflict formation (“what started this conflict in the first place”) (Mitchell 2014: 27). An immediately arising question concerns the conflict’s *intractability*. If intractable conflicts are simply defined as “those which, irrespective of what kind of parties are involved or the social environment in which they occur, continue for a long time and resist efforts to resolve them” (Mitchell 2014: 60), then Western Sahara is definitely one of them (Joffé 2009). Three features concur in this regard: first, the original goal incompatibility between the parties is about a scarce material resource of a zero-sum nature, that is territory and sovereignty (Joffé 2010); second, this involves “goals and aspirations that are logically incompatible and nonsubstitutable”; and third, some of the latter goals have reached the point of “[concerning] the continued existence of one or both of the main adversaries” (Mitchell 2014: 63). Paradoxically enough, this is one of those “intractable asymmetric conflicts” that are “actually highly symmetric, at least in the salience that the adversaries attribute to the issues in conflict, as well as in the value that they assign to achieving their own goals by winning” (Mitchell 2014: 59). Moreover, its identity and existential dimensions appear to have gained prominence over time, which would have added a layer of incommensurability to the fundamental scarcity issue: “The battle for Western Sahara has rolled on, unresolved

for over forty years, because it is that very nature/quality of being [being Sahrawi] that has come to be contested by many voices. The trouble with time is that new voices appear in the geographies of the argument, each seeking to write or over-write themselves ‘within’ while the ‘original’ geographies fade from the record and memory” (Isidoros, this volume).

In any case, the focus of the book is not the never-ending debate on *why* this conflict has grown old behind the scenes, faced with the inadvertent neglect of the international community, but *how* specifically it has aged—ramifying on various scenes and geopolitical scales while conversely being impacted and reshaped by developments on each of them. A second caveat is that the object of study are the tangible dynamics and effects of the conflict’s durability that can be observed in agents and structures at different levels of analysis, rather than ethical and normative debates such as the one sparked by Jeremy Waldron’s (1992) thesis on the supersession of historic injustices. At the same time, a shared concern of the authors of this volume is to make an effort at *reflexivity*, which can be defined as the “researchers’ (and policy makers’) awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it” (Schierenbeck 2015: 1030).

A SPARSE AND UNEVEN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

The origins of this collective volume on the global, regional, state/national and local dimensions of the Western Sahara conflict lie in an international seminar that was hosted by the universities of Granada and Jaen in October 2015, as well as a previous special issue published in 2013 by the Spanish *Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas* (Ojeda-García and Veguilla 2013). The initiative to organize the seminar and edit these publications arose from some dissatisfaction with the state of the art in the scholarly analysis of this conflict. With some noteworthy recent exceptions (Zunes and Mundy 2010; Boukhars and Roussellier 2013; Barreñada and Ojeda-García 2016) and leaving aside highly valuable contributions from journalists (Hodges 1983; Bárbulo 2002; Shelley 2004), the academic literature dealing with this conflict has largely failed to do justice to all of its complexity and multidimensionality, as well as to make sense of the diachronic evolution entailed by its very longevity. This is to a significant extent the result of this literature being itself quantitatively limited and subject to a number of qualitative constraints and biases stemming from issues of sociology of knowledge. By and large, Western Sahara has long suffered from a marked lack of international interest at both political

and academic levels (Errazzouki 2013). Its peripheral position discourages research on it as being marginal and hardly publishable in leading academic outlets even under the remit of area studies. This has resulted in four observable trends in the available scholarship, namely a disciplinary concentration in the areas of anthropology and international law, a widespread inclination towards exceptionalism in accounts of the conflict, the limitation of a large number of publications to Spanish-language audiences and the predominance of normative and legalistic approaches over empirical socio-political analyses.

In the first place, the observation of the academic marginality of the Western Sahara issue needs to be qualified by distinguishing between disciplines. In actual fact, this conflict has enjoyed significant attention if not predilection in the field of international law, especially in Spain (Soroeta Licerias 2014; Ponce de León et al. 2012; Ruiz Miguel 1995), and not least the study of Saharan tribalism and Sahrawi refugees are deemed to be even overcrowded by anthropologists (Caro Baroja 1955; Caratini 1989, 2003; López Bargados 2003; Naïmi 2004, 2013; Campbell 2010; Wilson 2010, 2014; Boulay 2015, 2016; Isidoros 2015; Gimeno Martín 2016).² Anthropology and international law make an odd disciplinary couple, with each of them arguably standing at opposite ends of the continuum between the localized micro-level subjectivity of everyday human life and exogenous top-down legal objectification. Yet both have addressed the old and intricate question of who/what are the “Sahrawi” and somehow fed each other insofar as the international legal emphasis on Sahrawi “autochthony”—since the 1975 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice—has drawn on the anthropological concept of “kinship” (*asaba*) (Isidoros, this volume). An immediate remark is that there remains an essentially *political* gap to be bridged between anthropology and international law in analysing this conflict, all the more so if, as claimed by Konstantina Isidoros and Isaías Barreñada in this book, the major identity boundary currently demarcating who is viewed as a Sahrawi in the context of the Sahrawi nationalist camp lies in support for self-determination as a political project, “regardless of where they live and how it affects them” (Barreñada, this volume).

Secondly, the academic—just as the political—discussion of the Western Sahara conflict has tended to depict all phenomena surrounding it in quite particularistic terms. Assuredly, arguments in favour of the uniqueness or anomaly of this case are not in short supply. Chief among them are the cliché that describes Western Sahara as Africa’s “last colony” and the footnote that distinguishes it as the only odd territory on the UN list of non-self-governing territories that lacks an uncontested administering power—as

Spain has purported to be exempt from any international responsibility in this regard since 1976.³ Similarly exceptional are the old-fashioned mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which lacks a human rights component unlike most of the UN peace-keeping operations of the post-Cold War era (Capella Soler 2011; Khakee 2014), and the European Union (EU)'s longstanding non-involvement and backseat role in this issue, which stands in stark contrast to its attempts to contribute to the resolution of other protracted conflicts in its southern and eastern neighbourhoods (Vaquer 2004; Fernández-Molina 2016). This is not to mention the widespread discourse on the uniqueness of Sahrawi refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 1–2) and the actual exceptionality of the Tindouf camps in terms of self-management and limited control by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011b: 9), which would add to the inherent “state of exception” (Agamben 2005) or political and legal no man’s land that characterizes all refugee situations and refugee camps throughout the world. This being said, it is unclear whether the fixation with exceptionalism has benefitted our knowledge and understanding of the Western Sahara conflict, or has rather contributed to isolating its analysis from the wider literature in conflict studies, forced migration studies and many other disciplines. One of the contentions in this book is that more comparative analyses would help overcome a somewhat blinding idiosyncratic bias.

Thirdly, the overall international academic neglect of this conflict, coupled with post-colonial linkages and sympathy, has confined a significant part of the extant publications within the limits of the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking audiences (see Hernández Moreno 2007). The academic literature in English, French and Arabic has been sparse and, most problematically, all of the linguistic clusters have often worked as hermetic compartments, with authors tending to read and reference works mainly in their own working language. Fourthly, due to the longstanding predominance of legal studies within Spanish social sciences as well as well-meaning normative concern about the injustices inflicted upon the Sahrawi people, the “Spanish bias” has come hand in hand with a legal and prescriptive bias in the study of the conflict. This would not be a problem itself if it were not for the gaps it has created over the years in the knowledge of (in David Hume’s terms) *what is* as opposed *what ought to be* in the context of this issue. Moreover, the ever-repeated argument that “the conflict of Western Sahara is a classic example of the conflict between the logic of power or realpolitik and international law, which includes the right to

self-determination” (Omar 2008: 56) has crystallized in a neat dichotomy of international law vs. politics, which does not reflect a far more complex reality. Among other things, as argued by Anna Theofilopoulou in this volume, “those who espouse the legal argument either ignore or are ignorant of how the Settlement Plan came into being, how it was negotiated and the geopolitical dynamics surrounding the conflict”.

In addition, besides the aforementioned factors relating to the sociology of knowledge, attempts to understand and explain what was/is effectively happening out there in the Western Sahara conflict have recurrently encountered the obstacle of the high politicization of conflicting accounts and narratives, including many academic analyses (for a recent useful pro-Sahrawi collective publication, see Véricel 2015). Although the voluntary or involuntary involvement of scholars in the battlefield seems hardly exceptional in the realm of conflict studies, in this case the lack of a critical mass of research and researchers increases the risk of “creating a vicious academic combat zone” (Isidoros, this volume). In connection to this, the researchers’ access to the field in the two main local scenes of the conflict—the Western Sahara territory annexed by Morocco and the Sahrawi refugee camps ruled by the Polisario Front near Tindouf, Algeria—has often been hampered by the corresponding governing authorities or shaped by reliance on specific networks of interlocutors. On the one hand, visits to the territory under Moroccan control and particularly to the capital El Ayun by most foreign observers remain carefully administered and ostensibly, intimidatingly watched by the Moroccan security services. This makes long-term fieldwork virtually “impossible” (Zunes and Mundy 2010: xxxiii), subjects empirical research on the ground to a constraining semiclandestinity and limits the time scope to short stays under the permanent threat of expulsion. Contacts with the local population are in equal parts marked by suspicion and eagerness to meet the stranger—especially by pro-independence Sahrawi activists (Fernández-Molina 2015a: 237)—which might somewhat bias the findings. A noteworthy exception in this regard is the extensive intermittent field research carried out by Victoria Veguilla in the Western Saharan city of Dakhla from 2001 to the present (Veguilla 2011a). Constraints in this particular case were of a different kind: access to the field over the years was contingent upon not addressing every topic and not interviewing all the actors. On the other hand, the Tindouf refugee camps have traditionally been more open to outsiders, from non-governmental organization (NGO) workers and activists to academics and journalists, yet priority has been granted to “practice-oriented, rather than research-oriented, visits” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 34).

Justifiably or not, the issuing of official invitation letters from the Polisario Front required to obtain an Algerian visa has often been linked to assessments of the visitors' actual or potential contribution to the "cause" of Sahrawi nationalism (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014: 34–35).

One final bias that is admittedly present in this very book and deserves some unpacking is the "conflict bias" involved in construing and labelling the phenomena under study as a conflict. This assumption can be problematized particularly as one of the parties, Morocco, has always preferred to tone down the wording and talk about the "Sahara issue" or "question" (under the influence of the French language), thus trying to normalize the country's long annexation of the disputed territory. Also, full-blown armed conflict or war has been objectively absent since at least the early 1990s in both qualitative (ceasefire) and quantitative (level of battle-related fatalities) terms. Thus a relevant question arises: "What sort of a conflict do we have either when one party denies that a conflict actually exists or when both disagree over whether the issues have been properly defined or characterized? Who defines/decides whether there actually is a conflict? One of the parties? All of the parties? Third-party outsiders?" (Mitchell 2014: 25). When it comes to empirical research, it can be at times appropriate and even more productive to analytically push the "conflict" framing into the background when studying some of the political dynamics occurring in Western Sahara—especially at the local level and in connection to the Moroccan governance of the territory.⁴

All in all, this (self-)critical appraisal of the academic literature is not to diminish the significance of existing works on the Western Sahara conflict but quite the opposite. In spite of all of the aforementioned difficulties, four-five strands of scholarship have developed and settled in English, French and Spanish, each of them largely focusing on a different level of analysis. The first includes historical, military and journalistic accounts of the origins of the conflict. Most of these works underscore the conflict's national and bilateral nature by depicting it as the result of Western Sahara's unachieved decolonization and self-determination process as well as a confrontation for sovereignty between the Polisario Front and Morocco (López and de la Lama 1975; Criado 1977; Vilar 1977; Gaudio 1978; Villar 1982; Barbier 1982; Hodges 1983; Bontems 1984; Lawless and Monahan 1986; Diego Aguirre 1988, 1991; De Piniés 1990; Pazzanita 1994; Hernández Moreno 2001, 2006; Bárbulo 2002; Shelley 2004; Barona Castañeda 2004; for the pre-colonial and colonial history of Western Sahara, see Hernández Moreno 1989; Martínez Milán

2003; Pazzanita 2006; Correale and Gimeno Martín 2015). Secondly, authors concerned with the global level of analysis have examined the involvement of the super powers and especially the United States of America (USA) during the Cold War, post-Cold War and War on Terror eras (Zoubir and Volman 1993; Zunes 1998; Mundy 2006; Darbouche and Zoubir 2008; De Orellana 2015), the vicissitudes of UN attempts at conflict resolution since the late 1980s (Zoubir and Pazzanita 1995; De Froberville 1996; De Saint-Maurice 2000; Dunbar 2000; Mohsen-Finan 2002; Callies de Salies 2003; Pointier 2004; Solà-Martín 2007; Mundy 2007b; Souaré 2007; Fisas 2011; Jensen 2012; Theofilopoulou 2006, 2007, 2010, 2013), the limited involvement of the EU and EU member states throughout these decades (Vaquer 2004; Gillespie 2004, 2010; Benabdallah 2009; Darbouche and Colombo 2011; Riquelme Cortado and Andrés Sáenz de Santa María 2012; Smith 2013; Torrejón Rodríguez 2014; Fernández-Molina 2016; for the case of Spain, see Ruiz Miguel 1995; López García 1999; Vaquer 2007) and the increasingly politicized legal issue of Morocco's international trading in Western Sahara's natural resources (Shelley 2006; Trasmontes 2014; White 2015; Zunes 2015). A third group of scholars has prioritized the regional dimension, discussing the extent to which this conflict has historically resulted from or been fuelled by competition between Morocco and Algeria for regional hegemony in the Maghreb (Damis 1983; Berramdane 1992; Mohsen-Finan 1997; Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier 2004; International Crisis Group 2007a, b; Mundy 2010; Martinez 2011; Ammour 2012) as well as its actual or potential connections with growing instability and security threats in the Sahara-Sahel area since the turn of the millennium (Mohsen-Finan 2010; Wehrey and Boukhars 2013).

Fourthly, more grounded research on socio-political developments witnessed in both the Moroccan-controlled territory and the Tindouf refugee camps has straddled between the state/national and local levels of analysis. This is particularly clear in the former case, where studies have addressed, on the one hand, the “carrots” and “sticks” of the Moroccan state's governance of Western Sahara, that is, public policies, decentralization and autonomy initiatives (Veguilla 2004, 2009a, 2011a, b; Sater 2008; Hernando de Larramendi 2010; Desrues and Hernando de Larramendi 2011; El-Maslouhi 2011; Khakee 2011; López García 2011; Vloeberghs 2011; Theofilopoulou 2012; Ottaway 2013; Boukhars 2013; Mohsen-Finan 2015) as well as “settlement” policies, repression and human rights violations (Mundy 2012; Mundy and Zunes 2015; Martín Beristain and

González Hidalgo 2012). On the other hand, a still-budding literature focuses on Sahrawi youth, civil society, social movements, protests and nonviolent resistance (Smith 2005; Stephan and Mundy 2006; Brouksy 2008a, b, 2015; Veguilla 2009b; Barreñada 2012; Gómez Martín 2012; Boukhars 2012; Gimeno 2013; Dann 2014; Mundy and Zunes 2014; Deubel 2015; Fernández-Molina 2015a; Porges and Leuprecht 2016). Meanwhile, the analytical distinction between the “contested” state/national level (Geldenhuis 2009) embodied by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (RASD, for its French/Spanish acronym) and properly “local” or grassroots dynamics is more blurred when it comes to an exceptional spatial and political setting such as the Tindouf refugee camps. The number of publications showcasing fieldwork conducted there has not been scarce (San Martín 2005, 2010; Mundy 2007a; Caratini 2007a, b; Gómez Martín and Omet 2009; Wilson 2010, 2014; Campbell 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). This literature links up with some significant contributions from the disciplines of refugee and forced migration studies (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2005; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009, 2010, 2011a, b, 2012) and migration and diaspora studies (Gómez Martín 2011; Wilson 2014). In addition, these strands of literature are complemented by some insightful publications by geographers who emphasize the multiplaceness and moving socio-spatial borders of the Western Sahara conflict and its actors (Dedenis 2006, 2011; Bennafla 2013).

On a different note, Moroccan scholarship on this issue has grown abundantly over the last two decades and can be divided into three categories, which show dissimilar degrees of independence from official guidelines and discourse, namely more sophisticated academic works that engage with the literature and various theoretical debates in political science and international relations (Messari 2001; Maghraoui 2003; Daadaoui 2008; Benmessaoud Tredano 2011b; El-Maslouhi 2011; Zouitni 2012; Rahimi 2014; El Houdaigui 2015); sociological and anthropological studies that make interesting empirical contributions but end up shoring up the official arguments on the conflict (Naïmi 2004, 2013; Cherkaoui 2007); and timely publications that explicitly follow and acclaim flagship Moroccan policies and chiefly the 2007 Autonomy Plan (El Ouali 2007, 2010, 2012; El Messaoudi and Bouabid 2008; Benmessaoud Tredano 2011a) to the extent of arguably forming part of Morocco’s public diplomacy (Fernández-Molina 2015b: 64). The bottom line is that, in spite of some academics pushing the limits of public debate on the “national question”, “the Moroccan equivalent of Israel’s ‘new historians’ have yet to emerge” (Mundy 2014: 654).

LOST IN CONFLICT CLASSIFICATIONS

Building on more multidimensional or multilayered studies such as those by Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy (2010) and Anouar Boukhars and Jacques Roussellier (2013), the intended contribution of this book lies, in the first place, in bringing together these four levels of analysis: global, regional, state/national and local. The aim is to make headway in disentangling the dynamic interplay between all of them or, in other words, examining change and continuity in the Western Sahara conflict through multilevel lenses. The time frame primarily addressed is the almost two decades elapsed since the turn of the millennium, when it can be argued that a gradual “spatial and scalar shift” or “inward turn” has brought the centre of gravity or locus of the conflict back *inwards*, to the interior of the disputed territory where it originated in the 1970s, and added new dimensions to it (Fernández-Molina 2015b: 46–47; Gillespie 2011). Such evolution can be described as dialectical change, as novelties have not led to a replacement of the original decolonization and sovereignty nature of the dispute but have resulted in growing complexity and contradictions. In terms of levels of analysis, the drivers of change appear to have been located mostly at the local level. While the situation within the diplomatic sphere and the internationally led conflict resolution process seemed to stall or freeze, dynamics occurring within the Western Sahara territory under Moroccan control became more and more prominent. Local protests and resistance by hitherto unnoticed “internal” Sahrawi pro-independence activists (based inside this disputed territory) quantitatively and qualitatively blossomed from 1999 onwards (Barreñada 2012; Smith 2005), achieving a considerable impact on both the global level and the Moroccan state/national level. In the context of the Sahrawi party or national movement considered in its entirety, this was to entail a gradual yet profound strategic reorientation from the old approach “based on armed struggle and diplomacy conducted by the Polisario, to one based on civilian-led nonviolent resistance led by Sahrawis living inside the occupied territory [...]” (Stephan and Mundy 2006: 2). In other words, change did not stem from the state/national level embodied by the RASD and the Polisario Front, but the latter understood the need to capitalize on it by recognizing the aforementioned activists and increasing contacts with them.

Furthermore, this “inward turn” of the conflict also represented an opportunity for the Sahrawi nationalists to recover some of their standing at the global level. It crystallized into new international strategies based on the combination of a “low politics” strategy (in terms of content)

with parliamentary and judicial channels (in terms of means) (Fernández-Molina 2016). This low politics strategy has focused on two secondary issues that were not central to the UN Settlement Plan but contribute to internationally questioning and delegitimizing the Moroccan annexation of the Western Sahara territory, that is, Morocco's human rights violations and the economic exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara. The main goal of the internationalization of the human rights issue has been to secure the extension of MINURSO's mandate to human rights monitoring in both the disputed territory and the Tindouf refugee camps (Capella Soler 2011; Khakee 2014). While eventually never achieved, this demand became the main bone of contention in UN Security Council debates on Western Sahara from 2009 to 2015 and provoked unprecedented diplomatic crises between Morocco, on the one hand, and the UN and the USA, on the other, in 2012–2013 and 2016 (Fernández-Molina 2013; Mohsen-Finan 2015; Theofilopoulou 2016). However, some of the authors in this book consider that this Sahrawi approach has been ultimately ineffective for its promoters: "While framing the problem of Western Sahara in the apolitical terms of human rights has won Western Saharan nationalists new sympathy and some diplomatic victories, it has failed to destabilize the fundamental geopolitical architecture underwriting the conflict" (Mundy, this volume). "This has only resulted in diverting the [UN Security] Council's attention from its main task of pressing the parties to work on a solution to the conflict, without meeting the Polisario Front's demand" (Theofilopoulou, this volume).

Meanwhile, the international questioning of the legality of Morocco's trading in Western Sahara's natural resources (fisheries, phosphate and oil) gained momentum after 2002 following an opinion issued by UN legal counsel Hans Corell on contracts signed by Morocco and foreign companies to explore mineral resources in the territory (Boukhars and Roussellier 2013: 244–245). The main target of this Sahrawi strategy has been the EU and its bilateral economic cooperation agreements with Morocco, all of which fail to differentiate between economic activities conducted in, and products originating from, Morocco proper and the Western Sahara territory. Some substantial achievements have been made in this regard through parliamentary channels—the European Parliament's rejection of the protocol of extension of the 2006 EU-Morocco fisheries agreement in December 2011 (Smith 2013)—and through judicial channels—the European Court of Justice's (non-final) ruling annulling the EU-Morocco agricultural trade agreement (as far as its implementation in Western Sahara is concerned) in December 2015. These strategic shifts of the Sahrawi

party demonstrate how changes of conflict dynamics at the local level have had significant effects on the global level, which have in turn sometimes contributed to reinforce the former following a circular logic.

Coming back to the core of the conflict, it is also worth considering the extent and the implications of this “inward turn” and relative reframing of the agency and issues at stake between the parties. While it is widely acknowledged that a transformation has occurred in the “socio-spatial form of the conflict” (Bank and Van Heur 2007), that is, in the way it is construed and constructed by actors from both sides as well as outsiders, the existence of more fundamental changes affecting the very nature or essence of the conflict remains unclear. Do these signs of internalization involve a *de facto* shift from what was once a typical decolonizing war of national liberation or an extra-systemic war to something more akin to an identity/secession conflict devoid of the armed confrontation component? While the former are defined by the conflict analysis literature as armed conflicts pitting a sovereign territorial state against a political entity displaying some state features but limited international recognition—in this case the RASD—the latter would be carried out by identity or communal groups, “often with the purpose of secession or separation from the state” (Holsti 1996: 21; Singer 1996: 43, 47). In other words, in identity/secession conflicts, the main dispute or goal incompatibility would revolve around “the relative status of communities or ‘communal groups’, however defined, in relation to the state”, including “struggles for access, for autonomy, for secession or for control” (Ramsbotham et al. 2011: 76).

Curiously enough, a quick look at the most well-known international conflict databases in search of some comparative insights reinforces the idea that Western Sahara is somewhat lost in classifications. First of all, Western Sahara does not currently qualify as a war or armed conflict in any of them, since it no longer meets the definitional requirements of sustained combat involving organized armed forces and resulting in a minimum of 1000 battle-related deaths per year (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). In addition, a serious discrepancy can be observed between Correlates of War, which categorizes this conflict as an “extra-state war” that lasted from 1975 to 1983, and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) Armed Conflict Database, which considers it an “internal armed conflict” running from 1975 to 1989. For Correlates of War, the Western Sahara conflict was an “extra-state war” because it pitted a state or member of the inter-state system (Morocco) against the armed forces of a non-state entity outside the borders of that state (Polisario). It was also an “imperial war” rather than a “colonial war” as the relationship

between the parties was not one of colonial power vs. colony. The outcome of the war in 1983, when Morocco consolidated its military control over the annexed territory and the intensity of armed combat substantially decreased, was that the conflict continued at below-war level of fatalities.⁵ By contrast, the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset assumes that Western Sahara was an “internal armed conflict” between the government of a state (Morocco) and an internal opposition group or “guerrilla organisation” (Polisario) without intervention from other states—except for one year, 1976, when it was an “internationalized internal armed conflict” due to Algeria’s overt involvement.⁶ The situation over the last three decades is summarized as follows: “As no activity reaching the level of an armed conflict has taken place since 1989, the conflict remains terminated as of that year. However, the basic incompatibility between the parties—the status of the territory of Western Sahara—remains unresolved”.⁷

It is beyond doubt that the conceptual neatness of conflict classifications and databases is “less justifiable when one comes to deal with conflicts in the real world, which are invariably much messier than those that appear in the pages of books” (Mitchell 2014: 32). However, these inconsistencies about the nature of the Western Sahara conflict further illustrate that, beyond the letter of the law, the dilemma about it being international or internal is far from new. This is a sensitive line of reasoning since no classification or labelling is politically neutral. The political problem with describing Western Sahara as an identity/secession conflict is that it departs from the premises of international law, for which the original decolonization component of this dispute remains the touchstone, and it strikes a chord with Moroccan positions. On the other hand, this approach might be useful in analytical terms in order to better grasp the evolution of Moroccan governance of and socio-political dynamics in Western Sahara territory. At any rate, for some of the authors in this volume, these relative changes in the shape of the conflict are nothing but the inevitable effects of its very longevity and ageing.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS ARE INTERCONNECTED... AND CONTESTED

Another necessary caveat and point for discussion regarding the purpose of this book is that the scale and levels of analysis of the Western Sahara conflict are also a matter of contention. Any labelling the issue—as a decolonization/sovereignty dispute, a regional conflict or a peripheral Cold War East-West confrontation—is politically loaded and controversial. From

the former two descriptions, placing the emphasis on the decolonization component is generally understood as stemming from an essentially “pro-Sahrawi” perspective, while giving prominence to the regional dimension—and Algeria’s involvement—has often (simplistically?) been read as a “pro-Moroccan” position that underrates and undermines Sahrawi agency. This politicization is in line with the increasingly generalized understanding that in conflicts like this, “geographic scale is no longer pre-given or simply a conceptual tool, but [...] it is actively appropriated by social actors as part of their arguments and their practice in order to persuade others” (Bank and Van Heur 2007: 595–596). In other words, it is possible to observe the “promotion of specific scalar imaginations at the expense of others” and dynamic transformations in the “socio-spatial form of the conflict”, which usually involve changes in the geometry of social power (Bank and Van Heur 2007: 596–597). Besides the aforementioned “inward turn” of the Western Sahara conflict, the recent construction of a merging Maghreb-Sahel regional security complex (Martinez and Boserup, this volume) is a good example of this.

That being said, one of the central endeavours of this book in terms of levels of analysis is a call to localize the study of and research into the Western Sahara conflict. This is in line with the “local turn” that has become widespread over the last decade in the works of conflict and peace scholars and practitioners. The “local” has been rediscovered as a reaction to the shortcomings and failures of the top-down and one-size-fits-all toolbox of the post-Cold War international liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The common denominator among the “local turn” advocates is an emphasis on the bottom-up potential for “peace from below”, as well as the need to recognize and empower local agents as primary architects and owners of peace, as authors and not recipients in peacebuilding. On this basis, the “local” has been incorporated into both the mainstream problem-solving discourse of international institutions—which recommends enhancing local governance and ownership in order to increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of what are ultimately externally driven peacebuilding operations—and more critical or transformative analyses—which aim at genuine emancipation and inclusion of local agency (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015).

The latter “critical localism” (Mac Ginty 2015) propounds a reflexive and cautious use of what admittedly remains an unspecified, elusive and contested notion, and is in line with the scepticism about the “local” maintained by some of the authors in this book.⁸ The pitfalls of which

academics and practitioners need to be aware include, in the first place, that of romanticizing, essentializing or homogenizing the “local”. Underrating or obscuring the fact that “local communities are often sites of heterogeneity, change, dissent and agency” (Mac Ginty 2015: 847) amounts to a form of depoliticization: “To the extent that ‘the local’ is plural, dynamic and contested, it must also be political” (Hughes et al. 2015: 821). As a result, questions need to be raised as to “Who controls wealth and power distribution locally? Who gets to decide what is local and what is not? Who speaks for local culture or local community? Who determines who is an outsider and who is an insider?” (Hughes et al. 2015: 821). A second shortcut to be avoided is a static and binary understanding of the “local” as opposed to the “international” (Paffenholz 2015; Kappler 2015), which is far from reflecting any contemporary reality. As an alternative, some propose a sort of de-territorialization of the concept of the “local” by approaching it in terms of “activity, networks and relationships” (Mac Ginty 2015: 840), which cut across various levels of analysis. Meeting the challenge of empirical substantiation and accumulation is also key to deconstructing such false dichotomies. All in all, the conclusion of critical localists is that “the local does not offer a solution, but a range of opportunities to think differently about the relationship between power, agency and freedom” (Hughes et al. 2015: 818–819).

Some insights from this “local turn” approach seem relevant to a multilayered analysis of the Western Sahara conflict, which would counter the fact that it often continues to be discussed as a sort of delocalized issue. Much of the existing international law and normative literature conveys a “sense of placelessness” (Mac Ginty 2015: 843), while usual accounts of international UN-led negotiations are imbued with a Cold War mindset in which peacemaking remains depicted as a national and international affair, “a preserve of diplomats and state machinery” (Mac Ginty 2015: 844). The “local” is notably absent. Of the aforementioned scholarly literature on this conflict, studies on local developments in the Tindouf refugee camps and the Moroccan-controlled territory remain by far the thinnest. It is also about the local level of analysis that international policy-makers know the least, as reminded by the UN Secretary-General in his 2012 report on Western Sahara: “[...] It [is] vital for the UN and the international community as a whole to have access to reliable, independent information on developments in both Western Sahara and the refugee camps in order to consider how best to promote a settlement”.⁹

The main aim and common thread connecting the empirical contributions of the authors of this book is to provide a multilevel analysis of the Western Sahara conflict by examining issues and actors located on its concentric or overlapping global, regional, state/national and local scenes, and searching, whenever possible, for cross-level interactions. This analytical framework is reminiscent of the levels-of-analysis approach developed by Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff (2009) for the study of ethnic conflicts (Table 1.1) (see also Taras and Ganguly 2006). Cross-level interactions are broadly defined here as causality links of any kind between agents, structures, events or processes located at different levels of analysis. The subsequent chapters do not purport to be exhaustive in this regard; only a few of all of the possible cross-level interactions are addressed (Table 1.2).

In the first part of the book, and by way of introduction to the global level of analysis, Anna Theofilopoulou offers a practitioner's perspective on the limitations of UN conflict resolution mechanisms within the strait-jacket constituted by the great powers' self-interested preferences and

Table 1.1 Levels-of-analysis approach by Cordell and Wolff

<i>Level</i>	<i>State structures and actors</i>	<i>Non-state structures and actors</i>
Local/ substate	Local elites/leaders, authorities and representatives of the central government, established institutional arrangements and socio-economic structures	Locally resident communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders and locally operating NGOs, rebel forces, private-sector interest groups and criminals
State/ national	National elites/leaders, central government, established institutional arrangements and socio-economic structures	Communities/ethnic groups/religious groups and their elites/leaders and statewide-operating NGOs, rebel forces, private-sector interest groups and criminals
Regional	Neighbouring states and their institutions, regional powers and regional international organizations, as well as their respective elites/leaders; established structures of political and economic cooperation	Cross-border/transnational networks (ethnic, religious, civil society, business, organized crime, rebel groups and so on) and their elites/leaders
Global	Powerful states and international organizations of global reach and their elites/leaders	International NGOs, diaspora groups, international organized crime networks and transnational corporations, as well as their respective elites/leaders

Source: Cordell and Wolff (2009: 10)

Table 1.2 Cross-level interactions in the Western Sahara conflict

		<i>Agents/causes</i>			
Recipients/ consequences	Local level 1: Western Sahara territory	Local level 2: <i>Tindouf</i> refugee camps		State/national level 1: <i>State/national level 2:</i> RASD	Global level
		Western Sahara territory	Morocco		
Local level 1: Western Sahara territory	X	Family/kinship bonds, communication and visits, civil society connections, defamation of "returnees"	Moroccan governance and public policies, socio-economic investments, recognition measures, settlement policies, repression and human rights violations	Official support for "internal" pro-independence civil society organizations, RASD Ministry for Occupied Zones, inclusion in Polisario General Congress and elections, RASD TV	"Arab Spring" framing of "internal" Sahrawi protests
			Internet and media propaganda, encouragement of dissent and "return" administration of foreign aid, elections, threats of a return to armed struggle	Algeria's hosting and protection of refugee camps, impact of Maghreb-Sahel security/instability on securitization of camps, kidnapping of foreign aid workers	International civil society and US human rights initiatives, visits by foreign observers/supporters
Local level 2: Tindouf refugee camps	Family/kinship bonds, communication and visits, civil society connections, official visits by "internal" Sahrawi activists to camps				EU/European humanitarian aid, limited role of UNHCR, support by international civil society, foreign visits to camps

(continued)

Table 1.2 (continued)

<i>Agents/causes</i>				
	<i>Local level 1: Western Sahara territory</i>	<i>Local level 2: Tindouf refugee camps</i>	<i>State/national level 1: State/national level 2: Morocco RASD</i>	<i>Regional levels Global level</i>
State/ national level 1: Morocco	Participation in Moroccan institutions, elections, parliament and consultative councils, responses to Moroccan public policies and recognition measures, socio-economic and nationalist protests, instrumental usages of Sahrawi identity		X	Diplomatic interaction/negotiations, internet and media propaganda, threats of a return to armed struggle Escalation and de-escalation of Algerian-Moroccan tensions, opportunities created by Maghreb-Sahel security instability Expectations of Moroccan security cooperation in the War on Terror, post-Arab Spring expectations of political reform and liberalization

State/ national level 2: RASD	Participation by “internal” activists in Polisario General Congress and elections	Participation in RASD institutions and elections, responses to RASD governance of camps, protests and dissent, demands of a return to armed struggle	Diplomatic interaction/ negotiations, internet and media propaganda	X	Algeria’s material and diplomatic backing for RASD	Expectations of democratization, prevention of radicalization/ terrorism and accountability about the administration of humanitarian aid
Regional levels			Moroccan foreign policy and parallel diplomacy in Sahel	Role of RASD/ Polisario Front in regional security	X	US counterterrorist policies in Sahel, international military interventions in Libya and Mali X
Global level	Nonviolent resistance, “low politics” international strategy (human rights and natural resources)	Threats of a return to armed struggle	Moroccan foreign policy, diplomatic crises with UN, USA, EU, etc., lobbying, parallel and public diplomacy, propaganda	“Democratization” of RASD and elections, discourse on gender equality and religious freedom, “low politics” international strategy (human rights and natural resources), parliamentary and judicial strategies, threats of a return to armed struggle		

approaches. Jacob Mundy argues that the global structure of US hegemony has invariably shaped the Western Sahara conflict and the strategies of all the actors involved since the late Cold War until today. For example, Sahrawi responses to this global-level constraint include the RASD's efforts to showcase the "democratization" of the political structures in the Tindouf refugee camps and the new strategies of Sahrawi activism emphasizing nonviolent resistance and human rights issues in the territory controlled by Morocco. María Luisa Grande and Susana Ruiz highlight some of the particular features and inter-institutional inconsistencies observable in the EU's inhibition and limited engagement with the Western Sahara issue, which appear to be quite exceptional in the context of the rise and fall of the EU's ambitions about promoting security and preventing and solving conflicts in its neighbourhood.

The regional levels examined in the second part of the book are plural and comprise both the horizontal geopolitical scene of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), or the Arab world, and the vertical scene consisting of a merging Maghreb-Sahel regional security complex, where Western Sahara and the Sahrawis seem to be some sort of missing link. Inmaculada Szmolka assesses the appropriateness and the implications of the Arab Spring regional framing imposed *a posteriori* on the Sahrawi protests that took place in Gdeim Izik, El Ayun, in October–November 2010 (Errazzouki 2012; see also Wilson 2013; Fernández-Molina 2015a), as well as the consequences of the reforms launched by the Moroccan state in 2011 as part of the "fifth wave of political change" in the MENA on both the Moroccan state/national and local level of the conflict. Laurence Thieux addresses the Maghreb scene, where the Western Sahara conflict has often been traditionally located by many scholars. She discusses the domestic and external determinants of the role of Algeria as Morocco's rival in the competition for regional hegemony, as the lifeline for the Polisario Front and the host country for the Sahrawi refugee camps, and even as a full-blown party to the conflict for those who argue, in keeping with Rabat's argument, that this is a fundamentally Algerian-Moroccan dispute. Luis Martínez and Rasmus Boserup analyse the reshaping of regional security and the growing prominence of the north-south Maghreb-Sahel axis in the eyes of the international community in the context of the War on Terror and the post-2011 instability. Miguel García Guindo and Alberto Bueno address the tricky situation and dilemmas facing the RASD/Polisario Front due to these new forms of securitization of the region. Moroccan diplomacy and propaganda have tried to seize the opportunity

since the early 2000s by promoting a new securitizing discourse about the alleged transnational terrorist and/or criminal connections (or potential risk thereof) of the Polisario Front, the “threat of ungoverned spaces” and the War on Terror’s framing of the Western Sahara conflict, thus “globalizing the local conflict against Polisario” (De Orellana 2015: 489, 479). The terrorist kidnapping of foreign aid workers from the refugee camps in October 2011 was a particularly critical juncture for the Sahrawi leadership’s management of these sensitive cross-level interactions.

The third part of the book is devoted to the state/national-level analysis of the Moroccan governance of the Western Sahara territory as well as its consequences at the local level. Raquel Ojeda-García and Ángela Suárez-Collado discuss the place and role of Morocco’s 2010–2011 Advanced Regionalization Reform in relation to this conflict, as an intended means to boost the legitimacy of—if not fully legalize—the annexation of Western Sahara as well as to reinforce the credibility of the 2007 Autonomy Plan on both global and local levels. María Angustias Parejo and Laura Feliu disentangle the intricacies of the activities of the members of the Moroccan parliament representing Western Saharan constituencies in the sphere of parliamentary diplomacy and the way these global-level tasks interact with the changing identity substratum of the conflict, based on these MPs’ own identity self-descriptions. Victoria Veguilla explains how Moroccan public policies towards Western Sahara such as elections and housing face the challenge of adjusting to the deep socio-demographic transformations provoked by sustained northerner “immigration”—or “settlement”—in the territory while preserving local stability and formally living up to the international legal standards, which privilege “autochthony” in the management of local resources.

Finally, the fourth part of the book offers the most grounded and localized insights about the Sahrawi resistance and identity in both the Western Sahara territory and the Tindouf camps. Claudia Barona and Joseph Dickens-Gavito provide a historical account of the development of Sahrawi civil society and protests in the territory annexed by Morocco. Isaías Barreñada discusses the transborder ethnic and identity dimension that has always underlain the conflict, overlapping—yet not full corresponding to—the territorial issue. His chapter sheds light on the scarcely explored grey zone of the nationalist activism of ethnic Sahrawis from southern Morocco who have mobilized hand in hand with their counterparts from the disputed territory despite falling outside the colonial territorial demarcation of Western Sahara and the electorate for an eventual

self-determination referendum, all of which poses challenges for both the Moroccan state and the Sahrawi nationalist movement.

Konstantina Isidoros explores the relationship between the extraordinary resilience of the Sahrawi refugee population and local understandings of “autochthony” and kinship, particularly by women refugees living in the Tindouf camps, also drawing contrasts with the exogenous and top-down categorizations of international law. Finally, Alice Wilson examines the particular features of the “work of elections” on which the Polisario Front and RASD leadership have expended considerable energy—in spite of the lack of multipartyism and free elections in the liberal democratic sense—as well as its effects at the Sahrawi state/national level (forging a transterritorial “national” imagined political community encompassing the refugee camps, the Moroccan-controlled territory and the diaspora), the global level (enabling Sahrawi parliamentary diplomacy) and the local level (creating “cultural and moral events” in the camps).

NOTES

1. Protracted refugee situations are defined as those involving a refugee population of 25,000 persons or more originating from the same country who have been in exile and seeking asylum for five or more years in another country, most usually a developing country. Sahrawi refugees in Algeria represent one of the world’s oldest protracted refugee situations after those of the Palestinian refugees (outside the mandate of the UNHCR) and the 1972 Burundian refugees in Tanzania.
2. Remark made by Alice Wilson during the seminar in Granada/Jaen. The predominance of anthropologists was also visible in the international conference “La question (irrésolue) du Sahara Occidental: quels enjeux pour quelles recherches en sciences humaines et sociales?” organized at the Sorbonne University, Paris, in June 2016 to inventory existing social science research on this subject.
3. See <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/nonselfgovterritories.shtml>
4. Remark made by Victoria Veguilla during the seminar. For an argument in favour of analysing Western Sahara as a “crisis”—or a succession of crises—instead of a “conflict”, see Pointier (2004: 30).
5. See COW War Data, 1816–2007 (v4.0), available at <http://cow.dss.ucdavis.edu/data-sets/COW-war>
6. See UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, 1946–2014 (v4-2015), available at http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_prio_armed_conflict_dataset/
7. See <http://ucdp.uu.se/#/statebased/721>

8. Remark made by Isaías Barreñada during the seminar.
9. See http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/197 (p. 5).

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PART 1

Global Level

The United Nations' Change in Approach to Resolving the Western Sahara Conflict since the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

Anna Theofilopoulou

In February 2000, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan talked openly for the first time about the need for a political solution to resolve the conflict over Western Sahara through direct talks between the parties to the conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco and the *Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y del Río de Oro* (Polisario Front). Until that time, the UN had been guided in its work to resolve the conflict by the 1990–91 Settlement Plan on Western Sahara,¹ which would result in a self-determination referendum for the people of that territory. The Security Council undertook the task of resolving the conflict over Western Sahara under Chapter VI of the UN Charter.² After unsuccessful efforts to proceed with the implementation of the plan, impeded by a lack of cooperation by both parties, the secretary-general asked his then Personal Envoy James A. Baker III to “explore with the parties an early, durable and agreed resolution of the dispute”. At that time, the implementation of the Settlement Plan had reached yet another impasse and the prospect of

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the referendum was moving further into the distant future. By Resolution 1292, the Security Council supported the proposal.³

The secretary-general's proposal came about after several years of frustrated efforts by the UN, starting in 1991 with the coming into force of the Settlement Plan and the creation of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum on Western Sahara (MINURSO), responsible for implementing the plan. Two outcomes were foreseen as results of the referendum, either independence or integration with Morocco. Having managed to conclude the necessary first step to hold the referendum, the identification of potential voters in December 1999, but having failed to produce a voter list that would be acceptable to both sides, the secretary-general and his personal envoy felt that after nine years of intense work by MINURSO, it was necessary to adjust the approach taken thus far.

The aim of this chapter is to review and explain the reasons behind the UN's change in approach to resolving the conflict over Western Sahara. The first three sections discuss the difficulties encountered by MINURSO and Personal Envoy Baker to move the parties toward the referendum of self-determination envisaged under the 1991 Settlement Plan; describe the "political solutions" that were subsequently put forward by the UN; and explain the rationale behind them. The fourth section discusses how the UN has dealt with the conflict since Baker's resignation. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations on what the Secretariat and the Security Council could attempt to do to resolve the conflict while also providing an update on recent developments which have all but precluded any resolution of the conflict in the foreseeable future.

SETTLEMENT PLAN VS. POLITICAL SOLUTION

The Settlement Plan, based on proposals presented by the secretary-general to the parties, was drafted by a team of UN staff who were not privy to the consultations of the secretary-general with the parties and their private comments to him, which led to their acceptance of the plan "in principle". The plan thus contained tasks that were not well thought out and an unrealistic timeline for its implementation. It was a vague document with structural problems that precluded its smooth implementation, giving both parties the ability and power to manipulate the process. The two parties recognized very early on that the best way to win the referendum would be by influencing the identification of potential voters and each developed a strategy to achieve this. Morocco was determined

to expand and inflate the electorate, originally based on the 1974 Spanish census, while the Polisario Front was trying to keep it as close as possible within the parameters of the census. As a result, both parties withheld their cooperation with MINURSO and stopped the identification process whenever they judged that it would be in their interest to do so. And the identification process, which by necessity had been built on complete reciprocity between the two sides due to their deep mistrust of each other, allowed both ample opportunities to do so with impunity.

At different times, both sides stalled the implementation of the plan when it did meet their objectives: independence for the Polisario Front and integration for Morocco. The Polisario Front did so during the identification of potential voters for the referendum out of fear that MINURSO was approving too many Moroccan applicants; Morocco did the same after preliminary identification results showed that a clear victory for Morocco in the referendum was not assured. The Secretariat tried to accommodate the parties; however, it did not have a clear strategy other than finding solutions to each new obstacle so that the identification would continue. Nor was it clear about its aims; at times, the Secretariat appeared more interested in continuing the process than the parties themselves. This created a pattern of proposing technical solutions to resolve what were essentially political problems, which the Secretariat was unable to or unwilling to address. In addition, when the ceasefire between the parties came into effect on September 6, 1991, delinking it from the referendum as the Settlement Plan originally foresaw, this took away all sense of urgency from both parties to resolve the conflict. Thus, they both settled into allowing the identification process to proceed as they saw fit.

On the other hand, the issue of direct talks between the parties, ostensibly to discuss "post referendum arrangements" (since the Settlement Plan was silent on exactly what would happen after the vote), had been raised many times since the start of the consultations on the plan. The unspoken but real hope of both the UN and the Polisario leadership from the start was that through direct talks the parties would reach an understanding on something between integration and independence. However, such talks never happened after the plan went into effect because the Polisario Front always brought up the issue of independence, while Morocco unfailingly stated that they could only meet to discuss arrangements in the event of integration; the implementation of the plan was the job of the UN.

As Secretary Javier Pérez de Cuellar mentions in his memoirs,⁴ during the consultations on the proposals leading to the Settlement Plan, held in

extreme secrecy between the secretary-general, one of his confidants and the parties, he had proposed that in his view, autonomy for Western Sahara would be the preferable outcome. King Hassan II of Morocco had an initially positive response and at his request, then President Chadli Bendjedid of Algeria, also involved in the consultations, was asked to approach the Polisario Front. During the longest impasse in the identification period from the middle of 1995 to the end of 1996, the possibility of a “political solution” outside the confines of the Settlement Plan started being discussed both within the Secretariat and informally with the Security Council. In December 1995 Secretary-General Boutros Ghali stunned the Security Council during informal consultations by saying that he never really believed that the referendum would take place, due to the clearly irreconcilable positions of the parties on key issues regarding the implementation of the plan. However, he had hoped that by concluding the identification of voters based on the figures, the parties would agree to direct talks to find another solution. Agreeing, the Security Council for the first time used code language referring to direct talks in its resolution.⁵

THE STALLED VOTER IDENTIFICATION PROCESS AND BAKER’S ATTEMPTS TO RELAUNCH IT

The identification process started in August 1994 and was concluded in December 1999. In May 1996, during the interruption caused by the Polisario Front due to its lack of confidence in MINURSO’s handling of the identifications, the secretary-general proposed a formal suspension of the identification together with the withdrawal of the police unit and the reduction of the MINURSO military.⁶ Since neither party was ready to see the end of the process and possible dismantling of MINURSO, they agreed to a proposal by the Acting Special Representative to meet secretly for an open-ended discussion where anything could be discussed, except integration or independence. There were two such meetings; in the second, the Polisario Front brought up independence. Morocco would not accept that. No other meetings were held, and Morocco spent the rest of 1996 downplaying the meeting, while the Polisario Front stressed its importance. The identification continued to be blocked and did not resume until the latter part of 1997.

When Secretary-General Kofi Annan assumed his duties in January 1997, he conducted an internal review of the UN operation in Western

Sahara with his staff. It was agreed that both parties, despite their posturing, wanted the UN to continue its involvement to resolve the conflict and, indeed, depended on the UN to do so, both for their own internal constituencies and also vis-à-vis the international community. In order to push them to take some difficult decisions, it was agreed that a mediator should be brought in to guide and pressure them to do so. The secretary-general himself suggested former US Secretary of State Baker as mediator, given his well-known negotiating skills, integrity and toughness.

Baker accepted the position of personal envoy of the secretary-general on Western Sahara. During his first visit to UN headquarters, he was fully briefed on the situation and met with the parties, as well as with representatives from the neighboring countries of Algeria and Mauritania. As a first step, Baker proposed a visit to the region to meet with all the principals and ascertain how they wanted to proceed. During his trip, Baker was assured by all sides that they wished to proceed to the referendum and dismissed any diplomatic overture offered by him to possibly look for another solution outside the referendum. After the first trip, Baker proposed direct talks between the parties, where both Algeria and Mauritania would also be present, to discuss ways to break not only the impasse in the identification process, but also to make progress to resolve other elements of the Settlement Plan. These other elements had been set aside, as the UN had recognized that unless the differences between the parties regarding identification were resolved, none of the remaining tasks could be accomplished. It was agreed at the outset that the talks would be private and not international, and would continue for as long as Baker saw progress. Baker and his team would offer bridging proposals but would not have the power to impose a solution or veto an agreement. Finally, a key element was that no issue would be considered as finally agreed upon until an agreement was reached on all outstanding issues.

Baker and his team held four rounds of proximity talks with the parties and neighboring countries where the issues impeding the identification process were discussed, bridging proposals were offered by the Baker team and once accepted, agreements were sought in other elements of the plan. In the fifth round, held in Houston, Texas, with all concerned face to face, the draft code of conduct for holding the referendum was discussed and all agreements reached during the previous four rounds were accepted and initiated by the parties.

There was little doubt within the Baker team that one or both parties would pull out of the process after the identification process was

completed, the various tasks were addressed and the parties were faced with the inevitability of the referendum. As expected, this happened with the conclusion of the identification process when there was a reversal in the parties' attitudes. The Polisario Front felt reassured that MINURSO was doing a credible job identifying applicants, while Morocco became very nervous that the overall numbers might not work in its favor and started searching for ways to put obstacles in the process. It also insisted that thousands of applicants whose names had been submitted to MINURSO by Morocco as Sahrawis who had not been in the territory during the Spanish census be identified and found eligible to vote. When MINURSO finished the identification, it announced that out of 198,469 applicants, 86,368 had been found eligible to vote. The appeals, almost exclusively from Morocco, reached a total number of 79,000, with more expected when MINURSO proceeded to identify all the candidates from certain contested Sahrawi tribes as demanded by Morocco.

MOVING TO THE POLITICAL SOLUTION

Baker consulted with the Secretariat about how best to proceed as it became evident that the referendum was moving further and further into the distant future despite technical and legal arguments by some in the Secretariat who felt that the UN should work out specific modalities to complete the appeals process and avoid a breakdown of the identification process. The Polisario Front was content to watch the Secretariat and MINURSO deal with the Moroccans, feeling that spending time and resources to complete the appeals would not change the final numbers to Morocco's advantage. Polisario focused its attention on weakening a draft protocol given to the parties regarding the repatriation of refugees from the Tindouf camps in the event that the identification was completed and the other elements of the plan went into effect.

The secretary-general's report⁷ of December 1999 gave the Council the first clear indication that the Settlement Plan was in trouble by assessing that the "prospect of holding the referendum within a reasonable period of time, instead of becoming closer, had become even more distant". The report⁸ of February 2000 went further and stated that the date of the referendum could not be set with certainty at that juncture. For the first time, the secretary-general admitted that proposing technical solutions, as the UN had done so far to address the political problems, would only result in further delays as such solutions could not bridge the parties'

differing interpretations of the Settlement Plan. Even if the referendum were to be held, there was no enforcement mechanism should the results not be accepted by one party. With this assessment, the secretary-general asked his personal envoy to consult with the parties to explore ways to achieve an early, durable and agreed-upon resolution of their dispute.

Baker undertook another visit to the region, which yielded nothing new other than the usual rhetoric on all sides. He then invited the parties, together with Algeria and Mauritania, to meet with him to find a solution to the dispute. He met with the parties twice in London under the same rules as in 1997. Nothing positive came out of the meetings, as both sides stuck to their positions, simply trying to score points against each other, and ignored Baker's invitation to propose concrete solutions to the plan's multiple problems. Their positions were still very divergent, and despite a professed willingness to cooperate with the UN, they had not moved any closer. In September 2000, during the third meeting in Berlin, Morocco, finally realizing that the referendum might not work to its advantage, stated its desire to start a sincere and frank dialogue with the other side to work out a lasting and definitive solution to the Western Sahara conflict, taking into account Morocco's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Polisario promptly rejected the proposal and stated that it would only engage in a dialogue about implementing the Settlement Plan.

The Security Council was informed of Morocco's offer to devolve authority,⁹ but when by April 2001 Morocco had not offered anything concrete to Baker, he prepared the draft Framework Agreement (FA)—also known as Baker Plan I—on the Status of Western Sahara.¹⁰ The FA was meant to be negotiated between the parties to provide a five-year period of autonomy for the territory, followed by a self-determination referendum. Although it was a detailed document enumerating the tasks for each side, it did not spell out the options for the referendum. The king of Morocco approved the document but when Baker presented it to Algeria, the leadership was noncommittal. As for the Polisario Front, its secretary-general refused to even take a copy of the document. At the request of the Security Council,¹¹ Baker tried to convince the Polisario Front and Algeria to consider the document, meeting with them to address their concerns. However, he did not succeed. In November 2001, during President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's visit to the Baker Institute in Houston, he informed Baker that Algeria and the Polisario Front would be prepared to discuss a division of the territory, claiming that this idea had originated with the late King Hassan II of Morocco. Baker visited Morocco to inform

the government of the Algerian suggestion. He had two meetings with the king and his advisers, who were divided on the proposal. In the second meeting, the king rejected the proposal.

At that point, a grim report was sent to the Security Council on the options available regarding Western Sahara. Since no early, durable and mutually agreed-upon resolution of the dispute could be reached by consensus, four options were presented that did not require the consent of the parties: (a) implementing the Settlement Plan; (b) revising the Framework Agreement based on the parties' comments; (c) exploring the option of dividing the territory; or (d) the withdrawal of MINURSO.¹² The Council proved unwilling to decide and again asked Baker to continue his efforts and devise another solution that would provide for self-determination.¹³

This he did, and in January 2003, he delivered to the parties and neighboring countries the Peace Plan for Self-determination of the People of Western Sahara—also known as Baker Plan II—offering a similar division of tasks for the two sides during a four-year autonomy period to be followed by a self-determination referendum. This time, three outcomes for the referendum were laid out: integration with Morocco, independence or continued autonomy.¹⁴ By Resolution 1495, the Security Council unanimously supported the Peace Plan.¹⁵ Despite its reservations, prodded by Algeria, the Polisario Front eventually accepted the document. Baker tried to get Morocco to give him something that he could present to the other side, but he did not succeed. In April 2004, after Morocco rejected the Peace Plan because of the independence option, France, together with the USA and Spain (an elected member of the Security Council at the time), persuaded the rest of the Council to retreat from its support for the Peace Plan and reverted to strongly supporting a mutually acceptable solution, ignoring the fact that the Council had already been told by the secretary-general and his personal envoy in February 2002 that such a solution would not be possible due to the irreconcilable positions of the parties. By Resolution 1541, the Security Council formalized this regression in the efforts by the UN to resolve the conflict over Western Sahara.¹⁶

In June 2004, Baker informed the secretary-general that he wished to resign from his duties as he had done all he could to resolve the conflict. In his letter of resignation, he said that in the final analysis, only the parties could exercise the political will to reach an agreed-upon solution, adding that the UN would not solve the problem of Western Sahara without requiring one or the other or both parties to do something they would not voluntarily agree to do. The secretary-general announced his resignation

with regret but he also assured the Security Council and the parties that the UN would continue to assist the parties to find a solution to the conflict (despite his private agreement with Baker to demand that the parties assume their own responsibilities for the resolution of the conflict when informing the Security Council of his resignation). He asked his then Special Representative to work with the parties to search for such a solution.

HOW THE UN HAS DEALT WITH THE CONFLICT SINCE BAKER'S DEPARTURE

Since Baker's resignation, two more personal envoys have been appointed: Peter van Walsum of the Netherlands and Christopher Ross of the USA, who has been serving since January 2009. As promised when it rejected the peace plan, Morocco submitted its own proposal in April 2007 offering a statute of autonomy to Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty. One day before Morocco made this submission, the Polisario Front submitted its own proposal, based exactly on the Baker Plan with guarantees to Morocco in the event of independence. Since that time, there have been two proposals on the table, one from each party. Over 11 years after Baker's resignation, the UN is in exactly the same spot in terms of finding a solution to the conflict. There appears to be no prospect for a resolution of the dispute on the horizon and with the passing of time, both sides have become more entrenched in their positions. In addition, frustration has been building and the geopolitical situation on the ground both in Western Sahara and North Africa has added new worrisome dimensions to the conflict, bringing violence and terrorism into the equation.

There are those, mainly the Polisario Front and its supporters, who insist that the Settlement Plan is a legal document based on self-determination which the UN could have implemented. The international civil society supports the Polisario position ignoring, or not knowing, that in 2001—despite professions of legality and self-determination—Polisario was willing to divide the territory as suggested by Algeria. In addition, those who espouse the legal argument either ignore or are ignorant of how the Settlement Plan came into being, how it was negotiated and the geopolitical dynamics surrounding the conflict. Those with knowledge of the consultations between the secretary-general and the parties, the neighboring countries and key members of the Security Council know that the Settlement Plan was conceived as a political instrument. That is how the parties and the Security Council have seen and treated it and continue to do so, despite public claims to the contrary.

When evaluating the approach of the UN Secretariat and MINURSO, it is important to remember that when the secretary-general and his personal envoy reached the conclusion in 2000 that the UN had to change its approach in handling the conflict, it was not an easy decision. The UN had done all it could to move the parties toward the referendum. However, it was faced with several factors that did not bode well for the prospects of a smooth and peaceful resolution of the conflict under the Settlement Plan. Foremost among those factors were the behavior of the parties during the eight-year effort to carry out and conclude the identification of voters; the extraordinarily high number of pending appeals; the continuous maneuvering by both sides to upend the work of the UN, which showed no sign of abating; the very real possibility that should the referendum take place, the results would certainly be contested by one side or the other; and last but not least, the complete silence of the Settlement Plan on post-referendum arrangements to implement the results of the referendum.

It had become clear that trying to reach a resolution of the conflict through the Settlement Plan was not working, despite the insistence by some that Western Sahara is a decolonization issue for the UN and all that the organization had to do was continue with the efforts to carry out the referendum. However, as subsequent events showed, the new approach has been no more successful than the previous one. The impasse continues; the parties have dug into their positions with more vehemence than ever before. Their distrust of each other and of the UN or whoever attempts to talk reason and compromise is stronger than ever.

As regards the role of the Security Council, from the moment that this UN body assumed the responsibility to resolve the conflict as an issue of peace and security under Chapter VI of the UN Charter—claiming that Chapter VI requires the Council to obtain the consent of the parties to the dispute for its decisions—it has demonstrated a keen interest in hearing positive news and technical solutions to the problems that MINURSO encountered in the identification process, while avoiding taking any hard decisions itself. The Council has always been eager to approve solutions proposed by the secretary-general or the personal envoy but has refused to take a firm position or even ask the parties to do something they do not want to do, invoking the provisions of Chapter VI of the UN Charter. After the two solutions proposed by Baker (the Framework Agreement and the four options not requiring the consent of the parties) were not accepted by the parties and/or supported by the Security Council, at the Council's request he delivered the Peace Plan for Self-determination

of the People of Western Sahara. However, as mentioned before, when Morocco rejected the plan in 2004, France, the USA and Spain persuaded the Council to weaken its support for it and wait for a proposal on autonomy that Morocco had promised to present. In April 2007, this finally happened and as soon as Morocco did so, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1754, which has been the basis of the UN's work since then. The resolution asks the parties to negotiate without preconditions with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.¹⁷

In addition, Resolution 1754 called the Moroccan proposal "serious and credible", although through WikiLeaks it was disclosed that in March 2007 when Morocco submitted its Autonomy Plan to key members of the Security Council—France, the USA, the UK, Spain and Germany (a member of the Council at the time)—they found it almost identical to what Morocco had delivered to Baker before, which he had considered insufficient to work with. Nevertheless, in a meeting of political counselors in Rabat, in response to the intensity of Morocco's insistence, it was decided to advise Morocco to proceed and submit its proposal to the UN and to support it despite its shortcomings. Furthermore, at France's suggestion, the proposal was singled out for praise in the resolution, ignoring Morocco's blatant violation of international law when claiming sovereignty over Western Sahara. What are the reasons for this attitude? Bilateral considerations and politics appear to have taken precedence over the need to seriously try to resolve the conflict.

In response to Resolution 1754, a series of meetings ensued under both Personal Envoys van Walsum and Ross where no agreements or anything substantive toward resolving the dispute were ever reached other than to continue meeting. Personal Envoy van Walsum, in his April 2008 briefing of the Security Council, asked the Council for guidance after informing them that nothing approaching negotiations had occurred in the meetings held under him. The Council did not respond to van Walsum's request and kept repeating the language of Resolution 1754 in subsequent resolutions. Meanwhile, Morocco continues to demand that its own proposal be the sole basis for negotiations under the personal envoy, while Polisario insists that both proposals be on the table. Personal Envoy Ross has tried to add other dimensions to the meetings, hoping that they might help alleviate the parties' distrust, but he has not had much success.

Personal Envoy Ross continues to visit the capitals of the Group of Friends of Western Sahara (France, Russia, Spain, the UK and the USA) and the region to consult with the principals and the players in the dispute. He has added visits to Western Sahara. However, there are no indications that the situation is about to change now or in the foreseeable future. Having weathered the crisis of the Arab Spring by co-opting the protesters and offering a new constitution, Morocco feels emboldened and has become more intransigent on Western Sahara than ever before. Subsequent increasing terrorist events in Europe and the region have turned Morocco into a key player in counterterrorism in the eyes of the USA and France, which has added to its inflexibility. In 2012, Morocco withdrew its confidence in Personal Envoy Ross, accusing him of bias, and demanded his replacement. Morocco withdrew its demand only when it met with resistance from the USA and the country received assurances from the secretary-general that both the personal envoy and MINURSO would stay strictly within their mandates.

A new dimension to the conflict has been the insistence by the Polisario Front and its supporters both in civil society and the Security Council to add human rights monitoring to MINURSO's mandate in Western Sahara. This has only resulted in diverting the Council's attention from its main task of pressing the parties to work on a solution to the conflict, without meeting the Polisario Front's demand. In 2013, after a clumsy attempt by the US Ambassador to the UN to insert human rights monitoring language in the annual Security Council resolution on Western Sahara, Morocco called off joint military exercises with the USA and did not relent until the perceived offensive language was withdrawn. In November of that year, President Obama personally reassured the Moroccan king of the constancy of the US position regarding Western Sahara and made it clear that the USA considers the Moroccan Autonomy Plan serious, realistic and credible.

The other key countries in the Security Council, namely the Group of Friends, appear loath to do anything to rock the boat in Western Sahara, especially considering the situation in other Arab countries, foremost Syria and Libya. Algeria continues to be the wild card in all this, with rumors circulating regarding a successor to President Bouteflika and wishful thinking on the part of Morocco that once he goes, Algeria will relent and resolve the conflict to Morocco's advantage. Linking the spread of terrorists and extremists in the Sahel and even the Maghreb with Polisario has been a favorite ploy by Morocco to convince the international community that only its presence in Western Sahara can avert such a danger. Certainly,

nobody would want further instability in an already not very stable region. But for this to be avoided, key members of the Security Council need to do more than accommodate Morocco's every real or perceived sense of slight.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Clearly the Security Council and the secretary-general need to rethink the UN's strategy to resolve the Western Sahara conflict. In this, the Group of Friends of Western Sahara needs to assume a leadership role in resolving the conflict with the USA and France, taking the lead with the support of the other members. Regardless of the eagerness of French and US senior officials to state that they support the Moroccan autonomy proposal, calling it "serious and credible", they must be aware that neither they unilaterally nor the Security Council as a whole can demand that it be used as the sole basis for negotiating a solution to the conflict, as Morocco insists. To do so would mean that they accept Morocco's claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara, something that they know is against international law.

Morocco's supporters should acknowledge to themselves and tell Morocco, as only friends can do, that after 40 years of irresolution, Western Sahara, in its current political limbo, has become a liability for the kingdom, despite Morocco's exploitation of natural resources, the legality of which is disputed under international law. Despite statements by the Moroccan government for domestic consumption, they are aware that their hands are tied in their current position and that the issue will not be resolved to Morocco's advantage simply because Morocco expects that this will be the case. The Security Council will need to request meaningful concessions from both parties and the concessions will only be effective if they are addressed to both, but especially to the stronger of the parties, Morocco. Firmness is essential in getting stubborn adversaries to cooperate, and mediation can only be successful when it requests concessions from the side it is closest to. Only in this manner will the other side feel trust and agree without arguing when asked to do the same.

We have seen both sides modify their stubborn approach when dealt with firmly by the Security Council and the secretary-general. They all need to be persuaded that time is no longer on their side, if ever it was. Morocco and Algeria, which seem to compete on issuing statements blaming each other for the lack of progress, need to understand that they are still playing with fire having hundreds of thousands of unemployed, idle and frustrated young people among their citizens and residents while

they continue to spout rhetorical statements as to who is to blame for the impasse. The Polisario Front also needs to hear that heroic statements about a government in exile and taking up arms, something that Algeria will never tolerate, will not bring it any closer to resolving the conflict. However, after recent developments in March–April 2016, with Morocco unilaterally deciding to reduce the civilian component of MINURSO after it strongly objected to a statement by the secretary-general during his trip to the region (which Morocco had tried to block), both the Secretariat and the Security Council have demonstrated a complete lack of desire to take a firm stand regarding Morocco’s unprecedented behavior. Rather than remind Morocco that the presence of a peacekeeping operation in an area of potential conflict is non-negotiable and warn the country that its behavior could have disastrous consequences for the fragile ceasefire observed by MINURSO, both the Secretariat and the Security Council have tried to pacify Morocco. The resolution adopted extending MINURSO’s operations until April 2017 contains only a vague promise to consider how best to reinstate MINURSO’s full functionality if Morocco has not allowed this after 90 days. At the same time, the rest of the resolution reverts to language used since 2004, asking the parties to “continue cooperating” with the personal envoy to find a resolution to the conflict. As long as a key axiom of negotiations—that the mediator cannot want a solution more than the parties themselves—is ignored, there will be no resolution to the conflict. Both the Security Council and the secretary-general need to stop doing the same thing and expecting different results, as they have done for years. This is not a strategy, only a definition of insanity.

NOTES

1. Security Council documents S/21360 (June 18, 1990) and S/22464 (April 19, 1991) comprise the Settlement Plan on Western Sahara.
2. Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice, Chapter VI, Pacific Settlement of disputes.
3. S/RES/1292 (2000) of February 29, 2000.
4. Pérez de Cuellar, 1997: 341–342.
5. S/RES/1033 (1995) of December 22, 1995.
6. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/1996/343 (May 8, 1996).
7. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/1999/1219 (December 6, 1999).
8. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/2000/131 (February 17, 2000).

9. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/2000/1029 (October 25, 2000).
10. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/2001/613 (June 20, 2001) Annex I.
11. S/RES/1359 (2001) of June 29, 2001.
12. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/2002/178 (February 2002).
13. S/RES/1429 (2002) of July 30, 2002.
14. Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation Concerning Western Sahara S/2003/565 (May 23, 2003) Annex II.
15. S/RES/1495 (2003) of July 31, 2003.
16. S/RES/1541 (2004) of April 29, 2004.
17. S/RES/1754 (2007) of April 30, 2007.

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The Geopolitical Functions of the Western Sahara Conflict: US Hegemony, Moroccan Stability and Sahrawi Strategies of Resistance

Jacob Mundy

To understand the durability of the Western Sahara conflict, one must understand much more than the positions of the parties—Morocco and the Western Saharan independence movement—and the historical genesis of their grievances. This durability is an outgrowth of the extent to which the Western Sahara conflict has come to function within the structures and processes that reproduce US dominance globally. Although the Western Sahara conflict, as a territorial dispute that threatens the security of north-west Africa (if not the southwest Mediterranean), is inherently destabilizing, it is this dynamism that is the important point. That is, rather than viewing the issue as a “frozen” or “forgotten” conflict that is marginal in world affairs, the Western Sahara conflict must instead be appreciated for the ways in which it helped remake US hegemony amid the crises of the 1970s and helped maintain it throughout the post-Cold War period. Such an appreciation can take shape when viewing the conflict from the level of geopolitics (how US hegemony was rearticulated); from the regional, dyadic and national level (how Moroccan-Algerian antagonisms, the

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Western Sahara conflict and Moroccan regime-building operate within US hegemony); and from the level of Sahrawi resistance (how the inefficacy of shifting strategies of national liberation have failed to disrupt these processes).

This chapter seeks to explain how the Western Sahara conflict and its perpetual impasse have helped make and remake US hegemony possible, from the middle of the Cold War to today's increasingly multipolar world. At the same time, US hegemony has also been one of the most important underlying conditions maintaining the Western Sahara stalemate throughout shifting geopolitical contexts. Elaborating these mutually constitutive processes first requires an understanding of a general theory of US hegemony. This theory holds that US preponderance after Vietnam and the 1973 oil "embargo" was rearticulated around new relations of oil, weapons and finance. Although the Western Sahara conflict has never been about oil, the 1975 Moroccan invasion and the fierce Algerian-backed resistance of the Sahrawi nationalists allowed northwest Africa to be incorporated into the new architecture of US hegemony in the late-Cold War period. An important dividend of militarizing the Maghreb was the stabilization of the Moroccan regime through the perpetual instability of the unresolved conflict in Western Sahara. At the same time, the Western Saharan independence movement has shifted its strategies of resistance to adapt to changing global environments, from its early days of moderate opposition to North Atlantic dominance to its more recent efforts to accommodate and advance Western interests. These strategies of resistance and accommodation, however, have borne little fruit; the driving concern of the Western Sahara peace process is Morocco's stability, not Western Sahara's national rights. Western Sahara might be at the bottom of the international peacemaking agenda, but that is because it has become central to the processes that reproduce US dominance. The durability of the Western Sahara impasse, and the inability of the Western Saharan independence movement to affect it, is precisely because of these implacable forces.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF US HEGEMONY

The Western Sahara conflict emerged during a period in which the United States was seeking to rearticulate the basis of its global hegemony in face of challenges to its military and financial supremacy. The driving logics of the Western Sahara conflict had little to do with these rearticulations

prior to November 1975, when Morocco invaded the Spanish colony. Nonetheless, the crisis in Western Sahara, which soon became a protracted war and an intractable political conflict between Morocco and Sahrawi nationalists, was easily accommodated within the new global framework of US hegemony. That framework evolved out of several important developments in the preceding years; two are worth underscoring.

The first development was the loss of the Vietnam War. This loss demonstrated the futility of direct military occupation to advance the late neo-colonial project of installing pro-North Atlantic governments by force. South Africa's failed invasion of Angola in 1974–75 likewise held important consequences for the fate of Western Sahara, two of which were, one, the increased outsourcing of the labours of hegemony to proxies such as Morocco and, two, the related militarization of those proxies, and thus the resultant militarization of entire regions. At the same time, the idea of conventional military power and influence in the Middle East was rescued by Israel's victory in the 1973 October War. Post-Vietnam scepticism about the utility of conventional air and ground forces in the age of nuclear weapons, irregular warfare and transnational terrorism was somewhat abated by the performance of Israel. This not only paved the way for a more advanced political, security and economic relationship between the United States and Israel, it also provided US arms manufacturers with proof of their weapons' efficacy (Mitchell 2011). Desperate to recuperate the petrodollars being hoarded by Middle East states, militarizing the Middle East through useless arms sales had the added benefit of circulating the world's premier currency back into US hands (Bridge and Le Billon 2013: 139).

This leads us to the second development. In the 1970s, oil producing countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, increasingly wrested control of their domestic energy production from the large oil companies that had dominated global extraction, refinement and circulation during the first century of oil. Some of this recuperation took the form of outright nationalization, while others took the route of adjusting concessions by raising taxes on oil firms and establishing an international pricing regime. As the profits of international oil companies took a huge hit, these firms sought their own strategies to regain their lost profits and to open new territories of exploration, such as Alaska and the North Sea (see Parra 2010: chapters 11–13). To make these new sources of oil viable, the price of oil had to be higher; the 1973–74 oil crisis was thus manufactured to make this happen. The so-called Arab oil embargo was a

pseudo-crisis that had little to do with supply and demand. It had much more to do with a coalition of convenience between US politicians who did not want to cave to Arab pressure on Israel's opposition to Palestinian statehood and the international oil companies' desire to find new ways of producing oil scarcity now that the means of producing scarcity were out of their hands and in the hands of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Mitchell 2011).

In the context of this seemingly hostile international environment, the United States worked to forge new alliances so as to reconsolidate its post-World War II hegemony. Part of this reconsolidation involved the destabilization of the Middle East through the rapid militarization of friendly countries and the resulting arms races it inspired. That is, oil and militarization helped prime the pump of a regional security dilemma. As noted above, this militarization had the added benefit of recuperating US dollars from petro-regimes. It also forced other states, those not backed by North Atlantic powers, to look to the Soviets to meet their security needs. This regime of militarization and insecurity also helped create the Cold War cartography of the Middle East and Africa—those allied to North Atlantic interests and those opposed or “neutral”. An important example of these processes of militarization is Morocco and Algeria vis-à-vis the Western Sahara conflict.

MILITARIZING THE MAGHREB, 1970s–80s

While the monarchs of Morocco had maintained longstanding relations with the US government prior to French and Spanish domination, Morocco's importance to the United States has to be understood particularly in terms of the geopolitical shifts of the 1970s, as Morocco's long-standing alliance with the United States—prior to World War II—involved little more than acknowledgements of mutual recognition to facilitate trans-Atlantic and Mediterranean trade. The United States and Morocco like to trumpet their eighteenth century treaty of friendship, one of the oldest maintained by Washington. But this rhetoric of “America's oldest ally” politely ignores the fact that Washington accepted, if not welcomed, Franco-Spanish imperialism in Morocco.

Actual ties of consequence between Morocco and the United States were crafted during the Allied landing in Morocco during World War II. It was then that a true friendship was forged, not only that between the Moroccan monarchy and future US president Eisenhower, but more importantly

between the monarchy and a key figure in US military intelligence: Vernon Walters. Walters would maintain this friendship with the Moroccan monarchy as his post-war career developed into one of the most notorious in the Cold War. Walters, once described as the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) *de facto* case officer for all things Moroccan, would rise to become deputy head of the CIA at a critical moment in the history of Western Sahara: the October–November 1975 Spanish Sahara crisis (see Mundy 2006). The seeds of Morocco's North Atlantic orientation were thus planted in the North African battles of World War II. There was no doubt that—following a brief struggle to end the Franco-Spanish protectorate, a struggle dominated by a coalition of conservative and monarchist forces led by Al-Istiqlal Party—the French-backed King Mohammed V would be quick to stake out a pro-North Atlantic position in the Cold War.

With the end of the protectorate system in 1956, Mohammed V began consolidating a weak state and a factious polity. Morocco was, and remains, a relatively poor country. Even at the turn of the millennium, Morocco's GDP still correlated with the amount of rainfall the country received. At the same time, a major export of Morocco's agricultural sector has been cannabis-related products, products which are not factored into publicly available development data. This allows revenues earned from the trade to remain opaque, though UN estimates in 2003 suggested that it was a €10 billion industry (UNODC 2003). To what extent Morocco is a narco-state governmentally as well as territorially is an open question, though such an industry would not be possible without longstanding public-private partnerships.

From independence to the present, Morocco's Alawi regime has been highly dependent on being embedded within existing configurations of geopolitical and financial power, particularly with Paris and Washington. The Western Sahara conflict helped secure and bolster these relationships, such that the rule of the Moroccan regime today would not be possible without these clientelistic relations and transnational flows of capital that underwrite the power of the monarchy (see, e.g. Tuquoi 2006). Although the Moroccan regime's anti-colonial credentials were bolstered by its support for the Algerian independence movement, Mohammed V was less eager to see the more democratic tendencies in the Moroccan Army of National Liberation join forces with anti-colonial militants in the Spanish Sahara in 1957. Uprisings and other forms of social unrest marked the early days of post-independence Morocco, largely owing to the country's poor economic base (Hart 1999). Indeed, Morocco's

resource endowments were a major concern driving notions of “Greater Morocco”, an idea invented by the Istiqlal Party and soon championed by the monarchy. Greater Morocco was the notion that Morocco’s true pre-colonial territory encompassed parts of western Algeria, northern Mali, and all of Spanish Sahara and Mauritania down to the Senegal River. This notion was put before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1975 and soundly rejected by The Hague as historical nonsense (Franck 1976). Nonetheless, it was on this basis—the Greater Morocco thesis—that King Hassan II, who succeeded his father in 1960, launched a war of aggression against Algeria in 1963 to recuperate Morocco’s *terra irredenta* in the regions of Tindouf and Bechar. The outcome of the 1963 Sand War demonstrated the Organization of African Unity (OAU)’s unique capacity for intercontinental peacemaking but nonetheless marked a turning point in relations between Algiers and Rabat that was never amended. It is this rivalry—exacerbated and now largely maintained by the Western Sahara conflict—that has helped justify the excessive militarization of the region.

In the case of Morocco, the Franco-American militarization of the state in the 1960s was justified in terms of the Cold War. But as with his father, Hassan II inherited a polity that was not so easily governed and an economy with significant vulnerabilities. With North Atlantic support, Hassan II went about systematically disabling and destroying his opponents on the left. Yet the real threat to his rule was the military, which staged at least two known coup attempts in the early 1970s. The option of invading Western Sahara afforded Hassan II an opportunity to reconsolidate his rule, to expand the size of Morocco’s military to match Algeria’s while focusing its energies towards the south, to eliminate or subordinate the last vestiges of Moroccan republicanism and to enhance the resource wealth of the state.

Algeria’s militarization, on the other hand, was the outcome of a different set of security challenges. Algeria’s resource endowments were obviously larger than Morocco’s, but so was the size of the state that had to be governed. The Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) had just fought a brutal war of independence against a key North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) state in the midst of the Cold War (1954–62), and then a brief and bloody civil war to consolidate the regime (1962–63). Having wrested control over its hydrocarbon wealth from France in the early 1970s, Algeria was in a better position to use that wealth to develop the country and its military. By the time of the 1975 Spanish Sahara crisis, Algeria fully supported Western Sahara’s independence, though Algeria’s

Foreign Minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika had diplomatically supported Morocco's right to raise the question of historical title in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Whether or not Algeria could have predicted Morocco's invasion of Western Sahara (and Spain's refusal to defend the territory from that aggression), President Houari Boumedienne took great offence at Morocco's violations of international law and what he believed to be a regional norm: that the map of northwest Africa could not be re-drawn without consulting Algeria.

The disparity in the levels of militarization between Morocco and Algeria at the time of the 1975 Sahara crisis was clear to the US government. Concerned that a Morocco-Algeria war might erupt, the State Department performed an analysis of the military capabilities of both sides. It strongly suggested that Morocco was no match for Algeria's sizeable air force and, more importantly, its tested ground forces. Thus the occupation of Western Sahara and the incipient war against the Polisario Front would provide Morocco with a strong rationale to get more military support from Washington and Paris. Whereas key Middle East client states such as pre-1979 Iran and Saudi Arabia could simply purchase excessive amounts of US military equipment via oil revenues, Morocco would have to leverage its geopolitical position as the co-defender of Gibraltar, as a counterweight against Algerian (or Libyan) regional ambitions and as a growing adjunct to the United States' post-Vietnam foreign policy of outsourcing intervention.

Indeed, the "regional balance" was a key consideration driving the United States to support Morocco in King Hassan II's October 1975 bid to take Western Sahara away from the Spanish. The Sahrawis and their political ambitions simply did not exist in the minds of the US decision makers at that time. At a key moment in the 1975 Sahara crisis, when President Ford was deciding whether or not to oppose Morocco's invasion or use the UN to legitimize it, Kissinger misled Ford into thinking the ICJ had ruled in Morocco's favour. Kissinger also described Western Sahara as empty desert inhabited by a few nomadic bands. That said, it is difficult to imagine that Hassan II would have taken the step of militarily confronting a European state such as Spain without backing from Paris and Washington. Spain was not yet a member of NATO but was a key ally hosting important US military bases. The existing diplomatic record shows Kissinger urging a diplomatic solution to the Hispano-Moroccan crisis, but this was *before* Morocco publically announced its plans to take the territory. Kissinger knew of the pending invasion because the CIA told

him on 3 October 1975 that Morocco was going to invade the Spanish Sahara regardless of the ICJ opinion, which was set to be released on 16 October. The key CIA document talks about this information coming from assets inside the Moroccan military, but at least one US diplomat, Richard Parker, then Ambassador to Algeria, strongly suspected that Vernon Walters had received an advanced plan of the Green March months beforehand (see Mundy 2006).

Morocco's geopolitical role after Vietnam and the Arab oil "embargo" was not simply as a passive counterweight to Algeria or the sentinel guarding the Pillars of Hercules. As mentioned above, South Africa's failed invasion of Angola led to an important Franco-American Cold War invention: the Safari Club, a secret organization whose members included Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt. This group helped coordinate ostensibly anti-Soviet interventions in Zaire in the late 1970s (Mamdani 2004: 84–87). Morocco was also a key conduit for US support to Angolan rebels, support that was otherwise illegal under US law. And Morocco was also a base for Libyan dissidents opposed to the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. Hassan II also played a key role as an Arab backchannel to Israel (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 73). Morocco thus helped the United States succeed in disrupting Arab unity on the question of Palestine by detaching the issue of Sinai from the broader international mandate to find a comprehensive Middle East peace based on 1967 borders, the creation of a Palestinian homeland and solving the refugee question.

At the same time, Morocco was becoming more and more entrenched in a quagmire in the Western Sahara. The Polisario Front, which had succeeded in driving Mauritania out of the conflict and in securing support among African states, was in a dominant military position by the late 1970s. Like many guerrilla wars, Polisario did not have to win a decisive military victory; Polisario just had to make Morocco quit or negotiate. But the loss of Western Sahara would have been catastrophic for King Hassan and thus for US interests as well. Supporting Morocco became all the more important after the loss of Iran's Shah to a popular revolution in 1979. Iran's independence from US control, first of all, enhanced the importance of Saudi Arabia in US policy; the Saudis would largely subsidize Morocco's war in Western Sahara and later forgive that debt when Morocco joined the coalition to liberate Kuwait in 1991. Thus, Middle East oil largely paid for US weapons used in the war against Western Sahara.

The Iranian revolution also saw further US retrenchment around other allies like Morocco. Whatever hesitation the Carter administration had in

supporting Morocco's war of aggression in Western Sahara, that hesitation began to disappear after the fall of the Shah. Under the Reagan administration, support for Morocco was unbridled. Second only to Egypt, Morocco received more US aid during the Cold War than any other African country. Morocco was also an early test case for an International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural readjustment programme aimed at rescuing a highly authoritarian regime engaged in mass state terror at home and abroad. The turmoil in the Moroccan war economy was abated somewhat by these IMF rescue packages, though they often provoked bloody protests and repression when the mandated austerity measures were implemented. It was largely due to this aid—Saudi and IMF financing, and US and French weapons—that Morocco was able to salvage its position in Western Sahara and slowly consolidate its control over the major cities (El Ayun, Smara and Dakhla), the phosphate mines at Bukra and the fisheries off the coast. In the end, Morocco was able to construct the world's largest military barrier while maintaining an occupying force of at least 100,000. Gulf and US efforts to rescue Morocco also had the benefit of making sure Morocco's military did not once again turn on the monarchy. Even though new institutional mandates had been put in place to police the army (e.g. the national gendarmerie), the militarizing function of the Western Sahara war could abruptly turn on Hassan II if the battlefield was lost to Polisario's guerrillas. There were significant political expenditures to ensure that this vulnerability did not become realized. Lastly, the US militarization of the Moroccan regime had the benefit of embedding its army, air force and navy into US weapons systems, training regimens and other non-adaptable features of contemporary armament (Zunes and Mundy 2010: chapters 1 and 3). By comparison, Algeria's adoption of Soviet and Eastern bloc armaments proved disastrous for the country in the 1990s. Following the collapse of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, Algeria found itself facing an Islamist insurgency with outdated, insufficient and ineffective weapons that could not be easily repaired, replaced or enhanced given the poor state of the economy and the disruption of their established armament suppliers (Martinez 1998).

Although Morocco is not entirely monopolized by US military training and technologies (see International Institute of Strategic Studies 2016: 344–346), the inter-military links between the Palace and the Pentagon laid the groundwork for a lasting and mutually beneficial relationship. During King Mohammed VI's 2013 visit to meet President Barack Obama in the White House, the king also received two high-level officials

at his residence in Washington that evening: the Secretary of State *and* the Secretary of Defence. Indeed, this dinner seemed to have smoothed out a brief period of turbulence in US-Moroccan military relations. That April, Rabat had been unhappy with US support for UN human rights monitoring in Western Sahara as the question was being posed in the UN Security Council. In addition to launching diplomatic protests, Morocco cancelled the joint military training and simulation exercise known as African Lion, an event organized by the US Africa Command (Africom) that takes place less than 400 kilometres from the Western Sahara border each year.

MAKING MOROCCO GOVERNABLE: WAR, CRISIS AND “PEACE” IN THE 1990s

Several productive consequences emerged from the war in Western Sahara. Morocco’s invasion and occupation of Western Sahara was, first and foremost, an act of regime consolidation. The incompleteness of the attempted annexation—and the vulnerabilities that incompleteness has produced—have become important factors in the reproduction of three coordinated processes: the conflict, the Moroccan regime and the geopolitical systems elaborated above.

The prolonged crisis at the heart of the Moroccan state, the Western Saharan impasse, has become central to the legitimation of the Moroccan regime and its ability to construct a comprehensive apparatus capable of governing a diverse and divided population. As is well known in the literature on territorial conflicts, particularly secessionist movements, these conflicts tend to generate intense and implacable feelings on both sides of the warring dyad (Gilber 2012). The ideational power of territorial conflicts even extends into the realm of nonviolent resistance movements. In their survey of hundreds of civil resistance campaigns in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Chenoweth and Stephan (2012) found no case where a nonviolent movement was able to achieve secession through nonviolent means. Even if Western Sahara is considered under international law a case of botched decolonization rather than formal secession (Soroeta Liceras 2014), it is enough to recognize that the Moroccan view on the issue, and its refraction in Paris in Washington, functionally renders the conflict in secessionist terms. In this way, theories of intractable territorial conflict are highly relevant to understanding the fundamentally irresolvable nature of the conflict given present realities first articulated in 1975.

The internationally undetermined status of Western Sahara, nearly four decades in operation, has become the central tool in Moroccan statecraft. The making and maintenance of the Western Sahara conflict helped consolidate and reproduce the monarchy's domestic hegemony through the anti-politics machine of irredentist jingoism. This partly explains the elaboration of a relatively strong regime despite access to the kinds of natural resource endowments that are typically used to explain regime durability in so-called rentier states such as Algeria, Libya and the Gulf regimes (see Beblawi and Luciani 1987). At key junctures in the country's post-colonial history and its relations with key allies, the Moroccan regime has used Western Sahara as a wedge to navigate its way through domestic and foreign blockages.

This process of stability through instability not only functions to make Morocco governable, it has also largely served to maintain Morocco's status as a key Franco-American ally. What little pressure was brought to bear on Hassan II to make peace with Polisario was done so out of recognition in the late 1970s and early 1980s that Morocco was never going to win Western Sahara outright. At the same time, Hassan II used his various peace overtures to delay the peace process itself, whether his 1981 commitment to the OAU to hold a referendum in Western Sahara or his constant efforts to renegotiate the UN-OAU settlement proposals. Likewise the Moroccan king rejected Algerian offers under Chadli Bendjedid to negotiate some kind of power-sharing arrangement between Polisario and Morocco, though two decades later Morocco would embrace such ideas of "autonomy" as the solution to Western Sahara once victory through a referendum was foreclosed.

With the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical arrangements that had underwritten North Atlantic power and US hegemony were simultaneously vindicated and put into question. Problems that had been deferred in the Cold War were given renewed priority. The United Nations' peacekeeping and peace-building functions were allowed to flourish but also faltered at several key moments (Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo). Longstanding authoritarian regimes faced internal and external pressure to democratize, while previously sheltered domestic economies were forcibly pried open by the forces of international finance and commerce. At the same time, the collapse of the US-Soviet Union rivalry saw an outbreak of civil wars that not only shocked the world's conscience, but also tested the international community's ability to manage conflict effectively (Power 2003).

After Morocco's withdrawal from the OAU, the Western Sahara peace process was under the guidance of the UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. Pérez de Cuéllar took the existing OAU settlement framework and, through shuttle diplomacy, secured the agreement of Morocco and Polisario to a simple plan for the decolonization of Western Sahara: a ceasefire, withdrawal of troops, return of the refugees and then a vote on independence or integration. It is now clear from Pérez de Cuéllar's (1997) memoirs, and those of his deputy (Goulding 2003), that this simple plan had widely divergent interpretations. This divergence, however, was not simply between Rabat and Polisario; it also included the secretary-general. Morocco had no intention of a vote limited to native Western Saharans and, more importantly, Pérez de Cuéllar had no intention of holding a vote in the first place. He only saw the threat of one as useful leverage to gain concessions from Morocco. Unaware of these facts, the UN Security Council created the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) in 1991 on the assumption that its purpose was to do what its name implied.

Through a deal reached in secret with King Hassan, a ceasefire was announced though no other element of the Settlement Plan was enacted as called for under the Security Council-endorsed plan. This process of dismembering the Settlement Plan—from comprehensive “agreement” to a step-by-step process—mirrored the ill-fated approach taken in the Oslo Peace Process. What Oslo accomplished was the outsourcing of many tasks of the Israeli occupation to the Palestinian Authority while simultaneously allowing Israel to increase its rate of colonization of the West Bank. In the case of Western Sahara, a similar process unfolded: Morocco's infrastructural and demographic colonization of Western Sahara accelerated, an acceleration that only complicated UN efforts to establish an electorate for the final status vote. In the name of securing peace in Western Sahara, the UN Mission was thus quickly incorporated into the conflict's machinery of instability by disabling or rendering dysfunctional the actual peacemaking capacities of the mission. James A. Baker III's efforts to rescue the UN mission in Western Sahara, starting in 1997, were successful up until the exact point when they actually threatened to solve the issue. At both these critical junctures (early 2000 in the case of the Houston Accords and summer 2003 in the case of the Baker Plan), it was the Security Council, not Morocco, that essentially blocked the resolution of the conflict by refusing to live up to its stated commitments.

The major challenge facing Morocco in the 1990s was not simply the presence of UN peacekeepers and administrators in Western Sahara (a permanent international presence that would underscore the undetermined status of the territory); it was Morocco's geopolitical function after the Cold War. In the absence of a threat to global security, the burgeoning neoliberal agenda of the 1990s prioritized democratization and open markets above all else. While the Moroccan regime was comfortable with the latter (given the transnational financialization of the monarchy's power), the former was more difficult to navigate. After all, how could an authoritarian monarchy make itself useful to a global regime predicated on the democratization of state power and the privatization of economic power? But the neoliberalization of the Moroccan regime actually produced the strategies of rule that have become the regime's mechanisms of stability for nearly two decades: the Moroccan opposition (first Socialists, then Islamists) were granted limited controls over the state, benevolently devolved to the Parliament from the monarchy (Graciet and Laurent 2012). These elected governments proved incapable of curtailing the powers of the monarchy because of the persistence of two forces: one is the so-called *Makhzen*, which is a royally appointed, controlled and monitored administrative structure that runs parallel to elected bodies; the other is the growing financial power afforded by the monarchy's domestic and international holdings. Coupled with the ideological power of the Moroccan monarchy over the polity (as demonstrated in the incapacity of Moroccan "Arab Spring" protests to imagine a revolution that would produce a republican order), this system of rule has easily discredited two significant sources of opposition (Socialists and Islamists) while allowing the monarchy to pretend to be retreating from power as its sovereign wealth and technocratic governance grow.

TERRORISM TO THE RESCUE IN THE 2000s

The latest geopolitical function of the Western Sahara conflict is undoubtedly its role in the waning global War on Terror launched by Washington after 11 September 2001. Morocco's role in the post-9/11 reality was largely forged over the course of the 1990s as Algeria faced a protracted crisis of armed conflict, terrorism and state repression. Although Algeria was not the only Arab or African state to be facing civil war and violent Islamist insurgency, the size and persistence of the violence in Algeria,

coupled with the horrors perpetrated against civilians, marked Algeria as a key site in what would become the global War on Terror after 9/11 (Zoubir 2002). With the emergence of terrorism as an international problem in the 1970s (Stampnitzky 2013), Morocco had long touted the peaceful nature of its people given the religious authority of its monarchy. With the contrasting picture in Algeria in the 1990s, Morocco could further cultivate this image of being a bulwark against radicalism and violence (see Wehrey and Boukhars 2013).

This image, however, was one that had to be carefully managed. Like many other regimes in the Arab world, Morocco had used the nascent Islamist movement in the 1970s to counter Leftist movements, often with US encouragement. Moroccans contributed to the ranks of the Mujahidin in Afghanistan in the 1980s and the ranks of Al-Qaida's early internationalist efforts in the 1990s (including the Algerian insurgency), and they formed a significant component of the volunteers who went to Mesopotamia after the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq (Burgat and Dowell 1993; Kepel 2006). The May 2003 coordinated suicide bombings in Casablanca then became the exception that proved the rule: Morocco was tolerant and peaceful, and consequently domestic efforts to keep it that way should be supported at home and abroad.

The timing of the 2003 Casablanca attacks was also important for two other reasons. Regionally, Morocco had been under threat of being displaced by Algeria as the key US ally in the War on Terror in North Africa. Given what had just transpired in Algeria in the 1990s, President Bouteflika was in a better position to make the case for an unprecedented Algerian-US partnership against Al-Qaida and allied forces. Indeed, part of Bouteflika's mandate, as given to him by the military powers that had ruled Algeria since the 1992 state of emergency, was to rehabilitate Algeria's international image, which had suffered under suspicions of excessive brutality against the insurgency and its civilian supporters (Roberts 2007). The events of 9/11 afforded Bouteflika a golden opportunity to do just that, to reach out to Washington. The new relationship between Washington and Algiers, fostered by longstanding energy relations, was put to the test by the Western Sahara peace process and several other developments (e.g. the invasion of Iraq and the second Palestinian intifada) (Riedel 2013; Zoubir and Benabdallah Gambier 2005).

In Western Sahara, James A. Baker III, the former US Secretary of State with strong ties to both Bush administrations, was then leading the negotiations between Morocco and Polisario. Baker had determined that the

only way forward in Western Sahara was to organize a referendum on the options of integration, autonomy and independence. Although Morocco had rejected the last option in 2000 (after pretending for two decades to support it), Baker assumed that the country would accept a referendum if Morocco's settlers could also vote. This would thus create an electorate of two Moroccan settlers for every native Western Saharan. In 2001, Baker had tried to go forward without the independence option but had instead been instructed by the Security Council to put it back in (a mandate Baker had actually asked the Council to give him). Given these parameters established by the parties and the Council, the 2003 Baker Plan was the only way forward. Although Polisario was unhappy with the new referendum arrangements, Algeria pressed Polisario to accept the plan as either the best way forward or at least as a way to put Morocco on the spot. It was thus up to the United States and France to get Morocco to accept it as well (Theofilopoulou 2006).

The 2003 Casablanca bombings helped defuse the pressure building on Morocco to accept the Baker Plan. What little priority the George W. Bush administration had put on settling the Western Sahara conflict was easily trumped by the need to make sure Morocco would continue to be a safe and stable partner in the political, economic and military struggle against national and transitional Islamic militants. The cost to Washington of throwing the Baker Plan under the bus was Algeria's cooperation in the War on Terror, which became more and more reluctant. What value Bouteflika had gained from his partnership with the second Bush administration was no longer of use and, given the unpopularity of the Iraq war, it was easy for Algeria to distance itself from Washington's War on Terror (Ammour 2012). Global oil prices, moreover, had climbed throughout the 2000s. This aided the financial rehabilitation of the Algerian state to such an extent that it emboldening Algiers to press for renegotiated exploration and production contracts with the foreign firms doing business in Algeria's energy sector. At the end of the day, however, Bouteflika's ambitions had always been much more domestic than international. He secured a second and far more legitimate mandate in 2004, thus providing him with the domestic wherewithal to re-establish the Algerian presidency as the pinnacle of the regime's structure.

Rather than seeing peace in Western Sahara as central to the stabilization of Mohammed VI's reign, Washington has always helped maintain this regime of insecurity at the heart of the Moroccan state—that is, the Western Sahara conflict. The Arab Spring and, more importantly,

the 2012 Mali crisis continued to demonstrate Morocco's ability to leverage North Atlantic security concerns to its benefit, an ability that largely rests on its military occupation of Western Sahara—that is, the maintenance of 50,000 US trained and equipped soldiers in a contested territory. Indeed, concerns about security in the Sahara-Sahel are now central to the discourse of the Western Sahara conflict. The post-9/11 counter-terrorism policies that the Bush administration adopted for Saharan Africa, notably the Pan-Sahel Initiative and the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership, were poorly suited to building security, though these initiatives did much to produce the very thing they claimed to be fighting: terrorism (Keenan 2009; Keenan 2012). By declaring the Sahel a terrorism zone before any significant acts of terrorism were reported, US policy drove away one of the few forms of legitimate commerce for many populations in the Sahara: tourism. Other forms of commerce traditionally practised by Saharan communities (inter-regional labour and trade in both legal and illegal goods) became increasingly stigmatized for their ostensible connections to terrorism, yet such trade was the only option for many to earn a living (Lacher 2012; for background, see Scheele 2012). At the same time, US military cooperation with governments in the region often played into strategies of suppressing minority opposition groups in the Sahara: Tuaregs in the case of Mali and Niger, and Sahrawis in the case of Morocco. Though the primary stakeholders in the Sahara's security should have been the people who live there, US military policy largely allied itself with governments that have repressed those stakeholders (see Mundy 2010). It thus comes as little surprise that Morocco has sought to “terrorize” the issue of Western Sahara and label Polisario as terrorists since 9/11 (De Orellana 2015), flooding Washington, D.C., with millions of lobbying dollars to make this a reality (Barclay and Chick 2014).

Since Baker's resignation in 2004, the Western Sahara peace process has laboured under the illusion that the UN Security Council is willing to solve the problem in a way consistent with longstanding UN Security Council resolutions. The Council is fully aware that a “mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara” (e.g. UN Security Council Resolution 2285, 29 April 2016) is fundamentally at odds with Morocco's repeated and categorical rejection of any referendum. That is, there is no mutually acceptable solution that provides for self-determination under existing geopolitical arrangements. Though the UN peace process is ostensibly

a conflict resolution mechanism, it has largely served to place limits on the Western Sahara conflict. These limits give the conflict a false sense of intelligibility and manageability, but at the expense of making it actually resolvable.

WESTERN SAHARAN NATIONALISM AND US HEGEMONY: FROM (FAILED) CONFRONTATION TO (FAILED) COLLABORATION

Western Saharan nationalism was strongly opposed to US hegemony even if its initial leaders aligned themselves and their ideology with the anti-imperialist agendas of the leading African and Arab liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the ideals of the Non-Aligned Movement and the particular aspects of the post-Nasserist visions of Boumedienne and Gaddafi (Zunes 1987). One, first of all, has to make a strong distinction between the early years of Polisario (1973–76), when the organization was composed of a relatively small vanguard of idealistic militants and, on the other hand, its later consolidation as a broad political front incorporating a more diverse array of political tendencies and social bodies. Significant defections away from Spanish organized bodies in 1975–76 (PUNS, the colonial *jamma'a*, and assorted security forces) should be read not as the radicalization of the Sahrawis but as the realization of a pluralistic nationalist movement incorporating both conservative and progressive tendencies, despite the movement's unitary and revolutionary veneer. Though Gaddafi's vision of the *Jamahiriyah*, "the state of the masses", had some effect on how Polisario "imagined" their state in exile, it was largely Algerian tutelage in the arts of internationalized insurgent politics that had the greatest impact on Polisario's evolution from 1976 onwards. Where Gaddafi steered Libya into open confrontation with the North Atlantic world, Algeria sought a more pragmatic route, balancing its revolutionary credentials with its insistence upon diplomacy and mutual respect as the preferred tools of international politics. Though Algeria often supported the direct and indirect opponents of US policy, the country never ran afoul of US interests enough to earn it a place on such notorious lists as the list of "State Sponsors of Terrorism", established by the US State Department in 1979. That said, Algeria has also never enjoyed much favour in Washington despite often ranking as one of the top energy suppliers to the United States and as host to several

US oil companies (see Parker 1987; Zoubir 2002). In Washington, D.C., Polisario established a presence in the late 1970s to present its case to US policymakers. Although Polisario won bipartisan support in the US Congress, this had little effect on either the Carter or the Reagan-Bush administrations, which prioritized the stability of the Hassan II regime (i.e. a stable stalemate in Western Sahara) above all other concerns during the period of the Morocco-Polisario war (1975–91).

Adapting to the end of the Cold War, Polisario enacted reforms to bolster the democratic credentials of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (RASD) structures and to address concerns of abuses in the camps. At the same time, these reforms were largely symbolic in nature and limited to the purging of particularly notorious characters (Lippert 1992). With the normalization of life in the camps and the increasing international presence of humanitarian and solidarity workers, it was also necessary to develop more realistically consultative structures, ones modelled after European governments, than the revolutionary structures Polisario had relied upon in the 1970s (San Martín 2010: chapters 3–4). That said, Polisario and RASD continue to exist in an asymmetric relationship with the former dominating the latter, an alleged relationship of necessity until independence is achieved (Ould Ismail Ould Es-Sweyih 2001). One important reason for the efforts to democratize camp life in the late 1980s and early 1990s had to do with the increasing demobilization of Polisario's forces, which saw men return from the front on a more permanent basis. Additionally, the post-exodus population boom was beginning to be felt in the camps as the children born after 1976 became a new economic and political management problem for the Polisario. For the exiled Sahrawis who lived under the regime of the Polisario-RASD, the years of the late 1980s and early 1990s were years of anticipation, as UN promises of a referendum began to take shape. The 1991 ceasefire and arrival of MINURSO led many Sahrawis to prepare for a return to their homeland in the early 1990s; it was only after several years of delays in the referendum voter identification process, which was finally concluded in 1999, that the 100,000 Sahrawi refugees began to realize that the vote was far from guaranteed by the international community. By that time, it was clear that the question of Polisario's democratic credentials was a moot point. Western Sahara would be granted independence if and only if Morocco agreed to it. The idea that the Security Council would mandate independence, or even a referendum, quickly faded at the turn of the century (Adebajo 2002; Theofilopoulou 2006).

The emphasis on democratic norms in Sahrawi nationalist discourse in the 1990s was followed by an increasing focus upon issues of human rights, particularly in the wake of sizeable protests in 1999, 2005 and 2010. Because of these demonstrations and the international attention they brought to the issue of Western Sahara, Polisario's leaders began to claim that nonviolent civil resistance was central to their national liberation strategy in the twenty-first century, second only to the international diplomatic efforts of Polisario. Figures such as Aminatou Haidar began to receive international acclaim and soon the mandate of MINURSO, which is the only UN mission that does not monitor human rights, became a central point of contention in the annual debates over Western Sahara in the UN Security Council (Human Rights Watch 2014). While framing the problem of Western Sahara in the apolitical terms of human rights has won Western Saharan nationalists new sympathy and some diplomatic victories, it has failed to destabilize the fundamental geopolitical architecture underwriting the conflict. One case in point is the constellation of long-standing supporters of Western Sahara that gained prominent positions in the Obama administration, notably Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security Advisor Susan Rice. Even on the ostensibly technical and apolitical issue of human rights monitoring in Western Sahara (never mind the actual peace process), there has been no movement towards enacting a simple modification of MINURSO's mandate to bring it into alignment with the human rights norms of all other UN missions. Moreover, nonviolence as a realistic strategy for Western Sahara depends on highly uncertain variables: the reaction of the international community and the solidarity of Moroccan settlers. Given the steep demographic asymmetry between Moroccan settlers and Sahrawis (at least two to one), Sahrawi protestors are incapable of successfully rendering Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara ungovernable (Mundy and Zunes 2015), which is key to the success of almost any nonviolent resistance movement (Chenoweth and Stephan 2012). Moroccans not only outnumber Sahrawis, but the Moroccan state has total control over the territory, meaning that Sahrawis are not able to mount an effective campaign of economic sabotage.

The only nonviolent strategy left is a kind of "suicidal rebellion" (Kuperman 2005) that aims to goad the Moroccan state into over-reacting through massive state violence. There are indications that such a strategy might work (Stephan and Mundy 2006), though there is also reason for caution (Mundy and Zunes 2014). In instances where Sahrawis have put their bodies on the line (e.g. the 2005 Intifada and Haidar's hunger strike

in 2009), the international community, including the US led “Group of Friends”, has tended to increase its involvement in overt and subtle ways (for background on the Western Sahara “Group of Friends”, see Whitfield 2007: chapter 6). Yet the 2010 Gdeim Izik protest camp seemed to demonstrate the limits of a nonviolent strategy for Western Saharan independence. It not only showed the Moroccans state’s willingness to use overwhelming force to maintain order, it also revealed the fleeting attention of the international community, which was soon distracted by more momentous events in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (Wilson 2013; Fernández-Molina 2015b).

The increasing emphasis on human rights and democracy, which aimed to appeal to core North Atlantic values, has paid little dividends for the Western Saharan nationalist movement. Other strategies designed to appeal directly to particular US interests, economic and religious freedom, have also failed to gain much purchase in Washington, D.C. For years, Polisario has claimed that parliamentary democracy and democratic socialism would be the political and economic basis of an independent Sahrawi republic, one committed to core capitalist values (free trade, property rights and so on). This discourse of economic freedom not only sought to undo the impression of Polisario as a socialist or communist organization (despite its strong and longstanding ties to the regime of Fidel Castro in Cuba), it also sought to counter the gains Morocco had made through increased trade openness with Europe and the United States in the 1990s and 2000s (on the idea that the Western Sahara issue is a “resource conflict”, see White 2014). One of the ways in which Polisario attempted to bolster its international business credentials was through agreements signed with multinational corporations, most of which would go into effect once Western Sahara gained independence. Chief among these agreements were licencing agreements with oil and gas companies, which were signed during a period of increasing focus on northwest Africa’s energy potential onshore and offshore. Starting in 2001, Morocco began to sign a series of agreements of questionable international legality for possible oil concessions in Western Sahara. Polisario’s counter-contracts had the potential to bring competing energy companies into conflict, but little has come of it (see Shelley 2004; Olsson 2006). Despite enthusiasm for northwest Africa’s potential gas and oil deposits, most companies lost interest following Mauritania’s dismal production rates. As oil and gas prices increased after the 2008 global financial collapse, companies began to return to Morocco and Western Sahara with renewed interest, going as

far as drilling test wells off the coast of occupied Western Sahara. Though the sudden downturn in oil prices in late 2014 has, once again, scared interest from northwest Africa, it is clear that the oil question is one that Polisario has yet to counteract or contort in its favour. Indeed, there is no sign that the contracts Polisario has signed with oil companies have had any deterrent value.

Playing directly to one of the core constituencies within US conservatism, Polisario has likewise sought to court Washington's favour through a "South Sudan strategy" (Kirk 2012; see also part two in Bereketeab 2014)—that is, by working with evangelical Christian communities. Though Polisario has long enjoyed support from Republicans and Democrats in Washington (Pazzanita 1994), Western Sahara's profile began to increase among US religious conservatives in the 1990s during a time of intense hostility towards the United Nations in the US Congress (Zunes 1998). The case of Western Sahara was added to the list of UN peacekeeping failures such as Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. As conservatives began to take an interest in the issue, this opened the door to small church groups visiting the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria. For these religious organizations, Western Sahara became a missionary opportunity, though proselytizing in the camps was strictly forbidden. For Polisario, these groups were part of the powerful force of the religious right, which held significant power during the Bush administration. Yet unlike the South Sudanese, which were viewed as Christians or potential Christians being persecuted by Khartoum, the Sahrawi struggle could not be framed in such compelling terms for US religious organizations. Though religious groups had been pivotal in the struggle for South Sudan, their impact on Western Sahara has been minimal and possibly counterproductive. For example, one of Polisario's strongest supporters in the US Senate over the previous decade has been James Inhofe, an extremely conservative evangelical Christian famous worldwide for his ongoing denials of global warming. Additionally, Morocco has mobilized its own discourse of religious freedom to advance its case in Washington by regularly mobilizing pro-Israel and associated Jewish cultural lobbies and groups. Morocco's good relations with Israel, enhanced by the large Moroccan Jewish community in Israel, is often instrumentalized to maintain Rabat's central position in US foreign policy (Fernández-Molina 2015a: 208–209). This has proven to be a much more powerful social and political force acting in Morocco's favour than the small evangelical communities Polisario has cultivated relations with.

CONCLUSION: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES?

In the early 2000s, the UN negotiation team for Western Sahara presented Morocco and Polisario with a document detailing missed opportunities. These were cases where parties to a dispute had failed to seize an opening for peace, failures that had led to further stalemate or even less desirable outcomes. The document, however, had little effect on the peace process, which has since then deteriorated by all accounts. It is an intriguing idea that there was an opening in the early 2000s: Algeria's apparent openness to a political solution, Morocco's willingness to talk autonomy and Polisario's vindication in the UN referendum voter identification effort, which functioned as a proxy referendum in itself. Such thinking, inasmuch as it abstracted the Western Sahara conflict from its actual geopolitical context, was doomed to failure. Here, again, we see how the entire Western Sahara peace process has largely served to perpetuate the dynamics of stability and instability that were elaborated in the wake of the 1975 Green March crisis. Inasmuch as the only authentic missed opportunity for a different future in the Israel and Palestinian conflict was in 1947 and 1948 (Gendzier 2015), what has been witnessed in Western Sahara since 1975 are patterns of conflict and resistance taking place within the implacable limits of US hegemony.

As argued above, these limits grew out of the rearticulation of US hegemony in the 1970s. The loss of the Vietnam War and the Arab oil "embargo" forced Washington to adapt to these new politico-military and politico-financial challenges. These adaptations saw the United States set about engineering new relations in Africa and the Middle East to consolidate its losses and advance new strategies of global dominance vis-à-vis the bipolar architecture of the Cold War. A new political economy of militarization began to take shape, one that would recuperate lost oil revenues by increasing arms sales to the region: Iran (until 1979), Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt and Iraq. An unintended but not unexpected consequence of these financial and militarizing strategies was the production of regional insecurity. Although tensions between Algeria and Morocco were already present before King Hassan's invasion of the Spanish Sahara, the Western Sahara conflict allowed Morocco to be incorporated into this new US system of economic and military dominance through the use of US arms purchased with Saudi funding to fight an unwinnable war in Western Sahara.

Since then, the maintenance of Western Sahara's internationally undetermined status has helped in its own way to help reproduce the geopolitical

arrangements the United States began structuring in the 1970s. The Morocco-Polisario dispute served to advance US interests amid the turbulence of the late Cold War and it became a principle factor in the consolidation of Morocco's post-colonial regime. The perpetual crisis at the heart of the Moroccan state—the question of Western Sahara—has served to reproduce authoritarian rule in Morocco and has thus also maintained a vital US proxy. At the same time, the Western Saharan independence movement has, particularly since the end of the Cold War, attempted to adapt its strategies to these geopolitical realities. Rather than confronting US hegemony, which was an indirect consequence of Polisario's war against Morocco (1975–91), the Western Saharan nationalist movement has sought to find ways to accommodate its mission within the architecture of North Atlantic interests through discourses of democracy, human rights and freedom, particularly economic and religious. As the world enters a new phase of alleged geopolitical decentring with the rise of China and open hostility to US dominance from various actors, it remains to be seen how these new realities will affect the Western Saharan impasse, shape the Moroccan regime and limit Sahrawi resistance. If the past and the circular logic of hegemony are any guide, the Western Sahara conflict will persist as long as it continues to serve that logic.

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The EU's Reluctant Engagement with the Western Sahara Conflict: Between Humanitarian Aid and Parliamentary Involvement

María Luisa Grande-Gascón and Susana Ruiz-Seisdedos

The discourse and practice of the European Union (EU) in its position regarding the conflict in Western Sahara has been ambivalent. While institutions such as the Commission and the Council have remained in the background, adopting decisions and making commercial agreements with Morocco and ignoring the conflict over Western Sahara, the European Parliament has been much more likely to discuss it. The Parliament and the EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO)—through its development cooperation policy—have been the two institutions that have sustained a more insistent and long-lasting interest in the Sahrawi question. This makes the question of how the two bodies—especially the Parliament—have positioned themselves particularly interesting. The Parliament has repeatedly discussed the Sahrawi question and its approaches have been vital, at times, with regard to maintaining development aid to the area, engaging in trade agreements such as in 2012 or

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simply ensuring that the conflict does not end in oblivion. In this regard, there have been few studies on the Parliament's positioning on the Sahrawi question despite the fact that for some time it has played a notable role, albeit an uncertain and fluctuating one. The main role of the Parliament with regard to the Sahara can be seen both in the number of positions and resolutions it has adopted—more than any other body in the EU—and in the forceful nature of many of them. Historically, the line it has taken has oscillated between positions close to those advanced by Morocco on the one hand and support for the process of self-determination, the latter more closely associated with pro-Sahrawi interests, on the other. These changes in position, hardly ever unanimous, have resulted from a range of interrelated factors, in particular the changing political composition of the Parliament and pressure over the issue from Morocco. Nonetheless, significant diplomatic crises have been followed by periods of moderation and the softening of positions.

While on occasion relatively proactive—more so than other European bodies and more than the EU's own member states—the Parliament has generally based its resolutions around decisions adopted by the United Nations (UN; notwithstanding a number of criticisms about the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara [MINURSO], established in 1991 by Security Council Resolution 690).

It is important for the Parliament to be able to establish itself as a distinct actor in European foreign policy, with an identifiable presence in international relations. As Torrejón (2014) observed, European foreign policy has developed along two institutional axes: an intergovernmental axis and an economic axis. A variety of policies have been articulated around these axes related to international politics, economic and trade relations, and development cooperation. In addition, there is a geographical dimension to European foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on policy towards African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) and Mediterranean countries. While there are significant differences between one area and another in the way policies have developed, the growing importance of the EU in development cooperation and humanitarian aid is undeniable, with significant aid being delivered to the Sahrawi refugee camps over time. One of the main instruments devised for these purposes is ECHO, created in 1992 when the European Union Treaty came into force and identified development cooperation as an area of EU foreign policy. In the case of the Sahrawi refugee camps, the department has carried out assistance and humanitarian aid work in a number of ways, with food aid and cooperation work

done most notably in conjunction with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Sotillo 1988).

Policy regarding the defence of human rights has also become increasingly important, having emerged relatively late on, in the 1990s, and focusing on spreading democratic values and fundamental freedoms. Particularly in the European Union Treaty, development cooperation policy is tied to respect for human rights. Point 2 of Article 130 U states clearly that “Community policy in this area shall contribute to the general objective of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, and to that of respecting human rights and fundamental freedom” (Sotillo 1998: 75).

One important element contributing decisively to the positioning of the EU as a whole and the European Parliament in particular are the interests of some of the more important actors in the Sahrawi conflict. A number of these, such as Spain and France, are members of the EU. Economic interests have become intertwined with the desire to achieve stability in the Maghreb, to fight against terrorism, to control migratory movements and to exploit natural resources. As Barreñada (2006: 5) has written, “in the Maghreb, the eternal dilemma of the EU as an actor on the international stage – whether to act as a transforming power or one that maintains the *status quo* – is more clearly visible than in other regions. The accelerating deterioration of the image and legitimacy of Europe among these populations, in the same way as is occurring in the Middle East, should therefore come as no surprise”.

This chapter provides a historical overview of the European Parliament’s role in the Sahrawi conflict regarding the key moments along the unfolding timeline of the conflict and the main areas in which it has engaged, along with the primary issues that have been the focus of European attention. The political composition of the Parliament, which changes after each election, has had obvious repercussions in both qualitative and quantitative terms for the way in which a number of issues have been addressed. The different resolutions adopted by the body draw attention to these variations.

Although the positions adopted by political groupings are not uniform, with each one containing a range of attitudes towards the Sahrawi question, there are clearly visible position changes and contrasting resolutions that reflect fluctuating parliamentary majorities. In general terms, and with many different nuances, political groupings on the right have supported Moroccan positions, while groupings on the left have been more

pro-Sahrawi (Barbier 1982; Urruela 1995). But this has not always been the case; until 1985, left-wing groups supported the Sahrawi position, while the right backed Morocco but after that date—when Spain joined the EU—the nationality of the members became almost as influential a factor as party ideology, leading at times to splits and differences of position within the political groupings (Bahajjoub 2010).

The pro-Sahrawi pressure group has also had an impact on the Parliament's decisions, but it wields less influence than Morocco and its diplomatic efforts. Nevertheless, it is certainly a high-profile pressure group with a permanent base in the Parliament and, along with the social movements and Sahara friendship groups in the various member states—particularly Spain—it contributes to an increasingly significant lobby in European and international affairs. Another group within the EU but without official status is the European Parliament's Intergroup on Western Sahara, one of 28 bodies that bring together members of the Parliament from different groupings to address specific issues, in this case matters relating to the Sahrawi conflict.¹

THE POSITIONING OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WITH REGARD TO THE REFERENDUM ON SELF- DETERMINATION FOR THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE

While the European Parliament's immediate reactions to the conflict were limited and late in appearing, the early response was favourable to the Moroccan position. This stance later gradually transformed, eventually favouring the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. The latter position echoed the resolutions passed by the UN in the 1970s that defined the Sahrawi conflict as a decolonization process in which the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination was to be enacted through the holding of a referendum (Urruela 1995). These contradictory stances can be seen in resolutions such as that of 12 March 1980 on Western Sahara, which stated that Western Sahara did not constitute an example of a decolonization process because it was considered Moroccan territory and was thus a regional conflict in which international bodies could not intervene. However, amidst an increasing number of initiatives on the Sahrawi question, the Parliament's position changed. This was made clear in the Resolution of 15 March 1989 on the political situation in Western Sahara, which recognized the Sahrawis' right to self-determination (Torrejón 2014; Urruela 1995).

Subsequent resolutions, like that of 18 April 1991 regarding support for the UN peace plan for Western Sahara, backed the plan and contributed a number of recommendations to the preliminary stages of its development. This plan, it should be remembered, put forward holding a referendum as a way to resolve the Sahrawi conflict. The 12 September 1991 resolution on the peace plan for Western Sahara reiterated this view, clearly advocating the holding of a referendum on self-determination.

It should be borne in mind that in 1981, the majority was held by political groupings from across the right of the spectrum and, consequently, the predominant view favoured the Moroccan position. In 1988 and 1991, when resolutions supporting the Sahrawi position were passed, the socialist group had a majority in the Chamber, with Spain and Portugal having recently acceded to EU membership (Vaquer i Fanés 2007). As a consequence, the European Parliament rejected Morocco's request for a delay in holding the referendum and changes to the identity criteria used for the census to establish the voting register for the referendum. In doing so, the Parliament was upholding the Polisario Front's position.

The right to self-determination in the context of the Sahrawi conflict was not to be revisited until 1995, and then in a more tempered fashion. The 16 March 1995 Resolution on Western Sahara contained no express reference to the Sahrawi situation as a decolonization process; nor did it clearly back the Sahrawis' right to self-determination. There was only mention of the concept of a free and fair referendum. Adjustments were proposed to the Settlement Plan, in view of the serious problems encountered in applying it, and Morocco was blamed for the paralysis in implementation, but without any clear indictment, although MINURSO's inability to manage the referendum was denounced. The Resolution of 6 June 1996 on Human Rights in Morocco continued this theme in response to the difficulties experienced in moving the Settlement Plan forward and to problems over voter identity for the census caused by unhelpful Moroccan interventions (Desrués 2000; Soroeta 2009). In 1999, there was also a change of perspective on the Sahrawi conflict, with the Parliament focusing on progress made towards resolving the conflict, highlighting this in the Resolution on Western Sahara of 14 January 1999. However, there were also signs of hesitation and fears relating to holding the referendum because of obstacles put into place by Morocco.

Until the end of 1992, the groups supporting the Sahrawi cause held the majority in the European Parliament: the socialist group, the left-wing European United Left coalition and the Greens, among others. However,

these groups themselves shifted their positions towards the end of 1992. On the other side, the groups that had been aligned with Morocco, such as the European People's Party, the European Democratic Alliance and the Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, no longer maintained their inflexible postures; indeed, some of them began to change, criticizing violations of human rights carried out by Morocco in the occupied territories (Torrejón 2014).

Since 2000, the Chamber has passed a number of resolutions on the Sahrawi conflict, taking different positions. The European Parliament Resolution on Western Sahara of 16 March 2000 continued to support the Settlement Plan even though at the time, the UN was considering the development of new initiatives intended to replace it. Specifically, Morocco and the Polisario Front were being asked to collaborate with James A. Baker III on the development of a new plan. Baker I (the Framework Agreement), presented in 2001, included the holding of a referendum aimed at establishing a definitive status for the occupied territories within five years. The plan was rejected by the Polisario Front.

The European Parliament Resolution of 11 June 2002 on relations between the EU and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) saw the beginning of enhanced cooperation and the Chamber voted in favour of the various options proposed by the UN, on the condition that they be negotiated between the parties concerned. Among these options was a choice between continuing to apply the Settlement Plan or revising Baker I. The November 2003 Resolution on the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) endorsed Baker II, the definitive version of the Baker Plan, which received the support of the Polisario Front this time.² The implementation of Baker II was later endorsed once again in the Resolution of 27 October 2005.

Finally, while not specifically related to the Sahrawi conflict, the Resolution of 13 March 2014 on EU priorities for the 25th session of the UN Human Rights Council requested that Morocco “continue negotiations for a peaceful and long-lasting solution to the Western Sahara conflict, and reaffirms the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination, which should be decided through a democratic referendum, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions”. This effectively reaffirmed the Sahrawis’ right to self-determination and called on Morocco to help bring it about.

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE DISPUTE OVER NATURAL RESOURCES

While natural resources are of great interest at the beginning of conflicts of varying degrees of intensity between states, only recently has research begun to look closely at the matter. Recent decades have seen increasing mention of so-called “water wars”, quite apart from the conflicts over ever-desirable oil deposits. The Moroccan-Sahrawi issue also includes a significant conflict over the natural resources of the disputed territories. As Trasomontes (2014) observes, Western Sahara first attracted the interest of Spain and then of Morocco with the discovery of natural resources, initially fishing grounds,³ and later oil and phosphates. Prospecting on Sahrawi soil began in the 1940s, but it was in 1962, with the discovery of the deposits at Bou Craa, that it became systematic. As Morten Hauge (2007) remarks, the phosphates, fisheries, gas and other resources of Western Sahara are a fundamental part of the Moroccan economy, making Morocco’s interests in the territory considerable indeed.

There have been numerous resolutions pronounced by the UN Assembly reiterating the need for administering powers to safeguard and guarantee the economic rights of peoples in non-self-governing territories regarding their natural resources,⁴ all of which was confirmed by the 2002 legal opinion issued by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs Hans Corell.⁵ These all confirm that the exploitation of resources is legal provided that there is collaboration with the people who live in the territories and that their interests are taken into account (Smith 2013).

The European Parliament showed more interest in natural resources beginning in 2000, when its other positions softened. The varying, and at times ambivalent, nature of the Parliament’s position can be seen in the two main resolutions on this matter. The first is dated 1992 and sets out its position on the Fisheries Agreements. The resolution accepts that the waters of Western Sahara should be included in the Fisheries Agreements with Morocco, despite both the Parliament’s Committee for Development and the UN taking positions against it (Morten Hauge 2007). This first Fisheries Agreement was in force from 1995 to 1999. Then, after a seven-year hiatus, in 2006, a second agreement was signed, by which the EU made economic and financial aid available to Morocco and European boats were allowed access to Moroccan fisheries, which included the waters with the best fishing grounds (those with abundant fish stocks, bigger fish and no obligation to abide by temporary interruptions in fishing aimed at

promoting stock recovery), such as those of Western Sahara (Trasomontes 2014). In 2011, this agreement was extended, but unlike on previous occasions, the protocol enacting the extension of the Fisheries Agreement between the EU and Morocco was not approved. On 14 December 2011, the Parliament voted it down by 326 to 296 with 58 abstentions, and it did so based on a number of points:

- It applied to Sahrawi waters;
- The depletion of the fishing grounds through over-fishing;
- The low levels of profitability for the EU;
- Morocco was not using the funds to benefit the local population in contravention of the requirements laid down in a number of UN Assembly resolutions on the exploitation of natural resources in non-self-governing territories and the lack of evidence that the agreement was beneficial to Western Sahara (Torrejón 2013).

But with the Parliament in this ambivalent position, as has been demonstrated here, the new Fisheries Agreement, which was signed on 24 July 2013, was ratified by the body (Trasomontes 2014), despite the fact that there were and continue to be doubts as to its legality, as expressed in a parliamentary answer given by the EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries:

According to the UN position, to which the EU abides, Western Sahara is considered as a non-self-governing territory and Morocco its ‘de facto’ administrator. Since the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement contains specific provisions for the benefit of the local population, this agreement is legal and respecting international law, as mentioned in its replies to the numerous parliamentary questions on the subject (European Parliament 2015).

Finally, a decision about the controversial agreement was handed down by the Court of Justice of the European Union, which on 10 December 2015 considered it invalid to apply to Western Sahara (Judgment of the General Court 2015). This caused a new diplomatic crisis between the EU and the Kingdom of Morocco. Thus, the size of the resources at stake seems to play a decisive role in determining the eventual outcome of the conflict, the position of the European Parliament and that of the EU itself, which has shifted once again as time has marched on.

POSITIONING ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND REFUGEES

Although, as Soroeta (2009) observes, a commitment to human rights did not appear in the founding documents of the EU, subsequent developments have seen these rights expressly incorporated. However, on occasion, other interests of a more economic nature have taken precedence over the defence of human rights. A “democracy clause” is included in all international agreements made by the EU with third countries, which makes it clear that respect for human rights by a state or states participating in these agreements must be ensured and that this would, furthermore, be binding (Cebada 2003). If a state fails to meet its obligations and human rights violations occur, the agreement can be suspended; this has happened in some cases, where aid to certain countries has been halted. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this clause has not always been a guarantee of respect for human rights (Soroeta 2009).

From the beginning, European Parliament resolutions have made repeated reference to the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the situation of the Sahrawi refugees. For example, one of the first resolutions on the refugees, the Resolution of March 1981, took the Moroccan view that the refugees in Tindouf were not Sahrawis from Western Sahara⁶ and established the need for the UN to carry out a census in order to establish where they came from. Since 1987, the European Parliament’s stance on the refugees has focused on the need to provide them with humanitarian aid, hence the Parliament’s Resolution on the Work of the ACP-EEC Joint Assembly of 23 January 1987, which made a request for aid, especially foodstuffs, and health and education infrastructure. The Resolution of 15 March 1989 on the political situation in Western Sahara continued to highlight the need to increase humanitarian aid to the refugee camps.

The approach of the European Parliament to human rights has largely concentrated on two elements: the human rights situation in the camps and the situation in the rest of Western Sahara. At first, concern centred on the refugees and on the napalm bombing of a number of their settlements by Morocco, as well as the use of repressive action by Morocco against the Sahrawi population in the occupied territories, including arbitrary arrests, disappearances, cases of torture and so forth (International Crisis Group 2007). The first resolutions referring to the human rights situation in the Western Sahara territory were passed in 1987. They addressed the question of human rights in Morocco and denounced the holding of Sahrawi

civilian and military prisoners along with the disappearance of a number of Sahrawis. There was explicit condemnation of Morocco over the violation of human rights and a request was made for the release of political prisoners. As Torrejón (2014: 44) observes, with these resolutions, “the European Parliament began to develop a form of practice with regard to human rights in Western Sahara that would serve as a point of reference for subsequent activities in the sphere”. Later resolutions would go on to address human rights issues and the more specific case of Western Sahara, for example the Resolution of 15 February 1990 on breaches of human rights in Western Sahara.

A larger issue arose in 1992, when the Chamber ran out of instruments with which to pressure Morocco and published a ruling disagreeing with the financial protocols agreed upon between the European Community and Morocco. In the resolution that accompanied the ruling, the Chamber requested compliance with the human rights clause in view of the grave violations of human rights committed by Morocco. This provoked a serious crisis in relations between the EU and Morocco, and significant pressure was applied to persuade them to reconsider. In the end, the protocol was approved, but the following day, the Parliament also passed a resolution on the release of the Sahrawis being held in Western Sahara, reiterating its condemnation of Morocco and demanding that it release the detainees and end the state of emergency in the occupied territories (Urruela 1995).

After this crisis, the Parliament’s stance softened and subsequent resolutions addressing the matter of human rights were related to Sahrawis who had disappeared in Morocco and Western Sahara (27 May 1993) and violations of human rights in Morocco and Western Sahara (10 February 1994). There were continued calls for the release of detained and disappeared Sahrawis and for permission to be given to international observers and humanitarian organizations to enter the territories; calls also continued for Morocco to meet its obligations under international agreements on human rights.

Beginning in 2000, violations of human rights came to prominence in the European Parliament. For example, the European Parliament Resolution on Western Sahara of 16 March 2000 addressed the question of human rights. Additionally, the European Parliament Resolution of 14 April 2005 on Humanitarian Aid to the Sahrawi Refugees made very clear mention of the human rights situation and the situation of Morocco’s prisoners of war; in October 2005, the Polisario Front freed the prisoners

of war it was holding, but Morocco did not. The Resolution on the situation in Western Sahara of 25 November 2010 addressed the protests in Laayoune and the situation of the refugees, while the Resolution of 22 October 2013 on the human rights situation in the Sahel region included a request that MINURSO take over supervision of human rights.

One particularly serious problem was Morocco's refusal to allow access to a European Parliament delegation that sought permission for a visit to the Sahrawi territories; this came in the wake of protests over Morocco's human rights abuses that took place in a number of towns across Western Sahara in May 2005 as part of the so-called Sahrawi Intifada (Soroeta 2009). Hence, in the European Parliament Resolution on human rights in Western Sahara of 27 October 2005, the request was made for Morocco

[...] to facilitate access to the territory of Western Sahara for independent observers and representatives of human rights defence organisations and the international press; [the Parliament] deplores in this connection the expulsion of several European delegations; considers that the visit by its delegation to the region will provide the European Parliament with fresh information regarding the situation there, and is confident that the delegation will be able to carry out its mission unobstructed [...].

(European Parliament resolution on human rights in Western Sahara, 27 October 2005)

The resolutions of the European Parliament dealt with more than reports of human rights violations by the Polisario Front. On numerous occasions, they also took up denunciations made by organizations working in defence of human rights, principally Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, especially in Laayoune (Amnesty International 2005; Omar et al. 2008).

In recent years, there have been reports, originating in Morocco, of infringements of human rights in the camps at Tindouf, although these have not been proven. Reports on this subject made by a number of humanitarian organizations do not mention any cases of what might be considered serious infringements of human rights committed by the Polisario Front (Soroeta 2009; De Orellana 2015). In 2015, the Council of the European Union approved the 2014 Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World, which considers Western Sahara a non-self-governing territory. The report expresses its concern regarding the human rights situation in the region and emphasizes the importance

of improving the situation both in Western Sahara and in the refugee camps at Tindouf.

The European Parliament's most recent resolution on this subject was that of 17 December 2015 related to the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World (2014) and the EU's policy on the matter, in which Western Sahara is mentioned in point 76 of the report:

[The Parliament] calls for the fundamental rights of the people of Western Sahara, including freedom of association, freedom of expression and the right to assembly, to be respected; demands the release of all Sahrawi political prisoners; demands access to the territories of Western Sahara for members of parliament, independent observers, NGOs and the press; urges the United Nations to provide MINURSO with a human rights mandate, in line with all other UN peacekeeping missions around the world; supports a fair and lasting settlement of the Western Sahara conflict, on the basis of the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

HUMANITARIAN AID FOR THE SAHRAWI REFUGEES

The EU, along with its constituent member countries, is the largest overall contributor to development cooperation in terms of the volume of resources it controls, with a total of €56.2 billion. This represents 0.43 per cent of the Gross National Income (GNI) of the EU (European Parliament 2015). However, the development cooperation work carried out by the EU for the Sahrawi population is what is technically known as humanitarian aid, not development cooperation. Humanitarian aid includes emergency aid and aid in the form of long-term operations for refugees and internally displaced persons. Emergency aid consists of

aid provided in urgent circumstances to victims of disasters caused by natural catastrophes or armed conflict, aid consisting of the free provision of goods and services essential to immediate survival (water, food, shelter, medicines and healthcare). This type of intervention normally occurs for very limited periods, normally no more than six months, occasionally up to twelve (Abrisketa and Pérez de Armiño 2000).

Humanitarian aid, strictly speaking, is not development aid as it does not generate development; it encompasses emergency aid and aid intended to provide essential goods and services on an ongoing basis to populations of

refugees and displaced persons, the latter being the case in Western Sahara (Boum 2014).

As in the case of development cooperation, if all member states' national aid budgets are combined together with that of the European Commission, the EU is the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world. The European Community Humanitarian Aid Agency, now ECHO, is the EU's main agency in this field. It was created in 1992, and since then has financed aid and rescue operations and coordinated the policies and actions of the member states; it has channelled a total of €21 billion since its creation. In 2014, the budget set aside for this type of aid was €1.273 billion (European Parliament 2015). Notable also is the role of the European Parliament in this area as a co-legislating body alongside the Council. It supervises the delivery of humanitarian aid through two committees—the Development Committee (DEVE) and civil protection, which falls under the auspices of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI)—and has periodically highlighted the need to increase funding for humanitarian aid.

In the case of the Sahrawi refugee camps, the humanitarian aid given has been very significant.⁷ Initially, it took the form of food aid (a subdivision of humanitarian aid) to the camps, and it has been in operation since 1976, when the first donation was made: 100 tonnes of powdered milk. The variety of types of aid later increased and branched into finance for programmes and projects carried out through development NGOs or in partnerships between development NGOs and the EU. This early aid was delivered on an occasional basis, but from 1987 on, aid has increased, fundamentally food aid and projects aimed at creating health, education and agricultural infrastructure, as illustrated by the European Parliament Resolution on the Work of the ACP-EEC Joint Assembly of 23 January 1987, which requested humanitarian aid for the refugees.

Successive resolutions from the European Parliament have requested increases in aid, especially beginning in the 1990s,⁸ and it has been precisely these petitions and this continuous pressure that has managed to direct a degree of budgetary attention towards the situation of the Sahrawi people. As ECHO itself acknowledges in a number of its annual reports, “The situation of Sahrawi refugees continues to be a forgotten crisis, in particular due to donor fatigue and little international attention” (ECHO Aid Strategy for 2004). The principal component of aid, as noted above, is food aid, which represents around 50 per cent of the resources sent to the area, with the rest targeting infrastructure for water supplies,

healthcare and waste management. The budget set aside by the EU for the Sahrawi camps at Tindouf has hardly changed in the last decade, despite the continuous increase in the global humanitarian aid budget managed by ECHO, which has doubled from €570 million in 2004 to €1.273 billion in 2014 (Table 4.1).

Aid to the Sahara is, however, currently being called into question or is at least the source of some controversy in the wake of the so-called OLAF report produced by the European Anti-Fraud Office, which is part of the European Commission. The report details how humanitarian aid from the Commission and other international organizations sent to the Sahrawi refugees in the four-year period from 2003 to 2007 ended up, in part, being sold in markets in Algeria, Mauritania and Mali, leading to accusations of possible “misappropriation” and “large-scale fraud” in the handling of humanitarian funds. Possibly more important still is the fact that the number of refugees, always a controversial point, has been challenged, pushing certain circles within the European Parliament to ask for a reduction in the aid sent to the Sahrawi camps (El Mundo 2015; El Diario 2015). The report by the NGO DARA, an evaluation of the humanitarian aid offered to the Sahrawi refugees between 2006 and 2008 (DARA 2009) and carried out on behalf of the EU itself, is not conclusive on the subject, explicitly stating that due to the lack of resources made available for the task, a thorough assessment of the matter could not be made.

Table 4.1 European Commission budget for humanitarian aid and civil protection, managed through ECHO 2004–15

	<i>Overall budget (millions of euros)</i>	<i>Budget for Tindouf camps (euros)</i>
2004	570	8,000,000
2005	652	9,311,000
2006	671	10,900,000
2007	768	10,000,000
2008	936	10,000,000
2009	930	10,975,000
2010	1115	10,000,000
2011	1154	9,000,000
2012	1344	10,000,000
2013	1353	10,000,000
2014	1273	10,000,000

Source: European Commission, table prepared by the authors

CONCLUSION

The position of the European Parliament on the Sahrawi conflict has changed over time, determined by the composition of the Parliament and its varying conservative or socialist majorities. The nationality of parliamentary members has also had an influence, and this has meant that parliamentary groups have not always been internally unanimous. Pressure from Morocco has been taken into account in a number of resolutions and has been significant at particular points in time. What is not in doubt is that the Parliament has taken on a leadership role in the Sahrawi conflict within the EU, becoming one of the most active international presences.

On the other hand, given that the existence of the conflict has been known, and that, as authors such as Thomas Dye (1976) have observed, in the analysis of public policy, “inaction” or not taking decisions, or taking decisions to do nothing also represent the adoption of a position and the European Parliament’s lack of action on some important matters cannot be overlooked. The Parliament’s failure to adopt a position on the Moroccan proposals for autonomy or on the Polisario Front’s proposal to continue with Baker II after 2007, which outlines the parties’ current positions, should be mentioned in this regard; also worth noting is that despite pressure from Morocco, the Parliament did not pass the resolution it had intended to on the Aminatou Haidar case (Torrejón 2014).

Finally, humanitarian aid to Western Sahara has increased over time, both in terms of the types of aid and the volume of resources involved, although for the last decade it has remained constant, while the overall humanitarian aid budget has doubled. The role of the European Parliament in humanitarian aid, together with the work of ECHO, has been fundamental in ensuring that aid has, in fact, been maintained and not reduced at any point, a story that can be traced through successive parliamentary resolutions.

NOTES

1. A number of subjects were addressed during the meeting that established the European Parliament’s Intergroup on Western Sahara: a request was made for a visit to Western Sahara by a delegation of members of the European Parliament (the previous delegation had been prevented from visiting by Morocco); a statement was agreed upon that condemned the expulsion of international observers from Western Sahara and the continuing

abuse of human rights in occupied Western Sahara; and finally, a petition was launched calling for the Sahrawi people to have the right to self-determination through the UN peace process.

2. Baker Plan I set out the creation of an autonomous regime with powers in a wide range of areas such as tax policy and taxation, social welfare, education, transport, trade, environment policy and so forth, and the holding of a referendum to settle the final status of the territory within five years. Anyone who had resided in the territory the year before it was held would be able to vote in the referendum. While Morocco supported the proposal, albeit judging the Settlement Plan to be in need of modification, the Polisario Front rejected it.
3. There are some very interesting articles on Moroccan interest in Sahrawi fishing grounds, in particular one that focuses on the octopus catch (Veguilla 2009).
4. Resolutions 35/118 of 11 December 1980, 52/78 of 10 December 1997, 54/91 of 6 December 1999, 55/147 of 8 December 2000 and 56/74 of 10 December 2001.
5. This Legal Opinion states: "It must be recognized, however, that in the present case, the contracts for oil reconnaissance and evaluation do not entail exploitation or the physical removal of the mineral resources, and no benefits have as of yet accrued. The conclusion is, therefore, that, while the specific contracts which are the subject of the Security Council's request are not in themselves illegal, if further exploration and exploitation activities were to proceed in disregard of the interests and wishes of the people of Western Sahara, they would be in violation of the international law principles applicable to mineral resource activities in Non-Self-Governing Territories".
6. Before settling definitively at Tindouf, the Sahrawi refugees were located in Angala and Al Mahbes, where they were bombarded by the Moroccan Army. Subsequently, the current settlements at Tindouf were set up. The initial stance adopted by Morocco was that these were not refugees but hostages being held by the Polisario Front, who had kidnapped them, and that many Sahrawis from other countries, such as Mali, Niger, Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco, had also been settled in the camps.
7. Humanitarian aid and refugees are very closely linked, such that resolutions sometimes address both issues.
8. European Parliament Resolution of 15 March 1989; European Parliament Resolution of 16 March 2000 on Western Sahara; European Parliament Resolution of 23 October 2003 on the overall budget of the European Union for 2004; European Parliament Resolution of 14 April 2005 on humanitarian assistance to refugees from Western Sahara.

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PART 2

Regional Levels

Western Sahara and the Arab Spring

Inmaculada Szmolka

On 10 October 2010, a protest camp in the Sahrawi desert area of Gdeim Izik was established, 12 kilometers from El Ayun. Various sources estimated that there were between 10,000 and 30,000 people in the camp (Gómez-Martín 2012; López García 2011a). The protestors' first demand was aimed at improving the economic, work and living conditions for the inhabitants of the Western Sahara provinces under Moroccan administration. At the start of the protest, the flags of the Polisario Front and pro-independence slogans were absent (Desrues and Hernando de Larramendi 2011). Later, however, the social protest transformed into a nationalist demand over Western Sahara. On 8 November 2010, Moroccan security forces began the evacuation of the camp at the same time that a commission of representatives from the group negotiated a response to their demands with Moroccan members of parliament and members of the

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Conseil Royal Consultatif des Affaires Sahariennes (Royal Advisory Council for Moroccan Affairs or CORCAS)¹ (López García 2011a: 3).

Some academics and political analysts saw in the Sahrawi dissent a preface to the revolutions and protests that broke out a few months later in various North African and Middle Eastern countries (Chomsky 2011; López-García 2011b; Gómez-Martín 2012; Huber and Kamel 2015: 129; Barona 2015), social movements that were given names such as the “Arab Spring”, “Arab Springs”, “Arab awakening” and “Arab uprisings”. Other authors have argued that the Sahrawi protest movement should not be included in the same dynamic as the Arab Spring,² although there are some connecting elements among all these social and political opposition movements (Boukhars 2012: 4–5; Lamamra 2015: 39; Wilson 2010: 133). The aim of this chapter is to assess, on the one hand, whether it is possible to situate the Sahrawi Gdeim Izik protest of October 2010 in the context of the Arab Spring and, on the other, to explore the changes that have affected the political situation of Western Sahara and the conflict over sovereignty between Morocco and the Polisario Front.

The hypothetical point of departure in this chapter is that the Gdeim Izik and subsequent protests in Western Sahara cannot be placed within the opposition movements and the “fifth wave of political change” (Szmolka 2013) that have shaken the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).³ On the one hand, the Sahrawi protest, despite sharing some characteristics with the Arab revolutions and protests, has its own unique characteristics derived from the conflict over sovereignty of Western Sahara, which is a nationalist variable that is not present in any other case in the MENA region. On the other hand, Morocco’s resistance to change regarding a resolution to this conflict has prevented the Sahrawi protest from developing politically in a positive manner. This can be observed in various levels of analysis: local, regarding the political and social conditions of the inhabitants of Western Sahara; in the Kingdom of Morocco, in relation to the territorial organization of the state and the means of representation and political participation of the Western Saharan regions; and international, regarding the possibility of new conflict-resolution initiatives over sovereignty.

This hypothesis is tested by the following four objectives: first, to study the characteristics of the Sahrawi protest, paying special attention to the elements that make it unique; second, to evaluate whether changes have taken place in the organization, representation and means of political participation in Western Sahara; third, to discern whether the political reform

process carried out in Morocco in response to the 20 February (20-F) social movement has had consequences for the territorial organization of the state and, therefore, for the provinces of Western Sahara under the administration of the Kingdom of Morocco; and fourth, to verify whether there has been an advance or stagnation in the resolution process of the sovereignty conflict over Western Sahara.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE GDEIM IZIK SAHRAWI PROTEST AND THE ARAB SPRING

The starting point for this analysis is the belief that the Arab Spring is not a unitary process but rather that it manifests itself distinctly, in line with the heterogeneity of the countries of North Africa and the Middle East (Huber and Kamel 2015: 127–8). Nevertheless, in the different Arab manifestations of social opposition, common characteristics can be observed such as in the causes behind the social movements, the sociodemographic profile of the demonstrators, the strategy of the protesters, the media projection that the protests achieved and the opening up of political change processes. Some of these characteristics are present in the Sahrawi protest at Gdeim Izik. Among those principally worth noting are the socioeconomic situation (as an origin of the protests), the occupation strategies and the diffusion of the protests through social media. Despite some common points, the Sahrawi social movement has its own elements that make it unique—specifically the demand for the right to territorial self-determination that comes from a long-standing conflict over sovereignty—as well as other differentiating features.

First, the Gdeim Izik protest did not have a contagion, snowball, demonstration or emulation effect⁴ in the Arab countries, but rather the spark of the protest originated with the triumph of the Tunisian revolution and, principally, the Egyptian revolution, due to the influence of Egypt in the region. The success of the 18-day revolution, which culminated with the fall of Hosni Mubarak on 11 February 2011, seemingly demonstrated that it was possible to replace an authoritarian leader who had remained in power for decades through social protests that quickly created a so-called contagion effect to almost all the other Arab countries, which were swept along by snowballing protests that were emulated in other countries, where the protesters employed the same slogans and strategies (occupation of the central city squares, use of social media as a tool to

convene people and disseminate information about demonstrations and so forth). Similarly, a diffusion process occurred, which involved changes in the behavior of political actors, elites and citizens.

The Sahrawi protest was not imitated by the citizens of other countries, due to its failure after violent repression by the Moroccan authorities and the absence of significant changes in the status of the Sahrawi provinces. Despite the relevance that the Western Sahara conflict has in the regional balance of North Africa, the Gdeim Izik protest was perceived by the Arab world as a local problem. The Arab world, with the exception of Morocco, pays little attention to Western Sahara and it is for this reason that it seems unlikely that Tunisians and Egyptians were inspired by the Sahrawis (Wilson 2010: 133). On the other hand, the Gdeim Izik events attracted the attention of the international press, but only proportionally to news interest in Western Sahara, that is, in a scant way and for a short period of time (Wilson 2010: 133).

Second, there are similarities in the social and political demands of the Sahrawi and Arab opposition movements, inasmuch as citizen demands led to greater economic and social welfare for their respective populations. In the case of the Sahrawi protest, this represented a reaction to the arbitrary distribution of building land by the town hall in the framework of the 2009 local elections for the purposes of patronage and electioneering (Fernández-Molina 2015: 241). Labor and social demands were added to the demand for improved living conditions. The Arab and Sahrawi protests also had a distinctive political dimension. The main objective of the revolutions and Arab protests was the democratization of authoritarian regimes, while in the case of Western Sahara, the protest had a nationalist political background, a consequence of the lack of resolution of the long conflict over the sovereignty of Western Sahara.⁵ In sum, the Sahrawi movement was due to various factors: a growing sensation of discrimination against the Sahrawi people; Moroccan policies regarding the Sahrawi provinces; frustration when faced with the intensification of colonization; and the poor results from political negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) (Barreñada 2012: 1). All of these nationalist and social factors led to new forms of resistance and strong activism among Sahrawi civil society (Shelley 2004).

Third, the Gdeim Izik camp protests were not spontaneous in character, as was the case in nearby African countries. In fact, they had been anticipated a few months previously but they were postponed until a later date. The establishment of the Sahrawi camp took advantage of the window of

opportunity resulting from a relaxation of Moroccan repression against social movements and the permissivity of the *wali* (governor) of the El Ayun province, Mohamed Guelous, who, in his fight for power with the mayor of El Ayun Hamdi Uld Rachid, permitted a settlement in response to socioeconomic demands (Fernández-Molina 2015: 237). On the other hand, in contrast to the Arab countries, where there were no large-scale demonstrations in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in the towns of Western Sahara there had been strong dissent in previous years. Important protests took place in different Sahrawi cities in September 1999 (months after Mohammed VI ascended to the throne) in May 2005 in El Ayun (known as the “Sahrawi Intifada”), which continued until the end of that year, and in 2009 and 2010, which saw solidarity demonstrations in support of the hunger striker and Sahrawi activist Aminatu Haidar. Similarly, following the events at Gdeim Izik, protests and confrontations took place in the cities of Dakhla (February and September 2011) and El Ayun (in the months of March to May 2011).⁶

Fourth, most Arab and Sahrawi protesters share a sociodemographic profile of being young and unemployed (Gómez-Martín 2012: 63); however, the social composition of the Arab movements was more heterogeneous and the connection between the protesters weaker due to the absence of a common ideology linking them (Achcar 2013; Bayat 2013; Khosrokhavar 2012). Initially, the social protest movements were non-ideological, without leaders, horizontal and without a clear structural organization (Durac 2015: 239). The outset of the revolutions and Arab protests mainly featured young social media users and groups from other social strata without any political affiliation. These were joined afterward by members of parties and Islamist association trade unions—wherever they existed—human rights associations and other opposition groups. For example, besides the young people who were not politically militant, the Moroccan 20-F movement comprised a hundred very distinct social and political organizations: human rights organizations, women’s associations, anti-corruption groups, *al-Adl wa al-Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality) Islamists—up to its withdrawal from the movement in early 2012—leftist parties, *Amazigh* movements and a series of local coordinators (*tansikiat*) that had emerged in previous movements to protest the shortage of basic products and make other socioeconomic demands in various cities across Morocco (López-García 2011c: 2). Importantly, the Sahrawi activists did not involve themselves in the 20-F protests and, therefore, their demands were not present in the demonstrations (Suárez-Collado 2015). Neither

were there demands for greater decentralization by the demonstrators (Ojeda and Suárez 2015: 47). The Sahrawi protest leaders were much more homogeneous in character, with the Hassaniya identity element acting as a cohesive factor. However, since the 1980s, there has been a high degree of polarization between Sahrawis and *dajilis*. In fact, after the dismantling of the camp, there were civil confrontations between these two sectors (Veguilla 2013a).

LOCAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE SAHRAWI PROTEST

The protest at Gdeim Izik resulted in questions about Moroccan governance in the provinces of Western Sahara: local policies, corruption, the administration of natural resources, privileges over collectives and interests, and so forth (Veguilla 2015: 1–2). After the Gdeim Izik camp was dismantled, promises were made to carry out socioeconomic reforms regarding land and subsidies, as well as other benefits for the Sahrawi people (Gillespie 2011: 181). Similarly, negotiations between the protesters and the Moroccan representatives before the Moroccan security forces entered the camp included considerations with regard to launching various commissions to investigate housing and employment.

The first political action following the Gdeim Izik camp event took place on 26 November 2010 with the dismissal of the *wali* (governor) of the El Ayun province, Mohamed Guelsous, who was replaced by a Sahrawi, Jalil Yil. The *wali* is a key figure in the region, as a representative who implements Moroccan governmental action in the province. As noted above, the *wali* may have allowed the camp to exist because of his dispute with the mayor of El Ayun, Hamdi Uld Rachid, brother of the president of CORCAS, to whom the protesters attributed irregularities in the distribution of land for the construction of housing (López-García 2011a: 6, citing the Moroccan newspaper *Al Sabah*). On 13 October 2015, new *walis* were appointed in the Sahrawi provinces administered by Morocco, as well as in the other Moroccan provinces.

Beyond this personnel change in the El Ayun province, there were other changes in the organization, representation and means of political participation of the Sahrawis in political institutions. For all intents and purposes, Western Sahara is considered part of the Moroccan state, meaning that the two entities share the same form of territorial and administrative organization: regions, provinces and communes. Institutional representation is articulated around three axes: local councils; regional

councils; and a Chamber of Representatives and Chamber of Advisers at national level. The local councils and the Chamber of Representatives are chosen by direct suffrage. In the case of the Chamber of Advisers, election is indirect through an electoral college formed by local councils, work organizations and trade unions. In the constitutional reform of 2011, the Chamber of Advisers continued to reflect this local and socioeconomic representation in an attempt to strengthen regionalization. The regional councils are chosen indirectly, but with the new 2011 constitution, elections have used direct suffrage (4 September 2015). This change forms part of what has been termed an advanced regionalization process. The new organic law of the regions (14.111) considers the president of the regional council to be the executive authority (article 102); nevertheless, the *wali*'s power of control is maintained through the guardianship role that the *wali* exercises and, ultimately, the Ministry of the Interior.

Representation and policy participation in the Moroccan political system and Sahrawi political sub-system are only articulated through Moroccan national parties. Parties are considered a platform for individuals to launch themselves onto the Moroccan political scene and to pursue a career (Parejo and Veguilla 2011: 14). Militancy and Sahrawi opposition mainly come from associations and social groups, which are more assertive of their cultural identity and their right to self-determination. The result has been a network of nationalist associations that have created a space for organization because of the impossibility of other forms of political organization (Barreñada 2012: 10). These organizations include the Committee for the Defence of the Right to Self-Determination for the People of Western Sahara (CODAPSO), the Committee for the Support of the UN Settlement Plan and the Protection of Natural Resources of Western Sahara (CSPRON) and the Trade Union Confederation of Sahrawi Workers (CSTS).

Lastly, it has not been possible to identify any improvements regarding human rights. In 2013, the Rabat Military Court of Justice Tribunal tried 24 Sahrawis detained for confrontations with the Moroccan security forces during the evacuation of the Gdeim Izik camp. The trial was strongly objected to due to the lack of guarantees for the defendants. On 17 February 2013, eight defendants were sentenced to life in prison, four to 30 years in prison; ten to sentences of between 20 and 25 years; and two to 2 years in prison (MAP, Moroccan official press agency). They were sentenced on the basis of articles 293, 294 and 267 (paragraph 5), 129, 130 and 271 of the Penal Code, according to article 7 of the

Law of Military Justice. However, due to the fact that Western Sahara is a non-autonomous illegally occupied territory, the laws of international humanitarian justice must apply, which expressly state that an occupying power cannot demand the obedience of an oppressed population on the basis of national laws and must at all times respect their fundamental rights (art. 45 and 46 of the II Hague Convention, 1899) (Camacho 2015: 24).

The actions of the Moroccan security forces in dismantling the Gdeim Izik camp were scrutinized by a research commission in the Moroccan Chamber of Representatives, created on 27 November 2010, but without the report having any possibility of political consequences. On the other hand, the Consultative Council on Human Rights was transformed by the decision of 3 March 2011 into the National Human Rights Council, which has three head offices in the Sahrawi provinces (Boukhars 2013: 4). Nevertheless, the role of this body is limited to writing reports and recommendations. The National Human Rights Council coexists in the sphere of other human rights organizations, the most important of which are the Collective of Sahrawi Defenders of Human Rights and the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Violations of Human Rights Committed by the Moroccan State. These two organizations presented reports about what occurred in Gdeim Izik. In the 5 years since Gdeim Izik, reports by various international human rights organizations have continued to denounce illegal detentions, torture, threats and psychological pressure, sexual abuse and violations of the rights of association and meetings and of freedom of expression (see the Amnesty International report 2015).

CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL REFORMS IN MOROCCO FOR WESTERN SAHARA

In Morocco, the 20-F protest movement gave rise to a process of political change driven by King Mohammed VI. On 9 March 2011, in a speech to the nation, the king announced a plan for political reforms. This plan specified a modification of the Law of Parties and some elements of the electoral system, the reform of the constitution and the designation of a head of government who is the representative of the party with the greatest number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives. However, the democratizing power of these reforms has been limited, given that no change in the political regime has taken place; it persists in being authoritarian because the king continues to unlawfully hold the majority of the legislative and executive power.

One of the first results of the policy reform process in Morocco was the modification of the legal regulation of parties. Organic Law 29-11 of 22 October 2011 regulates the constitution of parties, adhesion to that constitution, the principles of party organization and administration, their financing and control, the union and merger of parties and the sanctioning regime. The new Law of Parties does not provide any opportunities to improve the key issue of representation and political participation in Western Sahara, such as the possibility of creating parties with an ethnic or regional base. Specifically, the 2011 regulation reform, like its predecessors in 2002 and 2006, prevents the foundation of parties upon a religious, linguistic, ethnic or regional basis or upon any basis deemed discriminatory or contrary to human rights in general. Similarly, it prohibits the formation of parties that are contrary to the constitution or its principles or that threaten the Islamic religion, the monarchy, the democratic foundations or the territorial integrity of the kingdom (art.4). The new constitution, which came into effect in July 2011, confirms these limitations. This means that constitutional reform would be necessary to allow the participation of regional or ethnic parties, which is why this aspect cannot be included in any negotiation about the status of Western Sahara.

As on previous occasions, the reform of the constitution was spurred on by the king. Following his speech to the nation, Mohammed VI formed a technical commission of legal and political experts who sent their report to him on 10 June 2011. Afterward, a constitutional referendum was held on 1 July 2011, which approved the constitutional reform by 98.5 percent of the vote with a turnout of 72.65 percent of registered voters.⁷ One of the objectives of the constitutional reform, as announced by the king, was to stimulate the advanced regionalization project that had begun a year before the start of the social protests.⁸ The consequences of the process of political change in Morocco for Western Sahara highlight two particular aspects in the constitutional reform: national identity and the territorial state organization model.

First, the Preface to the Constitution references the Sahrawi-Hassaniya identity among the components of the Moroccan state, together with the Arab and Amazigh reference that already existed in the Constitution of 1996. This is preceded by an emphasis on national unity, territorial integrity, and the unity and indivisibility of national identity. Similarly, the Hassaniya language is acknowledged to be an integral part of Moroccan cultural identity alongside a reference to the most commonly spoken languages in the world and a separate paragraph reserved for the Arab and

Tamazigh language (art. 5). On the other hand, in the discussion of the National Council of Languages and Moroccan Culture, only the Arab and Tamazigh languages are expressly mentioned (art. 5).

Second, the constitution mentions decentralization and advanced regionalization (art. 1), the latter being a concept that does not exist in comparative law. Chapter IX of the new constitution establishes the regions and territorial communities.⁹ Perhaps the most significant aspect of this section is the absence of specification regarding certain aspects. For example, the different regions are not named. The regional decree establishes three regions (10 – Guelmim-Oued Noun, 11 – Laayoune-Saguia al Hamra and 12 – Ed Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab) that do not entirely correspond to the Western Sahara territory. Regions 12 and 11 coincide with the non-autonomous territory, but region 10 enters the international division of Western Sahara through the Assa-Zag province (Collado and Ojeda 2015: 91).¹⁰ Nor does the constitutional reform distribute responsibilities between the central state and the regions. It simply refers to the type of responsibilities: those of the territorial communities, shared with the state and transferred by the state (art. 140). Third, Chapter IX discusses the election of the regional councils by direct universal suffrage (art. 135) and establishes some vague rules regarding the powers of the presidents of the regional councils. This section highlights the fact that executive power is devolved to them in relation to the decisions of the regional councils (art. 138).

Finally, Title IX devotes an article to the *walis* of regions and governors of provinces and prefectures as representatives of the central power and the decentralized services of the central administration of the Moroccan state. The functions of the *wali* include guaranteeing the application of laws, the implementation of rules and governmental decisions and the exercise of administrative control (art. 145). Similarly, the new regionalization law of 2015 has maintained the guardianship role of the *wali*, a point that impedes any form of a self-governing regime. It is important to underscore the fact that the Moroccan state administration has a strong presence in Sahrawi territory and has reproduced the same organizational administration as in Morocco with the aim of strengthening Moroccan claims over the territory. Therefore, the peripheral administration includes the figure of the *wali*, the agents of authority and the heads of the foreign services of the different ministries (Mohsen-Finan 1997: 74).

In sum, the new legal framework approved in Morocco is limited with regard to the Western Sahara question for the following reasons: the new 2011 Law of Parties and the constitution do not allow for the possibility

of creating regional or ethnic parties; the newly defined regions and provinces do not relate to identity criteria, but instead unify Sahrawi territories and populations with others that are traditionally Moroccan; the regionalization law does not configure an asymmetric decentralization for the regions with differentiated elements of identity; and the *wali* maintains a guardianship role over the regional councils.

As a consequence of the reform process launched by Mohammed VI after the protests, the elections to the Chamber of Representatives were moved up to 25 November 2011, although its mandate ended in September 2012. The elections to the Chamber of Representatives were judged to be competitive, although human rights organizations denounced the harassment of some people defending the election boycott and isolated incidents of vote buying (López-García 2012). On the other hand, although the elections involved the participation of 31 political forces, the abstention of the 20-F social movement, Islamic organizations (*al-Adl wa al-Ihsan*, *al-Badil al-Hadari* and *al-Umma*) and various other left-wing parties (the Unified Socialist Party, the Socialist Democratic Party and *Annahj Demokrati*) was notable. As on previous occasions, the Sahrawi constituencies were overrepresented in relation to their population; each of their electoral districts had two seats. On the other hand, although the *dakhilis* currently represent the largest demographic in the Sahrawi provinces, they were underrepresented in the Chamber of Representatives—as occurs in local representation—given that the central administration of the state limits their candidates in order to guarantee Sahrawi representation in parliament. The Sahrawis usually vote for the candidates who are closest to their group of origin (Veguilla 2013b).

The results of the 2011 election in the Sahrawi constituencies did not seem to be influenced by the protests of the previous year, given that the same characteristic features of previous electoral processes were repeated. Abstention was high in the Sahrawi constituencies, although less than the aggregated average (45.4 percent), as on previous occasions (Veguilla 2004). Therefore, the minor changes compared to previous elections should be interpreted as a sign of political disaffection and citizen alienation regarding the political parties. On the other hand, it is worth emphasizing that there is no strong party anchor, either in relation to the vote or the candidates. This lack of allegiance is due to the candidate's profile as a "notable" and the "nomadism" that characterizes them (Veguilla 2013a). Therefore, a vote for a party candidate is usually an "ethnic vote" for the candidate who is closest to a voter's tribe (Veguilla 2013a, b) (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Participation and parliamentary representation in the Sahrawi constituencies in the 25 November 2011 elections

<i>Region</i>	<i>Constituency</i>	<i>Participation %</i>	<i>Parties that obtained seats</i>
El Ayun Bojador	El Ayun	49.5	Justice and Development Party (1)
	Bojador	71.7	Istiqlal Party (1) Authenticity and Modernity Party (1)
Guelmin Esmara	Assa-Zag	76.6	Popular Movement (1) Socialist Union of Popular Forces (1) Authenticity and Modernity Party (1)
	Esmara	59.4	National Rally of Independents (1)
	Guelmin	54.1	Istiqlal Party (1) Socialist Union of Popular Forces (1)
	Tata	66.4	National Rally of Independents (2)
	Tan-Tan	56.9	National Rally of Independents (1) Istiqlal Party (2)
	Tarfaya	78.1	National Rally of Independents (1) Istiqlal Party (1)
	Tarfaya	78.1	National Rally of Independents (1)
Ued-Eddahab Laggouira	Ued-Eddahab	58.5	Justice and Development Party (1) Socialist Union of Popular Forces (1)
	Ausserd	72.7	Istiqlal Party (1) National Rally of Independents (1)

Source: Prepared by the author from www.elections2011.gov.ma; for participation from López García, 2013

The appointment of Abdellah Benkiran as head of the government on 29 November 2012 did not represent a change in direction regarding the Western Sahara question, mainly because there is little room to maneuver for the government regarding Western Sahara policy, given that this is an area that is reserved for the king. In short, the reforms carried out by Mohammed VI do not represent any substantial change for Western Sahara. A policy of democratization and decentralization in Morocco would represent a significant step to resolve the conflict (Theofilopoulou 2012: 1).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SAHRAWI PROTEST REGARDING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT OVER THE SOVEREIGNTY OF WESTERN SAHARA

Following the Sahrawi protest of 2010, there was no significant advance regarding new proposals to resolve the conflict over sovereignty in Western Sahara. The most recent proposals were presented by the same parties involved in April 2007, without any opposing party being allowed to participate. Morocco presented a document titled “The Moroccan initiative for the negotiation of a statute of autonomy in the region of the Sahara”, which proposed a detailed distribution of responsibilities between the Moroccan state and the Sahara region, as well as the institutions of self-government and their form of election. After starting with the institutions of self-government, it proposed to hold a confirmatory referendum on this model of territorial organization. Significantly, the regions are competent in fewer sectors in the new 2015 law on Moroccan regionalization than in the proposal presented by Morocco in 2007. For its part, the Polisario Front presented the “Proposal for a mutually acceptable political solution that guarantees the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara”. In its proposal, the Polisario backed holding a referendum to consider the independence of the territory.

The dismantling of the Gdeim Izik camp took place during a direct round of negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario in Manhasset, New York, which ended on 9 November 2010. Nevertheless, Morocco and the Polisario met again in December of that year and in January 2011. Afterward, there were meetings in June 2011 and March 2012 in Manhasset. In all these rounds of direct negotiations and informal conversations, beginning in 2007, Morocco and the Polisario have solidified

their respective positions and have not reached an agreement on basic questions such as the exploitation of natural resources in Sahrawi territory.

Since Gdeim Izik, the mandate of MINURSO has been renewed annually. The last time was through Resolution 2218 of 28 April 2015, which authorized the presence of MINURSO until 30 April 2016. Despite the fact that the events in Gdeim Izik focused the international community's attention on human rights in Western Sahara (Fernández-Molina 2015: 237), this did not lead to changes in the policy of international actors. Therefore, the resolution of 2015 of the UN Security Council did not include the proposal, put forward and then withdrawn by the USA, that MINURSO take responsibility for human rights monitoring both in the Western Sahara territory under Moroccan administration and in the refugee camps in southwest Algeria under the control of the Polisario Front. The human rights situation is a question that the USA has repeatedly raised for many years and that appears in the latest reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations about the Sahara, but no progress has been made. Morocco believes that the guarantee of human rights is its responsibility in the territories that it administers. Therefore, it has opened regional offices of the National Human Rights Council in the cities of Dakhla and El Ayun (El País, 3 April 2013). In sum, the Sahrawi protests have had no effect in advancing a solution to the conflict over sovereignty in Western Sahara. The international community has not made this question a priority on its political agenda. Furthermore, the UN has not chosen to explore new solutions to the problem, instead opting to favor the status quo.

CONCLUSION

The starting point for this article was the idea that we cannot frame the events of Gdeim Izik in Western Sahara within the protest movements and the fifth wave of political change that have shaken North Africa and the Middle East. Furthermore, this association is undesirable, given that it shifts the focus of attention away from the key question at the source of the events in Western Sahara, namely the conflict over sovereignty of the territory.

First, although the Gdeim Izik protest shares some common elements with those that occurred in North Africa, it has its own specific characteristics. For example, it does not have a revolutionary character as did Tunisia, Egypt and Libya; the Sahrawi protesters maintain a basic element of cohesion in their Sahrawi identity, and there are trigger factors

and specific objectives that must be framed within the lack of advances in the diplomatic and political terrain in the resolution of the international conflict. Second, the Gdeim Izik protest has not produced substantial changes in either the socioeconomic situation of the Sahrawi people or the organization, representation and forms of institutional participation in the territory, which are common to the regions of the Moroccan state. The only significant change has been the dismissal of the *wali*, a very important figure in the Moroccan central administration, from the El Ayun province because of their political control over the territory. Third, the reforms carried out by Mohammed VI do not represent any substantial change for Western Sahara. The new Law of Parties does not consider the possibility of creating regional or ethnic parties and the constitutional reform and the regionalization law do not guarantee an autonomous regime for the Sahrawi people. Fourth, there has been no variation in the international management of the Western Sahara conflict since Gdeim Izik. Since the camp was dismantled, informal meetings have continued between Morocco and the Polisario Front, although both sides maintain the respective positions put forward in their 2007 proposals: Morocco arguing for autonomy for Western Sahara within the Moroccan state and the Polisario Front contending that a referendum should take place that includes the option of independence. Finally, as noted above, in April 2013, the mandate of MINURSO was extended for a further year, with the same conditions as in previous years.

NOTES

1. The CORCAS is a consultative organ established in 2006 by King Mohammed VI to replace the Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs created in 1982. The CORCAS is made up of 141 representatives from different social sectors of the Saharan provinces appointed by the king (Brousky 2008: 180).
2. This article prefers to use the concept of “Arab Spring”, given that, despite the differences between the uprisings in the Arab societies (structural conditions and intensity, duration and extent of protests), as well as the political demands (from taking down the regimes to changes in the political system and its policies only), the Arab Spring is a phenomenon that shares the same origin and causes that produced the uprisings. Neither was it a sudden “awakening”, given that prior citizen awareness of the political, economic, social and cultural problems in each country already existed and that civil society had developed considerably in previous decades.

3. In the same way, neither is it possible to associate the demonstrations and protests in Palestine with the Arab Spring (Pace 2013: 1). For a comparative study of the conflicts in Palestine and Western Sahara, see Barreñada (2011).
4. These different concepts emerged to analyze the influence of the regional and international variable in the study of the processes of political change. See Huntington (1991) or Whitehead (2001).
5. There are authors who only take into account social factors in the analysis of the Sahrawi protest, such as discontent with the social and demographic changes that the territory has experienced since its annexation by Morocco in 1975 (Boukhars 2012: 9–10). However, I believe that political and international factors cannot be excluded from the explanation of the social Saharwi movement.
6. Additionally, a protest movement originated in March 2011 in the refugee camps around Tindouf (Algeria), which is under the control of the Polisario Front. Specifically, the Movement of the Revolutionary Sahrawi Youth challenged the form of electing and then re-electing the leadership of the Polisario in February 2012.
7. The degree of consensus among the political forces was high. The institutional parties supported the constitutional reform, with the exception of four minority parties from the extreme left. The constitutional commission met with parties, trade unions and associations to develop their report. On the other hand, the 20-F movement refused to participate in the process and demanded the formation of a constituent assembly and deeper reforms to the constitution.
8. In January 2010, the Regionalization Advisory Commission was created to write a report about a model of advanced regionalization for all the regions in the state on the basis of four fundamental principles: the unity of the nation-state; solidarity between the regions; an equal balance of powers and resources among the local authorities, central government and the institutions involved; and the adoption of broad decentralization within the framework of a system of efficient territorial governance (Ojeda and Suárez 2013). To consult the commission's full report, see its webpage: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PageFR.aspx?id=8> and, for a detailed analysis, see Ojeda and Suárez 2013.
9. The territorial form of the state can be the object of constitutional reform, since it does not form part of the constitutional "hard core" which cannot, by law, be reformed (i.e. the Muslim religion, monarchic form of the state, a form of democratic government with rights and fundamental liberties) (art. 175).
10. The territorial status of Western Sahara has been partially modified on various occasions. Following the withdrawal of Spain as the administrative

power in Western Sahara in 1975 during the first years of the war (1976–1978) between the Polisario Front and Morocco and Mauritania, Morocco created the provinces of El Ayun, Esmara and Bojador. After Mauritania withdrew from the conflict, Morocco established a new province, Ued Eddahab (Río de Oro) (Veguilla 2011: 21). With the 1997 regionalization plan, the Western Sahara was split into three regions: El Ayun-Bojador-Saguia el Hamra, Gulemin-Esmara and Ued Eddahab-Lagüira (Ojeda 2002, 2006).

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Algerian Foreign Policy towards Western Sahara

Laurence Thieux

After 132 years of colonization, Algeria's foreign policy has been closely linked to the nationalist project of state-building. It was during the battle for independence that the National Liberation Front (FLN) began to articulate its foreign policy as a way of reinforcing its legitimacy and gaining the support it needed to carry out its nationalist project. After independence, the territorial question featured prominently in the country's international relations as an integral part of the process of nation-building aimed at strengthening the sovereignty of the young state over an Algeria defined by the borders inherited from the colonial period. Indeed, territorial issues lay at the root of the first conflict between Algeria and Morocco, the 1963 Sand War, the resolution of which would not resolve the border disputes between the two countries. In this climate of rivalry and distrust, the question of Western Sahara and the support given to the Polisario Front by the

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Algerian leaders would counterbalance and contain Morocco's irredentist ambitions. Since then, Algeria's position has remained largely unchanged despite deep internal social, economic and political transformations in the country and the new challenges presented by its geostrategic position. The analysis of the evolution of Algerian foreign policy towards the Western Sahara conflict is part of the comprehensive and multilevel approach followed in this book. Algeria is an important piece of the regional jigsaw as the principle supporter of the Polisario and host of the refugee camps.

This chapter analyses Algerian foreign policy with respect to Western Sahara, identifying the domestic and foreign drivers for change and continuity in historical perspective and in the current situation. It first provides a general overview of Algerian foreign policy since independence and its position regarding the Western Sahara conflict. It then analyses the factors at home and abroad that have influenced this stance, evaluating the importance of different elements and identifying possible triggers that could effect a change in the Algerian position. Since 2011, the Algerian regime's reading of the political transformations that have affected its neighbours (Mali, Tunisia and Libya) has led it to adopt a defensive posture, seeing its security as vulnerable to new threats from abroad in a context, moreover, of economic weakness. These new security challenges and economic constraints could compel Algeria to be more pragmatic in its foreign policy.

THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF ALGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The Algerian foreign policy conceived during the nationalist battle for independence was guided by two main principles: the defence of territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the defence of the right to the self-determination of nations. The former explains Algeria's rejection of any form of foreign interference and its resistance to becoming involved in the domestic affairs of other countries, while the latter has allowed the country to consolidate its international legitimacy and extend its sphere of influence abroad. In the 1970s, for instance, the single-party FLN conducted intensive parallel diplomacy through its Foreign Affairs Commission, supporting many national liberation movements in Africa and Latin America.¹

In accordance with the normative principles guiding it, Algerian foreign policy has interpreted and defended the Western Sahara issue as a decolonization conflict whose resolution is the responsibility of the international community and, moreover, the country has denied that its position is motivated by expansionist ambitions. Indeed, in a March 2007 speech

given to African heads of state at a conference of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika reaffirmed that 'if the Sahrawi people decide that Western Sahara is to be controlled by Morocco, the first messages of congratulations will come from Algeria' (Baghouz 2007: 526). In short, the position of principle reiterated by successive governments in Algeria has been based on well-defined structural interests related to protecting national sovereignty and expanding its regional and international influence abroad.

The defence of the principle of self-determination is one of the pillars on which Algeria has forged its influence and legitimacy within African regional organizations. It is also one of the reasons that the position of the regime with regard to Western Sahara has remained unchanged: 'The legitimacy of the Algerian state is tied to defending the right to the self-determination of nations, a principle that unites the different components of the state and is based on United Nations resolutions. Algeria has supported 18 liberation movements since its independence'.²

Algerian support for the self-determination of the Sahrawi people also serves its strategic interests to the extent that it has been used as an instrument to contain Moroccan territorial expansion, which would challenge Algeria's territorial integrity (Mortimer 2015: 19). The historical dispute over border demarcation and the battle for hegemony in the region have long been features of the bilateral relations between Algeria and Morocco, characterized by an abiding distrust that would later be fuelled by the Western Sahara conflict. Shortly after the two countries gained their independence, Morocco began to challenge the territorial inheritance delineated by France, and early skirmishes between the two countries reflected these territorial disputes. This state of affairs was partially settled by the Treaty of Ifrane signed in 1969 but, as Morocco would not recognize the irrevocability of the borders between the two countries, Algeria continued to consider the situation unresolved. To this day, some leading politicians in Morocco openly take issue with the demarcation of the border, claiming Moroccan sovereignty over cities like Tindouf and Bechar³ (Martinez 2011; Belkaid 2015).

For newly independent Algeria, deeply immersed in a process of nation-building and state-building, the external dimension and territorial question developed into domestic political challenges. The foreign policy principles of non-interference and supporting the self-determination of nations secured the domestic legitimacy of the regime. Furthermore, the fight for independence gave Algerian foreign policy a distinguishing

characteristic of its identity:⁴ 'This organic human tie between the diplomacy of the *makis* [insurgents] and that of independent Algeria created a strong perception and internalization of sovereignty, non-interference and the right of nations to self-determination' (Driss Ait Hamadouche 2015: 12).

WESTERN SAHARA IN ALGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Although Algeria has not modified the general principles of its policy towards Western Sahara, changes in the country's domestic political context have produced fluctuations in the intensity of its support for the right to self-determination with regard to the Sahara and the Polisario Front. Algeria first began to develop an active foreign policy in the 1970s, designed to give the country an important foreign presence in the context of a favourable international situation (the 1973 oil crisis and the affirmation of the power of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries/OPEC; Algerian leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement) (Grimaud 1984: 22). During the first decades that followed independence, territorial issues were central to both foreign relations and domestic political management. In 1963, a dispute with Morocco regarding sovereignty over the city of Tindouf sparked the Sand War, which initiated a new period of distrust between the two countries.

Before the 1975 Moroccan Green March, Algeria did not have a firm position on the self-determination of the Sahrawi people. During the October 1974 summit of the Arab League held in Rabat, Revolutionary Council Chairman Houari Boumediene did not react hostilely to the understanding between Morocco and Mauritania about the division of the then Spanish Sahara. Neither did he show clear support at that time for the Polisario Front, whose main backing came from Libya. Algeria maintained an ambiguous position, focusing on the ratification of the 1972 convention that established the borders between Algeria and Morocco⁵ (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 34).

Algeria interpreted the Moroccan offensive to occupy and annex Western Sahara as a new attempt to challenge the demarcation of the two countries' border. Algerian leaders at that time wished to maintain the territorial status quo after the decolonization process, and the regional balance would have been quite altered if Moroccan took control of the Sahara (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 34). The new president Houari Boumediene felt betrayed by the position taken by Western countries after the Green March and the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, accusing them of

redrawing the map of northern Africa without consulting Algeria (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 34). In 1975, Bouteflika, at that time minister of foreign affairs, reproached Henry Kissinger for supporting Morocco, warning him that if Morocco occupied Western Sahara with even a minimum of legality, it would create a precedence of violating borders with an attendant risk of conflict.⁶ In the years following this encounter, Algeria tried to resist/confront the new situation created by Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara by powerfully defending the self-determination of the Sahrawi people and supporting the two-year-old Polisario Front, actively defending the group diplomatically in various international forums such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), where it obtained support from 15 African countries (Grimaud 1984: 326).

Algeria's support for the Polisario Front and Sahrawi refugees brought an end to the 1972 border agreement between Boumediene and King Hassan II and to the Treaty of Ifrane that had proclaimed friendship, good neighbourliness and cooperation between the two states (Chena 2012). Algeria continued to provide humanitarian, diplomatic, financial and military support to the Polisario Front and then to the Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic (RASD) proclaimed on 28 February 1976. The country was also willing to host the four Sahrawi refugee camps set up on Algerian territory near Tindouf (Belkaid 2009: 340).

In the mid-1980s, Algeria went into an economic recession that forced the authorities to focus on domestic affairs. This period of difficulties at home coincided with a reorientation of Algerian foreign policy towards its immediate neighbours. The country abandoned its international ambitions to some extent and relegated the question of its support for the Sahrawis to the background (Mortimer 2015: 10). This reorientation in Algerian diplomacy left room for the country to participate in a regional integration project: the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) created in 1989. However, the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco blocked any real advances in strengthening inter-Maghreb ties. Finally, the violent conflict that played out in the 1990s between the Algerian army and armed Islamist groups—after the cancellation of the January 1992 electoral process that would have given the victory to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)—overshadowed Algerian diplomacy and the country entered a period of isolation.

The appointment of Mohamed Boudiaf, who had lived in exile in Morocco for nearly 30 years, to head the High Council of State in February 1992 brought with it new opportunities to resolve the Western Sahara conflict on the basis of a bilateral solution. However, Boudiaf's assassina-

tion a mere four months later eliminated this possibility (Hernando de Larramendi 2008: 190). With limited financial resources (Algeria's foreign debt in 1994 was almost 32 per cent of its GDP when the country embarked upon a debt restructuring programme with the International Monetary Fund), Algerian foreign policy focused on obtaining external support for war against the Islamists, trying to convince Western countries that the military coup and strategy to "eradicate" Islamist groups were legitimate (Thieux 2006: 106).

During this period, Algeria reduced its support for the Polisario but this was not accompanied by improvements in its relations with Morocco, which, to the contrary, were characterized by new tensions and mutual accusations. Algerian leaders accused Morocco of supporting Islamist violent groups as a way to pressure the country into changing its position with respect to Algeria and Western Sahara. After the terrorist attack in Marrakech in 1994, in turn, Morocco accused Algerian intelligence services of complicity in the attacks. In the face of these accusations, Algeria decided to close the land borders between the two countries, while Morocco began to require that Algerians and Algerian-born French citizens obtain a visa to enter the country. During this decade, Morocco also took advantage of Algeria's weak international position to try to regain the backing of some African countries and managed to convince some to withdraw their support for the RASD. This climate of distrust persisted and the differences with respect to resolving the Western Sahara conflict continued to mar relations between the two countries. While Morocco persisted in believing that the main obstacle to resolving the conflict was Algeria's support for the Polisario's maximalist positions, Algeria claimed that the problem was one for the international community to resolve and refused to take action.

Because of his long diplomatic experience,⁷ President Bouteflika was charged in the late 1990s with rehabilitating Algeria's stature abroad. The country's image had deteriorated due to both the massive human rights violations committed by the army in fight against armed Islamist groups and a surge in terrorism on French soil. When Bouteflika became president in 1999, he promised to work to improve relations with Morocco and reactivate the regional integration project. His presence at the funeral of King Hassan II in July of that year—the first visit of an Algerian president to Morocco in more than a decade—was interpreted as an important gesture on the road to reconciliation (Fernández Molina 2015: 84).

The global war on terrorism, a priority on the United States' agenda after the attack on the World Trade Centre in September 2001, gave Algeria an opportunity to sell its fight against Islamist groups as critical expertise in counter-terrorism and to regain a strategic position in its relations with the United States. At the same time, rising oil prices ushered in an economic recovery that helped the country return to the diplomatic stage. In an attempt to recover lost ground, President Bouteflika also revived Algeria's "African diplomacy".⁸

In this context, characterized by the need to recoup its legitimacy and influence in the international sphere, Algeria became more pragmatic in its position with respect to Western Sahara without disavowing its fundamental position of principle. After rejecting the first United Nations (UN) proposal in 2001—what would become known as the Baker Plan I—the Polisario accepted the Baker Plan II in 2003 under Algerian pressure, ratifying it during the 11th Polisario Front Congress held in October of that same year. However, between the fact that Morocco rejected the plan and that Resolution 1495 (which "supported" the second plan) was non-binding, this new diplomatic effort also stalled (Fernández Molina 2015: 53).

Moreover, the Western Sahara issue has hampered all attempts to normalize bilateral relations between Algeria and Morocco, which have fluctuated between brief periods of rapprochement and notably strained episodes. In February 2002, for instance, a proposal to partition Western Sahara included in a report from the United Nations Secretary General to the Security Council revived tensions with Morocco, which accused Algeria of being behind the initiative to create a microstate under its influence in order to gain access to the Atlantic (Hernando de Larramendi 2008: 191). Nor did Morocco's later attempts at normalization, such as removing the visa requirement for Algerians in 2004, have the desired effect. Repeated calls by Morocco to improve bilateral relations with Algeria have been guided more by the concern to guarantee international support than by a true desire to achieve reconciliation (Fernández Molina 2015: 82–83).

Algeria, in turn, has continued to instrumentalize the Western Sahara question in its relations with Morocco, vacillating between two positions: (a) a more flexible stance in which the normalization of relations with Morocco does not depend on resolving the Western Sahara conflict (which is in the hands of the UN); and (b) a more intransigent position that refuses to push into the background/set aside the Western

Sahara issue for the sake of advancing the normalization process. In the first position, Algeria has on several occasions indicated that the regional integration process is in no way connected to Western Sahara. In 2012, for example, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mourad Medelci noted that the Western Sahara question predated the creation of the UMA and did not have to play a part in the preparation of that year's UMA summit. The second position has coincided with the periods during which Algeria's status on the international stage has been stronger. For instance, in 2003, when the country had regained some of its stature in the international community and was enjoying a more comfortable economic situation at home, it adopted a more assertive stance and one less dependent on foreign pressure regarding Western Sahara and the regional integration processes. In an effort to recoup the influence it had lost abroad, Algeria reactivated its African policy and renewed its campaign for recognition of the RASD on the African continent. In 2004, South Africa recognized the RASD. During this period, President Bouteflika repeatedly emphasized Algeria's commitment to defending the principle of self-determination for the Sahrawi people. On several occasions, these declarations hindered attempts to restart the regional integration process and the UMA, dooming these endeavours to failure (Hernando de Larramendi 2008: 201).

When Sahrawi protests in the Morocco-held occupied territory increased beginning in 2005, Algeria abstained from making official declarations about the events, although the Algerian press reported on them with dispatches that conjured up the spectre of "Intifada" and condemned Moroccan repression.⁹ Algeria also refrained from making official declarations in 2010 when the Moroccan authorities blocked Sahrawi activist Aminatou Haidar from entering the country and she went on a hunger strike in the Lanzarote airport. However, the event once again received significant press coverage in Algeria and Morocco accused the country of instrumentalizing the case.¹⁰ Along the same lines, the Algerian government has maintained a reserved position towards the Gdeim Izik protest and the dismantlement of the camp by the Moroccan authorities.¹¹ Two factors can explain this cautious approach: first, the desire to maintain the status quo and prevent a cycle of escalating tensions with Morocco; and second, the fact that the Algerian government may not be entirely comfortable supporting civil protests or human rights defenders regardless of the causes they defend, an acknowledgment of its own internal challenges. However, protests within Western Sahara gave renewed impetus to Algerian support for Sahrawi self-determination. In January 2010,

for example, the president of the National People's Assembly (APN), Abdelaziz Ziari, made his first official visit to the refugee camps and urged the Polisario Front to move its headquarters from Rabouni (the administrative centre of the Sahrawi refugee camps) to Tifariti, a town located in the free zone.

Beginning in 2011, new attempts on the part of Morocco to normalize relations with Algeria were not fruitful. While Algiers was the first destination for Moroccan Foreign Affairs Minister Saadeddine Othmani in 2012, later incidents related to Western Sahara once again caused relations to cool. In April 2012, the Moroccan delegation left the funeral of former Algerian president Ahmed Ben Bella after RASD President Mohamed Abdelaziz appeared at the event. In October 2013, at a meeting of trade unionists sympathetic to the Polisario held in Abuja (Nigeria), a speech by President Bouteflika delivered by his minister of justice once again sowed discord. In it, the president made an urgent appeal to the UN to revive the negotiation process and introduce international human rights monitoring in the territories occupied by Morocco. At the same time, information was circulating that indicated that military manoeuvres were taking place south of the border between Morocco and Algeria with the Polisario.¹² In response, Morocco withdrew its ambassador from Algiers. Then in a speech given on 6 November to commemorate the Green March, Mohamed VI pressed Algeria to concern itself with its own human rights situation (Spencer 2013; Hernando de Larramendi and Fernández Molina 2015: 24–25).

Algeria continued to argue that its position with respect to Western Sahara involved supporting international law and the efforts of the UN to reach a definitive resolution of the conflict. At the third International Conference on Peace and Security held in December 2015 in Oran, Algerian diplomat Ramtane Lamamra stated that 'Algeria will make every effort to support the United Nations Secretary-General and his personal envoy to achieve a resolution of the conflict by holding a referendum' (Saaidia 2015).

RELATIONS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND THE POLISARIO FRONT

Algeria's position of principle with regard to Western Sahara has taken the form of unquestioned economic, military and political support for the Polisario Front almost since it came into being. However, this does not mean that the country's position on the Sahrawi people's right to

self-determination is perpetually linked to unconditional support for the Polisario and, while nothing at this time suggests a turnaround in the Algerian position,¹³ some factors could modify the terms of this heretofore uncontested alliance.

Thanks to a shift in the centre of gravity of the Western Sahara conflict from the status quo and paralysed diplomatic channels in the wake of increasingly intense and frequent protests in Moroccan-occupied Sahrawi territory, the legitimacy of the Polisario Front and its monopoly of representativeness in the battle for Sahrawi self-determination have been called into question by some. Moreover, the Polisario Front is facing growing criticism in the camps where a new generation is demanding democratic reforms and more political participation for critical voices (Gómez Martín 2012: 272).¹⁴ Some members critical of the Polisario Front, such as the Khat al-Shahid faction in 2004, have been challenged and have split off. While limited, the March 2011 demonstrations of “revolutionary youth” highlighted the emergence of a group of young people more inclined to challenge the legitimacy of the old guard (Ammour 2012: 143). The Polisario Front has also been suspected of involvement in criminal networks. Some of its members were even accused of fighting alongside Muammar Qaddafi’s troops against the rebel forces during the Libyan conflict in 2011.¹⁵ Finally, a report issued by the European Union (EU)’s Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) revealing a misappropriation of European humanitarian aid for the camps by Algeria and the Polisario has further tarnished the image of the Polisario Front¹⁶ (Keenan 2015). Following the report, the European Parliament used a procedural vote on “discharging” the 2013 EU budget to criticize the lack of control over humanitarian aid to the Tindouf camps (European Parliament 2015).

In the face of the emergence of new Sahrawi actors in both occupied Western Sahara and the refugee camps, the Algerian regime has maintained a single communication channel with the Polisario Front. However, some contacts have been established with Sahrawi civil organizations in Western Sahara such as the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA) and the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Gross Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State (ASDVH), which have participated in public acts organized by Algerian groups and associations such as the National Committee of Solidarity with the Sahrawi People (CNASPS). Human rights activists from the occupied territory have also made increasingly frequent visits to the camps despite repressive measures from Morocco¹⁷ (Barreñada 2012). The new roadmap approved

at the 14th Polisario Congress held in December 2015 includes support for the activists leading the Sahrawi “Intifada” in the occupied territory for whom 16 of the 49 seats in the National Secretariat are reserved.¹⁸

Algerian civil society—whose influence over Algerian foreign policy is largely insignificant—has shown a degree of indifference towards the Western Sahara issue. Nevertheless, the Algerian government has successfully co-opted a segment of its civil society, mobilizing the Algerian associations within its sphere of influence to defend the principle of self-determination for the Sahrawi people against Morocco in some regional and international forums.¹⁹ Algeria’s position with respect to the question of human rights is, generally speaking, ambiguous. On the one hand, the country has used human rights violations in Western Sahara as an argument against Morocco but at the same time, Algeria’s position has been unclear with regard to extending the authority of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to include the protection of human rights, since this would force Algeria—as a refugee camp host—to communicate directly with Morocco and oblige the country to sit at the negotiation table and accept the negotiation format that it has rejected in the Western Sahara conflict (Rousselier 2015). Any weakening of the Polisario Front or loss of legitimacy could also entail a loss of Algerian control over the Sahrawi question and its main tool for containing its Moroccan rival (Chena 2011: 110).

TURNING POINTS IN THE ALGERIAN POSITION TOWARDS WESTERN SAHARA

Although Algerian foreign policy to date has steadfastly supported the self-determination of the Sahrawi people and the Polisario Front, there are some factors that could influence or alter this position.

THE CIVIL-MILITARY BALANCE WITHIN THE ALGERIAN REGIME AND THE SAHRAWI QUESTION

The Algerian political management model since independence has been characterized by its opacity, a phenomenon that makes it difficult to analyse the decision-making process and the influence of the main political actors over the Western Sahara dossier, which has been used to consolidate the regime’s authority and justify the power of the army while fuel-

ling nationalist sentiment (Martinez 2011: 19; Mohsen Finan 2015). Furthermore, the different clans fighting to maintain their area of influence in the regime have all used the conflict as a tool in their battles. When Bouteflika hinted at a rapprochement with Morocco after he was elected president in 1999 and expressed his willingness to make progress in Western Sahara, the army did not hesitate to neutralize these initiatives, reiterate its support for Sahrawi self-determination and unequivocally assert its intention to limit the president's prerogatives when it came to Western Sahara.²⁰ At this time, the army and the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) continue to have unaltered decision-making authority over some dossiers, including Western Sahara and relations with Morocco, despite the reinforcement of the president's powers. In that respect, the directors of the DRS have held a stubborn grudge towards Morocco since the 1990s, accusing the country of blackmailing Algeria during the "Black Decade" and of supporting Islamist groups.²¹ This animosity explains its fierce opposition to reopening the land borders between the two countries (Belkaid 2015). Reciprocal accusations about the manipulation of Islamist groups as weapons to achieve other political goals are still heard today.²²

Foreign policy and security continue to serve as a battlefield where the continuity of the balance of power and the division of tasks between civilians and the military are at stake (ICG 2015). Given the opacity of the Algerian political system, it is difficult to evaluate the potential impact of this clan-based struggle on the country's foreign policy in general and political policy with respect to Western Sahara in particular. Since 2013, a process to reform the security sector has been underway that has affected the DRS in a number of ways: a reduction in its prerogatives,²³ the September 2015 resignation of Toufik Mediène, a leading behind-the-scenes power, and the subsequent ouster of other leaders close to him. The most recent step in the process of restructuring the intelligence services occurred in January 2016 when the DRS was broken up into several units under the control of the presidency. General Bachir Tartag, who replaced Mediène as head of the DRS, became an advisor to the president, responsible for coordinating the intelligence services.²⁴ It is still difficult to assess the significance of these changes and whether they will make it possible to separate the army from civil power. The army command structure continues to exert a predominant influence and is directly involved in this infighting.²⁵

The clan-based struggle and the apparent removal of the DRS from the Algerian political stage could help to change attitudes with respect

to the Sahrawi question, since the position of the militaries most hostile to reconciliation with Morocco has weakened. However, the decision to maintain Tartag as coordinating advisor at the head of the new structure created by presidential decree to replace the DRS has been interpreted as a guarantee of continued support for the Polisario Front.²⁶ The internal process to restructure the security forces in Algeria against the backdrop of the clan-based struggles in the country corresponds to both domestic and foreign political challenges, which have become even more interconnected since the beginning of the Arab Spring. The Algerian regime fears internal destabilization emboldened by the popular revolts in neighbouring countries and sees Western military intervention in the region (such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]'s actions in Libya) as a threat.

ALGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE FACE OF NEW REGIONAL SECURITY AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The setback in Algeria's international influence after 2011—despite the magnitude of the changes affecting its geostrategic environment—is another element likely to affect the country's position with respect to Western Sahara. In light of the political instability in the region, Algerian diplomacy since 2011 has maintained a wait-and-see attitude, relegated to the background. Several factors explain the diminishment of the country's foreign policy. Differences between the army command structure and the intelligence services regarding security strategies have weakened Algeria's capacity for action and its regional leadership in conflict areas such as Libya and Mali that directly affect its security²⁷ (Ammour 2015). Furthermore, when the foreign service became paralysed as a result of the president's illness, during which time presidential prerogatives over foreign affairs were considerably expanded, the impact on diplomatic activity was quite negative.²⁸ The September 2013 nomination of Ramtane Lamamra,²⁹ a diplomat and Africanist, as minister of foreign affairs has reactivated African diplomacy, at least, and the presence of Algerian foreign policy can once again be felt to some degree in regional forums.

Algeria is also limited by the decision to maintain its position of principle built around non-interference in the foreign affairs of other countries, as stipulated by the Algerian constitution and maintained in the draft constitution made public in December 2015.³⁰ Although it is possible to observe

some divisions in military and diplomatic circles regarding whether this defensive doctrine should be preserved, for the time being the old guard has ensured that this classic focus will not be questioned when it comes to regional crises. Maintaining the principle of non-interference is weakening Algeria's capacity to act in the region and limits its strategic options at a time of growing tensions and instability in the surrounding area (Porter 2015; Boukhars 2013). This situation could lead to the country being excluded from international deliberations that directly affect its security and ability to influence the Western Sahara question. The impact of regime changes on regional balance and alliances is another pertinent cause for concern.

Faced with these new security challenges, Algeria could be forced to redefine its strategic options and modify the principles and practices that have guided its foreign policy and, consequently, reconsider the Western Sahara question (Boukhars 2013). Morocco has also used the instability of the Sahel and ensuing concerns among Western governments to obtain new support for its autonomy plan for Western Sahara and discredit the viability of an independent state in the region. Several incidents have lent this argument more weight, such as the detention of various members of the Polisario involved in a trafficking ring in Mali and Mauritania in 2010 and the kidnapping of three foreign aid workers by the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in Rabouni in October 2011. Algeria continues to deny any correlation between regional security questions and the conflict in Western Sahara, and excludes the Polisario Front from problems of regional security (Boukhars 2013). Although Algeria's strategic position has been enhanced by the insecurity in the Sahel and the Western powers see Algeria as a key ally because of its military capacity and experience in the fight against terrorism, the regime has not developed a clear regional strategy and its hesitations and misgivings about becoming more actively involved in regional affairs have weakened its international position in the defence of the Western Sahara question against Morocco.

Other internal factors such as the economic situation could contribute to lessening Algeria's clout and influence in Western Sahara. After all, in the late 1980s, when the country was suffering from a deep economic crisis, support for the Sahrawis faded into the background. The reduction of income from hydrocarbons due to the fall in oil prices is forcing Algeria to make cuts that could threaten the country's financial support for the Polisario Front. Because of the current fall in oil prices, the volume of gas and petroleum exported by Algeria declined by 4.59 per cent in the first half of 2015 from a year earlier, prompting a 43.1 per cent decline in

earnings.³¹ In order to guarantee social peace, Algeria enacted a costly system of income redistribution, raising social benefits by 20 million dollars a year. Additionally, military expenses increased by 5.2 per cent in 2015, reaching 10.4 billion dollars (SIPRI 2016).

Its economic difficulties could lead Algeria to reconsider the negative consequences of its rivalry with Morocco and the lack of regional integration. This economic vulnerability could also breathe new life into regional integration projects, oblige the states to abandon maximalist positions with respect to the Sahara and revive negotiations.

CONCLUSION

Algeria has maintained the same position with respect to Western Sahara grounded in its defence of the self-determination of the Sahrawi people and its support for a solution based on UN resolutions and international law. The fact that the country has refused to become directly involved in the resolution process despite having unfailingly provided diplomatic, military and economic support to the Polisario has allowed it to avoid direct confrontation with Morocco and sit at the negotiation table, all the while using the situation as a tool to pressure the other country.

The evolution of the regional context since 2011 with the instability of Libya and Mali and the attendant new risks to Algeria's domestic security could force the country to reconsider, to some extent, the principles underlying its foreign policy. Trapped in its clan-based struggles and facing the pressing need to reform a system based on a declining income due to the fall in oil prices, the regime at this time is not in the best position to engage in active diplomacy. This weakness in its international reach could provide an opportunity—as at other times in the recent history of the region—to unblock the Western Sahara situation. Despite Algeria's repeated support for the leaders of the Polisario Front, they increasingly lack legitimacy and Algeria's defence of the right to Sahrawi self-determination does not necessarily mean unconditional support for the Polisario. For the time being, there are no perceptible indications in the domestic battles between the presidency and some sectors of the army that suggest any modification in Algerian support for the Polisario. Even so, the Polisario Front's crisis of legitimacy is causing Algeria to lose some degree of control over the Sahrawi cause.

Algeria has tried to maintain the status quo, but it may be forced to modify the rationale or principles that have guided its foreign policy

towards Western Sahara with a new reading of the economic and security challenges in the region that threaten its national project and its development. It is clear to all that security and the war on terrorism have become priorities for the international community and that the international position towards the Sahrawi question may change regarding the advisability of maintaining the status quo.

NOTES

1. Interview with Abdelaziz Rahabi, former Algerian ambassador to Mexico and Central America (1991–1994) and Spain (1994–1998), Algiers, 2/12/2015.
2. Interview with Baba Mustafa Sayed, professor at the Université d'Alger III, president of the Centre Saguia El Hara y Rio de Oro d'études stratégiques et politiques, Algiers, 2/12/2015.
3. In May 2015, Hamid Chabat, secretary general of the Istiqlal Party, asked Algeria to return several cities (Tindouf, Bechar, Hassi Beida, El Kanadarsa and so on), which caused a media uproar.
4. The FLN deployed an active revolutionary diplomacy between 1954 and 1962 to overcome the national movement's isolation: the 1955 Bandung Conference and the inclusion of the Algerian question on the United Nations agenda in 1956.
5. The agreement regarding the borders between Algeria and Morocco was signed on 15 June 1972 during the OUA summit in Rabat. The text emphasized that the convention provisions definitively resolved the border issues between the two countries. However, while Algeria ratified the treaty a few months later, this was not the case with Morocco, which waited until 22 June 1992 to ratify it with a *dahir*.
6. The conversations between US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the various parties involved indicate that at that time US leaders were convinced that if they did not gain control of Western Sahara, the monarchy's days were numbered and Morocco would fall under Soviet influence. See the declassified documents at <https://file.wikileaks.org/file/kissinger-bouteflika.pdf>
7. Abdelaziz Bouteflika was the youngest minister of foreign affairs under President Ben Bella, being 26 years old when he was appointed in 1963. He held the post until the death of Boumediene in 1978.
8. Algeria hosted the African Union summit in July 1999, successfully mediated the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000 and launched new initiatives such as NEPAD in 2001 with Nigeria and South Africa.

9. See for example *El Watan*, 30/05/2005, available at <http://www.elwatan.com/archives/article.php?id=20260>
10. *Le Monde*, 16/12/2009 and *Jeune Afrique*, 21/12/2009, available at <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/199291/politique/sahara-ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-de-l-affaire-haidar/>
11. See *Yabiladi*, 22/2/2013 available at <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/15647/proces-gdim-izik-reaction-tres.html>
12. <http://saharanews.org/3952-sahara-occidental-lalgerie-deterre-sa-hache-de-guerre.html>
13. After the congress was held in December, the Polisario Front re-elected Mohamed Abdelaziz as the president of the RASD. He was received by the Algerian president in the presidential palace that same month.
14. In the heat of the Arab Spring, a group of young people held a demonstration in Rabouni on 5 March 2011 asking for more support for the Sahrawis from the Polisario in the territories occupied by Morocco. They demanded reforms and changes within the RASD and judiciary, an end to corruption, a reform of the electoral code and greater participation for young people in political life. The demonstration was also supported by a group based in Spain (Khat al-Shahid). See: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/18/radar/human-rights-tindouf-refugee-camps>
15. In an interview with the French paper *La Croix*, Lahouari Addi asserted that hundreds of members of the Polisario Front fought with Qadhafi's troops with Algeria's approval. See <http://polisario-confidentiel.com/620-libye-les-mercenaires-du-polisario-transitent-par-le-mali-pour-aller-a-tindouf.html>
16. In February 2015, the EU's Anti-Fraud Office uncovered the system used by the Polisario Front to misappropriate an important amount of the European aid intended for the camps (10,000,000 euros) with the complicity of Algeria.
17. In September 2009, activists from Sahrawi associations inside Western Sahara were invited to participate in a meeting with the Polisario Front in Algeria and to visit the camps (Lagarde 2009)
18. <http://www.aps.dz/monde/33744-congr%C3%A8s-du-polisario-reconduction-de-mohamed-abdelaziz-une-nouvelle-feuille-de-route-pour-l-action-du-front>
19. For instance, the World Social Forum held in Tunis in 2015 for which the Algerian authorities hired 40 buses to guarantee a massive representation of the regime's satellite organizations in order to counteract the Moroccan initiatives related to Western Sahara at this forum. See <http://www.maghrebemergent.com/actualite/maghrebine/46603-des-militants-de-la-vraie-societe-civile-algerienne-denoncent-les-agissements-de-la-delegation-officielle-au-fsm-tunis.html>

20. Generals Nezzar and Taghit attended the Polisario Front Congress in Tindouf in 1999 (Garçon 1999).
21. One example of this blackmail was the extradition of the leader of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Abdelhak Layada, who was arrested in June 1993 in Morocco. Morocco offered his extradition in exchange for Algeria's withdrawal of support for self-determination in Western Sahara (Amarni 2005).
22. Morocco has been accused of manipulating the MUJAO (Mesbah 2012).
23. Presidential Decree 13-309 of 8 September 2013 (Official Journal of the Algerian Republic) removed some departments from the DRS. The judiciary police was dissolved and control of the press office was transferred to the military command structure.
24. At a press conference, Ahmed Ouyahia, presidential cabinet director, announced that the services would be broken down into different units: General Directorate for Domestic Security (DSI), General Directorate for Foreign Security and Documentation and the General Directorate for Intelligence, agencies of the National People's Army but under the presidency (Allam 2016).
25. This infighting came to light in 2011 when corruption cases began to reach the president's closest circles. They intensified in 2013 when the DRS tried to oppose Bouteflika's candidacy for a fourth term. Other signs of disagreement emerged during these years such as the events surrounding the hostage-taking crisis at the Tiguentourine factory in January 2013. Hassan and Athmane Tartag (DRS director) did not agree with the commander of the 4th military region of Ouargla, Gaid Salah, who wanted to negotiate while the DRS wanted to launch an assault.
26. Tartag headed military training for the Polisario Front during the 1970s: <http://polisario-confidentiel.com/1320-polisario-congres-vent-de-fronde-contre-mohamed-abdelaziz.html>
27. Algeria opposed NATO's operations in Libya, and in 2011, declined to participate in foreign interventions even when the country was the target of attacks, for example the MUJAO assault on the Algerian Consulate in Gao in April 2012 and the kidnapping of seven diplomats.
28. Interview with Louisa Ait Hammadouch, Algiers, 28/11/2015.
29. Ramtane Lamamra was ambassador to Washington, special envoy to the African Union in Liberia from 2003 to 2007 and later African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security from 2008 to 2013.
30. The new constitutional amendments approved in February 2016 stipulate (Article 26) that Algeria must abstain from resorting to war and infringing upon the legitimate sovereignty and freedom of other nations, and make an effort to resolve international controversies through peaceful means.
31. *Reuters Africa*, 8/9/2015, available at <http://af.reuters.com/article/algeriaNews/idAFL5N11E3HT20150908>

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Beyond Western Sahara, the Sahel-Maghreb Axis Looms Large

Luis Martinez and Rasmus Alenius Boserup

Until recently, observers and policymakers perceived the Maghreb and the Sahel as two relatively distinct regions with little security interdependence. First, the Maghreb was seen as linked primarily with the broader Middle Eastern regional security complex through Arab nationalist state ideology and through contentious Islamist political movements and terrorist groups. Second, the Maghreb was seen as linked with the Mediterranean regional security complex through anti-terrorism, migration and trade agreements with the European Union (EU). The Sahel, for its part, was primarily seen as a buffer zone between the Maghreb and the sub-Saharan security complexes of East and West Africa in which only Muammar Qadhafi's Libya played a significant strategic role through investments, mediation and direct and proxy military engagement (for a background on Sahel countries such as Mauritania, Niger, Chad, see Ould Ahmed Salem 2013; Emmanuel 2010; Delbos 2012; see also Gazibo and

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Thiriot 2009; McGovern 2013; Club de Sahel et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest de l'OECD 2014).

In the aftermath of the Arab revolts of 2011, this distinction between the Maghreb and Sahel security dynamics seems increasingly obsolete. With the unsettling of long-entrenched domestic and regional power configurations in North Africa during 2011, the security interdependence between the two regions has intensified considerably (Barrios and Koef 2014). Today, security dynamics are structured as much along a vertical axis that links the Sahel to the Maghreb and further into the Mediterranean regional security complex as it is structured along the traditional horizontal lines that link the Maghreb to the Middle East and the Sahel to West Africa and the Horn of Africa.

This chapter analyses this recent intensification of the security interdependence between the Sahel and the Maghreb. It argues that the collapse of Qadhafi's Libya combined with the refusal of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's Algeria to replace it as regional great power in the Sahel has produced a new conjuncture of intensified security interdependence between the Sahel and the Maghreb. It also argues that this new interdependence has dangerously eclipsed the Western Sahara conflict as the most important regional security issue capable of moulding and shaping present domestic and regional security politics of the great powers inside and outside the Maghreb and Sahel regions.

The rise of these threats along an axis that binds together the Sahel and the Maghreb in new ways does not, however, implicitly signify that the Western Sahara conflict has ceased to impact regional security politics. While Algeria and Morocco may develop an overlapping vision and shared interest for the future development of Libya after Qadhafi, the two sub-regional great powers in the Maghreb have complicated international relations and regularly seem on the brink of breaking diplomatic relations altogether. The non-resolution of the Western Sahara conflict is the root cause behind this potential great regional power rupture. The non-resolution of the Western Sahara conflict blocks any attempt to push for a broader regional integration as illustrated by the failure of the Maghreb Union. While the emergence of the new insecurity axis links Libya and Mali closer together in terms of threats and risks, the non-resolution of Western Sahara holds the potential for a long-term destabilization of relations between the region's two most powerful security actors, Morocco and Algeria. While there is, thus, a possibility that the two conflicts could reinforce one another, the reorientation of security priorities in the Maghreb and the Sahel opens the door for a possible increase in regional and international cooperation.

THE TRADITIONAL SEPARATION OF MAGHREB AND SAHEL

While there are deep historical, economic, cultural and tribal links between the sparse population groups that inhabit the desert areas of the southern regions of the Maghreb countries and the northern parts of the countries in the Sahel (for a background on migration and human mobility across the Sahara, between the Sahel and the Maghreb, see Bensaad 2009; Scheele 2012; Boesen and Marfaing 2014), the politics of the post-colonial states in both regions have to varying degrees tended to ignore, downplay or deny these. The nation- and state-builders who in the 1950s and 60s took over the administration and government of the decolonized Maghreb states promoted a nationalist narrative that rooted the new nation-states historically and culturally within the Arab world and in opposition to the politics and cultures of the former European colonies (Carré 1993). Algeria is a case in point. Already during the 1940s, Algerian nationalist thinkers from the Algerian People's Party-Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (PPA-MTLD) were erasing distinctions between national sub-cultures, including those of the population groups inhabiting the Saharan territories, in a bid to construct a shared national identity as "Algerians" (Carrier 1995; Harbi 1980; Stora 1998). In the post-colonial period, nationalist nation builders institutionalized this view of the Algerian state and society in domestic policies of "Arabization" aimed at reinvigorating a presumed shared linguist identity as Arab speakers and in regional policies of inclusion in the Arab League and collaboration with pan-Arab leaders such as Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser (Grandguillaume 1983). The neglect and in some cases repression of sub-national cultural, geographical and linguistic specificities of the southern parts of the Maghreb states did not, however, signify a general disregard for the southern territories. Most post-colonial Maghreb states have, on the contrary, ardently striven to maintain or even expand their territorial possessions in the Sahara: the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria in 1960 flatly rejected French proposals to a negotiated decolonization based on a partial partition of the Algerian Sahara. In 1975, Morocco embarked upon the risky annexing of Western Sahara in the wake of the Spanish withdrawal. And Libya sought to militarily subdue Chad in the 1980s.

Although there are clear differences in how these Arab nationalist policies played out—with Morocco arguably being the most culturally plural of the Maghreb countries—they all sought to varying degrees throughout the post-colonial period to integrate the southern territories and their populations into a broader national narrative based on the political and cultural

history of the northern regions that rooted the political identity of the Maghreb states in a post-Ottoman, Mediterranean, Arab and anti-colonial history that left little room for the specificities of the Sahel. At the same time, they relied heavily on their ability to provide exportable raw material to finance these very same nation- and state-building efforts: oil and natural gas in Algeria and Libya and phosphates in Morocco (Martinez 2012).

The contentious Islamist movements that—beginning in the late 1970s and with increasing success—challenged the hegemony of the nationalist narrative about the history and belonging of Maghreb societies and states did not provide more space for the Saharan sub-national culture and history. Like the Arab nationalist movements of the 1940s, Islamists saw the Maghreb societies as parts of a region that stretched east over towards the Arab world and which stood in opposition to European neo-imperialism and Western culture and history (Burgat 1995).

The shared nationalist and Islamist understanding of the Maghreb as a region primarily related to the Arab world and towards Europe has also dominated the scholarly literature. Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s, experts on Sub-Saharan Africa critically noted that experts on North Africa and the Maghreb took strikingly little interest in the research and analyses they produced about events and trends in the Sahel region. With the exception of a journal like *Politique Africaine*, which at an early stage sought to integrate the insights from analyses of and research into North African and Sahel affairs, most scholarship remained compartmentalized into regionally oriented problems and generally overlooked the interrelations between the Maghreb and the Sahel regions until the late 1990s. The same distinction between the Maghreb and the Sahel is found in most of the political science literature on international security during this period. Take for instance the influential volume by Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde (1997). In their case study section, they link North Africa to the broader Middle East and to Europe, while the Sahel is identified as a buffer zone between the regional security complexes of North, East and West Africa.

Possibly as a consequence of the political and intellectual separation of the Maghreb and the Sahel, most Western policy-making institutions have upheld the distinction administratively. Indeed, most European policy-planning and implementing agencies as well as their ministries of foreign affairs in Europe have Middle East departments that handle the Maghreb, the Mashriq and the Gulf, while “Africa Desks” handle the Sahel and southwards. While scholars and policymakers working on North Africa over the past two decades have convened and produced countless conferences, semi-

nars, books, articles and reports on European neighbourhood politics, the Barcelona Processes, the Union for the Mediterranean and the bilateral relations between North African countries and their European counterparts, comparative academic analyses of the social, political and religious transformations happening in parallel and across the Sahara have been rare.

By the beginning of the new millennium, facts on the ground in the Sahara challenged the established understanding of Maghreb and Sahel security as two separate things. In particular, beginning in the early 2000s, the rise of the terrorist group Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) gradually changed the picture of two separate regions inherited from the post-colonial political and intellectual paradigm. Most notably, scholars have over the past decade taken an increased interest in documenting and explaining the emergence and evolution of relations across the Sahara. Most of this has taken a security angle, focusing on relations between the states in North Africa and the Sahel as well as the composition and operations of the illegal networks of terrorists themselves and allied or competing networks of traffickers and smugglers operating in the broader Sahara. Thanks to the jihadists, the experts on the two regions have begun crossing the Sahara and integrating the insights and knowledge generated from the research being done on each of the two regions (Retaille and Walter 2011).

EARLY SECURITY INTERRELATIONS

In the 2000s, the jihadi groups in the Sahel region went through a gradual metamorphosis, particularly increasing their presence in the North African branch of Al-Qaida, AQIM, in southeast Algeria, in the Timétrine Mountains in Mali, in northern Niger and in Mauritania (Benchérif 2012; see also Adib 2012; Boiley 2012). The Sahel region provided a lucrative economic platform for criminal networks of jihadists and others. Benefitting from the experiences and networks of the Algerian *Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat* (GSPC), the members of the Libyan Fighting Group (LIFG) took refuge in the Illizi region in Algeria during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The region has hosted a number of Algeria's largest gas exploitation plants operated by the state-owned company Sonatrach and the local inhabitants have for a number of years demanded that a larger share of the income generated from oil and gas exploitation should return to the region's own local communities rather than being redistributed towards the northern and other regions in the country.

While it would be an exaggeration to present this situation as a welcoming environment for jihadists, the growing tension between locals and the state administration has made the local population prone to accepting the presence of jihadists without mounting large-scale organized resistance. Hence, Al-Qaida's North African network over the past decade has succeeded in expanding the territories where it operated in and out of by including a number of Islamist jihadist groups. In 2006, the GSPC, which was founded in 1998 by the Algerian Hassan Hattab as a breakaway group from the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA), pledged allegiance to Al-Qaida. In November, the time came for the LIFG. The integration of this group into Al-Qaida initially had the effect of significantly increasing the number of Libyan foreign fighters in Iraq. Indeed, in the late 2000s, Libyans constituted the second-largest group of foreign fighters after the Saudis in Iraq.¹ During the 1990s, each of these two jihadi organizations attempted to topple the governments of their respective countries of origin, Algeria and Libya, through classical guerrilla tactics. And they failed. Defeated, they appeared—prior to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and other American targets in September in 2001—completely out of touch with the social bases and political movements they claimed to represent. The invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 provided a mobilizing opportunity for both organizations. Under the influence of Al-Qaida, they transformed their strategies and decided to unify their forces in order to fight a single jihad on a regional level (Filiu 2009, 2010).

Their financial basis no longer relied on tax extortion from the locals but on the “kidnapping industry” (Daniel 2012) and smuggling cigarettes and other easily transportable commodities across the border (with the notable exception of the trans-Sahel drug trafficking business, in which the North African branch of Al-Qaida never got deeply involved) (Antil 2012). Besides kidnapping tourists, the Sahel offered a number of possible avenues of criminal enrichment that the jihadists could and partially did exploit. The profitable trans-border trade supports not only the local population groups and the security services, but also the jihadists. During the Tuareg rebellion in Mali, for instance, a market developed for vehicles stolen from the Libyan state under the control of Arab and Toubou groups who sold them off in Niger, Mali, Chad and Mauritania. A market for American cigarettes was also run from Benin and Niger providing tobacco to Libya. And in the decades prior to the Arab revolts, the Sahel became a transit zone for drug smuggling. The frequency with which the Libyan authorities seized large quantities of heroine clearly illustrated the existence of highly active drug smuggling networks in the region (UNODC 2013).

The multiplicity of threats emerging in the Sahara and spilling back into the Maghreb gradually became an object of concern for the international society during the 2000s. For the EU, this was a particular object of concern in relation to Libya. After a deal was struck with Libya to provide gas and petrol for the EU market's consumption, the stability of the Libyan regime and its ability to control its territory, including its southern border, gained new urgency for the EU. While the contracts themselves promised long-term delivery of Libyan oil and gas to the EU, a precondition for the delivery was that the Libyan oil and gas pipelines would not be destroyed and sabotaged by disgruntled rebel groups, criminal networks seeking to revenge themselves on the regime or by other types of criminal groups operating in the Sahara and the broader Sahel.

For the USA, the war on terrorism favoured a new period of intensified security collaboration with regimes in the Maghreb and Sahel region in the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001. As part of the Middle East Partnership Programme (MEPP) launched by President George W. Bush in 2003, the Maghreb was singled out in three particular aspects of cooperation: security, economy and energy. The visit to the Maghreb region by then US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld in February 2006 formed part of the rapprochement between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Maghreb states under the umbrella of the fight against terrorism. In parallel, private investments by US companies in Algeria and Libya steadily increased in the decade prior to the Arab revolts. In particular, the normalization of diplomatic relations between the USA and the Libyan government and the establishment of a US military base in Mauritania to serve as fore-post in the US global fight against terrorism revealed a new level of engagement by the USA in the region. Hence, for the American administration, the primary threats in the Maghreb predated the Arab revolts in the Sahel region. As summarized in the "Maghreb Roundtable" organized by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in February 2006:

The activities of terrorist networks that operate in ungoverned areas of North Africa and the Sahel are the primary threat in the Maghreb. Indigenous extremist groups and jihadi fighters fleeing Afghanistan have found safe havens near the Sahara where they are able to operate free from government interference[...] Terror networks in the region pose a transnational threat not only of the Maghreb, but to Europe as well[...] To combat the spread of terror networks in the region and improve regional security cooperation, the US recently launched the Trans-Sahara Counter Terror Initiative (TSCTI). (Benantar and Chena 2015)

As a direct result of these transformations on the ground and on the international political scene, the governments of Algeria, Libya and Mali launched a regional security cooperation programme in July 2009,² with the task of “combatting the insecurity in the Sahel/Sahara region” through the deployment of their shared military powers. In November of that same year, the interior minister for the United Nations (UN) office charged with combating drugs and organized crime, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Abdelfattah Laabidi, signed an accord to open a UNODC bureau in the Libyan capital of Tripoli, underlining the importance accorded to international cooperation in the fight against AQIM in the Sahel region and the parallel existence of criminal networks (Augé 2011; see also Reeve and Zoe 2014).

A key challenge to solve in that regard was, however, the Tuaregs, which for a long time had been a key cause of the perpetual instability in the region that allowed jihadist groups such as AQIM to establish themselves there. Indeed, for Libya, the Tuareg conflict would become an important instrument for re-engagement in regional security, prompting Qadhafi to support the arming of the Tuaregs in Mali beginning in March 2009. The repatriation of 386 former Tuareg rebels from the *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice* to Niamey on 12 November 2009 formed part of a general amnesty issued by the president of Niger with strong Libyan support. In the eyes of Libya, the broader Sahel region needed to be brought back under the control of the states.

The regional and international security cooperation programme, which then seemed like the only viable solution to combating both the jihadism of AQIM and the organized criminal networks and cartels of drug dealers and smugglers, however, proved incapable of achieving its stated goals.³ While the creation of these international anti-terrorism programmes provided legitimacy to the governments in Algeria and Libya and reduced the international isolation that they each experienced for different reasons during the 1990s, in particular vis-à-vis the USA, this did not lead to the creation of a strong regional military force capable of eradicating the criminal networks and jihadists in the Sahara. On the contrary, during the 2000s, both the Algerian and Libyan governments continued to handle the insecurity in the Sahara and the broader Sahel region through their intelligence agencies rather than their military institutions.

In the 2000s, the Algerian intelligence services went to considerable lengths in their attempt to create a durable environment in the Sahel region for the AQIM units as part of their strategy to keep the militant jihadists

away from Algeria's more densely populated and politically decisive northern regions around the capital of Algiers. Financially enriched from smuggling and illegal trans-border trade controlled by local intermediaries based in Djanet, Tamanrasset and Ouargla, AQIM quickly developed into an important economic agent capable of offering the local population in the Sahel access to resources that outcompeted all the other sectors of the impoverished local job market. The Libyan intelligence services under Qadhafi, in turn, adopted similar tactics, operating out of the southern border cities of Sebha and Kufra, and using administrative regulation and oversight of the illegal trans-Sahel smuggling networks as a way to create a large clientele among the local population in the entire Sahel region.

THE MERGING REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX

In the wake of the Arab revolts, the existing threats in the Sahara have escalated, multiplied and transformed themselves into a new security threat that eclipses all other external and internal threats for most of the countries. In security studies terminology, this signified a merger process in which the previously relatively autonomous regions of the Maghreb and the Sahel merged—or more precisely, where the buffer zone of the Sahel was merged into the Maghreb regional security complex. The sudden quantum leap in perceived threat by the Maghreb and Sahel states in the post-Arab Revolt period is mainly due to three overlapping factors on the ground: the collapse of Libya, Algeria's lack of the will or capacity to fill the void in regional politics and the structural incapacity of the Sahel states combined with the dynamics of international military interventionism.

THE COLLAPSE OF LIBYA

There are two reasons why the NATO-led toppling of the Qadhafi regime in Libya is seen as a key factor in explaining the ensuing instability in the Sahel. The first is that it allowed AQIM to pillage the abandoned arm stores of the Libyan army in collaboration with the Islamist rebel brigades of Cyrenaiqa and created a safe haven for Islamist rebels in southern Libya. In December 2012, the post-Qadhafi Libyan government sealed off its borders with Algeria, Niger, Chad and Sudan and decreed that the southern regions of Ghadames, Ghat, Obari, al-Chati, Sebha, Marzouk and Kufra were “military operational zones”. The Libyan government took the decision during an international security conference in Paris in

February 2013, thus underscoring the importance accorded to the issue of border control by Libya's international partners. Indeed, southern Libya and the broader Sahel had already become an issue for a number of international and regional observers during Qadhafi's rule who, in the immediate wake of the Arab revolts, pointed to the potential takeover of territories in the Sahel by AQIM in the case of a broader destabilization of Libya. During the 2000s, AQIM had planted itself firmly in the mountains of Timétrine in Mali, in northern Niger and in Mauritania. Benefitting from the tactical experiences and local networks accumulated by the Algerian GSPC during the early 2000s, AQIM also found refuge in the region of Illizi in Algeria. From here it ensured its financial income by demanding ransoms for freeing local and international hostages and via the trans-Saharan smuggling of illegal mass-consumption products such as cigarettes; it did not, however, fully engage in smuggling hard drugs (ICG 2005, 2013). The collapse of Qadhafi's regime not only provided AQIM with an opportunity to smuggle arms out of Libya and into the Sahel, it also removed the minimal security oversight that the Libyan government once had over its vast southern desert territories where AQIM operated, creating a veritable safe haven for the rebel group that it had never before enjoyed (Wehrey and Boukhars 2013).

The second reason that the NATO-led ouster of Libya's Qadhafi is seen as a key factor when explaining the ensuing instability in the Sahel is that it pushed hundreds of Tuaregs who had served in Qadhafi's security forces back into northern Mali where they became key actors in the ensuing secessionist movement. Anti-African racism and the rejection of the Tuaregs' role in Libyan internal security forces had already been a phenomenon in that country during Qadhafi's rule when opening towards Africa was an official policy of the regime. During the 1970s and 80s, thousands of young Tuaregs left their homes in Mali and Niger to go either to Algeria or Libya. During the 1980s, Libya had taken the position of a staunch ally of the rebelling Tuareg tribes in Mali and Niger when they rose up against their central governments. In 2005, Qadhafi expanded his strategic relation with the Tuaregs by instituting an unlimited visa for all Tuaregs in Mali and Niger who wished to emigrate to Libya⁴ and a great number of the emigrating Tuaregs integrated themselves into Qadhafi's battle force, the "Islamic Legion" and into the regime's broader security apparatus. Consequently, the Tuaregs were quickly and indiscriminately targeted by the rebels that rose against Qadhafi in February 2011. In the wake of the collapse of the regime, protracted campaigns against blacks

and Tuaregs were carried out with recurrent episodes of indiscriminate violence perpetrated by militias and rebelling communities. Starting with the accusations that the Thawarga migrants had massacred civilians in Misrata, anti-Tuareg and anti-Sub-Saharan African sentiment spread to every corner of the Libyan revolt during 2011, forcing the Tuaregs to flee Libya under accusations that the rebel militias had committed indiscriminate mass killings of the group during the civil war.

ALGERIA'S REFUSAL TO REPLACE LIBYA

Prior to the Arab revolts, Libya had been the only Maghreb country to have a foreign policy aimed at the African continent and, in particular, the Sahel region. In September 1999, during an extraordinary meeting of the African Union in Syrte, Libya launched its ambitious project of creating a "United States of Africa". According to this policy, Africa would become an important economic investment zone for the African Union. According to Qadhafi, this would be the historical solution to the African continent's protracted challenges with warfare and structural economic underdevelopment. In contrast to the revolutionary regime-destabilizing policy promoted by Qadhafi's regime in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1970s, the "United States of Africa" would be based on collaboration with the existing regimes—a collaboration envisioning a stateless Africa unified against external neo-colonial interference, with a common central bank and unrestricted migration (Vallée 2012). In short, it would be a regional application of the core principle of the abandonment of the state that Qadhafi had applied in the form of his *Jamahiriyya* polity in Libya. Much like with the Libyan model, Qadhafi's own personal ambition was to be an "advisor" of sorts for the African leaders in their quest to promote peaceful coexistence and ensure economic development. His trip to Brussels in March 2004 was very much inscribed in this logic of imposing himself as a key mediator between Europe and Africa. The broader political ambition of the policy was to reconstitute Libya as a great power capable of hammering out efficient conflict resolutions and collaboration between the two continents in international politics (Vallée 2012).

The collapse of the only North African regime that for decades harboured the ambition—however unrealistic it may appear—to impose itself as a regional great power with a strategy for African development and the will and capacity to back this ambition with considerable financial and (limited) military resources left a vacuum in African and Sahel security and

diplomacy. Indeed, the inability of post-Qadhafi Libya, torn by civil war, to uphold this policy was immediately clear and prompted the Sahel states as well as the international society to look for alternative actors to replace Libya—in particular, Algeria which, in 2011, stood out as the region's most stable and potent player (Chena 2011).

Since the independence of their states, the Algerian and Libyan authorities have gone to great lengths to control the actors in the Sahel by according them considerable financial and commercial advantages and perks. Far from being an area governed by chaos and an absence of state intervention, the two great powers of the Maghreb have controlled their southern frontiers through their intelligence agencies rather than their armies. As these are areas with small and scattered populations, the Algerian and Libyan intelligence services permitted the emergence of a trafficking-based local economy that allows the locals to survive and simultaneously gives the intelligence services influence. The aim for Algeria, as for Libya under Qadhafi, has been to ensure that the Sahel territory will not under any circumstances transform itself into a territory of warfare that would threaten the security of the oil and gas production infrastructure, which is vital to both rentier-based regimes to ensure their own survival. For the Algerian authorities—with the exception of the conflict with Morocco around Western Sahara—and the Libyan authorities, serious security threats to regime survival have, since independence, been localized in the north along the cities on the southern Mediterranean littoral regions near the states' centralized political capitals, Algiers and Tripoli. From the Algerian civil war in the 1990s to the insurrection in Benghazi in 2011, this pattern has exposed how security threats to the regimes' survival were traditionally located in the north and not the south (Boserup and Martinez 2016).

Throughout the 2000s, the Algerian intelligence services successfully sought to push the jihadi groups out of the mountainous areas in the northern part of the country towards the Sahel region. Mobilizing their substantial human and financial resources, the intelligence services influenced the patterns of action of the jihadi groups by providing ideal operational and developmental conditions for them in the southeast parts of the country as well as in the mountains of Timétrine in Mali, in northern Niger and in Mauritania. Here a tactical agreement developed gradually between the jihadi groups and the security services, which meant that the jihadists would not be repressed unless they attacked the petro-extraction infrastructure. This carrot and stick tactic against AQIM, in which the intelligence services relied on a targeted exploitation of intelligence information and

on their ability to provide financial opportunities for the jihadists within the informal sector of the economy, was an important component in the successful neutralization of the jihadi threat in Algeria over the past decade (Boserup and Martinez 2016).

Enriched by the financial income derived from smuggling and trafficking activities, most often controlled by intermediaries with close links to the Algerian intelligence services in Djanet, Tamanrasset or Ourgla, AQIM quickly became an important economic operator in the informal economy in the region, offering financial opportunities to the local population that would often engage entire families on the basis of a single person's involvement. In a similar way, the Libyan regime of Qadhafi had used the cities of Sebha and Kufra as intelligence outposts charged with the task of regulating the financial exchange in the Sahel in order to establish a large network of clients in the region. During the 2000s, the secure and profitable environment provided by the Sahel region for informal business and jihadism eventually attracted rebel groups in addition to AQIM, thereby turning the area into a host region for jihadists to the extent that international observers began sounding the alarm about the future of the region. Yet for Algeria and Libya, the objective was to keep the terrorism threat well out of their home countries, which they successfully achieved. Together these two countries created a common border surveillance policy based on a game in which they incorporated local actors, remunerating them directly or indirectly by allowing them to become rich through informal smuggling and trafficking activities. Neither Algeria nor Libya has ever had a policy aimed at militarily controlling its southern frontiers, but both have built up substantial networks of clients who could provide them with these services. A number of different actors have exploited this Algerian-Libyan arrangement in the Sahel and, by the end of the 2000s, Qadhafi's Libya was a major patron for a number of important clients in the region.

The toppling of the Qadhafi regime put an end to this clientelist way of governing the Sahel and made control over the Libyan Sahel frontier an issue of competition and confrontation between all the local actors that had previously been under the control of the Libyan intelligence services themselves. With the Libyan authorities' representatives on the run from the "revolutionary justice" being implemented by the victorious rebel militias, their former clients—the Tuaregs, Toubous and others—not only appropriated the former regime's arsenals of weapons but also, most importantly, the networks of clients that the new authorities in Tripoli had abandoned. The new Libyan government did not dispatch any

institutional instruments to regulate and control these networks and the illegal trade routes they operated. It also generally despised the Sahel and Qadhafi's broader African policy and suspected the Sahel populations of harbouring sympathy towards the former regime (ICG 2011).

LOCAL INCAPACITY AND INTERNATIONAL MILITARY INTERVENTIONISM

The military intervention against Qadhafi's regime was seen as a strategic mistake by the Algerians, who permitted local actors in the Sahel to impose their own agendas on the region. The 2006 Algiers Agreement for peaceful resolution of the conflict in northern Mali was soon forgotten. The Tuaregs seized the opportunity in January 2012 and displayed their lack of loyalty towards the central government of Amadou Toumani Traouré in Bamako. Algiers' former protégés, the *Mouvement National de Liberation d'Azawad* (MNLA) and Ansar Eddine, joined ranks with AQIM and MUJAO in the quest to chase the Malian army out of the northern province of Azawad. Quickly, however, the "secular" MNLA were chased out of Azawad themselves when AQIM established its short-lived emirate of "Islamic Azawad". As ideas of an international military intervention in favour of the Mali central government began to circulate, Algiers was once again strongly opposed to them. For Algiers, AQIM's takeover of Azawad offered an opportunity to regain some of the lost influence with MNLA and possibly with Mali's Ansar Eddine. Rather than see well-known networks and client relations destroyed by foreign military intervention, by 2012, Algeria was betting on a solution in which it would use its considerable and well-established espionage networks to stabilize the situation and ensure that it would not spiral into a security threat for Algeria and its important southern petrol exploitation infrastructure in particular. Only reluctantly, under strong international pressure and without any public debate about the issue, the Algerian authorities provided access to Algerian airspace for French jet fighters to conduct military airstrike missions in support of the UN-sanctioned and French-led intervention in Mali that began in January 2013 in support of the central government in Bamako and against the AQIM-led state of "Islamic Azawad" in the north.

The French-led military intervention in Mali undermined the balance of power and networks that the Algerian and Libyan intelligence services had established over the previous decade. It repressed an important financial operator in the Sahel, AQIM, which had acquired a central position in the redistribution of resources to the impoverished local population in

the Sahel in general and in northern Mali in particular. It also put an end to whatever remained of the policy of patronage that the Algerian intelligence services exercised over the jihadi groups and others in the region. In January 2013, a breakaway group from AQIM, al-Mulathamun, led by a former high-ranking member of AQIM's emirate in the Sahara, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, staged a spectacular attack on an Algerian gas exploration site in Tigantourine, taking more than 130 foreign hostages in retaliation against Algeria for its role in the French military intervention in Mali, Operation Serval. The event marked the end of more than a decade of the Algerian intelligence service's governance in the Sahara by prompting the Algerian authorities to deploy the army to the south. Moreover, it emphasized a new conjuncture in regional security interdependence—the vertical axis of instability between Maghreb and the Sahel—that had emerged as a result of two international military interventions, the collapse of Qadhafi's Libya and the inability or unwillingness of Algeria to replace Libya as a regional great power with the ambition and resources to impose its political will on the Sahel region (Chena 2013).

As illustrated by the 14 November meeting of the 2nd Regional Ministerial Conference on Border Security in Rabat, the Moroccan kingdom has intelligently managed to draw a number of diplomatic and soft power benefits from Operation Serval. In the absence of Algeria, Morocco has chosen to play a key role in Mali and in Libya (Baghzouz 2013). Indeed, the creation of the *Centre Régional de formation et d'entraînement au profit des officiers en charge de la sécurité des frontières dans les Etats de la région* has provided Morocco with an essential instrument both to enhance its own regional influence and to derail the various initiatives launched by Algeria. With the ability to destabilize the precarious internal and regional balance around the “Tuareg question” as part of its prerogatives to respond to the special needs of the population groups in the border regions, Morocco has acquired an instrument with which it will be able to strike back at any attempt Algeria may make to increase its unconditional support for the Sahrawi population in Western Sahara. While Algeria may still look for ways to loosen Morocco's grip on Western Sahara, Morocco may today raise the Tuareg question and their claim to the “lost” territory of Azawad, which includes part of southern Algeria. As a highly influential player in Senegal and Mauritania, Morocco—under the cover of Operation Serval—has been able to extend its networks of clients to Mali and Libya. In contrast to Algeria, Morocco also benefits from a strong popularity among the Libyan population due to its early support for the

revolt against Qadhafi. This relationship is further strengthened by the excellent relation that Morocco has with a number of Gulf monarchies, including Qatar, which has had a close relationship with a number of the Libyan militias opposed to Qadhafi since 2011. For obvious reasons, these unexpected and (for Algeria) negative developments have further aggravated relations between the two North African countries that were spared the Arab revolts. If the Algerian generals deem that the Moroccan policy in the Sahel actively threatens the state's ability to remain in control of its territory at some point in the future, this could lead to a major escalation of the conflict between the two North African great powers and rivals.

Operation Serval remains little understood in North Africa. In the wake of NATO backing for the military support to topple Qadhafi, it is seen primarily as a further destabilizing factor in an already-volatile region. The failed French attempt to explain its motives behind and aims for the intervention has only aggravated a tendency to seek conspiracy explanations among rather large segments of the North African population. In a context strongly marked by the presence of an Islamist political ideology, this has bolstered the idea promoted by the Islamists and jihadists that France is an enemy of Islam. The negative representations of Operation Serval among the broader population in the Maghreb region is complemented by a more general questioning of France's motives and agenda in the Sahel. The Moroccan king's participation in the inaugural ceremony for President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita provoked a great level of worry and stupefaction in Algiers, which felt forced to conclude that its own solid support for Operation Serval had paved the way for Morocco to infiltrate one of its important interest zones in the south. From Bamako to Tripoli, Morocco has sought to play an increased role, as emphasized by the Rabat Declaration of 14 November 2013.⁵ This is, however, a dangerous development. The unattended and unforeseen consequences of Operation Serval and NATO intervention in Libya could thus represent an escalation of the relations between Morocco and Algeria, a process whose first victims would be Mali and Libya.

Much as the Pakistani secret services in Afghanistan, the Algerian secret services will not be able to endure the rising power of its Moroccan rival for long in a region that it considers a key strategic asset. Moroccan foreign policy activism in the Sahel is made even more difficult for Algeria to endure by the fact that the Algerian authorities had been under pressure to accept and assist French military intervention in the first place. The criticism put forward against Algeria for failing to secure its southern borders by the partners in the military alliance in the Sahel is all the more

hard to sustain by Algeria given that Algiers considers NATO in Libya and France in Mali the actors responsible for undermining Algeria's security policies in the region. Algeria fears that it may join the list of countries that, like Pakistan, find themselves left to administer a vast space abandoned by the very same great powers that intervened militarily in their areas once they reach the limits of their intervention policies. For two decades, the Sahel has been the private domain for the Algerian security services, who make sure to take out anyone who is threatening Algeria. It may well be that in the aftermath of Operation Serval and the NATO intervention in Libya, the level of terrorism will only grow. As the ranks of Algerian jihadists recede in the post-Arab Revolt decade, fresh recruits from Libya, well armed and better organized, seem ready to fill their ranks.

CONCLUSION

The intensification of the security interrelationship between the Maghreb and the Sahel is the product of a recent conjuncture in regional politics based on four interlinking factors. First, it is the result of a failure of the European and Arab Gulf powers that toppled the Qadhafi regime to ensure a stable political transition. The ouster of Qadhafi, which occurred under NATO leadership with strong political and military backing from the French, British and Arab Gulf powers, laid the foundations for the current instability inside Libya. Second, it is the result of Algeria's lack of will or ability to replace Libya as a regional great power in the Sahel. Rather than jeopardize its fragile internal power balances by assuming the role of a regional great power in the Sahel, Algeria has primarily responded to the collapse of security there by securing its own southern borders with the Sahel. While this has permitted rebels and criminal networks to develop and intensify their interactions across the border between Libya and Mali, Algeria's position is consistent with its strong opposition, voiced in 2011, to the NATO-led intervention in Libya (Benantar 2015).

Third, it is the result of the long-term structural incapacity of the Sahel states to impose central authority over the totality of their territories—a structural factor that is well illustrated in the case of northern Mali where the collapse of Qadhafi's Libya played a significant role in tipping the local power balances in ways that developed into the secessionist rebellion aimed at “liberating” Azawad from the central government in 2012. Fourth and finally, it is the result of the way in which new regional security dynamics interfere with broader international concerns and, in particular, with European

Mediterranean security policies structured primarily around anti-terrorism and anti-immigration. Hence, the emergence of a *de facto* Islamist rebel-controlled territory in Azawad in northern Mali in 2012 prompted France and a number of its European strategic allies to intervene militarily in the region in early 2013. This further increased security interdependence by pushing armed rebel groups out of Mali and into the ungoverned territories of southern Libya as well as prompting Islamist rebels to carry out previously unseen attacks against strategically important economic infrastructure in southern Algeria.

The intensified security interrelation between the two regions challenges the traditional scholarly and policy view of the Maghreb and the Sahel as two distinct regions. Two sets of facts on the ground have been of particular importance in this respect: the gradual rise in illegal and criminal networks of jihadists, smugglers and migrants partially co-opted and tolerated by the Algerian and Libyan security services; and, since the fall of Qadhafi's regime and with rapidly increasing strength, new metastasizing jihadist networks that have benefitted from the collapse of the Libyan security infrastructure and the momentum for mobilization initially created by the reverberations of the Arab revolts and then by the international military engagement in Mali and Libya. This transformation of the security dynamics challenges both core claims in the political ideologies of nationalism and Islamism and the mainstream scholarly literature on the Maghreb and the traditional ordering of policy and research institutions working with the two regions. Finally, but most importantly, it has changed the regional and international perceptions of threats and security in the Maghreb and the Sahel.

With the partial collapse of Libya and Mali, international and regional security policies have given priority to handling the unstable north-south axis rather than the traditional east-west conflict in Western Sahara. Yet this may prove to be a perilous path. The conflict in Western Sahara continues to raise questions about whether the Sahrawi population will have the right to an independent state based on the principle of the people's right to self-determination. The instability that is likely to continue to arise from the continued denial of this right, which Algeria defends, will probably continue in military, diplomatic, financial and human terms. For the international community, the conflict in Western Sahara thus raises questions about how the creation of a new state can be achieved without simultaneously destabilizing its so far most stable partner in the region: Morocco. On the other hand, the rise of the new axis of instability linking the Sahel and the Maghreb poses another challenge to the international community: how to support the weak states in the Sahel from collapsing structurally and in terms of capacity? The French-

led intervention in Mali is a case in point. The diplomatic and military aim of the intervention was not to foster state formation, as was the case during the period of decolonization. Rather it was to save the territorial integrity of the “weakest” states in the region: Mali and Libya. The Western Sahara conflict has, wrongfully, been marginalized for a period in regional and international politics in the face of a new security conjuncture that emerged in the wake of the military intervention in Libya 2011, where the fear that international and regional actors have of seeing weak states collapse generated new security dynamics and policies.

This has opened the door to potential new developments in regional and international security policies in the region. The context has the potential to increase regional and international competition over the ability to sway the outcome of the conflict in Libya and Mali and the broader Sahel and Maghreb along the lines of narrow national interests: Egypt in eastern Libya; Algeria and Morocco in northern Mali; France in the broader Sahel, that is repeating the Western Sahara stalemate and deadlock between regional actors (Algeria and Morocco) and the broader international society (the UN, the USA and the EU). The Syrian case sets a chilly example for how such a situation should not be handled. Yet the context also offers the potential to increase regional cooperation and integration that could, for a while, eclipse the past stalemate observed in the Western Sahara conflict. It is, however, also possible that the emergence of a new axis of instability linking the Maghreb and the Sahel closer together in security terms could push the two sub-regional great powers, Algeria and Morocco, to unexpectedly find regional security policy compromises that could reduce the public diplomatic tension and instead ease the way for a possible conflict resolution in Western Sahara.

NOTES

1. *The New York Times*, 2007/11/22, Foreign Fighters in Iraq Are Tied To Allies of US.
2. Algeria's interests in Mali also have a petro-related element. Through the SIPEX company, a branch of the Algerian state-run oil-extraction company Sonatrach created in 1995 and registered in the British Virgin Islands, Algeria would, for instance, operate petro-exploitation of the ground in the Taoudenni region in Mali in 2007.
3. CEMOC (*Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint*) was created in 2010 as a military coordinating unit for Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali.

4. Jeunes Afrique. Tawergha: le martyr des Libyens noirs. 5 February 2014.
5. <http://www.diplomatique.ma/Portals/0/Conference/DECLARATION%20FINAL.pdf>

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The Role of Sahrawis and the Polisario Front in Maghreb-Sahel Regional Security

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The conflict in Western Sahara has been a lengthy and thoroughly analysed issue addressed from multiple scientific and professional perspectives. These studies have yielded a wealth of knowledge about a conflict that is approaching its 40th anniversary. However, and despite the wide variety of approaches to the conflict, analyses from security studies and intelligence analysis perspectives have not been as prolific. The security elements of this conflict have always been either relegated to the background or linked to the historical and legal development of the issue as simply another contextual factor to consider. In addition, it has tended to be examined retrospectively. But while it is true that all these studies are essential, so is the need for a greater profusion of studies that include forward planning, since this stage of analysis, given the tangential approach to security, supposes a significant lack of knowledge,

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especially when calibrating the risks and threats that are drawn in the short and medium term, in a highly unstable regional environment.

The already-complex situation in the Maghreb-Sahel area was made more so in 2011 with the advent of the Arab Spring. The many changes since then have resulted in North Africa taking a central place in the international scene, raising concerns of neighbouring countries and/or those that play significant roles in the region. However, despite the renewed attention to what is happening in this part of the world, the conflict in Western Sahara has been affected by a strange paradox. While the region reawakens the interest of the international community, the possibility of the emergence of another hypothetical state in the midst of this strategic region does not appear to be a priority for anyone. Tindouf seems to be slightly too far from the hot spots in the region, from the Gulf of Sidra in Libya to Lake Chad. This is a volatile scenario, plagued by weak states, in which Morocco and Algeria appear as two of the few state actors that can provide certain support to prop up the precarious situation of regional security, threatened by new terrorist groups—in addition to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)—such as Boko Haram, Daesh, Ansar Dine or small terrorist cells that are supplied by or complement the ranks of other fronts in Syria or Iraq with young fighters and which extends from the Libyan coast and Borno State—in the Nigerian northeast—through to the mountainous regions of Algeria and Tunisia to northern Mali. Furthermore, there are other risks related to human security to consider: a growing demography, climate change, unemployment, corruption, organized crime and so on. All of them configure a spectrum of potential drivers that could set on fire any other apparently non-related problems. Western Sahara is not immune to these factors, which can trigger a scale of events with unknown consequences.

Thus the conflict in Western Sahara seems to be overshadowed by these other scenarios that demand more urgent international attention: a twenty-first century cold war, “a situation of neither war nor peace” (Martín and Lozano 2002; San Martín 2005; Dedenis 2007; Mora 2015) and a permanent state of uncertainty maintained by different geopolitical interests (Mundy 2014, cited in Mora 2015: 21) that is languishing because of a referendum that has been postponed *sine die*. The renewed interest in the conflict seen in the early 2000s, “when a recurrence of Sahara is perceived in politics and the international media” (Mora 2015: 23), seems to have worn off. However, regardless of where the world is looking today, Sahrawis continue their particular—and it seems solitary—struggle.

Therefore, the leitmotiv of this chapter, approached from a security studies prospective and with an emphasis on an exploratory nature, is to focus on the role played by the Polisario Front as an “administrator” of the refugee camps and the hegemonic force of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (RASD), conditions that place it in a vital position to protect the camps from becoming an even greater problem for regional security in the Maghreb and Sahel areas. We hypothesize that Western Sahara and Tindouf in particular are key pieces on the regional board, such that their instability—due to a new escalation in the conflict, a greater penetration of organized crime or terrorist elements exploiting this window of opportunity—may condition the entire economic, strategic and geopolitically important region.

To this end, the first part of the paper presents a theoretical framework based on the concept of relative deprivation as a driver of political violence. The second part outlines the most relevant characteristics of the configuration of the refugee camps and living conditions of its population to then describe some of the elements that could contribute to creating a breeding ground of discontent among the Sahrawis in Tindouf, considering both the internal dynamics and external elements. This will allow us to finally build a SWOT analysis¹ and a useful strategic axis to appropriately analyse the situation of the refugee camps in Tindouf.

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION: A VECTOR FOR VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

Political and economic factors can have a significant impact on the causes of organized violence. In this section, we work from a theoretical perspective, basing ourselves on one concept, relative deprivation, that may help us understand why the difficult situation prevailing in the Tindouf refugee camps may be an important cause of radicalization that aggravates the problem. The concept of relative deprivation is explained as a trigger of radicalism.

The adoption of this framework is justified as long as the dynamics of internal—not necessarily armed—conflicts are consequences, among many other issues, of government malpractice, of the existence of corrupt systems, of unequal distribution of benefits or the heritagization of public resources and the exclusion of minority groups that generate horizontal inequalities. These factors, which tend to have economic roots, particularly

affect political, identity and/or socio-cultural variables and can occasionally degenerate into outbreaks of political violence that alter and challenge the dominant status quo (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2000, 2009; Weisntein 2002). What prompts most uprisings and what underlies many of the uprisings against the established power, beyond a shared ideological or religious view or a general feeling of social injustice and so on, is a matter of sheer survival (Gurr 1971). There are numerous cases proving that an uneven economic distribution has created a perception of relative deprivation, situations that are the cause of the vast majority of violent insurrections. In this regard, Robert Gurr notes that what drives an individual to join an organization that challenges authority is the possibility of increasing the possibilities of realizing their desires and values. To do this, it uses the frustration/aggression theory: when a subject is presented with an obstacle that prevents them from being satisfied, it causes frustration which in turn generates aggression as an instinctive response. This frustration does not necessarily lead to violence immediately, but when it is prolonged and is felt intensely, it degenerates into anger and violence over time. The author explains this hypothesis through the aforementioned concept and refers to the distance between what people think they deserve and what they really think they can achieve, and where the potential for collective violence will vary depends on the scope and intensity of the relative deprivation in a society. In fact, the economic discrimination that leads to uprisings which seek to restore or overthrow the established political order in the search for a more equitable distribution of wealth often degenerates into scenarios that feed the cycle of violence (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2003).

There are cases where some groups, who are in a privileged economic situation, turn to institutionalized—yet illegal—political violence to prevent the loss of their privileged status quo. In other cases, where the privileges of certain groups have been previously abolished and they have undergone a considerable reduction in their economic, political and/or social status, they may resort to violence to restore their privileges. We are not implying that all conflicts have a single origin, nor that they are all affected by factors relating to the economy. Sometimes, its influence is negligible in comparison with other political factors.

In fact, this growing influence of economic theories focused on maximizing the—monetary—benefits as an explanatory variable of the dynamics of conflict has been heavily criticized for its reductionist character. There is a certain consensus in relation to the fact that economic factors

affect the dynamics of conflict. It is true that individual motivations may vary over time as the conflict mutates, because struggles initially motivated by social, cultural or political factors have been supplemented and in some cases exceeded, for purely pecuniary reasons—and vice versa. However, doubts grow about the relative importance in terms of how they affect other political, socio-cultural and identity elements. The circumstance that participants are attracted by the benefits generated by the conflict cannot be the central provision on which the explanatory theory of their origin is built. It is therefore necessary to link economic indications to the expectations of different groups within a society in order to uncover what motivates certain segments of the population to consider themselves victims of institutionalized discrimination in relation to socio-economic benefits (O'Neill 2005).

THE POLISARIO FRONT, AN ESSENTIAL ACTOR: THE “NON-STATE” OF REFUGEE CAMPS

Since the establishment of the first refugee camps four decades ago in the Algerian province of Tindouf, the Polisario Front has been responsible for their administration. Integrated into the RASD, it is the most recognizable international image of the Sahrawis' difficult reality. Although Polisario Front authorities claim that the capital of the republic is Bir Lehlou, a town in northeast Western Sahara, the organization is principally based in Tindouf, particularly in Rabuni (Pham 2010: 13), where the Polisario Front has been able to set up a remarkable administrative structure (Bhatia 2001a). Each of the camps comprises a *wilaya*—an administrative province or region; these, in turn, comprise several *dairas* or villages, which are divided into four neighbourhoods. A police checkpoint at the entrance of each marks the end of the Algerian jurisdiction and access to the territory under Polisario Front control (San Martín 2005: 577).

Although there are official mechanisms of choice for each of these administrative levels, as well as a national parliament, the spurious nature of these alleged democratic institutions is obvious: the Polisario Front exerts complete control and has become the only movement party, “which can seldom be democratic” (International Crisis Group 2007a). This alleged situation of “state normality” does not exist: the Polisario Front heads, structures and maintains the *unborn* state, where “it is the military that manages the camps” (Mora 2015: 36). The Polisario Front depends

largely on the support of the Algerian government, which has provided it with such support at all levels since its beginning. Authors such as Pham (2010) and Bozonnett (2015) argue that if the Polisario still exists, it does so because of the support provided by Algiers. Some voices even say that the Sahrawi Polisario Front no longer exists, that there is only an Algerian Polisario Front, entirely subordinate to the designs of Algeria (Soudan 2010).

The Polisario Front has “the privileged status of being the sole representative of the Sahrawi people” (Wilson 2010: 429), a condition that has helped to promote a nationalist project (San Martín 2005: 587) and a sense of Sahrawi identity (Dedenis 2007), political worldviews indoctrinated through the educational system established in the camps by the Polisario Front (Omet 2008). Tens of thousands of people must deal with impoverished economic conditions and very adverse weather and geographical environment conditions. There are no confirmed figures for the number of people living in refugee camps in Tindouf. Some estimates put them at around 100,000 (International Crisis Group 2007a), between 130,000 and 160,000 (Wilson 2010) to approximately or even above 200,000 (Medina et al. 2011; Grande and Ruiz Seisdedos 2015). The question of the number of refugees is not trivial, to the extent that it is the key figure for a hypothetical referendum (Maura 2015). The difficult living conditions in the camps have brought great problems related to the pressing needs for food and water—serious issues in accessing water and sanitation resources—as well as a lack of health and housing (Grande and Ruiz Seisdedos 2015). These conditions cause the Sahrawi population to be greatly dependent on international aid for survival.

CORRUPTION, CLIENTELISM AND A DESIRE FOR POWER: THE WEAKNESSES OF THE POLISARIO FRONT

Exile, poverty and isolation are the harsh circumstances that have existed for 40 years. This calamity becomes even more difficult when the back-drop, the independence of Western Sahara, is presented as a remote possibility. All this stirs a dangerous brew, which can lead to new generations of young people, who live with the frustration of expectations, opting for more radical paths (Gallego 2014; Del Barrio 2015). Therein lies the fundamental role played by the Polisario Front as a hegemonic organization. Their influence can largely encourage or offset any spiral of radicaliza-

tion. However, complaints and criticisms about corruption, clientelism, authoritarianism and political immobility weaken the Polisario Front's position, impair its image and delegitimize it. If we look at the theoretical perspective presented in the previous section, it becomes clear that Sahrawi participation in political culture as well as possible situations of relative deprivation can be vectors of destabilization.

The first issue regards the consistent evidence that Polisario Front leaders have embezzled funds from international aid destined for refugees. There have been suspicions of this occurring for years, but it was a report by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF, for its acronym in French) in early 2015 that described in scathing detail how the gears of corruption worked (EUBulletin 2015; Cembrero 2015; Sagastume 2015). In addition, leaders of the Polisario Front had been taking advantage of these unlawful practices to establish favouritism, to the point of administering the right of refugees to visit relatives in territories under Moroccan rule (International Crisis Group 2007a: 13–14). Furthermore, the almost unchanged politico-military structure is seen as an opaque ruling caste, which has swallowed up all power (International Crisis Group 2007a) and exercises it in an authoritarian manner. Moreover, restrictions on the development of civil and political rights plus other abuses have been denounced (Human Rights Watch 2014), as have the Polisario Front's impediments to allowing investigations into "the state of human rights" (Amnistía Internacional 2014). Due to these reports and complaints, in March 2014, a National Committee of Human Rights was founded in order to guarantee human rights, not only in the refugee camps but also in the territories in Morocco. Apart from the unquestionable positive aspect of its foundation, if this committee denounces human rights violations in Morocco as well as hypothetical irregularities in Tindouf, it would mean great progress for the situation there.

The camps are held together at the moment, but it is difficult to find refugees who think they will return to Western Sahara in the near future. Most assume that only a force of arms will produce self-determination (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 135, 137). Sahrawis believe that 40 years of struggle in Tindouf must lead them to independence and the legitimacy of their leaders is based on that effort (Mora 2015: 44). Hence, the threats from Polisario Front leaders with their return to arms or military exercises as a show of force being a recurrent resource—although we can consider it a mere tactic for internal consumption to keep the flame of armed struggle against Morocco alive. However, the perception of many Sahrawis,

especially among young people, is that the Polisario Front has lost the initiative and languishes in the shadow of an international resolution and resolve that never arrives, lacking decision-making power and controlled by the same old generation overseen from Algeria (Boukhars 2012: 17). The desire for independence, always spurred by the Polisario Front, and nationalism can be factors of disaffection towards those same leaders who break their promises; in any case, the very delicate social situation cannot be denied, circumstances that can also be extrapolated to other Western Sahara territories (San Martín 2005: 583). Because, despite the exile and isolation, Sahrawi refugees logically do not remain oblivious to what is happening in Western Sahara; the different social protest movements and riots that occurred there over recent years demonstrate the high polarization and inequalities that exist between Sahrawis and other citizens (Szmolka 2013). Far from alleviating the situation, the subsidy policy initiated by the Moroccan authorities deepens divisions and accentuates the anxiety felt among the Sahrawis. This is because it occurs within a system of clientelism and aid, monopolized by certain segments of the population, where many skilled Sahrawi workers are unable to integrate into the system. The relative deprivation that led many Sahrawis to leave the Tindouf camps during the 1990s is the same relative deprivation that is pushing many of them to consider returning to the desert. Given the extraordinary expenses of the Moroccan government to defend and develop the occupied territory, it has been assumed that the minds and hearts of many Sahrawis have been won (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 140). But nothing could be further from the truth. The lack of equal opportunities and the system of aid provided by Morocco that fails to integrate them into the social and economic fabric can be particularly dangerous because of the potential destabilizing and/or radicalization consequences among the population. However, we must note some recent studies, which underline the non-radicalization paths followed by Sahrawis to date (Porges and Leuprecht 2016).

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AS ELEMENTS OF RADICALIZATION

Because of all the forgoing, “the radicalization of the Sahrawi people is a political cost” (International Crisis Group 2007a: 14) and a risk that must be considered. There have already been examples of these responses such as the 2011 and 2012 protest movements in the camps against the way

the Polisario Front leadership was elected (Szmolka 2013: 49). Some years earlier, in 2004, the first split within the Polisario Front core had occurred with a movement called the Polisario Front Khat al-Shahid, which called for reforms within the organization and a return to hostilities against Morocco. Although this dissident group did not acquire greater relevance and the protests did not amount to anything in the end, we mention both cases as proof that dissenting tones are not an impossible scenario. Because future prospects are negative—a decrease in international aid and no planned referendum (Grande and Ruiz Seisdedos 2015)—it is possible that the Sahrawis could opt for more radical solutions.

There are also other dangers related to radicalization and relative deprivation that must be seriously considered, given that to this malaise we must also add the convergence and coincidence of two other factors that increase instability in the Maghreb and Sahel regions: the significant increase in drug trafficking in many of these countries and the rise of Islamic radicalism in the region. Indeed, the Sahara and the Sahel have become an area of illicit trafficking, largely facilitated by the inhospitable terrain and the manifest inability of governments in the area to fully control their states. However, what had historically been light trafficking is evolving into a very lucrative, and sophisticated business, involving major international organized crime networks (Valdés 2013; UNODC 2013; Mazzitelli 2011), which sometimes even replace the real economy (Laleix 2015). According to Boukhas (2012: 7), these networks have expanded their operations and influence, undermining traditional tribal social structures (Lacher 2011). The areas close to Western Sahara, especially northern Mauritania- and Polisario Front-administered camps in southwest Algeria are becoming major hubs for smuggling and other organized trafficking crime:

To be sure, this illegal activity has existed for decades. It has been fuelled by the conflict over the Western Sahara and has benefited from the ethnic kinship that relates the Sahrawis of northern Mauritania and those of the camps of Tindouf as well as from the complicity of the Algerian army, the Polisario, and senior Mauritanian officials. (A. Boukhas 2012)

In this regard, Mohsen-Finan (2008) echoes a study carried out by the multinational company Altadis, which mentions the involvement of Sahrawis in the smuggling networks, relying on several routes through Western Sahara to Algeria and through Tifariti and Bir Lehlou, an oasis controlled by the Polisario Front. While it is not possible to confirm that

it is the Polisario Front as such that is allowing² these practices, it is clear that they can only be successful with the complicity of local individuals. An added problem the Polisario Front has in this regard is the fact that some of the refugees in Tindouf use their own vehicles for illegal trafficking of either migrants or cigarettes (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 130). The Polisario Front is not oblivious to the need to increase its own monitoring in the camps and, hence, along with Algerian forces, has reinforced checkpoints in the region in order to “combat illegal trafficking and the fight against jihadist terrorism” (Meneses 2014).

As evidenced by Boukhars (2012), the involvement of young Sahrawis in drug trafficking is a disturbing reality: they are socially isolated, lack direction and have no hope for the future; they feel abandoned by an old and outdated leadership. Turning to criminal networks can become a way to turn against a regime that has failed them and against the empty verbiage of the international community to their suffering. The danger is even greater when, as some authors have highlighted (Lacher 2011; IEEE and IMDEP 2013; Mesa 2013; Fuente Cobo 2014; Boukhars 2015), these networks and organized crime groups begin to work with jihadist groups. And, despite the idea of no borders between the Sahara and the Sahel (Fuente Cobo 2014), this is not an area without government, but “disputed territories, with numerous personal and ideological divisions” (Graham IV 2011: 587). It is precisely these gaps that criminal organizations and terrorists take advantage of in order to penetrate the area. Examples of this are the cases in Mali and Libya, where revolutionary movements—in the case of Libya—or independence movements—in the case of Mali—were exploited and engulfed by jihadi elements to implement their reign of terror, acting as genuine parasites in the chaos and expanding their areas of influence and activity.

This is a serious issue that concerns the international community; in April 2015, Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon stressed that “The growing frustration among the Sahrawis and the expansion of criminal and extremist networks in the Sahel-Sahara region have increased risks to the stability and security in the region” (Bozonnet 2015). It is in this context of increased criminal activity and social tensions that terrorist groups such as AQIM or others become part of the threat. Fear has always been the frustration that leads to criminality, which in turn leads to militancy and terrorism (Boukhars 2012: 6):

‘Powerful terrorist organizations like AQIM are expert at detecting persons showing signs of vulnerability’, states Michael Braun, a former director of operations of the Drug Enforcement Agency. Thus, the camps of Tindouf represent a potential goldmine for recruiters from groups like AQIM. (Boukhars 2012)

Thus, AQIM and its offshoot subsidiaries in the region could try to expand alliances with smugglers in refugee camps in Tindouf and recruit new militants among disenchanted youths.

It is not entirely unreasonable to assume that there are elements sympathetic to those causes if we consider the kidnapping of three aid workers in the camps in October 2011. The terrorist assault took place in Rabouni, which means the criminals were necessarily allowed into the heart of Polisario Front territory, besides having to cross a strongly militarized zone in Algeria; this clearly shows “local complicity, perhaps Sahrawi people who have turned to Islamic extremism and who did not raise the alarm” (Cembrero 2011). Indeed, the abduction was carried out by the terrorist group Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), a group linked to AQIM, possibly also with the participation of Ansar Dine, another radical Islamist group based in northern Mali. The Polisario Front has not previously had links with AQIM (Solà-Martin 2007: 404; International Crisis Group 2007a: 18) and has always been clear about its intended distance from the political-religious ideology practice by the Al Qaeda offshoot (Bhatia 2001b; Fuente Cobo 2011; Gallego 2014). This did not prevent it from being accused, through reports linked to the Moroccan intelligence or inconsistent studies, of supporting and being in collusion with these terrorist groups. In this regard, a complete study that refutes such information is available, by Carlos Ruiz Miguel (2010: 5–16).

Regarding the hypothetical participation of some individuals in terrorist groups, the view offered by Graham IV (2011: 589, 596) must be noted. This highlights the limited success of AQIM among local populations; the relationship is based more on lucrative exchanges than on any real affinity with the jihadists and the causes they claim to defend. In the case of abductions, it is possible for people outside extremist groups to collaborate in the kidnapping of foreigners for the purpose of selling them, thus equating these activities, because of their similar characteristics, with practices of piracy carried out off the Somali coast, where political or ideological reasons are far from the cause of such criminal actions, with other

financial reasons largely pushing criminals into perpetrating them. This idea reminds us again of the theoretical framework of relative deprivation.

Therefore, any collaboration between AQIM and other criminal organizations and elements of the Polisario Front or Sahrawi individuals would not be based on ideological affinities. There are also no reliable data to indicate that such relationships have occurred in the past to any great extent. Hence, the concern of siding with radical Islam resides not so much in Polisario Front elites, who are aware that “the choice of terrorism constitutes a grave strategic error [...] irreparable for the Sahrawi cause” (Fuente Cobo 2011: 21), but in the Sahrawi youth who are disgruntled and disaffected with their leaders. According to other authors, this situation is virtually impossible due to the profound alienation of the Sahrawi youth in regard to radical positions on Islam (Omet 2008). However, occurrences in recent years in the region of young Tunisians, Libyans, Malians, Moroccans and so on joining jihad in their own territories or enrolling in distant battlefronts, or the acquiescence of tribes or other local authorities with jihadi groups, demands that we take this possibility seriously, however low its probability. A good security and intelligence analysis should also consider those options that, as remote or bizarre they may seem, break firmly established assumptions in the different epistemic communities, in order to anticipate—with the knowledge that “black swans” are always looming—a more dangerous reality.

And last, but by no means least, these violent predispositions may be favoured by the Polisario Front’s non-determination of armed struggle, in that the militaristic propaganda could satisfy the unfulfilled desire for action. The possibility of the organization taking up arms is more rhetorical than real (Fuente Cobo 2011), given its depleted military capabilities and adverse conditions: the Polisario Front knows that a return to armed struggle would also entail great damage for the Sahrawi cause.

SWOT ANALYSIS AND THE STRATEGIC AXES OF THE POLISARIO FRONT AND THE SAHRAWI CAMPS

After analysing the factors that could foster the radicalization of the population in the Tindouf refugee camps without the consent of the Polisario Front, we will now move on to the prospective planning part of the chapter, using the SWOT-structured intelligence analysis technique (see Fig. 8.1).

Internal Analysis	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hegemonic position within the RASD • Political and historical legitimacy • Effective administration of the camps • Political principles removed from radical extremism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption and clientelism • Poor economic and social conditions in the camps • Problems of good governance and internal dissent • Warmongering rhetoric • Immobility • Collaboration of some Sahrawi people with organized crime
External Analysis	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater involvement of MINURSO and the international community • Changing positions in Morocco and/or Algeria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on Algeria • Dependence on international aid • Worsening living conditions of the Sahrawi in Western Sahara • Criminal networks • Terrorist groups • Instability in the region, spread of violence

Fig. 8.1 SWOT analysis of the Polisario Front
(*Source:* Authors)

The Polisario Front's strengths are related to its status as the dominant actor and only authority within the camps in Tindouf. This allows it to exercise tight control over its "administrations" and the security within the camps—for which it also has peripheral support from the Algerian army. At the moment, it is the sole actor ruling the camps, negotiating with other actors and representing the Sahrawi people. In addition, its long political tradition embedded in nationalism and socialism—which it has shaped to make itself more presentable to the international community—has ensured that the most radical Islamism remains on the margin of Sahrawi religious practice.

By contrast, this same position of Polisario Front supremacy has resulted in many problems. The sustained perception is that the Polisario Front comprises a type of "extractive elite" that is corrupt and practices clientelism, and the resulting perception of many Sahrawis of relative deprivation could lead them to dissent from the Polisario Front and indulge in

criminal and/or radical practices, either for personal interest or as a way to rebel against the status quo, or both. In addition, the precarious living conditions could act as a trigger to address this situation of deprivation, as could the lack of good governance in the four *wilayas*, where a single-party regime does not encourage participation.

This weakness may be exacerbated by the inaction and lack of initiative perceived in the Polisario Front leaders, especially by young people. The organization is treading on dangerous territory and a further solidification of its position would result in lost support from the international community. It is also known that its position vis-à-vis Morocco is far from superior, but—on the other hand—this does not prevent the group from demanding its legitimate claims, possibly from having weighed the political cost of maintaining intransigent positions as being less than the potential cost of giving them up (International Crisis Group 2007b). However, a hesitant attitude or a certain degree of consensus could cause it to lose the legitimacy its people give it, “knowing that any concession to the opponent is perceived as a betrayal” (Mora 2015: 44); the refugees may feel they have fought and resisted for 40 years for nothing. Warmongering rhetoric could encourage a young population, eager to see their aspirations to self-determination satisfied, and intensifying the mood to ultimately not act could be a very dangerous game and one not very well thought out by the Brahim Ghali regime.

In terms of opportunities, all involve the reconsideration of the positions of the key players involved: the United Nations (UN), through the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), trying to convince Morocco to change its mission and to respect human rights in Western Sahara, as several other non-governmental organizations and the Polisario Front itself have demanded; the United States, France and, to a lesser extent, Spain, pressuring Morocco to accept a referendum; Morocco, as a party that is directly involved; and the two neighbouring interested countries, Algeria and Mauritania (Sánchez 2014: 72–73; Slizhava 2014: 107). The Algerian government is particularly important as the primary supporter of the Polisario Front using the border dispute with Morocco as leverage, a controversial tool it also uses to attack the Moroccan State (Torres 2013).

However, it seems rather improbable that all these actors—as well as the other states and organizations involved in the conflict³—would change their positions in the short to medium term given the complicated situation of instability and insecurity in the entire North African region. As Jorge Dezcallar⁴ (2015: 98) notes, due to “the quantity of failed states spread over an area as

strategically sensitive as the Sahel [...] nobody is interested in the fate of a small Sahrawi state opposite the Canary Islands that is necessarily poor, weak and unpredictable”, perhaps only as a source of instability to the region and a launching point for the different criminal organizations operating there.

Regarding threats, the SWOT analysis exposes the Polisario Front’s delicate situation. First, its strong dependence on Algeria results in, on the one hand, a loss of legitimacy even among Sahrawis themselves and on the other, being subordinated to the will and destiny of the regime in Algiers. Another threat directly related to the Polisario Front’s external dependence is its attachment to international, economic and social aid that has been reduced in recent years because of the financial crisis and a situation that does not seem to promise any change in the future. Second, the deterioration of Sahrawi living conditions in Western Sahara may be another factor that fosters radicalization and directly influences the Sahrawis in Tindouf. A renewal of protests could contribute in this regard.

Finally, regional instability and insecurity. The Sahara-Sahel central area has become a hub for all types of illicit trafficking, which may be an alternative source of financial funding, a situation that can be seriously affected by the bonds binding organized crime and the various terrorist organizations operating there. The geostrategic position of Tindouf—crossed by the three axes that structure the Maghreb and the Sahel states (Herrero and Machin 2015: 192–193)—highlights its potential value. As in other parts of the Sahara-Sahel area, organized crime can act as a saviour to people with no other options for improving their living conditions. For instance, in those areas where the government does not act to provide the minimum basis of subsistence and satisfy both political and social expectations, an informal economy, illicit trafficking, crime or radicalism could increase as a desperate answer to these scarcities.

STRATEGIC LINES

From the results of the SWOT analysis, we can draw a number of strategic lines that, in our view, must be monitored in order to anticipate possible changes in Sahrawi attitudes towards more radical positions of any nature or towards greater involvement in illicit activities, as well as the stability and security of the refugee camps controlled by the Polisario Front. These five strategic lines are Polisario Front governance; the socio-economic situation; conflict in Western Sahara; change/stability and the permanence of the position of international actors; and organized crime and terrorism:

- I. Polisario Front governance: attending to existing corruption and clientelism, participation and good governance, and moderate political positions. Currently, the Polisario Front is the only actor representing the Sahrawi voice, especially in international forums (directly or through the RASD) as well as the single authority in Tindouf. This position is a clear strength. However, it may be the Polisario Front's Achilles' heel if the Sahrawi people blame the group for the stalemate in the conflict or for being an obstacle along the RASD's path towards democratization. Related to governance, corruption and clientelism are key points in terms of losing a legitimacy developed over 40 years, mainly among young people.
- II. Socio-economic situation: worsening/improving living conditions for refugees, in particular the level of humanitarian aid. The economic crisis in Europe has revealed how dependent Tindouf's economy is on international aid, a well-known circumstance for a long time, but nonetheless uncorrected. In this respect, the Polisario Front's ability to manage the situation is actually limited, or in other words, the socio-economic circumstances seem set to remain as critical as they are now. That is why relative deprivation or other worrying factors could intensify.
- III. Conflict in Western Sahara: developments in any new political or social protests staged by Sahrawis living in Moroccan-controlled areas, together with the necessary preventive attention to policy (political participation, respect for human rights and progress towards solving the conflict), social indicators (equality and integration) and economic indicators (employment and perception of relative deprivation). Hypothetical triggers in the future, even if they are not perceived as important in the beginning, must be attended to in order to monitor further socio-political conflict.
- IV. Change/Stability and permanence of the position of international actors, particularly MINURSO and Algeria (in the latter case, it is essential to remain alert to developments in the Bouteflika regime). Regarding MINURSO's role, the UN must reinforce its legal mandate to guarantee human rights. MINURSO constitutes the main, but last, symbol that the conflict in Western Sahara still matters to the international community. In spite of its importance, MINURSO forces are quite weak against Moroccan pressure,

because Morocco uses MINURSO as a tool due to Moroccan evidence that the UN mission is the strongest hope for an international solution for the Polisario Front. On the contrary, if MINURSO loses its position even more or if there is no change in its mandate—regarding how to protect human rights, as the Polisario Front complains—that could be another possible factor to drive the Sahrawi people towards more radical attitudes. The warmongering rhetoric is not of any help in terms of making progress towards peace.

- V. Organized crime and terrorism: there are clear signs that the area where the camps are located is a transit zone for all kinds of illicit trafficking, which means that monitoring the cross-regional activities of organized crime is essential. As for jihadist terrorist groups and the dangerous attempts to interact with them, they have opportunistically shifted their activity to the west and south-east—Libya and Mali—and thus do not seem to be a pressing concern for the moment. However, the ability shown by groups such as AQMI to adapt to new scenarios (Echeverría 2012) suggests that a change for the better in these countries—that is, pushing back jihadist positions in these territories—could move the interest of these organizations closer to the Algerian south-east and Mauritanian north, around Tindouf Hamada. The latter threat must be taken seriously because it has been a constant Moroccan argument to weaken the Polisario Front's position for years, especially in the context of the War on Terror launched by the United States. Morocco knows that Western countries are very sensitive to these issues and has tried to exploit this “window of opportunity”. The concern about terrorism in North Africa has intensified since the fall of Libya, the jihadist offensive in Mali and the different footholds that jihadist groups are trying to set up around the region. Many young people are joining the ranks of these groups, as can be seen in the recent attacks in Bamako, Ouagadougou and Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast, for instance. Without misunderstanding signals of discontent or disaffection, the increasing influence of radical movements among these types of populations—which were never expected to become targets—is a risk that must be taken into account in order to obtain the most accurate analysis.

NOTES

1. A SWOT analysis is a structured analytic technique that tries to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in any project or organization, as Heuer and Pherson (2011: 214–216) explain: the strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organization, while the opportunities and threats are characteristics of the external environment. The SWOT analysis is used as a framework for collecting and organizing information that might have an impact on it, providing a basis for further analysis. The SWOT should be filled by listing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that are expected to facilitate or hinder the achievement of the objective. After that, possible strategies can be identified for achieving the objective, which is done by asking how we can use each strength, improve each weakness, exploit each opportunity and mitigate each threat.
2. Something that has not prevented either Morocco or Mali from repeatedly accusing the Polisario Front of harbouring illegal trafficking networks.
3. For an exceptional review of the positions of all the key actors involved in the conflict in Western Sahara, see Mora (2015: 34–42).
4. A Spanish diplomat and expert on North African politics, he was the Spanish ambassador to Morocco and head of the Spanish intelligence services between 2001 and 2004.

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National and Local Levels (1):
Moroccan Governance of the
Western Sahara Territory

Western Sahara in the Framework of the New Moroccan Advanced Regionalization Reform

Raquel Ojeda-García and Ángela Suárez-Collado

Morocco's so-called Advanced Regionalization Reform was initiated on 3 January 2010, when King Mohammed VI announced in a speech to the nation the creation of the Consultative Committee on Regionalization (CCR). This body was entrusted with the task of preparing a new regionalization project (El Yaagoubi 2010), which was considered at that time "the greatest reform of the decade" in Morocco.¹ Notwithstanding, the initial exaltation over the project was replaced by its gradual demotion in the political sphere, particularly after popular protests erupted in the country in February 2011 in the context of the Arab Spring. In this regard, most of the political actors involved in the mobilization oriented their concerns towards other specific issues, such as corruption and the deficit in democracy, excluding increased territorial autonomy from their primary demands. Furthermore, the 2011 process of constitutional

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reform and the legislative elections in November 2011 also contributed to the project of regionalization being demoted on the agenda of the political parties and trade unions. From that time onwards, the king became the unique driving force behind the reform of regional administration (Ojeda-García and Suárez-Collado 2015), handling the almost four-year blockage of the project's legislative development and implementation in parliament with the adoption of new state policies and measures, mainly focused on consolidating the CCR's proposal in the so-called Southern Provinces, that is, those formed by the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara annexed by Morocco since the late 1970s. Consequently, the way in which the regional reform has been implemented suggests that it has been mainly considered by the Moroccan state as a means to stall further negotiations on Western Sahara and to strengthen and normalize its control over the territory.

This chapter explores the impact that advanced regionalization could have on the resolution of the Western Sahara dispute and how this latest regional reform has been used by the Moroccan state to reinforce its stance in the conflict. To that end, it analyses the Moroccan proposal in the framework of advanced regionalization to evaluate to what extent this territorial reorganization gives autonomy to the territory in dispute. For this purpose, the degree of decentralization achieved in the new regional model is studied in comparison with previous regional plans and political reforms, mainly the 1997 regionalization law, the CCR project, the 2011 constitution, the 2015 regionalization law and the 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides the general context in which the regional reform commenced, examining the reasons and aims behind the constitution of the CCR. The second section analyses the evolution of the advanced regionalization project in the Moroccan political environment, from the publication of the CCR's report in March 2011 to the approval of the new regionalization law in July 2015, paying special attention to the political debate, and public policies and measures adopted in between regarding both the advanced regionalization plan and Moroccan policy towards Western Sahara. The final section compares the new advanced regionalization reform with the laws and reforms mentioned above to appraise the effective degree of autonomy given to the regions in the new system of territorial organization using a model for policy analysis based on six criteria: democratization; transfer of power from the central state to the region; fiscal

resources; good governance and agencification (the presence and role of ad hoc agencies for public management); *tutelage* (state supervision of regional affairs and management); and regional division.

REGIONAL REFORMS IN MOROCCO AS A MEANS FOR POLITICAL LEGITIMATION AND CONTROL

Regionalization has been a central policy in the Moroccan state's form of governance for different political reasons. On the one hand, it has often been considered a solution to the state's problems regarding the Western Sahara conflict, European political demands and the internal crisis of elites (López and Hernando de Larramendi 1997; Ojeda-García 2006). On the other, it has also had great political significance insofar as it has been rhetorically used by the monarchy as an instrument for its legitimization as a promoter of change and modernization when the regime has needed to regenerate. However, contrary to its official purpose, the regionalization policy has never led to significant changes in the state's power structure.

From a historical perspective, the region appeared for the first time in Moroccan politics in 1971 as a means to respond to the country's needs regarding development and growth (Ben Osman 1996; Blanc and Rémond 1994; Gruber 1996). That regional model turned out to be economically inefficient, but very politically useful for controlling peripheral dynamics through the renewal of local elite networks. It was not until the mid-1990s that the region received legal recognition as a territorial collectivity in the 1992 constitutional reform. The second regional reform was part of the 1996 constitutional revision and 1997 regional law, which established 16 regions with a weak capacity for legislative initiative and a limited number of powers. Another important element of the 1997 law was regional demarcation, explicitly delimited with the idea of breaking the country's old cultural, historical, linguistic and tribal identities. In both regionalization processes, Moroccan regional policy was defined more by the implementation of a policy of deconcentration than power decentralization properly speaking,² because of the limited transfer of human and financial resources from the central state to the regions. The dominant idea in both models was the need for a centralized state to ensure the maintenance of political control and the country's territorial integrity, cohesion and homogeneity, to the detriment of the region, which was left without political and economic power (Ojeda-García 2002: 25–28).

Accordingly, the creation of the CCR must be considered the beginning of the third phase of the Moroccan decentralization process initiated in the mid-1970s, but also, following the official discourse, part of the institutional reform initiated by Mohammed VI after ascending the throne. Thus, the advanced regionalization plan has often been referred to in royal speeches as one of the four pillars—together with the reform of the judiciary, extensive devolution and a new social charter³—with which the king wanted to consolidate good governance in the country, defined as “the key to democracy and development”,⁴ and modernize the state.⁵ Certainly, the terminology referring to good governance was directly linkable to the projects and ideology of certain organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Thus, it can be considered that the reform programme announced by the king, aimed at good governance, responds to both international and domestic pressures. In this regard, from the international level, European Union (EU) requirements were imposed on Morocco in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the 2005 EU-Morocco Action Plan and the Advanced Status agreements (Fernández-Molina and Bustos 2010: 8–9). From the national arena, there were the pressures emerging from the need to find a solution to the question of Western Sahara (Zunes and Mundy 2010; Ben-Meir 2010: 93; Zoubir 2007: 162), provide a political framework where the proposal for a Moroccan autonomy plan could be credible and admissible (Kausch 2010: 1), and resolve two other major problems in the country’s political system: its inability to reproduce new elites to replace the traditional ones and the discrediting of the institutional political sphere (Tozy 2009: 6; Veguilla 2009).

The CCR was created upon the king’s petition (Fernandez-Molina 2011) to set a model of advanced regionalization for all of the country’s regions based on four fundamental aspects: a strong commitment to the nation’s sacred and immutable values (the unity of the state, of the nation and of the territory); the principle of solidarity; a balanced distribution of resources between powers and local authorities, central government and the institutions concerned; and the adoption of an extensive devolution within the framework of an efficient territorial governance system based on harmony and convergence.⁶ Moreover, it had to design “a wholly Moroccan regionalization model, based on the country’s specificities”,⁷ getting away from the idea of establishing a “mere imitation” or replication of other countries’ experiences, such as the German or Spanish territorial systems, which had been strong reference points for the palace in the past (López and Hernando de Larramendi 1997; Benyahya 2008, 2010).

The creation of the CCR generated intensive activity among institutional and non-institutional political and social actors. As in the 1970s and 1990s, political parties and important sectors of civil society attributed a democratizing power to the regionalization process. The resulting expectation provoked a significant number of activities and debates all around the country focused on this question. In fact, the king himself had encouraged the participation of social and political forces among the Moroccan population as a whole, and he had asked the CCR to take their proposals into consideration. Over the 14 months during which the CCR did its work, several social and political actors (political parties, trade unions and associations), governmental institutions (governmental offices, control agencies, national development agencies and other national institutions) and different international organizations forwarded a total of 124 written and oral proposals to the commission. However, public attention to the reform decreased once uprisings erupted in North Africa and spread to Morocco in early 2011, giving Mohammed VI the opportunity to consolidate himself as the single driving force behind the reform of regional administration.

FROM THE CCR'S PROJECT TO THE ORGANIC LAW: BLOCKAGES AND ALTERNATIVES TO ADVANCED REGIONALIZATION IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

On 9 March 2011, two weeks after the first demonstrations began in Morocco, King Mohammed VI put regional reform back on the political agenda through the announcement of a constitutional revision and the creation of the Advisory Committee for Constitutional Reform (CCRC). The king's decision was seen in Morocco and abroad as a strategic response to pre-empt a popular uprising in the country by promising reform from the top, while for him, he was simply continuing the implementation of his pre-existing regionalization plan (Ottaway 2013: 2). Notwithstanding, the CCRC and the constitutional reform focused the attention of political parties, organizations, associations, institutions and citizens on other issues such as the role of the monarchy, the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. At that time, democratization was more important than decentralization for them, meaning that regionalization and decentralization became residual demands. From that moment on, only the monarchy kept the regionalization process as the focus of its concerns (Boukhars and Rousseiller 2014).

The CCR's final proposal was published in March 2011. It was explained in three different books, and from its first pages, it was clear that the effort undertaken by the commission was faithful to the "great values and principles" outlined by Mohammed VI. In general, it was noteworthy that despite the project's aims to construct regions with an "essence of democracy", regions were excluded from having any real political power, with the focus on the promotion of integrated and sustainable development. Thus, the powers of the regions were confined to the economic and social spheres, and sovereignty, territorial integrity and political, legislative and judicial unity were not challenged by the CCR. In fact, all of them remained under the supervision of the king, the supreme representative of the nation.

The opposition to the CCR's project remained circumscribed to the regions where there are autonomist and regionalist groups—like northern Morocco and, particularly, the Rif—and to the programmes of some activist groups, such as certain far-left parties and Berber activists, who strongly criticized the territorial delimitation established and the non-legalization of regional parties.

Besides these sectors, the advanced regionalization project fell by the wayside in the public sphere, so much so that four years passed between the advanced regionalization project proposed by the CCR (2011), the constitutional reform (2011) and the beginning of the parliamentary procedure for the Organic Law on Regionalization (2015). This delay is explained by the fact that, despite behind the push for reform and the institutionalization of new regions lay the sensitive question of the Western Sahara conflict, certain political circumstances in the country made difficult to move forward with the advanced regionalization: in particular, internal conflicts among the different parties in the government coalition and the lack of interest among political stakeholders in the reform after the commencement of popular protests in the country.

During the time the regionalization reform was blocked in parliament, the king assumed the leadership of the territorial reform, concentrating his efforts on trying to enforce the CCR's project in the so-called (by the Moroccan state) Southern Provinces in order to continue with Morocco's plan to normalize its annexation of the Western Sahara territory. The measures adopted included the new Model of Development for the Southern Provinces and the reconfiguration of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), both given a boost by the events that occurred in the Sahrawi protest camp set up in Gdeim Izik between October and November 2010 (Desrues and Hernando de Larramendi 2011: 329).

The origin of the establishment of this camp lay in the same type of socioeconomic grievances and calls for “dignity” that boosted the subsequent upheavals that took place across North Africa from December 2010 onwards, and also in the deep inequalities between populations produced by Moroccan policies in Western Sahara (Fernández-Molina 2015: 235). Despite the fact that it was initially tolerated by the Moroccan state, the camp was dismantled with fierce repression, generating strong international criticism and demands to know what really happened. This international campaign forced the state to create a parliamentary committee to investigate the facts, finally concluding with a report in which it discussed the need to review the state’s management of local entities and incorporate the local population both in economic and social terms, as well as to change the clientelistic system dominating the state’s relationship with the territory (Desrués and Hernando de Larramendi 2011: 329). These recommendations were behind the adoption of the new Model of Development for the Southern Provinces and the reconfiguration of the CORCAS, as mentioned earlier.

Subsequently, in 2012, the king asked the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) to draw up a new model for the economic development of the Southern Provinces. The ESEC’s proposal was presented in October 2013 as a platform to consolidate the Moroccan position in the conflict and promote advanced regionalization in Western Sahara as a framework to resolve the political and territorial dispute. However, the ESEC’s report also somehow reflected the social and economic concerns expressed in Gdeim Izik and constituted a response to the suggestions made by the parliamentary committee, which investigated the events related to the dismantlement of the protest camp. The palace was also behind some additional decisions taken related to those recommendations, initiating a procedure for including new elites from the local civil society, especially groups focusing on human rights, youth and women, into the CORCAS (an institution ostensibly created to represent the interest of Sahrawis, but actually an entity to support Morocco’s positions and policies towards Western Sahara in the international sphere). The call for the renewal of the composition of the CORCAS came after years of public criticism about its inoperative character and its lack of credibility in the eyes of Sahrawis. However, no action has been taken in this regard.

The final phase of the regional reform came with the initiation of the parliamentary procedure of the Organic Law on Regionalization, which began

on 15 May 2015 when the House of Representatives adopted an organic law bill for provinces, prefectures and municipalities. This draft began to be discussed in parliamentary committee on 18 March 2015 and was strongly criticized from the beginning by the main opposition parties (Socialist Union of Popular Forces, Constitutional Union, Istiqlal—a former member of the governmental coalition with the Justice and Development Party—and the Authenticity and Modernity Party). Their critique focused on issues such as the lack of consultation on setting the next regional and local election dates and the short time established for approving the draft bill of the Organic Law on Regionalization. They considered that these aspects constituted a strategy to force the parliament to accept the rules and terms proposed by the government. Thus, the final approval of the organic law was preceded by tough negotiations inside the Parliamentary Committee for Interior Affairs, fuelled by the pressure exerted by the opposition in parliament (Gattiou 2015). The conflicting signs of the political bargaining could be observed in some of the issues debated, in which the nature and complexities of Moroccan politics were also present (e.g. the system for electing the president of the regional assembly, the quality and type of the powers assigned to regional assemblies and their presidents, the regional assemblies' relationship with the agent of authority representing the central state in the territory—the *wali*—and regional division). The last of these issues was one of the aspects that provoked strong debate, in particular regarding the appropriateness of including certain provinces in different regions, especially those related to the Sahara territory.

On 23 July 2015, three different organic laws were approved: regional organic law 111.14, prefectural and provincial organic law 112.14 and municipal organic law 113.14 (Mokhliss 2015). The differentiation was done to present regionalization reform as a total process at the subnational level and reinforce the idea that the subnational territorial administration was more autonomous regarding the central power than before.

A COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS OF THE ADVANCED REGIONALIZATION REFORM: HOW AUTONOMOUS ARE THE NEW REGIONS?

The territorial reform finally adopted was the result of the convergence of three different texts prepared over a five-year period: the project developed by the CCR, the 2011 constitution and regional organic law 111.14. The following subsections analyse the advanced regionalization

model following six main criteria identified to evaluate the real degree of autonomy given to the regions: democratization; transfer of power from the central state to the region; fiscal resources; good governance and agencification; control of the state and tutelage; and regional division. To assess them, the 2015 Organic Law on Regionalization, the provisions on regionalization in the 2011 constitution and the CCR project are analysed against the previous regional model, the 1997 regional law and the Moroccan 2007 autonomy plan for Western Sahara.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE REGIONS

Regarding the first criterion, democratization of the regions has been articulated using three mechanisms: amelioration in representation and legitimacy; greater access of women to elected posts; and the articulation of mechanisms that improve citizen participation, both in civil society and in the private sector. One of the most relevant changes introduced by the advanced regionalization plan is the election of the regional council by direct universal suffrage, with the number of its members determined proportionally according to the population of each region. Likewise, the public vote is set as the rule for electing the president, vice presidents and the council members. This system is also implemented for all the decisions taken by the council.

In its report, the CCR proposed that the members of the council have a voice and a vote, while the participation of other members on the council would be limited to the right to a “consultative voice”. The latter category was composed of members of parliament who were chosen in the constituencies of a region, presidents of the chambers of commerce (organized at the regional level) and trade unions with representation in Morocco’s upper house of parliament. In the Organic Law on Regionalization, attending regional council meetings during consultative terms—upon invitation from the council’s president—is reserved for the *wali* of the region in addition to officials, agencies and central state agents with a presence in the region and public companies whose powers cover the regional level (art. 36).

The document issued by the Council of Europe (Van Cauwenberghe 2010) on regional autonomy advocates for the need to create common links between the organs of regional representation and those of the central state. Accordingly, the 2011 constitution maintains a three-fifths representation for the territorial collectives. Article 63 stipulates that the three-fifths be distrib-

uted in proportion to their respective populations using the criteria of equity among the regions. Of these three-fifths, one-third is reserved for the regions. The regional councils choose their representatives from among their members. Two-thirds are chosen through an electoral college constituted at the regional level by the members of the municipal, provincial and prefectural councils.

To guarantee the greatest representation and transparency for the electors, the CCR's advanced regionalization project recommends using proportional formulas. The influence of the French model to represent the territorial administration can be seen in the "prudent" limitation of the accumulation of mandates. Despite this, the commission supported holding joint elections to the regional and municipal councils (the two that are to be elected by direct universal suffrage), proposing that one person cannot be a member of the regional, provincial and municipality councils at the same time. The Organic Law on Regionalization also establishes other incompatibilities for the president and vice presidents of the region. In the case of the president, these include being a member of the government, the House of Representatives or the House of Councillors as well as certain consultative councils and institutions at the national level (art. 17).

With regard to reinforcing democratic management, the new regional model grants the power of action to the president of the regional council to the detriment of the *wali*. This breaks with the prior dual-executive authority that existed at the regional level wherein the authority who could take decisions was not able to execute them, while the authority who was not able to participate in the decision-making process had to execute them. However, the symbols of the presence of the central state in the territory do not stop in the regional sphere, but also descend to the level of the prefectures and provinces. Finally, the advanced regionalization model provides certain consultative mechanisms for dialogue and concerted actions, giving the citizens and associations the possibility of exercising the right to include issues of concern to them on the regional council's agenda.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE SPHERE OF POWERS

Notwithstanding the fact that the advanced regionalization reform provides more powers to the regional councils, the limits and controls imposed by the central state persist and imply a denial of decentralization and, above all, of the democratization announced in the king's 2010 speech. Thus, on the one hand, regional councils still cannot take decisions regarding matters in their political sphere, showing that the Moroccan

state continues to believe that local and regional powers are immature and not able to govern regional issues without the central power. On the other hand, the control mechanisms of the Interior Ministry, as discussed below, thoroughly restrict the autonomy of regions (and other local authorities). Therefore, the powers vested in the 2015 advanced regional assemblies are focused on issues relating to economic, social, cultural and environmental development issues.

The region's powers are divided into three distinct groups: the own powers, that is, those returned to the region so as to permit—within its territorial space and the limit of its own resources—the development of its own actions, namely planning, programming, implementation, management and maintenance; the powers shared with the central state, which are based on the principles of progressiveness and differentiation; and the powers transferred by the central state to the regions, that is, those ceded by the central state to the region, following the principle of subsidiarity, as put forward in the Council of Europe's document on regional autonomy (Van Cauwenberghe 2010) in a way that allows for a progressive increase in the region's own powers.

The advanced regions expand their powers in three areas. The first is the international field, where they received the right to establish cooperation agreements with other local and regional councils from other countries and international organizations as well as non-governmental organizations for economic, social, cultural development and environmental promotion. The second relates to the potential development of research and technological innovation, mainly aimed at opening up the regions to universities and the universities to society. Finally, the third field refers to the implementation of infrastructure and equipment programmes designed to improve human and social capital in the regions, and attract more investment and development to the territory. Similarly, regions may address the elaboration of programmes to improve the social habitat and the development of rural areas. In sum, the spheres of a region's power—on its own and shared with the central state—are economic development; vocational training, continuous training and employment; transport; international cooperation; social development; the economic and social development of the rural world; environment; culture; and tourism.

Despite increased responsibility for the prefectures and provinces (it is assumed that there is no hierarchical relationship between the territorial collectives), the role of the regional council is preeminent over the other councils regarding regional development programmes. In this same vein,

the role of the regional council has improved in relation to joint actions between the central state and territorial collectives. While wielding practically all of these powers, the regions must act in coordination with the state and with the prefectures and provinces.

LOCAL FISCAL SYSTEM AND INTERREGIONAL SOLIDARITY

The advanced regionalization reform aims to ensure that the main work of the regional councils is focused on regional development. Morocco's severe deficits in human development act as the point of departure for this agreement, and consequently two distinct funds are planned to improve the social level of the population and to promote regional solidarity: one fund for social improvement intended to eliminate the regions' existing deficit in human development, infrastructure and equipment and other domains such as clean water and electricity, unhealthy habitats, health, education and road networks and telecommunications; and a second fund for interregional solidarity to make an equitable distribution of resources in order to reduce disparities between the regions. Programmes, activities, budgets and the criteria for the benefit of both funds are under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior and the presidents of the regional councils are the consultative authorities in these tasks.

The CCR's proposal for advanced regionalization urged that financial resources be optimized and forecast the creation of new regional rates adapted to the specificities of each region. The goal was not to increase the tax burden (currently 26 per cent in Morocco), but rather to ensure that payment falls on the users of large infrastructures (such as airports and major train stations). Fundamentally, the financial capacity of the regions since 1997 has been very poor. Total state income sent to local collectives in 2009, for example, was distributed in the following way: 49 per cent went to urban areas, 25 per cent to the rural communes, 19 per cent to the provinces and prefectures and only 7 per cent to the regions—that is, 0.7 per cent of the overall income of the state. Expenditure on human resources in the regions has represented no more than 5 per cent of the total, while social and economic spending—around 10 per cent of the total—has not been a priority either. Resources to the regions have clearly been insufficient since 1997, which is why the CCR's project presented some specific proposals: a 1–5 per cent recovery of the respective parts of taxes on societies and income; an equal distribution of the benefits from number plate fees and special annual rates on vehicles between the central

state and regional councils; and eligibility for the regions to benefit from the value-added tax as investments.⁸

In its article 188, the Organic Law on Regionalization also establishes that the state must allocate to the regions and in stages: 5 per cent of the benefit from corporate tax, 5 per cent of the benefit obtained from income tax and 20 per cent of the benefit from the tax on insurance contracts, in addition to credit from the general state budget until reaching 10,000 million dirhams in 2021. Finally, one innovative aspect of the project is a “finance and multi-annual law” that requires different ministries to provide financial breakdowns by region so that it is clear which public credits go to each region (Organic Laws 6380, 23 July 2015, 14–111 on regions).

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND AGENCIFICATION

The fourth criterion used to assess the degree of decentralization achieved by the advanced regionalization reform is based on the evaluation of good governance, which constitutes one of the main goals pursued by the Moroccan state with the regional reform. The advanced regionalization is contingent upon the belief that setting up agencies improves public management and prevents undue administrative and bureaucratic unwieldiness.

Earlier, this chapter discussed how important it is for Morocco to be in line with the goals and trends of major international organizations and with theoretical trends and practices regarding governance. In this regard, as part of a general tendency to improve public management, good governance is the concept that has lasted the longest in political speech and has managed to gain the most support among experts and public decision makers. Good governance has been defined as the management of public issues in an efficient and effective way, but above all it includes an awareness of the demands of the citizenry. It is at the core of the new tendencies in public management, which support adopting measures that go one step further towards hollowing out the state, through emptying the content and action of public administrations and the creation of other ad hoc organisms. Therefore, setting up agencies is an appropriate element for improving governance. However, despite the fact that the agencification of public management offers a series of advantages—such as reduced bureaucratic inertia, improved procedures and shorter processes and resolution periods—it also entails certain risks, such as the duplication of structures, overlapping responsibilities and an open door to the maintenance of clientelistic networks.

Following this overall tendency, the CCR's advanced regionalization project suggested that an agency be created under the control of the regional council that would be responsible for carrying out development policies and supporting the technical plan and initiation of investment projects. This proposal also responded to one of the ongoing criticisms in the 1997 plan for the regions, the lack of human resources and material means to implement a region's responsibilities, even when the seat of the regional council was, in many cases, located in the same space as the offices of the governor of the province or prefecture. Both issues are reflected in the final legislation; regional organic law 111-14 introduces a new entity in the regional sphere, the Regional Projects Agency, a legal organism with financial and administrative autonomy (art. 128), responsibility for executing the development projects adopted by the regional council and the obligation to support the council with regard to legal, technical and financial issues.

CONTROL OF THE STATE AND TUTELAGE

One of the criticisms of the process of decentralization and of regionalization in general started with the 1996 constitutional reform and the exercise of *a priori* tutelage. Despite this complaint, tutelage is maintained in the advanced regionalization reform, with the only difference being that any management carried out by a region is to leave greater autonomy for the regional governments. The CCR's proposal supported a reduction in both the deadlines and the powers submitted to tutelage by the central state. The text proposed that if the state's response was negative, regional counsellors should be able to activate their right to appeal to the competent tribunals, arbitration of the minister concerned or to the prime minister. However, despite declarations that central state control would be reduced, both the CCR's project and the regional organic law still give the power of control over the regional council's decisions to state agents, including the agenda and budget and other issues such as deliberations over the development plans, which also require the prior approval of the state. Finally, the reduction in the exercise of the state's tutelage goes hand in hand with greater judicial control and management evaluation of the decisions and acts of the regional council.

REGIONAL DIVISION

It is common for different aspects and elements in the designs for new regions to provoke debates and confrontation, but the thorniest issue, and the one that represents the biggest challenge, is regional division (Rousset 2010: 4). This was the case in Morocco, both before and after the publication of the CCR's report, which was faithful to the royal line and affirmed that in Morocco there was neither regional tradition let alone political regionalism and that the country was characterized by a territorial structure that was "unified and of a high level of integration under the aegis of a monarchy in symbiosis with its people".⁹ Following this statement, an advanced region could not be more than an institutional and functional structure, and consequently the rules established by the CCR for the territorial division were based on efficiency, building on what already existed (such as the provincial division), homogeneity, functionality, accessibility and proximity, proportionality and balance. Under these criteria, the number of regions in its proposal changed from 16 to 12 and the original design was reformed (Etayea 2015; Médias24 2015)—in particular regarding the division of northern Morocco—by political debates and negotiations in parliament that were accepted by the Ministry of Interior on 22 January 2015 in the form of the draft bill of regional decree No. 2.15.40.¹⁰

The non-self-governing territory in dispute, Western Sahara, is included as part of the Moroccan state and is articulated around three regions in both the CCR report and regional decree No. 2.15.40. Great effort was made in the CCR's document to justify and explain the territorial division and the criteria used for it. However, in the anticipated Moroccan regions that structure the territory of Western Sahara, less effort was dedicated to establishing criteria to group these provinces or to incorporating these provinces into southern Morocco with the provinces of the territory of Western Sahara. The draft of the regional decree establishes three regions (10—Guelmim-Oued Noun, 11—Laayoune-Saguia al Hamra and 12—Ed Dakhla-Oued ed Dahab), which do not entirely correspond to the territory of Western Sahara. Regions 12 and 11 coincide with the non-autonomous territory, but 10 enters the international division of Western Sahara through the Assa-Zag province (Theofilopoulou 2012). This strategy is the opposite of that implemented in 1997, because the 1997 division broke Western Sahara into three regions—Laayoune-Boujdour-Saguia El Hamra,

Oued-Eddahab-Lagouira and Guelmim-Es Smara—while Western Saharan provinces such as Smara were included in a Moroccan region (Table 9.1).

The results obtained from monitoring the basic criteria for analysing regional autonomy are of two types: one of an individual character, that is, the degree of autonomy of the region in the last regional reform; and the second, of a comparative character, evaluating the improvements in the degree of autonomy with respect to the 1997 model. Regarding the first group, the analysis shows that the degree of regional autonomy is insufficient, due to issues such as the lack of responsibilities in the political sphere and the prohibition of the creation of parties in the regional sphere; the maintenance of central state control *a priori* over the acts and decisions of the regional council; regional division where the territory in dispute—the Western Sahara—is divided into three regions and the affirmation of Moroccan sovereignty over this territory.

On the other hand, an analysis of the evolution of the region in 2015 in contrast with the previous model and developments since the 1996 constitutional reform demonstrates that there has been a notable improvement in the sphere of representation, because there is, for example, direct election of all members of the regional council, implementation of decisions on behalf of the president of the regional council and because citizen participation is a formally acknowledged objective. In the same vein, there has been a small improvement in the recognition of powers and the exercise of tutelage, for example, reducing deadlines and reinforcing the right to appeal against administrative decisions.

Finally, when compared to the autonomy plan for Western Sahara, the advanced regionalization reform is much weaker regarding powers, the availability of resources and the central state's control over decisions made by the autonomous territoriality. Moreover, the advanced regionalization does not permit the administrative separation of the Southern Provinces, which includes the disputed territory, or change their status with a referendum, an issue that is hampering a solution to the conflict in Western Sahara.

Table 9.1 Results of the comparative analysis of regional autonomy in different regional and constitutional reforms, 1997–2011

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Subcriteria</i>	<i>1997 Regionalization</i>	<i>2011 CCR project</i>	<i>2011 Constitution</i>	<i>2015 Regions organic law</i>	<i>2007 Autonomy plan for Western Sahara</i>
1. Powers	1.1. Responsibilities of an economic, social and cultural character	X				
	1.2. Promotion of employment, professional training, sport, environment and social solidarity		X	X	X	
	1.3. Responsibilities of a political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character					X
2. Type of election	2.1. Indirect election	X				X
	2.2. Direct election		X	X	X	X
3. Type of representation within the council	3.1. Representation of associations and professional chambers as well as trade unions within the council	X				
	3.2. Without collective representation of professionals and trade unions		X	X	X	

(continued)

Table 9.1 (continued)

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Subcriteria</i>	<i>1997 Regionalization project</i>	<i>2011 CCR project</i>	<i>2011 Constitution</i>	<i>2015 Regions organic law</i>	<i>2007 Autonomy plan for Western Sabana</i>
4. Role of the president of the regional council and their executive capacity	4.1. The <i>wali</i> implements the decisions adopted by the regional council	X				
	4.2. Executive function of the decisions of the regional council		X	X	X	X
5. Tutelage	5.1. Control <i>a priori</i> over decisions and acts	X				
	5.2. Reduction in the number of powers and deadlines for prior approval on behalf of the state		X	X	X	
	5.3. Control of legality <i>a posterior</i>				X	X
6. Criteria of the administrative divisions	6.1. Criteria that obviate the existence of cultural, historical and linguistic differences	X	X			
	6.2. Criteria of functionality and rationality		X	X	X	
	6.3. Criteria that do not question the unity of the state but that acknowledge the existence of cultural, historic and linguistic differences					X

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Subcriteria</i>	<i>1997 Regionalization</i>	<i>2011 CCR project</i>	<i>2011 Constitution</i>	<i>2015 Regions organic law</i>	<i>2007 Autonomy plan for Western Sahara</i>
7. Local tax system	7.1. Without resources or previously forecast state transfers	X	X	X	X	X
	7.2. Own resources and transfers from the state					
8. Existence of parties of regional identity	8.1. Parties only from the national sphere	X	X	X	X	X (?)
	8.2. Parties from the regional sphere					
9. Citizen participation	9.1. Without proposals for participation mechanisms	X				X
	9.2. Articulation of participation mechanisms		X	X	X	
10. Deconcentration	10.1. Deconcentration is not an objective of the regulation	X				X
	10.2. Deconcentration is boosted and reinforced in the regulation		X	X	X	

Source: Authors; criteria based on Ben-Meir (2010), Grubber (1996) and Van Cauwenberghe (2010)

CONCLUSION

If the objective of advanced regionalization was to respond to a number of international and domestic demands for greater democracy, more development and the creation of a situation conducive to resolving the Western Sahara conflict, the analysis developed in this chapter shows that those goals have not been achieved. If we compare the advanced regionalization with the 1997 regional reform, there is a remarkable improvement, but not enough, in any case, for implementation and development of Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara.

The advanced regionalization reform falls short of granting proper regional autonomy and therefore a high degree of decentralization due to the fact that (a) there is no recognition of powers of a political nature for the regional councils; (b) the creation of political parties of regional scope is not permitted; (c) the tutelage on key issues of everyday aspects in the region still exists; and (d) the regional division integrates the territory of Western Sahara, as if they were Moroccan provinces, which rules out the option of holding a referendum for the self-determination of the Sahrawi people. That said, it is true that advanced regionalization is an improvement over the 1997 regional reform, following the palace's strategy and logic of reforming without major disruptions, but with small steps.

On a final note, the advanced regionalization reform has important limitations when compared to the autonomy plan for Western Sahara, in which the autonomous territorial collectivity was provided with more powers, more resources and more decision-making capacity with regard to how to manage and collect economic and fiscal resources and was subjected to *a posteriori*, not *a priori*, verification and judicial control. The advanced regionalization reform does little or nothing to prepare the ground for a solution to the Western Sahara conflict, but establishes a mature and autonomous organizational guideline regarding the central power. In short, the lack of decentralization and democratization processes in Morocco undermines the credibility of Moroccan proposals to resolve the Western Sahara conflict through advanced regionalization.

NOTES

1. The establishment of the CCR and the initiation of the regionalization reform was widely regarded by large sectors of the Moroccan media as the one of the most important challenges for the country in the twenty-first century. See, for example, “La régionalisation avancée: L’avenir de la démocratie locale au Maroc”, Edition No.3263, 27 April 2010. Available at: <http://www.leconomiste.com/article/la-regionalisation-avancee-l-avenir-de-la-democratie-locale-au-marocbripar-abdelfattah-naimi> (accessed 13 April 2014).
2. “Decentralization” here refers to the transfer of powers and resources to local elective authorities, while “deconcentration” refers to administrative decentralization.
3. Speech at the opening of Parliament, September 2009, Speech on the 56th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, August 2009, and Speech to the nation on the 10th Anniversary of the Day of the Throne, 30 July 2009.
4. Speech to the nation on the 10th Anniversary of the Day of the Throne, 30 July 2009.
5. Speech to the nation, 3 January 2010.
6. Speech to the nation, 3 January 2010.
7. Speech to the nation, 3 January 2010.
8. Rapport sur la régionalisation avancée (RRA), Book I, p. 18 (2011). Available at: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PageFR.aspx?id=8> (accessed 18 September 2014).
9. Rapport sur la régionalisation avancée (RRA), Book I, p. 12 (2011). Available at: <http://www.regionalisationavancee.ma/PageFR.aspx?id/48> (accessed 18 September 2014).
10. The 12 regions established by the decree are the following: Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, l’Oriental, Fès-Meknès, Salé-Rabat-Kénitra, Beni Mellal-Khénifra, le Grand Casablanca, Marrakech-Safi, Tafilalet-Draâ, Souss-Massa, Guelmim Oued- Noun, Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra and Dakhla-Oued EdDahab.

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REGULATIONS

- Organic law 111-14 on regions (in Arabic), sent to the Ministries Council (1292015), and the Government Council (12115).
- Organic laws (in Arabic) published in the Official Journal, number 6380, 23 July 2015, 14-111 on regions; 14-112 on provinces and prefectures and 14-113 on municipalities.

The Western Saharan Members of the Moroccan Parliament: Diplomacy and Perceptions of Identity

Laura Feliu and María Angustias Parejo

On 25 November 2011, elections were held for the Moroccan parliament's House of Representatives. As on previous occasions, a number of seats in the House were for members of parliament (MPs) elected by constituencies in the territory of Western Sahara, a region that still has no territorial statute and has been under Moroccan occupation since 1975. Ever since the first

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elections were held in the region in the early 1980s, these constituencies have been electorally rewarded by an overrepresentation of the territory in terms of seats per population (López García 2000). This overrepresentation was increased in 2002 with the creation of a new constituency, Auserd-Lagouira, to which two new seats were ascribed (Veguilla 2013a: 6). In the ninth legislature, 21 MPs (out of a total of 395) were elected in these constituencies by universal suffrage.¹ Of these MPs, 11 represent five different constituencies located in three regions: Laayoune-Boujdor-Sakia el Hamra (Laayoune, Boujdor), Guelmim-Es Semara (Es Semara) and Oued Eddahab-Lagouira (Oued Eddahab, Auserd-Lagouira), which cross the territorial demarcations from the colonial period. In addition to these, there are a further ten elected parliamentarians (out of a total of 90) for the national constituency; seven of these are women (out of a total of 60) and three are young people (out of a total of 30) (López García 2011a, 2011b; authors' fieldwork in May–June 2015).

In this chapter, we introduce some brief considerations on the ways in which the activity of the members of the Moroccan parliament for Western Sahara constituencies (MMPWS), considered as a “diplomatic activity”, interacted at the local, national and international levels during the ninth legislature (2011–2015), and we will also consider the implications of the MPs’ self-identity perceptions upon that activity. We reflect on the implications of the dual profile of these MPs. On the one hand, they are representatives in a state/national parliament (that of Morocco) of a territory (Western Sahara) that does not legally fall under Moroccan sovereignty, and where the population is subjected to an antagonistic control relationship (the population as “them”). On the other hand, they are considered “Moroccan brothers and sisters” (the population as “us”). This political-legal dimension is overlaid, meanwhile, with a distinction between the need for notability (these MPs should be considered worthy of respect in Western Sahara) and representativeness (they should be considered legitimate representatives) (Veguilla 2005: 23–28). In this respect, certain questions have piqued our interest and fuelled our investigations: what are the consequences of these dual considerations? What do the MPs themselves think about their multi-situated identity? What difficulties and paradoxes result from their position, in terms of their alliance with (or their instrumentalization as a resource by) Morocco’s governing elites, as well as from the viewpoint of the MPs themselves? What implications do these questions have for the parliamentary diplomacy being implemented?

Without doubt, since the early 1990s, the problem of identity² has gained fresh importance under an authoritarian regime that is in the process of restructuring itself. The participation of the MMPWS in the national political game (just like that of the dissidents who deserted from the Polisario Front) is a prime indicator of the controversial processes of political liberalization in the 1990s and since the start of this century, and of their effect on the electoral, parliamentary and media arenas (Parejo 2010a, b; Feliu and Parejo 2013). The role of these MPs has proved essential not only as defenders of unionism (there are many other important actors who defend it vehemently), but also as the burden of proof of the truth of unionist proposals. Their acceptance of the Moroccan framework as a symbolic and effective frame of reference testifies (it is claimed) to the idea that the Sahrawis are essentially Moroccans. In a context in which the resistance to occupation by the territories' population has taken place openly and on a widespread basis, and in which repression (together with other more coercive measures) was deemed necessary to maintain said control, we believe—and this is our hypothesis—that the role of these political figures is still important, even though the circumstances have changed. The MMPWS have gained in salience thanks to their links with the Western Sahara territory in a context of change in the different forms of social mobilization within that territory and in the expression of identity (civilian-led, nonviolent resistance with new slogans and watchwords) (Stephan and Mundy 2006; Mundy 2012). If the “renegades” from the Polisario Front continue to be important in as far as they weaken the “enemy” and provide legitimization and information, then the MPs who were originally from Western Sahara have proved to be crucial to the internal management (which is in fact “external” to the actual Moroccan territory) of Western Sahara by the Moroccan elites in a context of challenge from new political and social actors (Barreñada 2012). Thus it has become important to try to normalize the control through an effective electoral policy (Veguilla and Parejo 2016) and to build and disseminate (internally and externally) a discourse on the territory that is favourable to Moroccan quasi-competitive authoritarianism (Parejo and Veguilla 2008: 12; Feliu and Parejo 2013: 88).

We must address, albeit briefly (and with all due caution), some of the theoretical-conceptual considerations on identity, an issue that has generated an abundance of literature in many different fields (including anthropology, political science, law, history, sociology and social psychology), and which we could not, nor do we intend to, cover in this article (Ilie 2010). Identity is a source of meaning and experience for people, and it represents the necessary

link between the individual and society. From a conceptual point of view, in order to examine these MPs' identities as an empirical fact, we will be referring to Castells (1998) and Martin (1992), on the understanding that identity is a process that is defined in relational terms. To that end, Castells (1998: 28) states that identity is "the process of constructing meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute or a related group of cultural attributes that are prioritized above all other sources of meaning". The social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relations (Castells 1998: 29). This is why, from a political point of view, identity becomes a key element with respect to the way political systems function, as it grants them legitimacy as a diffuse support element (Easton 1975, cited in Sojka and Vázquez 2014: 93). Our protagonists are MPs for constituencies that are located in the centre of a conflict over sovereignty from the standpoint of international law. Hence, it seems appropriate to adopt a dialogical or dialectic view of the identity construction process, as postulated by Martin (1992: 587), who believes that "the construction and description of identity derive from a dialogical mechanism: the definition of Self in relation to the Other is inseparable from the definition of Self by the Others, on the understanding that endo-definitions and exo-definitions are changeable, and that different exo-definitions may exist in one single group". In this respect, we share and subscribe to the unique perspective³ described by Veguilla (2004: 240) to comprehend the Sahrawi community's processes of identification based on objective and subjective relational dimensions.

This chapter does not analyse the content of parliamentary diplomacy; instead, it reflects on the particular position of MPs with respect to said diplomacy. First, we introduce some aspects of the parliamentary diplomacy of the MMPWS concerning the Western Sahara conflict. Second, the chapter covers certain aspects of the interrelations between the different levels of action (local, national and international). Third, it analyses the discourse regarding the identity issues of nine MMPWS in interviews carried out in May and June of 2015. Lastly, we include a few final observations by way of conclusion.

PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY AND THE WESTERN SAHARA CONFLICT

The MPs we will be focusing on in this chapter are the exponents of a desired image of plurality (i.e. parliament is comprised of Moroccan MPs from both the northern provinces and "from the South"). They also have very diverse socio-political profiles, beyond the fact that they have agreed

to participate in Moroccan institutions (and, therefore, to publicly accept a specific legality and legitimacy related with unionism: i.e. the defence of Moroccan ownership of Western Sahara), in a context of conflict between a population considered autochthonous and the colonists or *dakhilia* (people originating from Moroccan territory) (Veguilla 2013b). This plural framework is useful both as a confirmation of the official position on the local and national levels, and as a championing of the same on the international one. As Mohammed VI said in a speech to the Houses: “On this subject, we would remind you that Members of Parliament receive their mandate from the nation, independently of their political and territorial affiliations, and they must aspire to the level of general interest, and defend the nation’s highest interests”.⁴ The representation of these MPs has had a greater importance in this legislature, since there are no members of the new government who come from this territory. The link with territorial representation at the local level is of central importance, whether it be in terms of legitimate representation or notability (Veguilla 2005: 24).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the parliament elected in 2011 was conceived as an exceptional parliament,⁵ and has been described as a “ground-breaking” event,⁶ following the constitutional reform (Theofilopoulou 2012) that was enacted after the Moroccan Spring:

As you know, the Constitution has granted this legislature the nature of a bedrock *par excellence* [...] It is your responsibility, therefore, to take advantage of the progress made within the framework of the national parliamentary experience and to avoid the difficulties and problems that marked its unique path.⁷

It clearly has a great functional and symbolic value.⁸ For all that, it is hard to view the MPs for the Sahara constituencies as one single, homogenous political actor, given the plurality of political colours⁹ and resources they possess (such as experience and seniority, contacts, material resources and electoral support) and given their track records with regard to the “national cause” (which even includes representation by ex-leaders of the Polisario Front who switched allegiance to Morocco in the late 1980s),¹⁰ as we shall see below.

We seek evidence of the MMPWS’ activity on three levels (local, national and international). This activity may also be changing as a result of the very political and social transformations taking place in the territories and in Morocco (Bennafla and Emperador 2011). New actors,

new discourses that represent an alternative to the official discourse, new spaces for debate and access to information are all changing regulatory frameworks and regulations. In turn, the MMPWS do not appear to be so immutable in their copycat discourse of the official position. However, the question remains as to whether this is a planned strategy.

Parliamentary diplomacy, meanwhile, has come to occupy an increasingly important role in both the political discourse and the Moroccan media.¹¹ Even so, this presence is not commensurate with its limited ability in terms of designing policies or influencing the result of processes. Admittedly, there has been a significant increase in initiatives in recent years, thanks in part to the new opportunities offered by the proliferation of international forums of all kinds constituted by MPs (or open to them) (Stavridis 2002, Weisglas & de Boer 2007), though it is also true that, generally speaking, parliaments play a secondary role in foreign policy design. In the case of Morocco, furthermore, different circumstances have converged. First, the decision-making power is concentrated in the monarchical axis. (comprised of the king and his closest circle of advisers), which exerts control over the main foreign policy issues, traditionally a preserve axis (Hernando de Larramendi 1997; El Houdaïgui 2003 and 2010; Bouqentar 2010). Despite the recent constitutional reform, the governmental axis plays a subordinate role to its monarchical counterpart. While the government's powers and levels of autonomy have been strengthened, and the government cabinet has been constitutionalized (art. 92), its decision-making powers are still weak in comparison with the king's (Parejo 2015: 20). And with regard to Western Sahara, the special role that the security services have acquired in recent years is also worthy of mention.

Second (and linked to the previous point), according to Irene Fernández-Molina (2015: 34), the parliament is a subordinate decision-making unit that is dependent on the government's decisions and has few powers of its own (and these powers were not substantially altered by the recent constitutional reform of July 2011). Its capacity for control (and we repeat, over the government,¹² not over the monarchical axis) has proved very weak, apart from the usual questions and answers and a certain capacity to express opinions on the policies implemented.

Third, it is worth noting that we are, at all times, referring to a parliament situated in an authoritarian context, where the classic functions of control, legislation, representation, place for debate and election of government are redefined, thanks to the reactivation of a series of tasks that correspond to

the “duty to help and counsel” a neo-authoritarian monarchy. Thus, the Moroccan parliament is still a parliament that is in the process of institutionalization and also suffering from the ambivalences of a controversial political liberalization process (Parejo 1999: 94–95, 329). The redefinition and the increasingly subtle and elaborate control mechanisms of the function of representation (Marx 2015: 154) have proved particularly important in a conflict situation such as Western Sahara (Veguilla and Parejo 2016: 6) where, furthermore, actions are being carried out under a regime of occupation by Morocco and in which the MPs who come from these constituencies have all publicly supported the unionist option.

Having said that, it should be noted that ever since the days of Hassan II, and as part of Morocco’s diplomatic strategy of significant investment in resources to defend the “national cause”, parliament has found a space, together with many other political and social actors who have mobilized in support of this cause. According to the royal discourse, this has been the case on numerous occasions: “[...] the importance of these two mandates [parliamentary and communal] does not lie solely in the good management of public matters [...], but also in the desire to serve the nation’s higher interests and to defend its just causes, especially, and above all, that of the territorial integrity of our country”.¹³ However, the speech also notes the limitations and frustrations over the government’s actions.¹⁴ Particular criticism is reserved for the passivity of parliament which, it is claimed in the speech, only reacts to attacks, when it should take the initiative and be more creative.¹⁵

PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVITY AND THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN LEVELS (LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL)

The fundamental *raison d’être* of Morocco’s foreign policy is to find a way to project a series of the concerns of the political decision makers and the system’s elites, and at the same time to calibrate the impact of the external upon these concerns. This foreign policy involves mediation between the internal and external dynamics, in both directions. The MMPWS help construct the foreign policy, though they represent a series of constituencies that are effectively under Moroccan administration and at the same time outside Moroccan sovereignty, and which are still without any definitive territorial statute. The MMPWS can be considered, therefore, representatives

of one territory in another state's parliament. The "interior front" in which the "concerns" of the decision makers (Western Sahara) are framed is at the same time an "external front" (outside their sovereignty). We would like to make four observations on the subject.

First, the MMPWS accept the Moroccan official discourse on Western Sahara. The focal point of the discourse in this period was the championing of the second Autonomy Plan, presented by Morocco in 2007. Moulay Hamdi Ould Errachid sent out a message to the international community as a whole, by stating: "Autonomy represents the only viable solution for the regional conflict in Western Sahara".¹⁶ Or see also the declarations in the same vein by Mouloud Ajef in France in November 2012.¹⁷ This defence is supplemented by two points: on the one hand, the eulogising of the progress made in terms of advanced regionalization (essential to make the possibility of granting Western Sahara greater autonomy appear convincing) (El Messaoudi & Bouabid 2008, Hernando de Larramendi 2010) and on the other, the praise for the progress Morocco has made with regard to the democratization of its political system and full respect for human rights¹⁸ (and thus there is no need to increase the powers of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara [MINURSO] in that respect¹⁹), in contrast with the human rights violations in Tindouf. See in this regard the declarations by MMPWS Rqiya Eddarhem: "To any fair observer, this stands in stark contrast to the lives Sahrawis lead in the southern provinces of Morocco where we enjoy all the rights and responsibilities guaranteed by Morocco's new Constitution".²⁰

Second, the MMPWS' discourse also defends, to a certain extent, some of the Western Saharan population's social and economic demands. In some cases, this has involved a certain amount of criticism of government policies. This discourse is of a more internal nature, being linked with the interests of the voters these MPs represent. In contrast with this aspect of the Sahrawi opposition, information is available on the profits made by these elites thanks to their unionist sympathies, in comparison with the hardship suffered by the population themselves.²¹ However, this discourse also has a national dimension (incorporation with other discourses from the parliamentary sphere on Morocco's regions) and an international one. Concerning this latter, external dimension is visible both in its function for promoting the parliament's plurality and for normalising the control being exercised by Morocco. Furthermore, it is evident in the way it helps shape an issue that also falls within the international purview. This second point is particularly important. When asked to assess the diplomacy implemented with regard to the national cause, Saâdia

Alami Bynani replied: “Morocco has made and continues to make great efforts towards human development. Unfortunately, bad management and a lack of investment have produced poor results that impact negatively on the situation. But there are serious, continuing attempts being made to correct the situation”.²² However, above all, these MPs accept—as we shall see—the discourse regarding the Sahrawis’ essential identity.

Third, the complex interrelation between levels also exists with respect to the role of these MPs as interlocutors, facilitators and intermediaries within Western Sahara (as a mission from the Moroccan parliament to territories whose situation, we repeat, falls within an international purview). This is particularly evident in crisis situations in the territory. The events resulting from the creation of a protest camp in October 2010 at Gdeim Izik on the outskirts of Laayoune (where 20,000 people set up camp to denounce the social, political and economic situation in the territory) (Gillespie 2011, Gómez Martin 2012, Pace 2013) and its forced evacuation on 8 November (which produced grave human rights violations)²³ provide a good example of the interrelation between levels and their complexity. The way in which this crisis was managed shows, first, the usefulness of the MMPWS on the internal front. Thus, for example, MP Gajmoula Bint Ebbi acted as an intermediary with the camps’ dialogue committee. At the internal level, she could be considered an actor who has a greater knowledge of the terrain and its characteristics. On the other hand, it confirms the visibility of the MMPWS as a group with their own positions on all three levels. Gajmoula Bint Ebbi’s own criticism of Morocco’s management of the events²⁴ and the attacks she has come under from certain political sectors and the Moroccan media highlight the difficult balancing act involved for some of these MPs when they are confronted with the very contradictions of their position (meanwhile, MP Bint Ebbi’s prestige rose among the Sahrawi population). Are we witnessing an increase in the complexity of positions thanks to a wider margin of manoeuvre, which has resulted from greater openness in the parliamentary and media arenas, and the influence of more factors and actors? Is an attempt being made to use a plural discourse to demonstrate the “democratic” nature of the system?

We have witnessed several examples of MPs taking action to mark their position against the official line: first, when 14 MPs from Western Sahara signed a joint declaration on 19 March 2013, immediately before Christopher Ross began his journey on 20 March. In this declaration, the signatories stressed the need for justice for those detained during the events at Gdeim Izik, arguing that a military court was not a competent organ for this purpose.²⁵ And more recently, on 4 November 2015, a

group of MPs from the Justice and Development Party who come from Western Sahara (one of whom is Hamza Kantaoui) submitted a request to the king, asking him to pardon the 24 Sahrawi independence activists condemned in 2013 for the events at Gdeim Izik.²⁶

What is quite clear is that the MMPWS' actions appear to be aimed at neutralising other actions from the exterior (the Moroccan authorities claim that human rights monitoring is being carried out already as a result of initiatives by the MPs and the regional commissions of the National Human Rights Council) and attempting to project to the outside world an image of democratic normality (objective assessment mechanisms exist by now). According to Azzouha El Arrak: "The question of human rights in the southern provinces has become a document for pressure and blackmail by the enemies of our territorial integrity, who are hoping to publish it in order to undermine the progress that has been made by Morocco and the South [...] The great efforts made by Morocco to develop a system of human rights must continue, especially in the area of promoting human rights in the kingdom's southern provinces".²⁷

But once again, this role of mediation and intercession is not exclusive to the MMPWS. The creation on 27 November 2010 of an investigation committee to look into the events at the Gdeim Izik camp and Laayoune went beyond the MMPWS and included various members of the House of Representatives. This initiative, once again, invites two different interpretations: as both an internal and (above all) an external management process.²⁸ The committee's conclusions acknowledged mistakes made by the local authorities and the existence of individuals who have appropriated the region's resources; it advises that an investigation be opened into the matter.²⁹

Fourth, the MMPWS are "us" (Moroccan MPs), but they are also "them" (a differentiated identity with their own attributes). And it is here that we can see the difficulties involved in finding an identity to fit them. This is particularly evident in the complaints made by the MMPWS themselves about the mistrust shown towards them by the authorities. In an interview in May 2014, Gajmoula Bint Ebbi, speaking about the meddling experienced by COREFASA, the association she runs, complains of:

[...] a desire to ostracise Sahrawis, particularly the *ralliés* [those who switched sides from the Polisario Front to Morocco], for everything relating to the Sahara question. We are perpetually under suspicion [...] the people of the Sahara suffer from a policy of double standards. When a citizen from

the North criticizes the way the Sahara question is managed, it is seen as proof that he is a patriot; but when a citizen from the southern provinces does the same, it indicates that he is complicit with Polisario. But we are not asking for so much; we just want to be Moroccan citizens with full rights.³⁰

The issue is a sensitive one, and once again the internal/external dimensions are combined. These complexities of identity were clearly reflected in 2008, when Ahmed Lakhrif, originally from Es Semara and previously an MP, resigned from his post as secretary of state for foreign affairs,³¹ officially owing to his application for Spanish nationality (to which Sahrawis have been entitled since 2008). Whatever his reasons might have been for resigning,³² the comments on the matter by the political media and in the press highlighted the difficulties involved in normalizing the insertion of people from the Sahara into Moroccan politics. *Le Soir Echos* reported a member of The Royal Advisory Council for Foreign Affairs (CORCAS) as saying: “The separatists could simply say to the unionists that the Moroccan state does not trust any Sahrawi”.³³ This distrust shown by the Moroccan state and by the majority of public opinion has forced the MMPWS to deploy a defensive discourse to win votes: “I have not been bought by anybody, because the people who have been bought don’t talk. And I act out of conviction”.³⁴ Also, as Gajmoula Ben Ebbi explains, “[referring to those originating from the Sahara], we use them every so often as spokespersons to criticise the opponent”.³⁵

THE MPs’ SELF-IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS

As we have seen in the previous pages, this political elite is viewed by Moroccan elites and public opinion as being—simultaneously or successively—on the fringes of the “us” and “them” dichotomy. But now, let us take a look from the other side of the mirror, to examine the perceptions that these MPs have of their own identity through the analysis of nine interviews conducted with MMPWS (see below). We believe that this is the first time a specific fieldwork study has been carried out on MPs for the Western Sahara constituencies, and it can be linked with the few existing studies on Morocco’s parliamentary elites that are based on primary sources and data³⁶ (Parejo 1999, 2002a, b; El Harrak 2015).

In this study, we analyse the links between the MPs and the *qabila*, city, region, Morocco and the Maghreb, in order to examine in greater depth the order and strength of their identity preferences.³⁷ We differenti-

ate between the exclusive national identity (Moroccan) and identities that include different ingredients in accordance with theoretical views that admit the existence of plural identities (Castells 1998: 28) and the coexistence of multiple identities (Sojka and Vázquez 2014: 93, 95). We have used a fundamentally qualitative methodology that is based on the analysis of our own primary sources. The corpus is comprised of nine structured, in-depth interviews³⁸ conducted with the MMPWS from mid-May to mid-June 2015.³⁹ Our sample covers a plural political range of elected MPs (nine MPs from the Justice and Development Party, two from the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, one from the Istiqlal Party, one from the Party of Progress and Socialism and one from the National Rally of Independents). The parliamentarians were elected as follows: five for the national women's constituency, two for the national youth constituency, one for Laayoune and one for Es Semara. This explains why women slightly outnumber men among the interviewees: five women and four men. With respect to the MPs' ages, the "generation of the consensus" on the Sahara is predominant; that is, those born between 1975 and 1984 are represented here by five MPs, aged between 37 and 40. The next largest group is the generation born after independence (1956–1964), represented by two MPs over the age of 50 (53 and 57). Third, there is a tie between the "state of exception" generation (1965–1974) and the generation of the political and economic crisis of the mid-80s (1985–1992), each represented by one MP (aged 45 and 27, respectively).

As for their geographical origin, based on place of birth, most of the MPs were born in Western Sahara—six in our sample (three from Laayoune and three from Es Semara)—followed some way behind by those born in the southern Moroccan Sahara—two MPs (one from Guelmim and one from Tan-Tan), and one MP from central Morocco, specifically the city of Fez. With respect to the language variable, the parliamentary elite is divided into speakers of Hassaniya (Arabic local dialect) and Arabic; five of the interviewees report that Hassaniya is their first language and four Arabic. If we add the interviewees who report their first and second languages, then the proportion between the two majority languages remains unchanged: eight interviewees for Hassaniya and seven for Arabic. It is also worth noting that two MPs reported that English was their second language, while one reported Spanish and another French. As for their third language, the predominant option was French for five of the interviewees (and if we add those who reported that French was their second and fourth language, respectively, then the figure rises to seven MPs).

Meanwhile, five of the interviewees reported Spanish as their second, third, fourth and fifth language, respectively.

We will begin our analysis by exploring the emotional dimension of the MPs' sense of identification by examining the order of their identity links. Two MPs are clearly and equally linked to several different geographic-community levels: one to five levels (*qabila*, city, region, Morocco and Maghreb) and the other to three (*qabila*, region and Morocco). Both MPs put all these levels in first place on their list; they are the epitome of multiple identity.

A sense of possessing identity links exclusively with Morocco was only reported by a tiny minority in the sample and on a residual basis—namely, by just one MP (not from central Morocco). This exclusive link with Morocco strengthens the dominant trend that situates Morocco as the territorial level to which interviewees feel closest, though they add other geographical levels as their second and third options. This group is comprised of three MPs who supplement their sense of Moroccan identity with their links, secondly, to Maghreb, their region or *qabila*, and thirdly, to their region or city. If we add the MP who professed an exclusive link with Morocco and those who, after selecting Morocco as their first place choice, include other identity ingredients for their second and third places, then the final total is four interviewees.

Some way behind them, there is another, secondary trend featuring just two MPs who express their links with their region in first place, supplemented by, in the case of the first interviewee, a sequential progression of geographical areas (second place Morocco, third place Maghreb), while the second one chooses a descending line of geographical areas (second place the city, third place the *qabila*), which is halted by the interviewee's links to Morocco in fourth place (this is the only interviewee who locates Morocco in last place). The last trend, represented by just one MP, reports that his main link is with his city, followed by his connections to his region (second place) and Maghreb (third place). This is the only interviewee who does not include any connection whatsoever with Morocco.

If we add up all the interviewees' preferences in the different positions (from first to fourth place) the legitimizing identity⁴⁰ (Moroccan) is chosen by eight MPs, coexisting alongside the identity of resistance⁴¹ (regional, Sahrawi), which is the preferred option for seven MPs.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have tried to describe a series of factors that can be of help in the interpretation of behavioural and discursive interactions in processes of an identity-based and political nature. The role of the MMPWS is crucial to the normalization of Moroccan state occupation and control over Western Sahara (in a context of changes in the different forms of social mobilization within the territory and in the expression of identity) by means of an effective electoral policy (Veguilla and Parejo 2016) and with the aim of building and disseminating (internally and externally) a discourse on the territory that is favourable to Moroccan quasi-competitive authoritarianism (Parejo and Veguilla 2008: 12; Feliu and Parejo 2013: 88).

However, the above conclusion must be qualified. It is true that these MPs represent one of the strategically and symbolically most effective public policies of the Moroccan state for promoting—at home and abroad—the normalization of Morocco's presence in, and power over, the territory under control. But it is no less true that this electoral policy may (and does) generate effects that are undesired, controversial and not-so-easily controllable by Moroccan agency in terms of discourse and identity. These two questions, discourse/discourses and identity/identities may change in time and space, and acquire (complex) polyhedral dimensions that are the result of several factors—the different positions of the actors in the system, the subjective perception of these positions by the actors themselves, the margins for manoeuvre within the system and a view of identity that, instead of being essentialist, is seen as a process that is defined in relational terms.

Out of the three levels at play—the local, the national and the international (exterior)—the value of these MPs to the Moroccan system's primary and secondary elites has been strengthened at the local level (as a model, as an axis of clientelistic construction, etc.) in a context of the transformation of the Sahrawi population's confrontation strategies. The "interior front" (Western Sahara) in which the concerns of the decision makers are framed and in which the MMPWS act is, at the same time, an essential "exterior front" (outside their sovereignty) where the control exerted over the territory and the population is of fundamental importance. The discourse and actions at the local level act as a deterrent to any possible exterior action (there are already actors dealing with these issues, the situation is positive, etc.). Research into the role of the MMPWS in Moroccan parliamentary diplomacy shows that these MPs have conserved their symbolic value at the international level (as

proof of the identity they call for, as a resource in the diplomatic battles for representation, etc.), but their presence seems to be equated with that of other segments of the population. The final level, the national, seems to be more complementary, in a context in which we are told that the vast majority of Moroccan public opinion shares the official position regarding Moroccan ownership of the territory and the colonially rooted international conspiracy to separate it from the motherland. Likewise, in the national arena, the role of these MPs is hampered by a level of suspicion that is heightened by the opposition discourse of “them” and “us”. Lastly, the MMPWS are also elites that have to compete with other secondary elites. They possess resources of their own: information (local knowledge), capital, and local and national alliances. They have access to resources such as capital. However, these material resources have a relative value for the MMPWS, given that their value to the system derives mainly from their ability to attract and convince, both in the interior and the exterior.

Our analysis has also revealed a great deal of empirical evidence concerning the nature of the particular parliamentary elites’ identities. Our corpus shows the existence of multiple identities (i.e. the two interviewees who select a number of different identity options in joint first place), one example of an exclusive national identity model (Moroccan), a series of complementary identities (six examples) structured around the predominance of the legitimizing identity (Morocco, three examples), while demonstrating a compatibility between different types of loyalties: regional, local, tribal and supranational (Maghreb). It is also worth noting that, on a secondary level, the identity of resistance (Sahrawi) also articulates a complementary identity model (two examples) featuring a good combination of different loyalties—local, national (Morocco), tribal and supranational (Maghreb).

NOTES

1. The Moroccan electoral system is a proportional system of party lists for constituencies devised in advance by the Ministry of the Interior for each election.
2. On proposals for reform of the constitution on regional and identity issues by some Moroccan political actors (political parties and social movements) see: (Parejo and Feliu 2013).

3. Barona (1998, 2015) focuses more on the genesis of a nationalist ideology. She studies the genesis and process of construction of the “Sahrawi nation” as an imagined community based on the views of Benedict Anderson. In acknowledgement of the value and the interest of this work, we chose to adopt the approach used by Veguilla (2010).
4. Mohammed VI, “Texte intégral du discours de SM le Roi devant les deux Chambres du Parlement” (12 October 2012) (<http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux>).
5. This exceptionality and foundational singularity was also preached at one time in the parliaments of 1977 and 1993 (Parejo 1999: 97, 122 and 149).
6. Mohammed VI, “Texte intégral du discours de SM le Roi devant les deux Chambres du Parlement” (12 October 2012) (<http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux>).
7. Mohammed VI, “HM the King: 50th Anniversary of the Moroccan Parliament, A ‘Historic Moment’ in Morocco’s Political Evolution Process”, (25 November 2013) (<http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux>).
8. Mohammed VI, “Discours de SM le Roi Mohammed VI à l’ouverture de la première session de la troisième année législative de la 9ème législature”, 11 October 2013 (<http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux>).
9. Of the 21 MPs, there are six from the PJD, six from the PI, three from the USFP, two from the RNI, two from the MP, two from the PAM and one from the PPS.
10. Some of those with such a history, and who came from the Sahara, were appointed to embassies overseas (Brahim Hakim was appointed by Hassan II in 1992 as roving ambassador entrusted with the Sahara question; Mustapha Bouh Al Barazani was appointed Ambassador to Angola in 2009, Ahmedou Ould Souilem to the embassy in Spain. Mohammed Cheij Biadillah, president of the Senate, is also Secretary General of the Authenticity and Modernity Party [PAM]).
11. See, for example, the following articles: “In parliamentary diplomacy, we must transmit the message and overcome the repetition of the official discourse (in Arabic)”, *Ittihad al-Ichtiraki* (16 October 2010); “For a Parliamentary diplomacy that is influential, active and effective” (in Arabic), *Al-Bayane alyaum* (20 February 2011); and “The prospects for an active parliamentary diplomacy: limitations and possibilities” (in Arabic), *Hespress* (12 June 2012).
12. There has been a parliamentarization of the government and the appointment of the chief executive (Ruiz 2014: 34 and 56). The government emanates from the will of the parliament and the investiture of the government is explicitly established after there has been a majority vote in favour in the House of Representatives (art. 88). In relation to the king, the chief executive has been formally granted a dual autonomy: first, the

government is no longer answerable to the king (as was originally stated in art. 60 of the 1996 Constitution), the body is only answerable to parliament; and second, the head of government acquires the right to dissolve parliament (art.104) (Parejo 2015: 20).

13. Mohammed VI, "Discours de SM le Roi Mohammed VI à l'ouverture de la première session de la troisième année législative de la 9ème législature", 11 October 2013 (<http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux>).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. "Sahara Occidental: Des milliers de Sahraouis réclament à Laayoune le départ de la MINURSO", <http://droits-humains.org/>
17. Immigration and Integration National Forum, held on 25 November 2012 by the Global Coalition of Associations of Solidarity in Lille (France).<http://www.alharaka.ma/> (28 November 2012).
18. See, for example, the declarations by Hasna Abouzaid in the Report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (APCE), "Parliamentary contribution to solving the Western Sahara conflict", 6 June 2014 (www.assembly.coe.int).
19. See also the criticism made by the MP for the PJD, Khadija Bladi, who accused the members of MINURSO of propagating sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and asks why Morocco has allowed the mission to set up bases in cities near schools and among the population. "Députée islamiste: La MINURSO propage le SIDA au Sahara", <http://www.lemag.ma/> (7 June 2013).
20. Declarations in <http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/> (28 June 2013).
21. See Omar Brouksy, Mohammed VI derrière les masques. Le fils de notre ami, Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2014.
22. Interview in Arabic at: <http://sadabladi.com/news1098.html> (18 March 2013).
23. See AIODH, "Report on the trial held before the permanent military tribunal" (Rabat, 1–17 February 2013), <http://www.arso.org/>; and AMDH, "Rapport de la Commission d'enquête de l'AMDH sur les événements de Laâyoune du 8 novembre 2010", <https://saharadoc.files.wordpress.com>
24. Ebbi says she feels "tricked and humiliated" after the occupying authorities lied to her when they assured her that the camp would not be subjected to any kind of violent intervention. <https://almacenindependenciaysocialismo.wordpress.com> (20 November 2010).
25. "Sahrawi MPs belonging to the occupying authority demand that the people arrested for Gdeim Izik should be judged by a civil court" (in Arabic), <http://www.radiomaizirat.com/> (13 March 2013).

26. EFE, "Moroccan MPs call for a Royal pardon for Sahrawis arrested for Gdeim Izik", www.diariovasco.com (4 November 2015).
27. Three questions to Azzouha El Arrak, "Some human rights abuses in the Sahara are exploited politically by the separatists and to that end my proposal to overcome them", <http://www.pjd.ma> (25 February 2015).
28. Omar Adkhil, president of the Committee for Justice and Human Rights, originally from Western Sahara, forms part of this committee.
29. Report by the committee.
30. *Maroc Hebdo* (7 May 2014).
31. Lekhrif was elected as a member of the HC in 1997 and formed part of the Commission des Relations Extérieures et de la Défense and was vice-president of the Groupe d'amitié Maroc-Espagnol within the same. He also belongs to CORCAS.
32. Some analysts note that this resignation should actually be linked with the publication of the report by Human Rights Watch entitled: "Human Rights in Western Sahara and in the Tindouf Refugee Camps" (19 December 2008) (www.hrw.org), which confirms Morocco's violations of human rights in Western Sahara and refers to it as an occupied territory. In the eyes of others, meanwhile, it is the result of a struggle with the Khalik Henna clan.
33. Mohammed Boudarham, *Le Soir Echos* (28 December 2008).
34. Deiros, Trinidad 'Gajmoula Ebbi: "No-one has bought me", <http://www.publico.es/> (18 November 2010).
35. *MarocHebdo* (7 May 2014).
36. As part of her doctoral thesis, between 1991 and 1993, Parejo carried out 163 semi-structured interviews with different people outside the parliamentary sphere: representatives of the academic world, intellectuals, government employees, executives and senior ministry officials, journalists representing various political and market trends, representatives of different parties and trade unions, members of women's associations, staff from the Spanish Embassy, from the delegations for Education, Culture and Fisheries and from the *Instituto de Comercio Español* (Spanish Trade Institute, ICEX) in Rabat. The work carried out with MPs in 1993 was comprised of 62 in-depth interviews and 66 questionnaires (Parejo 1999: 31 and 211).
37. On this occasion, we examined the answers to two questions on the interviewees' feelings about their closeness to different territorial levels: Question 1: "People feel a greater or lesser sense of closeness to their town, city, region, country or Maghreb. Which territorial level do you feel closest to? Qabila, the city, the region, Morocco or Maghreb (No. 1 will be the most important one here...)" and Question 2: "Do you feel very close

[to this territorial level], quite close, not very close or not close at all?”. In the first question we omitted the expression “Western Sahara”, and replaced it with “region”. Tacitly, the interviewee understood that the “region” concept identifies the constituencies of Western Sahara.

38. There are a total of 21 MMPWS in the 2011–2016 legislature.
39. The fieldwork was made possible by funding from two projects, already cited, in which María Angustias Parejo is participating: SEJ 7234 and CSO2012-32917, see note 1.
40. The legitimizing identity is defined as the one that is “introduced by a society’s ruling institutions to extend and rationalize its domination over the social actors” (Castells 1998: 30).
41. The identity of resistance is defined as the one that is “generated by those actors who find themselves in positions/conditions that have been devalued or stigmatized by the rationale of domination, as a result of which they build trenches of resistance and survival based on principles that are different or opposed to those with which the society’s institutions are impregnated” (Castells 1998: 30).

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Changes in Moroccan Public Policies in the Western Sahara and International Law: Adjustments to a New Social Context in Dakhla

Victoria Veguilla

There have been significant changes in the social structure of the Western Saharan city of Dakhla over the past three decades. The balance in population numbers between the two cohabiting communities (indigenous Sahrawi and immigrant northerners or “settlers”¹) has shifted. There

This chapter forms part of the project “Territorial politics and processes of colonization/de-colonization in Western Sahara: actors and interests” (SEJ-7234), financed by the Government of Andalusia and the project “Persistence of authoritarianism and processes of political change in North Africa and the Middle East: consequences for political regimes and the international situation” (CSO2012-32917), financed by the Spanish Ministry for Economy and Competitiveness. The study has been carried out in the city of Dakhla and is based on important fieldwork initiated in 2001 (for the diploma in advanced studies) and developed during the doctoral period (doctoral thesis presented in February 2011) and subsequently. Research was carried out in the city of Dakhla, which is home to more than 90 per cent of the registered population of Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab and is where the official buildings for regional and local government are located, where electoral processes take place and where almost all the region’s activities are concentrated.

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is also a new generation born within the territory whose parents were originally from other Moroccan cities to the north. This generation feels “Dakhlan” and is increasingly defending their right to influence the politics in the region and to benefit, as the Sahrawi do, from the provision of basic goods. According to official statistics, the population of the Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab region was 21,496 in 1982 and 27,374 in 1990.² In 1994, however, that figure increased to 36,751 and reached 99,367 in 2004.³ It is now estimated that the figure could be almost 150,000 inhabitants. Some experts attribute this significant increase to the exodus from rural areas, the movement of people between cities and the natural growth of the population, whilst placing less emphasis on the relevance of northern migration (Cherkaoui 2007). Our study, however, based on research carried out by Bekkar (1994) and long-term fieldwork, is not in line with these views (Veguilla 2011). Trends in migration are continually evolving in response to changes in urbanization and deruralization, the natural growth of the population and the intra-regional and northern immigration from the 1980s to the early 1990s; the increase in population to 62,616 between 1994 and 2004 is almost entirely due to the north-south migration of northerners or Moroccans.⁴

The consequences of migration have a significant influence on the problems that Moroccan authorities face in their public policies and on those who benefit from those policies. The demographic changes that have occurred in this Western Saharan city are managed in relation to the objectives Morocco considers to be priorities for the national and local environment (security, public order) and at an international level (the Western Saharan dossier at the UN). The importance and different characteristics of these objectives give rise to a complex and often contradictory set of dynamics in the “de-centralization/re-centralization” of public policies within a variety of political contexts.⁵ These take place through various mechanisms, which can provide certain clarity to the increasing complexity that characterizes authoritarian public policies. These mechanisms range from the consolidation of “de-centralized” institutions to the creation of state institutions on an ad hoc basis, or the “technification” of political decision-making. In addition, there are key questions relating to policy-making, such as the controversies surrounding the definition of the issues on the political agenda, how they are dealt with and the choice of which groups should benefit from the decisions made and put into practice by the various institutions. In effect, the selection of the beneficiary groups by public authorities is highly relevant in

a social context undergoing profound structural change and under the permanent vigilance of international institutions and organizations from transnational civil society (Western Sahara Resource Watch/WSRW, for example).

This is the context for changes in the management of territory and its population and which I undertake to analyse by focussing on two policies in particular: (I) electoral policy and (II) housing policy. For the former, I will examine how the field of representation is being modified and how it therefore remains a key political policy for the Moroccan monarchy. The growth of political competition that has taken place in Morocco (Bennani-Chraïbi et al. 2004; Parejo and Veguilla 2008; Parejo and Feliu 2009; Parejo 2010) and which I will examine in this section gives more proportionate weight to the decisions of voters who live in the Western Sahara territory—the majority of whom are of northern or immigrant origin. In the latter section, I examine housing policy and, in particular, the relocation (subsidized by central institutions) of the immigrant population that has lived in shanty settlements since their arrival in the territory. This policy contrasts sharply with previous years when the beneficiaries of the distribution of housing have traditionally been either from particular professions (military and officials) or Sahrawi families.

The argument I defend is the following: Moroccan public policies in Western Sahara since the second half of the 1990s and up until the early years of the 2000s have developed according to a strategy that could be called “minority management”, in the sense that it has taken into account the minority characteristics of the indigenous population of the region, the people of Sahrawi origin. In the field of political representation, the aim was to ensure continuity in the local power structure⁶ by favouring a co-optation or selection of the tribal elite. Moroccan authorities promoted tribal identification—despite the nationalist and community identity that was built during the last years of the Spanish colonization of the Sahara (Barona Castañeda 1998)—and contributed to the reproduction of a hierarchy between groups inherited from the colonial period. In the field of the redistribution policy, the aim was to seek nationalist loyalties. For example, the Sahrawis were the target of clientelistic policies, which granted them monthly social support equivalent to the minimum wage (some 1250 dirhams or 115 euros), and a home according to the “National Promotion Card” (*Cartiya* in Arabic). This was also a form of government that the Moroccan authorities could justify by the economic backwardness of the annexed territories. Since then, however, there have been signs of gradual change in Moroccan public policies. In this

new scenario, a previously marginalized section of the local population, the immigrant population, “enters into politics”. These “dynamics of inclusion” are, however, in conflict with international norms⁷ that have regulated the situation in the territory by establishing a principle of action in the Sahara, which necessarily takes into account the indigenous population in the management of resources.

ELECTORAL POLICY: A REBUILDING OF LOCAL POWER IN DAKHLA-OUED ED-DAHAB?

An examination of the electoral policy implemented in Western Sahara cannot be made without an analysis of the evolution of the Moroccan electoral arena over the past two decades.⁸ In this field, the country has undergone some significant changes, which have not so much affected the capacity of elected institutions to govern as they have the dynamics of their election. There has been a shift from a situation where results were strictly controlled, even before holding elections, as a result of the negotiations in quotas between the palace and the political powers of the day,⁹ to one where voters can have a much greater impact on defining those results. It is not only the voters who have a greater part to play. The decade of the 2000s was also characterized by the renewed importance given to other political players: the so-called notables (Bennani-Chraïbi 2008; Zaki 2009: 19). These figures were the subject of an analysis by Rémy Leveau (1976) because of the significant role they played in the establishment of an independent Morocco, which had the capacity to control the fringes of society through the dynamics of ongoing negotiations and neo-patrimonial patronage. During the 2000s, the “notables” (who traditionally identified with parties close to the palace) adopted a more significant role due to their financial capacity and their territorial attachment, displacing other candidates such as the “militants” (Bennani-Chraïbi 2008), in the opposition or ex-opposition parties (Parejo 2006). Two of the factors that help to explain this scenario are the greater influence voters had over results and the mercantilist strategies adopted by candidates with financial means to legitimize votes. These phenomena, revealed by the analysts and observers of the elections of the period, exist alongside other dynamics of representation, most significantly the Justice and Development Party (PJD), the Islamist group with the majority in the legislative elections of November 2011, which gained a seat in the Sahrawi district of Oued Ed-Dahab.

ELECTIONS IN WESTERN SAHARA: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN THE REGION OF DAKHLA-OUED ED-DAHAB

Electoral processes in the southernmost region of Western Sahara have their own characteristics. Up until the legislative elections of 1998, the region was allocated two seats, which were traditionally occupied by Sahrawi candidates belonging to the Awlad Dlaym, the majority *qabila* (tribe), which has dominated the area since pre-colonial times (López Bargados 2003). The region of Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab has therefore identified with the Awlad Dlaym, and the city of Dakhla has always been considered “the city of the Awlad Dlaym” (Veguilla 2011).

In 1998, the Moroccan authorities passed a decree modifying the administration of the region, thereby creating a new province (the prefecture of Auserd-Lagouira was added to the province of Oued Ed-Dahab), a change that applied to an almost uninhabited territory, but which formed the basis for electoral reform: to the two seats allocated to Oued Ed-Dahab, an additional two seats were allocated for the newly created province for the 2002 legislative elections. The region was thereby overrepresented in the formation of the Moroccan Parliament—as observed previously (López García 2000)—and new political and administrative posts (governor, regional counsellor) were created to manage territories which were uninhabited and a population which was still mainly concentrated in the city of Dakhla.

An analysis of the legislative elections in Morocco in 2002 serves to underline some important differences with elections held in the past. Analysts believe that on this occasion, the votes of the electorate did, to a great extent, determine the results. The transparent publication of the results reveals some new dynamics (political disaffection and the growth of the moderate Islamist party, the PJD), and some that had already been seen, but which were accentuated (vote buying, a high percentage of abstentions) or adopted a new form (the increasingly common engagement of “notables” by almost all the political forces in the competition).

The results in the districts of Oued Ed-Dahab and Auserd-Lagouira (both were analysed in the city of Dakhla where they took place) were uncontested except by the followers of a deputy candidate who was not re-elected (Veguilla 2004). His followers, who had mobilized in a *khayma* (traditional tent), protested for several days in the *wilaya* (provincial administration) that a candidate who did not belong to the Awlad Dlaym *qabila* had been elected to represent Dakhla in the Moroccan Parliament. This deputy was

a businessman who belonged to the Ait Baamrane *qabila* and had lived in Western Sahara since the colonial period. Due to his first marriage to a Sahrawi woman from the Awlad Dlaym, S. Derhem was a member of one of the families favoured by Hassan II after Spanish de-colonization. They even obtained the licence for the fuel producers, Atlas. The candidate first ran in the 2002 legislative elections and invested a huge sum of money in order to secure the seat. In addition to this investment, and the support from members of his *qabila*, he also benefited largely from the immigrant vote. His election marked a turning point. For the first time, a representative elected in Dakhla did not belong to the Awlad Dlaym. In fact, his main *qabila* was the Ait Baamrane, which originates from the region of Sidi Ifni. This *qabila*, whose Saharawi or Moroccan origins are a topic of discussion and controversy depending on when or to whom you are speaking, has caused difficulty for the census that must be determined in order to hold a referendum on self-determination.¹⁰ The trend which began with the election of the Ait Baamrane representative in 2007 was re-enforced in the legislative elections of 2007 (the same representatives were re-elected) and again in the 2011 elections: S. Derhem was not a candidate on that occasion but passed his nomination on to H. Derhem (his brother), who won a seat in the district of Oued Ed-Dahab. The candidate from the PJD (which received the most votes at national level) was also a member of the Ait Baamrane *qabila* and received the second seat in the same district. This is extremely uncommon because no candidate from the Awlad Dlaym won in this district. Both of the winning candidates are from the Ait Baamrane. An analysis of these circumstances leads to an examination not only of the preferences of Dakhla voters, but also of the strategies employed by candidates as well as by the Moroccan authorities, who still retain their influence over the results by either accepting or rejecting particular candidates.

KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN THE MOROCCAN MANAGEMENT OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN DAKHLA- OUED ED-DAHAB

In Dakhla, voter preference seems to be determined by social cleavages and vote usage as detailed below (Veguilla 2009a, 2010):¹¹

- The community group you belong to: Sahrawi voters (including those who belong to the Ait Baamrane *qabila*, originating from the Sidi Ifni area) tend to vote for the candidates who belong to the same

group (*qabila* or faction) or, in their absence, for the candidate who is closest to this group or a Sahrawi candidate with whom they may share employment, whom they respect for their personal qualities (honesty, approachability) or with whom they share a relationship based on patronage. In the case of immigrant voters or the children of immigrants, the group is formed by members of their community (northern/Moroccan). This category of voter does not tend to favour a Sahrawi candidate with their vote unless a specific exchange is established with them (a vote in exchange for money or goods).

- A specific exchange that is unrepeatable: the difficulty for northern/Moroccan voters to integrate into the patronage-based relationships formed by the Sahrawis has led to the significant development in this type of exchange between candidates with a high purchasing power (none of northern origin, which we will see later) and voters who do not originate from Western Sahara. This does not mean that Sahrawi voters never accept any type of exchange. In these cases, the relationship usually endures past the electoral period. As a candidate purchasing a vote, ensuring that the voter will effectively vote for him once inside the polling station can be very complicated. There are various options: either the candidate takes the risk (having grouped together the voters through his network of intermediaries and taken them together to the polling place) or he employs another strategy such as, for example, preventing them from voting for his competitors by taking away their voting cards or by locking them in their factories until the polling stations are closed. In either case, the strategy of buying votes or voter cards does not ensure victory for a candidate, as we will see below.
- Political parties: a significant migration of candidates from one party to another can be observed in Saharan constituencies (Veguilla 2009a, 2011). A vote appears to be more dependent on an individual candidate than on the political party he represents. The function of the party is a means through which to present a particular nomination instead of an organization of a political movement. In the elections of 2011, however, something new occurred. The PJD candidate (Ait Baamrane), who does not resort to buying votes, obtained a seat in the Oued Ed-Dahab district. This suggests two possibilities: (1) a section of the Dakhla electorate voted for the PJD candidate because it shares his political views and considers him a force for political change in Morocco; and (2) this electorate voted for the party, refusing to participate in any type of particular

economic exchange or perhaps, collected money from other candidates and then voted for the PJD. We should also reiterate the origin of the candidate (who is not from the Awlad Dlaym). In the previous elections (2007) the candidate did belong to this *qabila* but did not achieve the same results. It is also true that the expectations of the party at national level were not the same as during the 2011 elections.

- Leadership and defence of professional bodies: the president of the Association of Small-Scale Fishing (APA), an organization established at a moment of acute crisis in the sector and during the implementation of plans for restructuring the sector by the Ministry for Maritime Fishing, put himself forward for election and attempted to capitalize on the activities carried out by the association in defence of the interests of fishermen, all of whom are northern/Moroccan, during a period in the electoral process. The candidate was Ait Baamrane, has lived in Dakhla since colonial times and is married to a woman from the Awlad Dlaym. He did not buy votes, nor did he ask for support based on the programme of the party he represents. He obtained 1,481 votes—which won him third place in the Oued Ed-Dahab district—by basing his electoral campaign almost exclusively on evoking the acts of the past and on the social and economic promises he would keep on behalf of this professional body.

Given the above and the consequences of demographic change in the city (a majority of immigrants and a Sahrawi minority), one wonders why no northern/Moroccan candidate has been elected. An analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics of the elected members of parliament reveals that they belong to professional organizations that are normally associated with the middle class (head of the fishermen's union, the taxi drivers union, students, workers at the fish-freezing plants). None of them are interest-based candidates with significant economic resources. Enquiries have produced various testimonies that confirm that the authorities discourage this type of potential candidate from putting themselves forward “for political reasons” (Veguilla 2011). It seems that some type of control exists—in an increasing atmosphere of transparency—to keep such a candidate from mobilizing the northern/Moroccan vote backed by economic capital.

The increase in marginal political competition in Morocco and Western Sahara in general and in the region of Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab in particular implies an empowerment of the electorate at the polls: a vote becomes political capital, which voters can use according to their

own particular circumstances and beliefs as well as according to where the elections are taking place. If there is an absence of control on the part of the authorities over vote buying, which favours some candidates (interest-based candidates who can accumulate significant economic resources), other candidates have known how to capitalize on the criticism of such practices (the PJD candidate and, to a lesser extent, the candidate who is president of the APA, both in the district of Oued Ed-Dahab).

These processes of political liberalization have not led Morocco to renounce their methods of controlling results. Those methods have changed, however. Today, more subtle forms of control exist than in the past—a control that can be exerted over nominations of candidates. The *wali* (governor) would advise northern candidates with financial means against putting themselves forward in order to prevent them from mobilizing financial resources and community groups during the campaign. Such a means of intervention would allow for controlled change in the face of the growing unease of an immigrant population which is dominant in number but which is, however, displaced from local positions of political representation, without producing a radical transformation in the local power structure. This could cause unease amongst the Sahrawi community and would not be well looked upon by the international community given the conflict over sovereignty that still persists.

THE SUBSIDIZED RELOCATION OF THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION TO NEWLY CREATED SETTLEMENTS. DAKHLA: A CITY WITHOUT SHANTIES!

On 27 January 2010, Dakhla was declared a “city without shanties”. This was a notable act for Morocco, where only 42 urban or rural areas have managed to eradicate this type of housing, which represents 19 per cent of the total number of slum houses across the country.¹² The regional distribution of shanties shows that 46 per cent are concentrated in Gran Casablanca and Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zear with 30.1 per cent in the former (86,661 houses) and 15.6 per cent in the latter (45,020 houses), according to figures from the Ministry of Housing, Planning and Urban Development.¹³ The percentage of remaining houses varies from 1.4 per cent (Gulimin-Esmara) to 6.4 per cent (Souss Massa Draa). As a percentage of the total number of urban dwellings, six regions have a number of shanties above the national average (8.2

per cent). The region of Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab was amongst the worst with 33.1 per cent of its total being slum housing. According to the same source, 6024 shanties were registered in Dakhla, 9815 in Laayoune, 4800 in Esmaara and 3181 in Boujdour.

The Plan for the Eradication of Slum Housing (City without Shanties Project) is a national policy, introduced by King Mohamed VI in 2003 after attacks by youths living in slums on the outskirts of Casablanca. The project has had mixed success depending on the region. According to a report from the Ministry for Housing, Planning and Urban Development, in the region of Oued Ed-Dahab-Lagouira, the programme was subject to the approval of the Royal Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) and review by the region's *wali* and the provincial governors in a meeting with the minister of the interior in December 2006. The plan has now been implemented with financial aid from the Ministry for Housing, Planning and Urban Development and, to a lesser extent, the Agency for the Development of the Southern Provinces.

The implementation of these public policies is an innovation in Morocco and, in Dakhla, "it has come about because of a weak business framework specialising in construction".¹⁴ In any case, the families who have benefited are from the working class,¹⁵ and have been given subsidies on basic goods since they arrived in the territory. The project's uniqueness is evident in its development and implementation. It has undergone the following phases:

- Acquisition of public land and establishment of basic infrastructure for the construction of housing. This work has been subsidized by the ministry and carried out by the *Société d'Aménagement Al Omrane Al Janoub*, a public-private partnership which specializes in planning and essential infrastructures for buildings, such as drainage systems, electrical installation, water supply and so forth (Barthel and Zaki 2011).
- Identification of the people who will receive land and aid to build housing.
- Demolition of shanties in two phases and allocation of land. The first phase began in 2008 and affected more than 3000 slums from the *Al Wahda* (The Unity) settlement; the second phase involved the *Lahrait* (Gardens) settlement, where 2000 slum houses were demolished.

- Endowments to each family from the *Al Wahda* settlements (but not the *Labrait*) of material aid (steel and cement) to the value of 32,000 dirhams and pecuniary aid of 16,000 dirhams for self-build, with the financing being provided by the Agency for Development of the Southern Provinces. The beneficiaries receive grants from this agency, which enabled the first phase of the new housing (in the *Hay El Hassani* settlement) known by locals as *Wakala* (Development) in reference to the organization.
- Self-build: employment of tradesmen to carry out work in phases and according to budgets.

According to the authorities, since it began in 2008 the policy has been a success. Now in the southern part of the Dakhla peninsula, there is a “parallel city”, a city settlement known as the *Madinat Al Wahda* (City of the Unity) which integrates several areas: *Hay El Hassani* (in reference to Hassan II and housing the relocated families from the *Al Wahda* settlement), *Annahda* (Renaissance, housing the families from the *Labrait*) and others which are still under construction and do not meet the same conditions for assistance. The implementation of the programme, however, has not been without its repercussions. There were confrontations between the police and inhabitants from the *Labrait* settlement in 2009, the year in which their housing was destroyed. The lack of material aid and financing for the construction of new housing on allocated land led to resistance to the destruction of the shanties. The backlash did not prevent the slum housing from being demolished, but resulted in different strategies for relocation being used depending on the families concerned.

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE PLAN FOR THE ERADICATION OF SLUM HOUSING? DISTRIBUTION POLICY PHASES FOR HOUSING IN DAKHLA

Moroccan government action dates back to the 1980s when Morocco assumed control of the region after it was ceded by Mauritania.¹⁶ In the first years, activity focussed on the renovation of existing housing and the construction of housing for the Saharawi population who were settling in the city after migrating from rural areas during a period of conflict. Housing was also established for the military contingent arriving from

cities in the north, who had been responsible for military operations and controlling the population.

In the 1990s, after the end of hostilities (1992) between the Moroccan army and the Polisario Front, two projects were particularly important: (1) the provision of housing for officials based in the region; and (2) the construction of the *Al Aouda* (The Return) settlement in the northern part of the city, which was earmarked to shelter the Sahrawi from the Tindouf refugee camp after the resolution of conflict. The second project forms part of Hassan II's entreaty to the Polisario Front to return the "disappeared" (the name given by Morocco to Sahrawi refugees living in the Tindouf camps in Algeria). For the first project, buildings were constructed at the entrance to the city and near the military district to be occupied by administrative officials based in the city—teachers, doctors and officials from the ministerial delegations and territorial administrations. In the *Al Aouda* settlement, housing which was empty for some years after its construction at the end of the 1990s is now sought after and the area is equipped with a variety of services: nurseries, schools, green spaces and the like. These houses were eventually distributed amongst Sahrawi families after protests by a group of Sahrawis in the early 2000s.

During the preceding decades, the 1980s–90s, Moroccan authorities provided the Sahrawis (those born in the occupied territories but also those who returned from the refugee camps in Tindouf (Wilson 2013: 87) with a monthly social support equivalent to the minimum wage (some 1250 dirhams or 115 euros) and a house according to the "National Promotion Card".¹⁷ This population group appears in the official statistics as "public officials". For these two decades, the people who benefited most from housing projects in Dakhla included the Moroccans (the military and public officials) and some Sahrawi families. The latter were allocated existing houses in the *Hy Oum Tounssi* settlement, located in the southern part of the city, in the *Hay my Rachid* area, which is an extension of the central zone where the houses abandoned by the Spanish in 1975–6 can be found and in the *Al Aouda*. There are two especially notable forms of allocation:

- The distribution of housing according to tribal structures. This is a method the Moroccan authorities have pursued since they assumed control and management of the territory, which allows them to identify and empower the prominent individuals from such structures by granting them new roles, thereby enforcing their leadership.

It promotes regional identification, which resonates with the rest of the population and aims to reduce the importance placed on other types of identification, particularly a nationalistic one such as being pro-Polisario. This is the type of policy implemented to distribute housing amongst the Sahrawi population in the settlements of *Hy Oum Tounssi* (established in the 1980s) and *Hay my Rachid* (the extension of the central zone, where the Spanish houses were situated). In this way, the Sahrawis who do not belong to the larger Saharan tribes (“the blacks” or “tribe-less people” or “minority *qabila*”) continued to live in a shanty settlement situated in the centre of the city (see below).

- Allocation of housing after political unrest. The *Al Aouda* settlement (The Return) was established in all the cities of Western Sahara for the Sahrawi families that arrived from the Tindouf at the end of conflict. In Dakhla, however, this settlement was allocated to young Sahrawis, many of whom were recently married and without homes to live in after the protests they organized in 2002. This was one of the first social protests held by young people that took place in Dakhla after the enthronement of Mohammed VI in 1999.

Insofar as the remaining local population is concerned, the acquisition of housing has taken on different forms. There are those who live in colonial houses which they made their own when the Spanish abandoned the territory; those who are renting their homes or who have bought them at relatively low prices;¹⁸ and poorer families who settle in slum dwellings as they migrate to the city from cities in the north. The last group, who receive a provision of basic goods from the military authorities, were living in the shanties of *Al Wahda* (the first to spring up in the city and where the immigrants who arrived in Dakhla during the 1980s and early 1990s resided) and *Lahrait* (where families without means who arrived in the city beginning in the mid-1990s lived).

NEW BENEFICIARIES OF THE MOROCCAN HOUSING POLICY

Until the mid-2000s, families who benefited from subsidized housing in Dakhla were either the military, public officials or Sahrawis belonging to important or relatively important tribal groupings in the city. The approval of the Plan for the Eradication of Slum Housing and its implementation in the territorial context of Dakhla has led to a change in the type of

beneficiary. For the first time, families who came in the initial waves of immigration are now joining those groups who benefit from the initiatives carried out by the Moroccan authorities. They are not necessarily members of a particular profession, whom the authorities might be seeking to incentivize to move to a region at some distance from Moroccan urban centres. Rather, they are families who lack economic resources, workers in the fishing industry or other trades who have been living in shanties since they emigrated in the 1980s–90s.

This type of immigration can be interpreted in many ways but its explanation is certainly linked to political influence. If the first settlers were motivated fundamentally by political variables (which could be said to include the quest for a better life), those who immigrated to Dakhla after the development of the fishing industry came in search of work and a “land of opportunities”. In both cases, the idea of a land where you can find a better life, which was conveyed by the media and integrated into the collective Moroccan “imaginary”, is certainly necessary to understand this change. In 2008 and 2009 it was these immigrants who gained the free territory. The means necessary to build housing was granted exclusively to displaced families who arrived in the first wave of migration during the 1980s and early 1990s.

In closing, we must not forget one section of society in Dakhla who also received housing in 2012, although they fulfilled another type of allocation criteria. These were the “black” Sahrawi, some of whom belong to a “minority *qabila*”. In this instance, families have benefited from existing houses financed by four local institutions and one national one: the municipal council, the provincial council of Oued Ed-Dahab, the regional council, the *wilaya* and the Agency for the Development of the Southern Provinces. The houses were given over on 18 November 2012, the day that commemorates Moroccan independence. The “black neighbourhood”, which was previously a walled zone as it contained the slums in the centre of the city, is now a settlement for all to see, with uniform and recently inhabited housing.

Both groups of beneficiaries were until now facing marginalization from the public policies implemented by the Moroccan authorities in Dakhla. The northerners, or Moroccans, are therefore being compensated for their discomfort and frustration, at least partially, whilst also being encouraged to adhere to the national cause. The Sahrawis, who have very few means, are being compensated for a policy which, were it not to involve them, would only favour people who are not originally from the region, the

non-indigenous. This is significant due to the fact the territory is under constant observation by the international community, which increasingly demands that the distribution of resources favour those who are originally from Western Sahara.

The housing sector has therefore emerged as a very strategic policy for the political powers in Morocco. It is one that greatly involves central, regional and local institutions as well as being heavily subsidized, principally by the state. These subsidies form part of a system of aid and self-help. The Sahrawi families who benefit see their expectations met in the sense that they deem themselves to be re-appropriating resources that once actually belonged to them ("it is our land"; "they are our resources"); the families of immigrant northerners who came to the territory without any economic means now find themselves, in the majority of cases, with houses subsidized by the authorities and jobs that allow them to maintain a level of existence that they would have found difficult to achieve in other cities situated further to the north. There are, however, families who were allocated land but, due to a lack of resources, are unable to build a home and have had to relocate to rented housing or garages belonging to friends or acquaintances.

CONCLUSION: DEMOCRATIZATION VERSUS A RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT?

A study of the electoral and housing policies in Dakhla reveals changes in local power structures and in the types of groups who have benefited from the national public policies in the area. These changes give the impression that there is progressive involvement in politics (with the vote and the distribution of basic goods by the authorities) from a sector of society that is today the majority. This group used to be on the margins of the political process in spite of forming part of Moroccan nationalist strategies.

A diachronic analysis of political processes and the electoral policy implemented in Dakhla helps to explain the dynamics of restructuring in this local context. The fact that, for the first time, no Sahrawi belonging to the *Awlad Dlaym qabila* won a seat in the Moroccan Parliament in the 2011 legislative elections is indicative of the changes that have taken place in the arenas of local representation. These dynamics originate from the wider processes of liberalization, which can be observed throughout the country. The vote is now political capital in the hands of the electorate that may not allow the election of an entire set of policy makers but will permit the election of a narrower band of political personnel in the country.

Intrinsic to this process, the vote has given Moroccan immigrants in Dakhla an instrument with which to control and transform the structure of local power. As the majority, this group feels stronger today than it has done in the past. The means of control that have been put in place by the Moroccan authorities counterbalance these changes somewhat. However, such controls will face difficulties in the future in attempting to break the transforming potential of the demographic changes the region is undergoing.

An analysis of the allocation of land, the provision of means to self-build and existing housing highlights the changes in the groups of beneficiaries as well as revealing their hierarchy. The policies of the Plan for the Eradication of Slum Housing to relocate the population living in shanties in Dakhla have benefited the immigrant population for the first time, whilst also emphasizing the differences within the dynamics of the group. Those families who were relocated from the *Al Wahda* camp, the first immigrants in the city, have received assistance with building whilst the second group has not.

However, in a change of focus, the immigrant population must remain marginalized according to international law in cases that concern non-autonomous territories, by regulating the exploitation of natural resources. In Hans Corell's opinion, the administrative power of a non-autonomous territory can exploit these resources as long as they benefit the indigenous population. The regulation is included in the current legislation of Western Sahara and is broadly interpreted by local Sahrawis, who would consider illegitimate any decision that does not benefit the local members of their community. We can therefore see how political processes of inclusion are in conflict with international law in general and with the norms regulating the principle of the self-determination of colonized peoples in particular. The principle of the majority and the right to inclusion by socially marginalized groups take on a different significance in Western Sahara, as they conflict with those principles which define a dispute dating back to the 1970s as well as hinder its resolution.

NOTES

1. This immigrant population is known by Sahrawi pro-independence people as "settlers" whom they accuse of forming part of a Moroccan strategy to repopulate Western Sahara.
2. Report on the Province of Oued Ed-Dahab, quoted by Bekkar (1994: 22). According to the source information used by the author, the Saharan population of Dakhla at the time of Spanish de-colonization was 5454.
3. Haut Commissariat au Plan, Moroccan Government.

4. For a more detailed analysis, see Veguilla (2011).
5. These dynamics have been observed in authoritarian regimes by Signoles and al. (1999), Signoles (2004), De Miras (2005), Catusse and al. (2005) and Ojeda (2004); for reference to his study in the west, see Camau and Massardier (2009).
6. These are elected positions (mayors and counsellors, deputies elected in these districts and the president of the region) and not positions from central institutions and administrations or nominated by them, such as governors and ministerial delegates.
7. This legislation addresses the management of natural resources in the non-self-governing territories based on the legal opinion provided by Hans Corell, the undersecretary general for legal affairs and legal counsel, on 29 January 2002 and the positions of the legislative and judicial institutions that adopt Corell's conclusions, such as the European Parliament's refusal to approve the extension of the 2006 UE-Morocco Fisheries Agreement in December 2011 and the European Court's annulment of the 2012 UE-Morocco Agreement on agricultural and fishery products in December 2015. According to Corell, exploring and exploiting natural resources cannot be undertaken in Western Sahara with disregard for the interests and will of the Sahrawi people who inhabit the territory. This paper believes that plots for housing are part of the resources of Western Sahara and that elections are one of the mechanisms by which political representatives are selected.
8. As the de facto ruler, Morocco has administratively and politically assimilated the Western Sahara (Mohsen Finan 1997).
9. For an analysis of the negotiations between the Moroccan authorities and the political parties, see the bibliographic references to Parejo; for an analysis of the political party system in Morocco, see Szmolka (2009, 2010).
10. For example, during the 2002 elections, the candidates opposed to the possible election of S. Derhem alleged that he was not of Sahrawi origin, qualifying him as a "false Sahrawi" (Veguilla 2004). However, after the demands in Sidi Ifni from groups whose members defined themselves as Saharawi (Bennafla and Emperador 2011; Barrañeda 2012), and who belong to this *qabila* (Ait Baamrane), and after the increased difficulty of bringing a referendum to a successful conclusion according to the conditions established by the United Nations in the 1990s, his identity as a Sahrawi seems to have been accepted even by those who first considered him a "false Saharawi". Gdeim Izik (2010) is nevertheless a specific episode in this identity dynamic because of the way in which the young protesters, who identify with the "true Sahrawi indigenous to the region", demanded their inclusion in a redistribution process, which marginalizes them.
11. Qualitative research taken *in situ*, based on interviews (with voters belonging to different community groups or groups originating from different

- geographical zones and with candidates analysing their own results during periods of political mobilization or more “ordinary” periods–Zaki 2005), on participant observation and on the analysis of results of every party in agreement with the legitimization strategies observed. Elections analysed: legislative in 2002, in 2007 and in 2011; municipal in 2003 and in 2015.
12. Report from the ministerial delegation for Housing, Planning and Urban Development for the region of Oued Ed-Dahab-Lagouira, January 2010.
 13. Report from the ministerial delegation for Housing, Planning and Urban Development for the region of Oued Ed-Dahab-Lagouira, January 2010.
 14. Interview with a technician from the ministerial delegation for Housing, Planning and Urban Development from Oued Ed-Dahab-Lagouira. 26 November 2012.
 15. For one businessman interviewed, the success of the Plan for the Eradication of Slum Housing in Dakhla is due to the abundant amount of work in the city. August 2012 interview.
 16. On 14 August 1979, Mauritania and the Polisario Front signed an agreement in which Mauritania relinquished the Rio de Oro region, which it had gained at the tripartite Madrid Accords in 1975. Morocco assumed control immediately after the treaty was signed and Mauritanian military forces withdrew from the region. Royal decree No. 2-73659 of 20 August 1979, published in Official Royal Bulletin (BOR) No. 3502, 2 December 1979, established the province of Oued Ed-Dahab (Bekkar 1994: 9).
 17. This policy is undergoing modification. The “National Promotion Card” has become a resource for redistribution, which the state can use without pre-established criteria, causing a generation gap between those Sahrawi who gain benefits and those (mostly young people) who are protesting in order to be able to do so. Gdeim Izik (2010) is an example of this. For a more detailed analysis, see Veguilla (2009b, 2016).
 18. We cannot ignore the fact that the armed conflict did not effectively end until 1992. The local economy only began to grow in the mid-1990s with the beginning of the development of some fish-freezing factories. The fishing industry developed quickly, but it went through a period of crisis in the first few years of the 2000s. During the 1990s and the early 2000s, land prices and rents were relatively low in the city. In today’s more economically favourable context, prices have risen considerably.

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PART 4

National and Local Levels (2):
Saharawi Resistance and Identity

Memory and Resistance: A Historical Account of the First “Intifadas” and Civil Organizations in the Territory of Western Sahara

Claudia Barona and Joseph Dickens-Gavito

In 1975 Morocco entered the hitherto Spanish Sahara and, from that moment on, little has been known about what happened inside the territory, as the crisis and the international interest were to be concentrated in the armed conflict. In 2005, thanks to the collapse of a three-decades-old information blockade and the outbreak of what came to be called the Sahrawi “intifada”, allegations of human rights violations in Western Sahara were heard around the world. The population began to break the silence and tell a history that had been suppressed for decades.

In Western Sahara there has been resistance since the beginning of the Moroccan occupation, but it has sought incompatible targets, as often occurs within occupied communities (Pitty 2001). The Sahrawi people’s resistance to the Moroccan rule emerged as the latter tried to enforce a new

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administrative system, by which it established a new political order with ethnic and social variations. The invasion of the territory created friction that made administrative policies change on numerous occasions. From our interviews, it is clear that clashes between civilians and security forces took place. The interviewees also emphasized that the occupation affects and scars an individual's daily life from birth (various interviews, 2009). The growth in the discontentment among the population was based on a sense of relative or complete deprivation of liberty. Peaceful resistance and daily survival became the only two options available to extend, at least partially, personal and communal liberties (Kempa et al. 2002: 26–29). Some interviewees observed that they decided to remain in Western Sahara regardless of the occupation, with one interviewee claiming “the flag does not matter; Morocco, Israel, or Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, I just want to live with dignity” (interview with anonymous Matala neighbourhood family, 2009).

In the aftermath of the annexation, Morocco revived the tribal discourse and a repressive policy in several phases. The Sahrawi population's main strategies to respond to this were historical memory and belonging to a particular group. The Sahrawis have faced a divisive force. The Moroccan kingdom's policies, coupled with the later establishment of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), evoked a reaction from the Sahrawis, who used a traditionalist discourse to consolidate their cultural resistance against the occupier (Barona and Landa 2011). Morocco's policies and resistance to them can be explained through post-colonial theory. In the writings collectively known as the *Prison Notebooks*, Marxist and post-colonial theorist Antonio Gramsci explains how subaltern classes maintain the economic structures of pre-existing social groups, preserving their mentality and ideology for some time, while also trying to influence and achieve their goals through the structures imposed by the dominant group. All this influences the different stages of “decomposition, renovation and neo-formation” of subaltern classes (Gramsci 1999: 202–203). Gramsci theorized that the dominant group, once weakened in its structure, tends to reconfigure its influence through changes in its political framework in order to maintain control of subaltern groups (Gramsci 1999: 202–203). What Gramsci describes is similar to the activity during and after the creation of the CORCAS and the territorial administration by the Moroccan crown. In light of this theory, the Sahrawis framed their relations with the occupier while restructuring their own identity.

The clash between antagonistic groups created the right environment for the establishment of a unique identity, that is, the constitution of their own social consciousness, which allows the Sahrawis to act as a group. This social identity manifests itself through their culture, behaviour and attitudes, as well as the relationships established between other oppressed groups against the ruling class. The Sahrawi people consider themselves linked by various bonds of solidarity, joint efforts, collective mental forms and the division of tasks. Therefore, they would lose themselves and regress in the development of their individual and group identity if they were to become dependent on a territorial identity based on a different political definition, such as a kingdom. In their evolution and the development of their idiosyncrasies and their political, economic, social and cultural particularities, the Sahrawi people have assumed the concept of citizenship as their own, skipping the phase of monarchy and empire that play a role in other national identities.

The aim of this chapter is to provide the historical background and examine the deeper local roots of Sahrawi resistance—micro-resistance—which has been present in various ways in the Western Sahara territory since the final stage of the Spanish colonial rule and the Moroccan takeover, although it has only become visible for the outside world and achieved an impact on the global level and the Moroccan state/national level over the last two decades. Based on little-explored materials from Spanish historical archives and around 150 interviews conducted in Western Sahara in 2008–09 and 2011–12, the chapter aims to shed light in particular on the grey zone of the 1980s and early 1990s, when the situation of this territory was one of virtual isolation, absence of any international presence and communication embargo in all directions (prevention of media access, impossibility to make direct overseas phone calls from private landlines, interference of radio signals, unavailability of satellite television).

RESISTANCE UNDER SPANISH COLONIAL RULE

Operation Camel¹ and Operation Swallow² designate the two evacuation protocols that the Spanish colonial administration had prepared for an eventual withdrawal from the province of the Sahara. The Berlin Conference³ had granted Spain the administration of the territories of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro. However, the Spanish crown maintained the occupation until 1958, when the territory was declared a state province. The Spanish presence had been limited to the coastal areas and

was mainly military and fishing related. Spain was mostly interested in having an economic presence in the territory. The wealth of the Saharan fishing bank attracted the first Spanish settlers—Canarians, in this case—who maintained a constant interaction with this territory after that point. Spain was limited to exploiting the coastal areas without taking into consideration the inland. The coastal area offered greater benefits than those obtained through intermittent transactions with the residents of the coast and inland and without the need for large investments. Spain's interest in expanding the area of economic influence in the country was due to the possibilities offered by new technologies. The establishment of fish processing factories within the Sahrawi territory itself made a treaty process in the area possible and profitable.

With the discovery of phosphates, infrastructure improvements were included after the probabilities of profitability were analysed. These improvements raised new investment opportunities and enabled the extension and consolidation of the Spanish area of influence. Investment opportunities in other areas and the amendment of the legal status of the territory also generated the urgent need for modifications within the legal and administrative structure of the new province. All this attracted a non-military Spanish workforce, albeit a transitory one, since the territory did not have an infrastructure that could meet the needs of this new population. In addition, the military presence increased to meet the requirements of security and supply.

In addition to the prolonged and unforgiving post-war Spanish economy, the surplus of military labour played an important role. There was an awareness of the possibilities of economic exploitation of the territory, as studies by Manuel Alia Medina have shown, but the idea of a colonizing government was non-existent here, unlike the colonizing missions of other European powers and even Spain itself in other areas. The indigenous Sahrawi population's increasingly non-nomadic lifestyle and the crisis of the traditional economy encouraged a rapprochement between them and the Spaniards. Nevertheless, their assimilation into the new economic system was limited by Spanish administrative procedures, which in turn limited the Sahrawi population's chances of obtaining the educational background and knowledge necessary to understand the extent of the territory's wealth and manage the exploitation of its natural resources.

Spain was interested in the economy, not the native population. Additionally, the administrative structure was slow in offering a series

of laws and decrees to realize, or even support, the process of self-determination. The Official Secrets Act, the statute for the situation of the Sahrawi people, and the provincial statute, among others, existed only in principle or were ambiguously implemented in times of deep social unrest.⁴ In the early 1970s, there was already a threefold discourse: that of the Madrid government, the provincial administration and the United Nations (UN), each with particular interests and uninterested in including the Sahrawi people. While Spanish diplomats at the UN defended the Sahara's right to self-determination and sovereignty, the Madrid government was to arrange the transfer of its administrative powers to Morocco and Mauritania through the 1975 tripartite Madrid Accords. This change in power forced the Spanish UN representative to change his discourse and recognize the existence of a non-self-governing territory. In the meantime, the provincial administration, subject to the Official Secrets Act, maintained a rhetoric about legitimacy and proposed the stewardship of the Sahrawis during the process leading to a referendum for self-determination. The provincial government then created a political party, which implemented some public policies and opted to prepare the population for the promised referendum.

Before long, the Spanish administration became aware of the dissatisfaction of the population. Official reports were clear: in 1972–75 memorandums constantly mentioned Sahrawi protests, particularly in the education sector, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

The student branch of the Polisario Front has withdrawn the scholarship from the children of [Mohamed Salem Hadj M'Barek] Paquito, Berical-la, etc., noting that the government has proceeded too brusquely. Some students, especially those receiving their degrees shortly, have said they will abstain from all activities due to fear of suffering the same fate. However, they have stated that when they finish [their studies] and when they become ministers or hold important positions in the government of their country, they will make Spain pay for these things, turning their back and even challenging it politically. For other students, the withdrawal of their classmates' scholarships prompted them to declare that they will carry on their activities, now more vigorously. (Sahrawi Central Government 1975: 2)

The Sahrawi population, after adopting a non-nomadic lifestyle, did not see their needs being met and the youth, above all, saw no future under Spanish rule. The right to a decent life dominated the discourse of the

younger generation. Salary, education and housing remained key points in their agenda. Even within the *jama'a*, a council of traditional Sahrawi tribal notables set up by the Spanish administration in 1967 with the aim of co-opting them, a movement developed championed by the younger generation (educated in the Spanish educational system) who not only questioned the participation of the Sahrawi population in the administration of the territory but also reorganized its own traditional system. This was the forerunner movement of the Advanced Organization of the Sahara, led by Mohamed Bassiri (Sahrawi Central Government 1970). Sahrawis wanted to stop being mere recipients of decisions taken by the Spanish government, which had helped only a small part of the population, namely, the *shuyukh* (elders, notables) and those close to them or the mother country. A growing sentiment existed among Sahrawis that they were to be the architects of their own political, economic, social and cultural administration. This same need arose openly and particularly strongly in the student segment of the Sahrawi population. All of them had been educated within the Spanish area of influence, had the possibility of leaving the territory and had access to vocational training that previous generations had lacked.

The changes in the *jama'a* implemented by Spain in 1968–69 were supported by some Sahrawi tribal public figures. This support was justified, to a certain extent, because of the mounting fear of Moroccan and Mauritanian interference should Spain leave the territory. For centuries the Sahrawis had accepted the Spanish presence, yet without doubting their own territorial sovereignty or considering relinquishing such sovereignty to others. The Sahrawi had and continue to have a conscience rooted in their cultural, social and political identity that differentiates them from other tribes in the area. Additionally, natural borders exist that go beyond the artificial limits drawn by European powers. These artificial boundaries, for example, did not prevent contact with the peoples north of the Draa River, although their most direct link has been with the tribes that were under Spanish administration.⁵ However, the 1958 Ifni War and the new border demarcation increased the distance between Ifni residents, the Moroccan people and the inhabitants of the newly proclaimed Spanish province of the Sahara (interviews with Ma el Ainin family and Said family, 2011). Between 1958 and 1960, when the Sahara's province status was ratified, there were constant waves of migration to Ifni, since the residents of the latter territory were prom-

ised certain social benefits (interview with Ma el Ainin family, 2011). One such case was that of the Ouali Mustafa Sayed family, who moved to Tan-Tan. The Sahrawi opposition always maintained their hopes of returning to the Sahara and resuming the project led by Mohamed Bassiri (Baddou 2008).

The Sahrawi nationalist movement, as mentioned above, went through several stages. The unrest after the 1958 crisis led to a growing emphasis by the nationalist discourse on Otherness, which was revitalized in the late 1960s in the context of the *jama'a*. At both times, the discourse tended to highlight social demands, which Mohamed Bassiri, the leader of the Movement for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Wadi el Dhahab, recaptured with clear language and a theoretical background. The Polisario Front concluded this rhetorical process to a certain degree, although several other developments, such as the 1975 Green March, the withdrawal of Spain and the outbreak of the war between Morocco and the Polisario Front, played an equally central role. A significant portion of the Sahrawi people remained within the so-called occupied area under Moroccan control. This population began to construct its own conscience as a Sahrawi people and explore ways to reveal this awareness. During this period, the population would gradually imagine and construct a common history that, in many cases, was detached from that of the refugee population that moved to Tindouf, Algeria.

Brahim Noumria's accounts of those years give an idea of how the children of the Polisario Front, who consider their childhood gloomy, were socialized (interviews with Mohamed Ismaeli and Abdullah Joula, 2011). These generations produced the first demonstrations and street movements that concluded with emerging alliances and the formation of a new generation that shared the same national project:

I was 10 years old. I studied in Spanish schools. Upon the accession [to the throne in Spain] of [King] Juan Carlos I, I remember that people talked a lot about the Spanish betrayal of the Sahrawi people. Every day we saw cars full of families who left the city of El Ayun, where I lived. We did not take things seriously. We overlooked the risk that threatened us.

The Spanish authorities took the city and applied a curfew. We could not go out and play after six o'clock. Everyone told us that, if we went out, we would die in the hands of the Spanish armed forces. The schools were all closed.

I remember that one night all of my family were very concerned. They said many Moroccan trucks had entered from the northern part of El Ayun. A month or so after that, they opened the schools. This time there were no Spanish teachers, as was customary. Only some Sahrawi who had approved the COU [baccalaureate] taught us in Spanish. It was 28 February 1976. Two weeks later, the Sahrawi teachers disappeared.

Three days without classes. The school where we were was the Women's Section. The fourth day they took us to another school, this time the School of the Barracks near the Polco quarter. They brought us a Sahrawi teacher called Marian Mohamed Salem. She taught us in Spanish for the rest of the school year. We realized that the missing teachers were arrested and disappeared for over a year. When the school year ended, our teacher, as we were informed, joined the Polisario Front along with another teacher called Zahra Ramdan. (Interview with Brahim Noumria, 2012)

Brahim Noumria's memoirs provide some interesting insights about the Spanish withdrawal and the unawareness of the proportions that the conflict would take. Many Sahrawis stayed, not due to sympathy with the new regime but because of their scepticism about the possibility of an invasion. The change was radical; the new generations had to be included in the system and education was a feasible pathway for this, but the results were not as expected. Morocco imposed a firm hand during the early years of the occupation. Forced disappearances or incarcerations were constant. Nevertheless, Morocco's best strategy, in addition to investment in infrastructure, was to block communications in the area: little was known about what was going on there until 2000. Only in 2005 the outside world heard again about Western Sahara as a result of Sahrawi collective action and protests in defence of human rights, a mobilization that broke the media blockade and raised many questions about what had happened in the area since 1976.

TRIBALISM, IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE UNDER MOROCCAN OCCUPATION

The Sahrawi protest camp that was set up in Gdeim Izik, El Ayun, in October–November 2010, was arguably the culmination of years of demonstrations reacting to the circumstances by means of ingenuity, tradition

and other tools that simplified a response to each act. Throughout 35 years, the Sahrawi people had kept a silent struggle that enabled them to build a social organization based on cultural resistance. Although the mass media started speaking of the Sahrawi struggle in the occupied territory only in 2005, as is apparent from several interviews conducted in Western Sahara, protests and demonstrations had actually existed since Spain withdrew from and Morocco annexed the territory. Tracking the progress of this social movement scene, it is possible to observe the emergence of various organizations with different objectives, as well as the gradual intervention of the Polisario Front in co-directing their activities. However, the first generation of Saharawi activists was inspired by the experience of Moroccan struggles. There are recollections of protests or “intifadas” in the mid-1960s, for example: “[...] The Moroccan people were one of the most active throughout the Arab world, since the 1960s in their struggle against the dictatorial regime in Morocco. In addition, thanks to this fight, they had experiences and progress in a civic struggle, which distinguishes them from the other Arab peoples” (interviews with Abdallah Jouda, Mohamed Ismaeli and Brahim Noumria, 2011–12). The hunger strikes and protests were clearly influenced by Moroccan experiences. What was lacking at the time was the amalgamation of the objectives, an ideology and an agenda for struggle that covered all possible parameters.

Peaceful street protests, as an emblem of *bidan* culture, became a cost-effective instrument. The logistics had to be flawless so that the protests could last long enough to set in motion a local, regional or international response. This was seen as a measure to help breach the media blockade in place since Morocco occupied the area. The first protest of this kind occurred in late 1976 in the city of El Ayun. Uncertainty and fear were constant as seen in the following interview:

The fences of the Spanish troops remained in place in the Moroccan-controlled city of El Ayun. It was the beginning of November. The first thing the Moroccans did was to bring red Ford trucks and yellow Berliet trucks loaded with food aid: wheat, oil, sugar, dates, coffee and milk cans. They opened a store in the Cataluña neighbourhood. They wanted to get closer to the people in the city. It was something like trying to buy us to be Moroccan. People made fun of the agents of the Moroccan gendarmerie. They insulted them from the street. Nevertheless, armed Spanish police guarded the warehouse door in order to protect the Moroccan gendarmes.

A few days later, we realized that the Moroccan battle tanks had entered the eastern part of the city, arresting thousands of Sahrawis living in the Zamla (stone house) neighbourhood. (Interview with Brahim Noumria, 2012)

The Moroccan security forces created an environment of uncertainty and fear which was somewhat mitigated when rumours about an alleged visit by a foreign delegation or the UN began to circulate through the streets of El Ayun. A group of women heard this and decided to talk to this delegation to condemn what was happening. It is estimated that approximately 500 Sahrawis arranged the meeting. To avoid a possible blockade, they decided to reach the delegation from the district of Corominas. The group was infiltrated and on the morning of the demonstration, the women found that the Moroccan police had taken the roads to the Parador, including a small uniformed detachment and another, larger non-uniformed group. The women were arrested, interrogated and then released. References to this case are few, though they manifest the distinctiveness of a struggle that took almost 40 years. Women, considered key individuals in the *bidan* community, turned out to be the voices of resistance that would seek new ways to develop peaceful resistance in the next decade. This path led to the emergence of the first Sahrawi associations, which were illegal for Morocco.

Once established in the area, Morocco created a basic infrastructure while remodelling the major urban centres. Notably, the Spanish quarter was no longer renewed after this time; it was necessary to obliterate the colonial history in the areas where Sahrawis lived. Social policies were practically absent, although the tribal factor determined many actions of the native population. The Moroccan authorities reactivated the tribal discourse and a multiphasic repressive policy. In response to this, Sahrawis reinforced their belonging and attachment to various tribal factions. In many cases, they emphasized this in an attempt to make a distinction with the new immigrants arriving from the north—many of them ethnic Sahrawis from southern Morocco, or the so-called impure Sahrawis.⁶ This concept then opened the door to the debate around colonial borders and the geographical space where the tribal Sahrawi Confederation moved before the Spanish colonial rule: who are the Sahrawis? Who coined this concept? How is the nation reconfigured to fit this concept? The answers to these questions would remain unclear and ultimately unresolved. Moreover, as noted by Bernabé López García (2013: 1), combined with

this distorted sense of identity was the failure of the Moroccan authorities to win the support of the native population. The so-called key years revived social unrest.

This situation largely fits with James Scott's (1990) understanding of resistance patterns. According to this author, first, the strength of a social group automatically arises from a subjugated position, although sometimes it is a concealed or micro-resistance. In the case of Western Sahara, one can observe that the families' perceive it their duty to preserve the *bidan* culture. A constant observation made by interviewees was that language and traditions should not be forgotten. Second, resistance creates a de facto subordinate group, since the socially dominant generate a subjugated group. Third, the resistance of the subjugated needs to be studied over a long period and takes a multitude of forms and arrangements, as exemplified by the difference between public and the private discourse. In Western Sahara micro-resistance became the tool that allowed organizations to extend their ties beyond the territory. This was a process by which the concealed discourse managed to overcome the barrier of the blockade although, after this achievement, it took again the backseat to the de facto forces. One of the first attempts to advance Sahrawi micro-resistance and provoke a public dialogue was the UN visit to the Western Sahara in 1987.

In November 1987, the UN decided to send a technical delegation to El Ayun. This news was welcomed by the Sahrawi population, which proceeded to organize and prepare a demonstration. The Moroccan authorities learnt of such arrangements and prepared to retaliate. On 19 November a massive raid resulted in more than 400 Sahrawis arrested, many of them minors. Although most of them were released after the conclusion of the UN visit, a group of more than 40 was kept in secret detention until June 1991. The group remained in the Galat-Maguna prison and, when released, became known as the Group of the UN or the Group of the 87 (interviews with Elghalia Djimi and Brahim Dahane, 2008). Some of its members were to create the largest organizations and to be recognized for their human rights activism, such as Elghalia Djimi, Brahim Dahane and Aminatou Haidar. Most of the activists emerged in 1991 and had to rethink their strategy. A first step was to consolidate the social organizations and propose a clear objective. The Committee for the Defence of the Right to Self-Determination for the People of Western Sahara Committee

(CODAPSO) and the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defender (CODESA) became the voice and coordinators of social demands (interview with Brahim Noumria, 2012), but failed to become legalized. The 1991 ceasefire was another opportunity to enhance the discourse in favour of self-determination.

To understand the demonstrations organized throughout the Western Sahara in the 1990s, it is useful to look at the processes that structured the last years of Hassan II's reign. As Patricia J. Campbell observes, this period is fundamental to understand the emergence of new political players in the region and the social changes sought and fostered, especially by the various movements involved in discussions on social change or revolting for reforms to the public order and the state (2003: 38–42). In this context, the ceasefire paved the way for the first large-scale Sahrawi protest or “intifada”. It was necessary to draw the attention and, if possible, the presence of the media. In 1992, the organizers had the logistics to organize three emblematic cities: Smara, El Ayun and Assa. Assa was a particular challenge as it involved the mobilization of Sahrawis outside the colonial borders of the Western Sahara territory, that is in southern Morocco. The participants in the struggles interviewed make it possible to reconstruct part of the story.

According to Brahim Noumria, Assa was the first city to condemn “the invasion of Morocco and the Western Sahara and to claim the legitimate right to a decent life, as they feel marginalized because of their [Sahrawi] origin since the independence of Morocco in 1955” (interview with Brahim Noumria, 2012). The army faced the population and there were several injuries. A number of detainees were taken to the city of Agadir where they were sentenced to one year in prison. The requests were not reported and the conditions did not improve. Smara, a city widely inspected since the arrival of Morocco, rose one day later, catching the Moroccans by surprise. Despite this, the arrests were in hundreds and some detained or disappeared into the PM-CMI (*Puesto de Mando-Campaña Móvil de Intervención*) prison for three years. The “intifada” of the three cities concluded with larger mobilizations in El Ayun. The population waved Polisario Front flags and stood in the traditional areas of the city. This behaviour was met with similar response by the Moroccan authorities, namely, repression, forced disappearances and arrests. Despite the scope of this 1992 mobilization, it did not resonate internationally and received limited local attention.

It is important to note that, until this point in time, no direct links with the leadership of the Polisario Front had existed. Sahrawi social movements inside the Moroccan-controlled territory developed without confirmed external influences. The Moroccan authorities had invested in several areas, but the media only visited them sporadically until the late twentieth century. The population was informed by radio or telephone, a very particular system, as calls were connected through a police station in Casablanca (interview with Moulay Ali, 2008). The death of King Hassan II and the accession to the throne of his son Mohamed VI were accompanied by some changes. Private and public phone lines became available in the cities and many former detainees or those who had disappeared used their allowances to create the first Internet cafes (interview with Brahim Dahane, 2008). These spaces facilitated the dissemination of information through social networks, some of the main arrangements of civil society (interview with Brahim Noumria, 2011). On the other hand, the new situation allowed for contact with Rabouni, the administrative capital of the Tindouf refugee camps, and contacts to coordinate activities were initiated. Peaceful protests also began aimed at defending human rights.

In the late twentieth century the native population lived in poor economic conditions, leading it to establish the first peaceful protest camp in 1999. In Echdeira Square, the heart of El Ayun, former workers at Phosboucraa, unemployed Sahrawi professionals and the disabled decided to settle indefinitely in a central area of the city (interview with Gejmoula Bent Ebbi, 2011). The strategy was simple: they put up their tents, they publicized their complaints and they waited for a compromise that did not come. They resisted for 19 days until the security forces removed them by force early in the morning. There was no media presence but this marked a watershed event in the history of Sahrawi resistance. The tent, as would be seen in Gdeim Izik, became an emblem of the people; it was their trademark and where they felt at home. This symbolic use of the tent has occurred systematically in North Africa, a phenomenon studied in detail by Susan Rasmussen (1996: 14–26). Furthermore, the use of the tent as a culturally symbolic item in the demonstration for self-determination is secular in nature and differs from other protests in the region that consistently use religious items as their means of objection.

In 1999, the peaceful offensive and the struggle for first-generation human rights began. A recollection continually heard was that the referendum could not be reached with a population that had been des-

ecrated for 40 years. The level of discouragement was present in returnees, who were poorly adjusted to society, as well as in the Sahrawi people, who saw no way out and moved inland (interview with Mohamed Ali, 2011). However, the media, contact with Rabouni, new Moroccan government policies and the war impasse, among other things, all redefined the associations and their actions. Thus, in 2005, the first “intifada” exploded with an impact among the international media, reviving the issue of human rights. The various organizations did not become negotiators but pressure agents, as discussed below. The Internet began to be used as a tool to open a new social battlefield with all sectors present. Young Sahrawis and Moroccans know how to take advantage of this new technology. Leaders of the “intifadas” appear on Facebook and Twitter serves as a means to spread information and schedule future demonstrations or raids. Additionally, online television from the occupied territories can be seen and the work of numerous bloggers read.

The social and economic situation of the Sahrawis has become a focus for the younger generation. The cities in the region suffer from a lack of public infrastructure. Education centres, street infrastructure, public places, green spaces and drainage canals, administrative services and urbanization, all of which had been neglected by Morocco, are part of the requests for a more dignified life. Since 1976, the largest investment sector has been the military; the area has about a quarter of a million soldiers and security agents, among others. Furthermore, the arrival of thousands of settlers from the 1970s onwards has played an important role, changing the demographic map of the region and weakening the Sahrawi presence in the area.

The lack of government response and the precarious circumstances have led the Sahrawis to devise new forms of protest to pressure the Moroccan state. Gdeim Izik was a new alternative, although the Sahrawis have needed to reconsider human rights issue with new strategies. Subsequent demonstrations did not achieve the expected result, although a new lobby has emerged with the support of some American NGOs such as the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. These achievements have been overlooked by the international press but opened a new alternative in conjunction with the USA. Besides the international element, the organizations in the occupied territory confront internal challenges. Since 2007, it has been clear from interviews that they face several problems, including fatigue after

decades of resistance, a lack of coordination, unattended new generations, frictions with some sectors of the Polisario Front, the issue of “returnees” from the Tindouf refugee camps and differences between various ideological tendencies, to name but a few. The territory under Moroccan control has an ambiguous situation in the context of the conflict, and those new generations, the children of the Polisario Front, are presented as potential new agents of change in a dispute that does not appear to have a short-term solution.

In conclusion, the social movements in Western Sahara may constitute the foundation of a modern civil society and a modern democratic system. Although the contemporary social movements have not achieved their main objectives, they have become new regional and international players, and key actors in the conflict. The relationship between contemporary collective action and civil society shows the Western Sahara conflict as a struggle towards a more mature and open society.

NOTES

1. The aim of the operation was to collect, classify and in some cases microfilm official documentation from the main Spanish dependencies in Sahara. It was also to prepare the logistics for the publication of the material on the peninsula. Data available in the folder, Documentary Sahara Fund (Luis Rodríguez de Viguri and Gil), currently held at the Fundación Sur, Madrid, Spain.
2. Operation aimed at removing military and civilian supplies from the area once the Spanish withdrawal was officially enacted. Data available in the folder, Documentary Sahara Fund (Luis Rodríguez de Viguri and Gil), currently held at the Fundación Sur, Madrid, Spain.
3. The Berlin Conference gave the Spanish crown the territories of Ifni, Western Sahara and Fernando Poo and included the protectorate in northern Morocco. The empire was already in decline, so the country's presence in Western Sahara was quite limited.
4. The Official Secrets Act of 1970 is not only a regional administrative control movement but also facilitates the monitoring of native actions and, in many ways, maintains misinformation in the province. The statute for the situation of the Saharawi people, moreover, raises many questions about management designed to give the appearance of Saharawi autonomy after a referendum is held. The documentation provided by the Rodríguez de Viguri archive is particularly extensive.

5. The documentation from the Spanish Commission for Sahrawi Historical Studies (originals and copies) contained in the Rodríguez de Viguri Archive provides interesting information on the cultural characteristics of the *bidan* people. This material formed part of the report submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. Colonel Viguri provided some of this material in 1993–98.
6. Several residents mentioned this concept during visits made to the Matala neighborhood in El Ayun in December 2009. What is striking is that several generations of Sahrawis used the idea of “pure Sahrawi”.

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Western Saharan and Southern Moroccan Sahrawis: National Identity and Mobilization

Isaías Barreñada

When Morocco annexed the territory of the former Spanish Western Sahara in 1976, the country eliminated the colonial border established by France and Spain situated at latitude 27° 40'. Thanks to this measure, which put an end to a brief separation of only 18 years, relations between Sahrawi communities from southern Morocco and the former Spanish colony were re-established, families were reunited and population movements began almost immediately. However, this partial reunification took place at a time of crisis and caused the Sahrawi society to fracture in a new way, beset by war and conflict.¹ One of the consequences was that Sahrawi nationalist activism in territories under Moroccan control has involved not only Sahrawis from the former Spanish colony but also southern Moroccan Sahrawis. The latter group has not only become integrated into a reconstituted Sahrawi society in the territory, but some have fully incorporated themselves into the political movement based in the occupied territory and aligned with the positions of the Polisario Front. This political phenomenon, which began with and has developed along-

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side the conflict, has been v implications and raises varied and significant questions. This chapter poses one key question along with two of lesser consequence. The first is whether this dimension is intrinsic to the conflict and is now becoming more visible or if it is a new phenomenon by which the Sahrawi nationalist camp is expanding, as a result of the prolongation of the dispute. The other two questions are related to how these southern Moroccan Sahrawis have made a specific contribution to the creation of a modern Sahrawi national identity and the possible consequences of their involvement in the nationalist struggle for the resolution of the conflict.

THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE AND THE TERRITORY

European colonialism delimited the territory of the western part of the Sahara desert and much later named it Western Sahara. The territory that came under Spanish rule in 1884—although it only became progressively controlled beginning in the 1930s—was inhabited by an indigenous population, the *bidani* (white, Hassaniya-speaking nomads with a unique tribal organization). The Spanish Western Sahara did not include the entire territory inhabited by this people, some of whom lived on land under French colonial control in the northeast, east and south. The French and Spanish colonialisms in the area assigned the western part of the Sahara through different treaties, and between 1900 and 1912, they drew political borders on a territory that had not had them before. They first established the limits of their colonial possessions before later delimiting the Spanish Protectorate in southern Morocco (between the Draa River and latitude 27° 40'), which had a different legal status from the Spanish Sahara (protectorate vs. colony). Later, when states in the region successively became independent, Spain was forced to cede to Morocco the Protectorate possessions, including Cape Juby-Tarfaya in 1958 and then the enclave of Ifni in 1969.² Spain pulled out of Western Sahara in February 1976 and the territory was split between Morocco and Mauritania. Finally, the current de facto limits took shape when Mauritania withdrew and Morocco built defensive walls (or berm) to separate the areas under its control from the narrow strip of land dominated by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (RASD) (Bennafla 2013). While these borders meant very little for the indigenous population for a long time, after independence, the indigenous people living in the territories of the new states were assigned a new citizenship. This was augmented by the fact that Morocco became a refuge for Sahrawis fleeing from the Spanish colony mainly in the 1960s.

On the other hand, Western Sahara did not experience decolonization; when the Spanish colonizers withdrew in 1976, it became occupied by Morocco and Mauritania, which claimed these territories using arguments based on historical ties. The indigenous population in the colony was not allowed to decide its own future as established by international law. As a result of this frustrated decolonization, the occupation and the war, one part stayed in the territory under the control of the occupier and the other crossed international borders into exile. Beyond this, a fraction of the indigenous Sahrawi population was already living in areas that had formed part of the southern portion of the Moroccan state since 1958. This group is the focus of this chapter.

Historically, the Sahrawi population has been distributed over a broad territory that is difficult to delimit between the southern slopes of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco down to modern-day Mauritania and entering south-east Algeria. Establishing these colonial—and later state—borders instigated a relative fragmentation of the Sahrawi populations that took some time to become clear-cut. The significance of the colonial borders was strengthened, not only because refuge could be found beyond them but also because for modern pro-independence Sahrawis it delimited the territory on which to establish the state project that should have emerged from the decolonization of Spanish Sahara. Spain's late colonialism caused a national liberation movement to take shape among the indigenous population who demanded their right to independence, but demarcated by the colony and not the ancestral territory of the "ethnic Sahrawis". In 1973 the *Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia El Hamra y Rio de Oro* (Polisario Front) was created, first to oppose Spanish colonialism and then the Moroccan and Mauritanian occupiers. In this conflict, Morocco argued that the territory had formed part of the kingdom for centuries, considering its appropriation the culmination of decolonization. The most brutal fragmentation of the indigenous population occurred with the exodus caused by the war and the establishment of a large number of Sahrawi refugees in southwest Algeria beginning in 1976. The Sahrawis, therefore, have been subjected to a multiple fragmentation: first the colonial and independence periods saw a fragmentation of the ethnic group between Morocco, the Spanish Sahara, Algeria and Mauritania, and then during the national liberation movement, the occupation and the war, the colonial population was again split up between those who went into exile and those who stayed in the territory.

The Moroccan-Sahrawi conflict can also be characterized by its length. The first phase (1976–1991) included armed confrontation between the

Polisario Front and Morocco-Mauritania. The second, beginning in 1991, has been characterized by a situation of no-war/no-peace with a cease-fire agreement and negotiations led by the United Nations, including the implementation of a settlement plan, deadlock, successive proposals and several rounds of later conversations with no significant results. The prolongation of the conflict has affected the parties in numerous ways. During this time the presence of the Moroccan occupiers and *de facto* annexation of the territory have consolidated with people from the north moving in, making important investments in infrastructure, setting up institutions, deploying military and security forces in the area and exploiting its natural resources.³ This entrenchment, however, has not normalized the situation. Policies of positive discrimination have generated suspicion in Morocco, tensions with the indigenous population persist, settlers who have not received the promised benefits are discontented, police control is systematic and the political liberalization enjoyed in the public arena in Morocco in recent years has been very limited in the Sahrawi areas, both in southern Morocco and in the occupied territory. In turn, the power groups and Sahrawi elites in the occupied zones have had different experiences in their collaboration with Rabat.

On the Sahrawi side, the prolongation of this situation has created new dynamics and tensions. For four decades, the Polisario Front—as the Sahrawi national liberation movement—has played a leading role in resisting and demanding independence in international forums and has created a state in exile, the RASD, organizing the exiled population in southwest Algeria and the so-called liberated zones and carrying out important diplomatic work. During this time, the Polisario Front has not been immune to occasional internal tensions. Both in the occupied territory and the Tindouf refugee camps, the civil population has grown weary.

THE BREAKDOWN OF BORDERS AND THE PROTEST MOVEMENT

The protracted occupation has had at least two effects. The first is the rise of a Sahrawi protest movement led by a range of actors, most notably young people who did not live through the Spanish colonial period and were born or socialized under Moroccan rule. While this collective action takes advantage of the Moroccan political framework (creating different types of associations), its undeniable political reference point is the Polisario Front, although structural links are relative and limited, making it a target of repression. On the other hand, the occupying authorities and

the pro-Moroccan Sahrawi elites have assumed that an identity component exists that can be stimulated or contained with various public policies, sinecures or positive discrimination measures; in other words, a sort of instrumental use of (or bargaining around) Sahrawi identity has become normalized and accepted within the Moroccan political framework.⁴

The Sahrawi (i.e. national) political identity is a recent phenomenon, to a large extent the result of late colonialization and frustrated decolonization. Before and during a large part of the colonial period, it was not possible to speak of a Sahrawi national awareness per se, but rather of traditional identities based on differentiated cultural practices (the Hassaniya language) and tribal membership. In fact, the most widespread name was *Abel es-Sahel* ("people of the west" or "people of the littoral"), a term that refers to their geographic location in Hassaniya. The Hassaniya-speaking Saharan area, the "Sahrawi cultural territory" was called *Sahil* (littoral) or *Trab al-Bidan* (*bidan* refers to the white Arab population). The "Sahrawi nation" is a modern concept, a unifier of the pre-existing ethnic diversity connected to the anti-colonial movement and resistance. The awareness of "nation" emerged as a result of the rapid social changes caused by the late Spanish colonialism in the indigenous society and the international context. This modern Sahrawi national identity began to be articulated in the 1960s and then more clearly in the 1970s with the independence movement, the war for liberation and the creation of the RASD (Brousky 2007). Sahrawi nationalism is not ethnic, but postcolonial, (re)constructing the community and creating a nation to provide it with an elaborate form of organization (a modern state) for which it had to emancipate itself beforehand (achieve liberation, decolonization).

Sahrawi nationalism demands the self-determination of the Sahrawi people in the application of UN Resolution 1514 (1960), but it was born and developed beyond the territorial framework of the colony. The movement crystallized both in Spanish Western Sahara and in the Sahrawi areas of southern Morocco and, accordingly, since the beginning Sahrawi militants from both areas have made up the Polisario Front. Moreover, for military reasons, during the military confrontation (1976–1991), armed actions took place both in the occupied zones and in southern Morocco (Tan-Tan, Tarfaya, Draa, Akka, Tata, Lemseyid, Ras el Janfra, Leboirat, Zak and so on).⁵ However, the Polisario Front has always aligned itself with the fight for the self-determination of the indigenous population in the territory of the former Spanish colony within the parameters of the national fight for decolonization, accepting the inheritance and intangibility of the colonial borders (Hodges 1983; Mundy 2007).

This inevitably led to a distinction between the Sahrawi population on the territory that would form the basis of the future state—and, therefore, the population with the right to self-determination—and the (ethnic) Sahrawis living outside this territory who do not have that right. The Polisario Front has not made this distinction explicit (some Sahrawis vs. others), but the group's political discourse has always specified the limits of the territory of the future state. The declarations made by the Polisario Front (the 1973 Constituent Congress, subsequent congresses) and the founding texts of the RASD (the 1976 declaration of the RASD, the 1976 constitution and later versions, presidential declarations) always refer to the colonial territory and clearly identify the "national territory" with a territory "with internationally recognized borders". In other words, they accept the idea of a nation-state inherited from the colony, a nation with the right to independence tied to the colonial territory and not the cultural (ethnic) territory. This underscores the concept of territorial integrity/unity as opposed to any possible partitions of the territory. This distinction is made continually in every discourse. Consequently, part of the nation will be left outside of the state.

The political action of Sahrawi nationalism, therefore, spills over geographically. Since its origins, it has simultaneously taken place within the colony and outside of it. However, the exile of the part of the population that has settled in southwest Algeria and the creation of the RASD, whose institutions are in Tindouf, have placed the nerve centre of the nationalist movement outside the disputed territory since 1976, in contrast to the battlefield (the occupied zones, the incursion zones) and the liberated zones. The RASD has, to some extent, been a state that controls a limited territory with a divided and dispersed population and its institutions in exile.

Similar to what occurred in Palestine in 1986 with the First Intifada uprising, in Western Sahara blocked negotiations contributed to a change in political initiative, led to that point by the Polisario Front from abroad. Beginning in September 1999 and then more clearly after May and June 2005, the population in the occupied territory took on a greater role. One key element was the emergence of a new anti-establishment political elite in Western Sahara made up of former resistance fighters (who had been jailed in the two preceding decades) and young people (many of them university students educated in Morocco, the beneficiaries of promotion and co-optation policies). This phenomenon became known as the "Sahrawi Intifada" or "Independence Intifada".

With the failure of the settlement plan, the nationalist protests and demands spread inside the territory, and after 2005, demonstrations in the occupied zones grew in prominence. Given the impossibility of openly addressing nationalist demands, the collective action focused on socio-economic demands and the defence of human rights. Sahrawi human rights political activists became particularly visible internationally; their stories have been disseminated, they participate in international forums and they have received international awards and recognition. The response of the Moroccan authorities has essentially been to repress these movements and close down spaces, feeding the spiral of confrontation. However, what is most interesting in the context of this study is the involvement of southern Moroccan Sahrawis in the nationalist protests.

Who are these southern Moroccan Sahrawis? The region that goes from the southern flank of the Atlas Mountains, Oued Noun, to the border with the former Spanish Sahara has traditionally been inhabited, to a lesser or greater extent, by Hassaniya speakers, as distinguished from the Berbers to the north (Naïmi 2005, 2013). The area south of the Draa River formed part of the Spanish Protectorate until 1958 with a border at latitude 27° 40' that separated some Sahrawi groups from others.⁶ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the traditional population movements in the area were joined by new ones as Sahrawis from different tribal groups from Spanish Sahara arrived in southern Morocco both for economic (displaced by drought) and political reasons (members of the Sahrawi Liberation Army, or ALS, exiles and refugees),⁷ creating a demographic mosaic of indigenous Sahrawis and immigrant Sahrawis (the so-called implanted population) who maintained ties with their place and tribe of origin. After 1958 these Sahrawis, living on the extreme periphery of the country, were politically and economically marginalized. Somehow or other they resisted acculturation policies (the insistence on assimilating/Moroccanizing or “de-Hassanizing” them with regard to their customs, language and clothing) and political repression. Rabat has always been somewhat detached from the southern province, the refuge of former ALS members hostile to the central power. The different composition of the population has characterized the human landscape of the region⁸ and has been a factor in the political behaviour of the population. This also produced the diversity of criteria between the parties during the identification process carried out by the UN for the independence referendum.⁹

Any analysis of the Sahrawi political protest movement in southern Morocco must take this situation into account. Furthermore, several questions need to be answered: is this a simple marginal contagion (of no consequence), tactical

mimesis (adopting the forms, but with different objectives) or a true identification and convergence tied to feelings of belonging recovered and nurtured in a new context? There are at least three explanatory elements to consider: identification, territorial continuity and the new inter-Sahrawi socialization produced by the occupation. Firstly, in terms of persistence of a common Sahrawi cultural identity (language, practices, customs, family ties) across the region, no one doubts the “Sahrawi-ness” (of the identity) of southern Moroccan Sahrawis who in turn are fully aware that they share a cultural identity with the Sahrawis in occupied Western Sahara, Mauritania and southern Algeria (Julien 2004; Yara 2001). Secondly, there has been continuity in human movements in the heart of the Hassaniya-speaking space. The new colonial and state political borders in the Sahrawi space were always penetrable; nomadism, trade, family displacement and social and matrimonial relationships continued. Between 1958 and 1976, the border limited—but did not impede—relationships between northern and southern Sahrawis. Before 1958 Sahrawis from Saguia el-Hamra or further south regularly sold their livestock and picked up provisions in cities like Tan-Tan, a practice that has continued. Sahrawis in Spanish Western Sahara had to obtain permission from the Spanish authorities to travel north. In the opposite direction, obtaining permits was more complex and depended on other authorities in an attempt to limit the entry of Moroccans or non-subject Sahrawis. There was also legal trade operated by Sahrawis and Moroccans who crossed the border with supplies (food and other products) as well as unsupervised crossings made, for example, by shepherds, smugglers and activists.

Thirdly, with the occupation, Morocco fully re-established territorial continuity and endeavoured to erase the traces of the colonial border, establishing new administrative provincial and regional limits and creating electoral constituencies that straddle the colonial border. After 1976 the southern Moroccan and Western Saharan Sahrawis had no trouble maintaining contact and exchanges; in fact, mobility between the north and south intensified and the same spaces were shared. Sahrawi families moved and resettled with north-south movements predominating: in large part encouraged by the authorities, Sahrawis from Tarfaya, Tan-Tan and Guelmin settled in the cities of El Ayun, Smara and Dakhla drawn by state projects, the Moroccan administration and trade. In fact, the Moroccan settlers were either coming from northern Morocco (the so-called northerners) or southern Moroccan Sahrawis.¹⁰ Many exiles to southern Morocco in the 1960s–1970s have returned to El Ayun, Dakhla and Smara. The less active south-north movement is more related to civil

servants sent to Moroccan cities or students who live in university cities for a few years. This two-direction phenomenon has made it possible to recover ties and establish new networks, developing relationships between Sahrawis at all levels. There is no doubt that this has strengthened Sahrawi identity among the people in southern Morocco who perceive themselves to be marginalized with respect to their fellow citizens in the north, while closer to their fellow citizens in the south. Moreover, southern Sahrawi Morocco is quite close to El Ayun, the main city in occupied Western Sahara and the main focus of political protest movements. Finally, the new co-opted Sahrawi elites in the occupied zones who have benefitted from political or economic sinecures and high positions in the Moroccan administration also include southern Moroccan Sahrawis.

The politicization and political protest movement among the southern Moroccan Sahrawis—whether indigenous or the implanted population, residing in southern Morocco or having relocated to the occupied zones—are related to this new reality (Cherkaoui 2007; Mundy 2012). There are two key factors here: firstly, in some cases it is possible to identify elements that correspond to processes of re-identification or identity recovery (ethnogenesis); and secondly, the social and political mobilization corresponds to the same causes at the root of the protest movement in occupied Western Sahara and develops in the same way in terms of frustration, identification and nationalization:

- Frustration: they feel dissatisfied and suffer from shortages (socioeconomic grievances, unemployment);¹¹ they are frustrated and feel alienated with respect to the political system and institutions and are aware that they are discriminated against (limited citizenship, non-recognition of their differentiated identity) and marginalized by the state;
- Identification: they experience the same forms of repression (the closing of spaces and restricted freedoms, direct, collective and family repression, detentions and deaths at the hands of law enforcement officials) and therefore see parallels in the causes behind the repression, interpreting their situation as deriving from their condition as Sahrawis (Beristain and Gonzalez 2012; Yara 2003);
- Nationalization of the protest: in many cases they couch (whether for tactical purposes or not) their protests and social or economic demands in identity-related elements, even occasionally wielding openly nationalist symbology and slogans (Sahrawi flags, catch-phrases, explicit support for the Polisario Front).

Finally, Sahrawi activists are found in the same associations and share discourses with a strategic nationalist background. However, although the mobilizations of the Sahrawis from the north are not substantially different from those of the southern Sahrawis, the latter are usually eclipsed by the dynamics in the occupied territory.

AN INDISTINGUISHABLE COLLECTIVE ACTION

The political protests and mobilization of southern Moroccan Sahrawis can be described and characterized as follows in terms of temporary location, geographic location, actors, repertoires of collective action and visibility:

As far as temporary location is concerned, the roots of Sahrawi nationalism (the first cells, some of the founders and early Polisario Front militants) are largely located in southern Morocco. After the Moroccan invasion, the nationalist involvement of southern Moroccan Sahrawis was indistinguishable from that of the occupied territory and a large number of Sahrawi nationalist activists who suffered repression in the 1970s–1980s (political prisoners, disappeared) were from or lived in this area. When the protests reappeared in the 1990s, they occurred in both areas. In 1992, there were demonstrations in cities like Assa¹² and the first Sahrawi *intifada* in September 1999 also was replicated in demonstrations in Tan-Tan and Guelmin. The protests and repression also affect cities in southern Morocco on a constant basis; as a result of the *intifada* of May 2005, for example, police repression in the area increased. Southern Morocco has always been part of the Sahrawi protest scene.

With regard to geographic location, for the Sahrawis their territory goes “from Guelmin towards the south”. In this space, collective action follows the same pattern: it is essentially urban, in cities and small towns where the population is concentrated. In southern Morocco, organized activism and mobilizations have materialized in places ranging from Tarfaya to the Draa area (Tan-Tan, Assa), Guelmin, Zak, Akka and M’hamid El Ghizlane and all the way to Agadir. Moreover, university students regularly travel to campuses at Agadir, Marrakech, Casablanca and Rabat.

When it comes to protest movement actors, while the leadership is shared between former victims of political repression and young leaders, the activists and actors in the protests are essentially people younger than 30. Many of them live in Moroccan cities for work or school and are prone to adding an identity element to their general frustration. Additionally, these activists circulate between the north and the south, with some from Western

Sahara living in southern Morocco and vice versa. An important portion of the directors of the nationalist organizations in the occupied territory did, in fact, come from southern Morocco to settle in El Ayun or Smara after 1976. These organizations operate where there is a Sahrawi population, both in the territory of the former Spanish colony and in southern Morocco.

In terms of repertoires and patterns of collective action, the practices in southern Morocco are similar to those of activists in Western Sahara (demonstrations, filing complaints) and are not specific to southern Morocco. As in the occupied Western Sahara, demonstrations (both spontaneous and planned) have increased in frequency and visibility and have diversified. The use of electronic resources (photos, videos, the Internet, social networks) when filing complaints has become more widespread and the reactions among the population have also intensified, with occasional outbreaks of violence. The use of nationalist symbology (graffiti, flags) has proliferated in many cities in southern Morocco. All of these expressions have elicited reactions from the authorities and, usually, repression, which feeds the nationalist protest spiral. Rather than being a phenomenon of simultaneity or a north-south network of social and political activism, it is all part of the same dynamic. The same patterns also appear in how the protests evolve from local demands to openly nationalist protests: (a) the root causes and circumstantial triggers (the protests often emerge as a reaction to socioeconomic factors, unemployment and demands for scholarships or transport and are exacerbated by specific incidents); (b) added to this are demonstrations of solidarity with the repression where it occurs, usually in the occupied zone; and (c) being stifled, the protests nationalize; the lack of means of expression contributes to nationalization (accompanied by pro-independence symbology) and radicalization, with contemptuous displays and open support for the pro-independence cause (Zunes and Barka 2009; Zunes and Mundy 2010).

A final feature is indistinct visibility. The activists are usually defined as Sahrawis from the Sahara or from a particular city, without establishing whether they come from the occupied territory or Morocco. Consequently, southern Moroccan Sahrawis do not have their own discourse or a differentiated activism; the action of Sahrawis from the north and south is a simultaneous and joint action. The most representative social organizations in the occupied territory include southern Moroccan Sahrawis without any distinction.¹³ They also participate together in international missions to condemn the situation in Western Sahara. In fact, several of the most important and well-known figures of the internal opposition are from southern Moroccan cities, some of whom moved to El Ayun, while others live in their places of origin.¹⁴

This means that a very significant portion of the Sahrawis imprisoned for nationalist activism comes from southern Morocco, as a close analysis of the political prisoners and activists in the last decade shows. In September 2005 of the 36 Sahrawi political prisoners listed by human rights associations, at least eight came from southern Morocco.¹⁵ In 2006 (May–August) of the 35 Sahrawi political prisoners identified by the Committee for the Defence of the Right to Self-Determination for the People of Western Sahara (CODAPSO), 17 were Sahrawis from southern Morocco.¹⁶ The report done by the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH) in 2008 on the human rights situation in Morocco lists 30 Sahrawi political prisoners, of whom 15 were from or arrested in towns in southern Morocco.¹⁷ Finally, in 2010 the Association of Families of Saharawi Prisoners and Disappeared (AFAPREDESA) identified 24 Sahrawi political prisoners, of whom at least nine came from southern Morocco. Moreover, three of the 25 prisoners jailed for the Gdeim Izik protest were from southern Morocco. This is also reflected in the list of activists killed during these years.

A COMPONENT OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Moroccan annexation-occupation and the disappearance of the border entailed a *de facto* reunification of the Sahrawis. Over time this has also allowed part of the population from southern Morocco to participate in nationalist mobilizations and support pro-independence positions. Despite the fact that southern Morocco does not form part of the occupied territory, these Sahrawis have not structured their own differentiated discourse within the national movement. They maintain the exact same discourse since they identify what they experience in their cities (poverty, marginalization) with the situation in the occupied zones. They often use nationalist symbology (RASD flags in demonstrations and indoor celebrations, slogans, artistic expressions) and openly express their support for the self-determination of Western Sahara and the Polisario Front in an advanced and subversive level of public demonstration. Neither is there any irredentist discourse,¹⁸ which seems to indicate that for now the Sahrawis accept the colonial borders and the territory of the future Sahrawi state. This is despite the fact that frustration, the violation of rights and repression have resulted in significant emigration among young people and occasional cases of fleeing to the refugee camps in Tindouf; that is, they are opting to support a Sahrawi national state project that initially excludes them.

In view of this, the Polisario Front national liberation movement has maintained a discreet position; it treats all Sahrawis equally whether or not they come from the former colony. The RASD has created a Ministry of the Occupied Territories that also caters to southern Moroccan Sahrawis. This institution condemns the situation in which these Sahrawis are living and considers their collective action part of the national movement. On the other hand, there is no specific discourse for them related to a political settlement of the conflict based on a decolonization that respects the colonial borders, accepting that part of the indigenous population, part of the nation, is excluded from the national state project.

Morocco, in turn, has contributed to this identification with public policies and measures specifically deployed to erase any differentiation between north and south and other policies that have had the opposite effect of that desired. Some examples include the fact that a portion of the settlers in Western Sahara were southern Moroccan Sahrawis; using collaborationist southern Moroccan Sahrawis to administer the occupied zones; the administrative division of the country combining southern Morocco with northern Western Sahara in the same regions; the policies for police control and repressive practices; the policies of, first, acculturation and then the folklorization of the Sahrawis; the integration of Sahrawis from both zones into the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) on an equal footing and so forth.

CONCLUSION

Monitoring and analysing the Sahrawi national political protest movement reveals that it is not only limited to the territory occupied by Morocco but also involves southern Moroccan Sahrawis and appears beyond the former colonial border. As many observers have noted, southern Morocco is part of the Sahrawi resistance and protest scene. This is not a geographic phenomenon, the result of contagion or spillover or due to sympathy or emulation. Neither is it a diversification of the Sahrawi nationalist camp or a new phenomenon. From its very first manifestations, the national movement has not been limited to the Spanish colonial territory but has also included southern Morocco. During the 1950s political protests occurred that were repressed by Rabat, and in the 1960s–1970s the Polisario Front was partially organized and came to fruition there. After the occupation, the area was also a site of resistance and suffered brutal repressions, in addition to armed actions. Many of the early activists who were impris-

oned or disappeared are from this region. For that reason, beginning in the mid-2000s, the new leading role of the domestic front has also included Sahrawi cities in southern Morocco. This would suggest that the anti-colonial and later nationalist protest movement is also a southern Moroccan phenomenon.

However, this dimension has scarcely been mentioned given the centrality of decolonization, self-determination and the state question in this conflict and on the national agenda. The fact that these elements refer to a contiguous but different territory and that the possible consequences (de-occupation, referendum, a state) do not affect them directly has not stopped southern Moroccan Sahrawis from participating not only in the political battle but also in the process of constructing a national identity.

This participation in the definition of the Sahrawi nation is explained by the uniqueness of the process. The first factor to consider is that the new national identity is articulated around common ethnic elements and a colonial experience different to that of their neighbours, to which southern Moroccan Sahrawis are not indifferent. The second is related to the emancipatory component; what distinguishes a national/nationalist Sahrawi from an ethnic Sahrawi is the former's commitment to the fight for independence ("a Sahrawi is someone who defends the national cause"), regardless of where they live and how it affects them. Finally, the third element is the appreciation of a new non-tribal diversity related to fragmentation and dispersion. The new Sahrawi national identity is borderless and integrates Sahrawis under occupation and in Morocco with refugees in Algeria and the diaspora, whether near or far. In this framework, the southern Moroccan Sahrawis contribute to and participate in the idea of the nation.

The failure of the settlement plan, the delay in solving the conflict and the passing of the years have led to the appearance of new realities, making the scene even more complex. Forty years after the beginning of the conflict, a solution that seeks to be viable must take these new elements into account. One of them is the crystallization of a national Sahrawi identity that also has a presence in southern Morocco. While this has not translated into irredentist demands at this time, the prolongation of the conflict and the authoritarian practices of Morocco could exacerbate the positions and help to radicalize demands, breaking the decolonization framework. Moreover, this fact means that, whether or not a Sahrawi state is established, Morocco must be able to democratically manage this national plurality in the heart of the country.

NOTES

1. I apply the term “Western Sahara” to the territory of the former Spanish colony (between latitude 27° 40' and latitude 21° 20') and the term “Sahrawi” to the population identified as belonging to indigenous Hassaniya-speaking tribal groups, regardless of their geographic location and whether this is their primary identifying trait. When I wish to make distinctions, I specify their location and origin (Western Sahara Sahrawis versus southern Moroccan Sahrawis). The formula *bidanis*, which corresponds to an old ethnic identity, is not used, nor is “Moroccan Sahrawis”, given that this would require differentiating between Moroccan-born citizens and those who acquired citizenship as a result of the 1976 occupation.
2. The region of Cape Juby (between the Draa River to the north and latitude 27° 40') and the town of Tarfaya (Villa Bens) were given to Spain in the 1912 Spanish-French treaty that established the Protectorate in Morocco, extending the territory of Western Sahara, which was now formally under Spanish control.
3. According to sources, the number of Moroccan settlers has grown from 150,000 to 750,000. According to data from the High Planning Commission (Morocco), in 2015 there were 510,713 inhabitants in the territory of whom 18 per cent or 92,176 spoke Hassaniya (Sahrawis); the rest, some 420,000, had come to the territory from Morocco.
4. See the studies by Victoria Vaguilla on socioeconomic conflicts in Western Sahara in which a latent national ethnic element is used by the actors involved; the identity element is a political asset for the indigenous minority.
5. In fact, the set of defensive walls built by Morocco between 1981 and 1987 in Western Sahara extends into southern Morocco to the foothills of Djebel Ouarkiz, that is, a hundred kilometres into Moroccan territory.
6. In sum, the area of southern Morocco with a Sahrawi population corresponds to the southern zone of the Spanish Protectorate (Tarfaya, Tan-Tan, Zak), but extends somewhat north of the Draa River to include Guelmin, Assa, Akka and the surrounding areas.
7. In the early 1970s there were some 60,000 Sahrawi refugees in southern Morocco.
8. It is difficult to precisely quantify the southern Moroccan Sahrawis since ethnolinguistic indicators are not included in Moroccan statistics.
9. In the identification process, Morocco defended the principle that the Sahrawi tribes located north of the border should participate as a whole. On the contrary, the UN established a list of identification criteria that gave precedence to ties with Western Sahara (demonstrated with documents or testimony).

10. The participants in the Green March (1975) included many southern Moroccan Sahrawis. When the government ordered the demonstrators to return, several thousands of them decided to stay in the Sahara with their families, forming part of the first contingent of settlers (some 50,000 in 1975–76). Later with the so-called second Green March for the future referendum in 1991, a new group of southern Moroccan Sahrawis settled in Western Sahara.
11. Ali Omar Yara has observed that since the 1970s the Sahrawi areas in southern Morocco (the Assa, Guelmin, Tarfaya triangle) have experienced the destruction of their social fabric, followed by the political repression of the 1980s–1990s and economic marginalization and misery of the 2000s [<http://arso.org.site.voila.fr/AOY.html>].
12. In 1992, 24 Sahrawi civilians were arrested in Assa (the so-called Assa Group) after participating in a social protest demonstration; they were sentenced to a year in prison.
13. For instance the ASVDH (secretary-general and vice president) and CODESA (10 of the 16 members of its executive committee, including the president, vice president and secretary-general).
14. Most notably: Ali Salem Tamek, Mustafá Abdel Daiem, Mohamed El-Moutaouakil, Aminatou Haidar, Naama Asfari, Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza, Sadik Bullahi, Brahim Sabbar, Larbi Messaoud, Ghalia Djimi and Banga Cheij. Some of these activists are from southern families who moved north in the 1950s.
15. Ali Salem Tamek (Assa, 1975), Mohamed El-Moutaouakil (Assa, 1966), El Hussein Lidri (southern Morocco, 1970), Hammadi Elkarsh (Guelmin, 1980), Lahcen Zriguinat (Tan-Tan, 1959), Mohamed Rachidi (Tan-Tan, 1978), Abdelaziz Dry/Edday (Tarfaya, 1982) and Hamma Achrih (Agadir, 1986).
16. <http://www.arso.org/rapportcodapso.pdf> CODAPSO, *Comité pour la Défense du Droit à l'Autodétermination pour le Peuple du Sahara Occidental*
17. AMDH, *Informe anual. La situación de los derechos humanos en Marruecos durante el año 2008*, Rabat.
18. Irredentism is understood to be the wish to annex territories considered to belong to a nation for historical or cultural reasons. In this particular case, the people defend their incorporation into a nation to which they feel they belong for historical or cultural reasons and consequently to the state that will emerge from the fight for liberation.

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The View from Tindouf: Western Saharan Women and the Calculation of Autochthony

Konstantina Isidoros

“Autochthony”, a synonym for native and indigenous, relates to a state of being and its quality of belonging to a place by virtue of birth or origin. It thus relates to three simple things: the human body, a sovereign soil and a *wish* to fasten the two together (a human consciousness of the French concept of *terroir*).¹ This principle is cherished in a common and familiar object that we would recognize, the national passport. But the *wish*, the quality of belonging, is the most subjective side of the equation and is where the simplicity of the idea of autochthony falls apart when many voices arise with different subscriptions to the principles of that idea.

The term is mostly used in anthropology and law. At the heart of the battle for Western Sahara lies an international legal fight for autochthony. Ironically, international law has long established the Sahrawi right to the self-determination of Western Sahara and every year the United Nations ritually reaffirms this right. This very act emphasizes how international law has recognized the Sahrawi right to autochthony, but has also failed to enforce itself and been contravened. Two further ironies with the legal precepts behind the idea of autochthony are that, first, a legal heir that emerges internally from a polity or country is supposed to be free from external legal control

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and influence (the idea of sovereignty); and second, an external heir invariably needs to be redrafted or otherwise amended in order to “reclaim” itself as being autonomous and native to the polity. Autochthony is therefore concerned with autonomy and an indigenous nature/quality that has developed from “within”. External autochthony must be written in.

VOICES AND OBJECTIVITY: WARS OF WORDS

The battle for Western Sahara has rolled on, unresolved for over 40 years, because it is that very nature/quality of being that has come to be contested by many voices. The trouble with time is that new voices appear in the geographies of the argument, each seeking to write or overwrite themselves “within” while the “original” geographies fade from the record and memory. Likewise, the battlefield itself has changed and moved from face-to-face armed combat to a diplomatic war of words and ideas about body, soil and claims to rights of belonging. Delay is a good strategy to wait for the matter to become so muddled as to engineer the envisioned outcome, or for the indigenous population to become overwritten by new, obliging generations. The international legal precept under question can then disappear, unresolved, into the obscurity of a status quo along the historical continuum.

The 1975 International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on the territory of Western Sahara sought to establish the autochthony of the rightful heir, and the attachment of that body to its correlational sovereign soil. However, one voice was not permitted to speak—it spoke from the “peripheries”. The Polisario (or “the Sahrawi”) had to be largely represented by Algeria at the ICJ due to a fourth irony.² The “indigenous native” had not already formed itself into a conventionally recognizable legal entity, in other words a “nation-state” (an autochthonous body attached to a sovereign soil), and therefore could not represent itself in court. The ICJ then proceeded to determine in its advisory opinion that the Polisario/Sahrawis *was* in fact the entitled legal entity to inherit.

My first point here, then, is that at a crucial moment of determination of the “internationally legal self” (see Heathcote 2012: 109–113) in this highest cathedral of international law, the Sahrawis could not use their own voice to describe or represent their own body and soil. My second point is that beginning in the 1970s, a cacophony of voices emerged to demarcate new discursive and positional geographies, like a new cartography over the original battle lines. This cacophony still plays its part in fogging the simplicity (the ICJ advisory opinion is clear and simple), thus scaffolding “the

Western Sahara question”³ and perpetuating its irresolution. This includes academic voices and scholarship. We analyze over and over again, armed with a plethora of theories, why the decolonizing self has remained *undetermined* (failed self-determination), who “the Sahrawis” are, precisely what/where their correlating sovereign soil is and what has failed in international law and the geo/regional/local politics behind it.

On the problem of voices caught between objectivity and subjectivity, I quote the introduction of this book:

Western Sahara has long suffered from a marked lack of international interest at both political and academic levels. Its peripheral position discourages research on it as being marginal and hardly publishable in leading academic outlets even under the label of area studies. This has resulted in [...] the limitation of a large number of publications to Spanish-language audiences [...]. [...] The obstacle of the high politicization of conflicting accounts and narratives, including many academic analyses [...] seems hardly exceptional in the field of conflict studies, [but in this case it is increased because of] the lack of a critical mass of research and researchers. [...] In connection to this, the researchers’ access to the field in the two main local scenes of the conflict—the Western Sahara territory annexed by Morocco and the Sahrawi refugee camps ruled by the Polisario Front near Tindouf, Algeria—has often been hampered by the corresponding governing authorities or shaped by reliance on specific networks of interlocutors.

Positionality is a serious methodological challenge in research on conflicts. The Western Sahara conflict captures in sharp analytical relief the analytical stances of scholars, a matter that has been long debated across academic disciplines in terms of scientific objectivity, research ethics and whether academics can and should be activists or “applied” scholars. Research on the Western Sahara conflict runs the risk of being translated as support for the Moroccan thesis or the Sahrawi thesis. What this really shines a bright light on is: who methodologically and epistemologically agrees or disagrees with the ICJ, in other words, scholars embattled on the verity of this thing we call “international law”, where Western rules are the core site of the battlefield. The reason this is so serious is that academic opinions and scholarship are read and can be used by the many actors in their battles. Actors have the power to mis-/use scholarship, but so too do scholars. Scholars have the power to shape the research to their embattled positions and are quite capable of creating a vicious academic combat zone.

My third point is that it is not just international law that has failed in the Western Sahara conflict. It is *Western* international law. Its canonical orthodoxy is our creation, our system of prescribed order, our rules. The ICJ decided very clearly that the territory was not *terra nullius*, that historical evidence of neighboring legal ties of allegiance did not imply sovereignty over or rightful ownership of the territory and that such legal ties did not prevent “self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory”.⁴

And so to move from law to anthropology. Anthropology is cautious about the idea of pure/absolute objectivity. Academics from any discipline are studying subjective human beings and the ethnographic method of long-term, immersed participant observation allows anthropologists to get up close to that subjectivity and see the finite, micro-level everyday of human life.

This is where the principle or idea of autochthony in legal terms translates across to kinship in anthropological terms. The ICJ’s 1975 examination of the Western Sahara case has enshrined a body of archival records that drew primarily from historical and anthropological sources of evidence from which the ICJ could build up a legal portrait of the territory’s temporal and spatial human geography. Six years earlier, in 1969, Spain had already returned the region of Ifni to Morocco. Cartographic lines were moved above the heads of bodies on the ground and the Ifni shift is just one of many before, during and since the ICJ Opinion. All over the world, cartographic and human geographies are constantly changing: borders shift; people and new generations migrate or are born in and out of the changing meanings and boundaries of human life. It seems many claims are in a constant cycle of being staked on a piece of land that carries different meanings and changing strategic interests. There are those who see more opportunities in supporting one or other of the party’s claims to the land. There are those who change their minds during their life trajectories, and others who tactically subscribe to several ideas at the same time.

THE VIEW FROM TINDOUF: *ASABIYAH*, KINSHIP AND NATIONALISM

Modern historiography—and our analytical techniques—tends to view colonial conquest as an event that incorporates vernacular societies *into* the history of the continent. But the view from the local Sahrawi position is very much one of looking out from their vernacular historiographical

position onto a colonial and failed “post”-colonial historiography that has become incorporated (overwritten) *onto* theirs. Asked to offer insights from the “Sahrawi local” position has been a curious task—as an anthropologist I have to deal with multifarious locals that can be as small as sitting under the shade of a *talha* tree (*Acacia seyal*) or as large as the notion of a *badiyah* (desert heartland). I have chosen “the view from Tindouf” as one locale in the sentiment of the topic of this book, where Tindouf represents a sort of central hub/headquarters of the anticolonial, liberation, self-determination and international legal journey that the Sahrawi people have recently made along this contemporary period of the historiographical continuum. There are many other places or moments of locality, of course, even a fleeting conversation or an unspoken sentiment. But I selected Tindouf as an interesting nucleus of assemblages of people drawn in crisis-flight from many locales and where I first ethnographically experienced a Saharan version of social network theory, and have spent eight years since trying to “capture” it.

A couple of aspects are clear: they possess an old and complex cultural-geographical typology pinned on the paradoxical strength of weak ties.⁵ This *nomadic* network typology features assortativity and clustering coefficient (see below on “accretion”) that appears “global” to them in terms of the geographical breadth across the Sahara, community (overlapping) structure and, as in agency-directed networks, a social structure of continual reciprocity links. There are two ways to try to help readers picture this microplex of a nomadic system that is cast far and wide across a physical geography and cultural landscape—the images of network science sociograms, or rhizomatic/arborescent knowledge as conceived in Deleuze and Guattari’s exercise in nomadic thought, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1993).⁶ The Sahrawi “local” is embedded in memory anchors, shared idioms, specific spheres of expertise that build up into an overall specialized desert society (as in-group survival) and a range of in-group linguistic markers embedded in the slight variations of the Hassaniya dialect across the region.

Everyday life in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf is one of “bare life” (Agamben 1998; Arendt 1966): a life in suspension and of refuge, trapped by the failures of decolonization and international law.⁷ The protracted nature of existence in refugee camps develops daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms of life and patterns of regularity that underpin a “state of exception”. The “high politics” in the legal and diplomatic battle for Western Sahara is very much *grounded* for the Sahrawi camp residents. Short-term visitors to the camps or those analyzing the situation

who have not visited may experience or sense an exceptionalism about the existence of the camps and the stories that are told about it (Voutira and Harrell-Bond 1995). It can seem an unusual, unstable, uncertain place to unfamiliar eyes. It has a temporality about it and it has to all intents and purposes become a permanently temporary home for the refugees. Many of the older Sahrawi residents of Tindouf have been historically nomadic—home can be packed and unpacked, agilely moved around and tactically sedentarized. The camp residents are experienced tent dwellers, adapting from customary camel and goat hair tents to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) canvas tents and since the 1980s, small outbuildings made from hand-made, sun-dried sand bricks that have come to form enclosed households in a close-quarters urbanizing environment. These qualities of being are some of the central reasons for the continued existence of the camps for over 40 years but also to the persistence of “the Sahrawi” entity to remain grounded, not just to the idea of self-determination and return to homeland, but to the principles of international law.

Another aspect to this is how and why the Tindouf refugees appear to have survived this “bare life”. Some commentators (mostly Moroccan propaganda) imagine and suggest that the Tindouf refugees are “trapped” there. This really is not the case. Checkpoints are for security—Tindouf is a strategic Algerian military zone near the Moroccan berm; it is a sentient warzone. The camps are also a site of thousands of year-round foreign and humanitarian visitors, where the Polisario and its population bear the burden and logistics of ensuring their lodgings and safety. There is nothing overly exceptional other than the camps standing as a testament to the shimmering mirage of international law itself, which has brought about human habitation in one of the most hydrologically deficient areas in this western region of North Africa.

There would have to be a very formidable reason why a society would put up with “bare life” in a set of refugee camps with minimal infrastructure and the harsh ecology of the Hamada—they would have to have a great stake in something to stay put. If the belief in and possibility of self-determination were to evaporate, the entire population would evaporate out of Tindouf. And this is, for the time being, unlikely because something very powerful keeps them together and it is not the Polisario *per se*. This is because the minimal infrastructure *is* the population—the human capital behind the idea of self-determination. Since the 1991 ceasefire, the Polisario have become the legs that pound the corridors of the Western

powers, propounding principles of international law. The Polisario and the RASD have evolved into an international legal entity that corrects the indigenous voicelessness of the 1975 ICJ hearings. These instruments of self-governance became a means for the Sahrawis to develop a legitimate voice in the arena of international law.

On the other side of the berm are Sahrawis who live under Moroccan occupation. Here, there is a maximal infrastructure, the force and breadth of the Moroccan state, its military forces and incoming settler populations. Local and foreign activists' and human rights campaigners' reports coming out from the occupied territory indicate other types of "bare life", with physical brutality, state violences and symbolic resistances, incoming settler populations, cultural appropriations as well as different forms of political and economic hardships. Again, something very powerful keeps them together. It crosses the heavily fortified berm without being seen; the 1990s UN-attempted voter registration could not quite pin it down, Morocco could not fake it and the UN Confidence Building Measures program's family visit flights barely do it justice.

Here the analytical shift from law to anthropology is a shift from autochthony to kinship, from international law to customary law. Behind the legal precept of self-determination are customary mechanisms of calculating and determining the Self and distinguishing the Other(s). Along the historical continuum, family, lineage and kinship have formed a web of ties across the region and across its many societies or other societies moving through it. As a customarily nomadic group of specialist desert societies, the Sahrawis are used to forming and reaffirming *asabiyah* across their vast and various heartlands.⁸ This is kinship on the move, kinship across long spatial and temporal distances—kinship that can survive the lack of everyday affirmation. These customary aspects are still utilized in the modern and everyday context today and can be most notably seen being illuminated into action in Jensen's (2005) frustrated account of the 1990s UN-led voter registration attempts where customary precepts of kinship refused to recognize allegedly false constructions of kinship by other parties. Here I argue that international law burnt its own fingers, unable to sociolegally override or overwrite customary rules of biological consanguinity.

This is because international law, and the UN voter registration system in the Western Sahara case, employs Western constructs premised on Western (patriarchal/paternalistic) notions of the family. Jensen goes into great detail about the voter registration project's attempts to ascertain

and use as its starting point “indigenous” ideas of consanguinity. But comparative anthropological studies have long established how humans have complex and varying ideas about how consanguineous relations are created, articulated and practiced. First, Morocco could only offer one primary relationship and it was not biological (consanguineous). The UN voter identification and registration attempts, and Spanish colonial censuses before it, registered male heads, not women’s tents. Genealogies were drawn out along patriline, and “tribe” was the primary group identifier from which to further identify “sheikhs” (male leaders of societal groups).⁹ Second, it is not just that women are missing from the record, but so too are other forms of kin-making with Sahrawi-specific prescriptions of customary authentication and legitimation.

Under conditions of war, some of these customary forms have been safeguarded by the Sahrawis against the risks of cultural (mis)appropriation by the war opponent and do not appear in Jensen’s detailed analysis of the voter registration attempts. These are, and were during voter identification/registration, how the Polisario and its constituent subscribers to self-determination were able to identify “fake sheikhs”. This is often seen being replayed in the post-1990s UN family visit flights across the berm, with mostly Moroccan-sided temper tantrums about who is visiting who. The Sahrawis on the other hand know who “real” kin are and this is why and how they have confidently stuck to their guns. One example of this is milk-kinship, which is very much a complementary consanguineous system—and female means—of calculating kinship and creating an imperceptible customary web of autochthony. Unlike blood kin who are likely to remain closer to the natal home (and more easily transcribed into the conventional Western idea of the patrilineal genealogical chart), milk kin is a web cast further and wider. Like blood kinship, milk-kinship is capable of being activated on recontact over long temporal timeframes.

In anthropology, we know that human societies make and explain kinship in an enormous variety of ways. One other such means of making relatedness is through “fictive” kinship. In other words, human society has ways of absorbing genetically unrelated kin and socially constructing (rewriting) them as biological.¹⁰ The ICJ archives on the Western Sahara case illustrate a key claim in Morocco’s thesis of preexisting “legal ties”. This is a type of fictive kinship-making (or staking a claim to it). In everyday life, human beings use a whole host of mechanisms to fake relatedness, such as cementing long-standing business relations, fixing “biological” errors such as infertility or missing heirs to reinscribe a new body into

the legitimate blood line, inventing/ignoring a cousin-like relatedness in order to fit into conventions such as cousin-marriage or monarchs enlisting sacred divinity. In the context of war, where identity becomes crucial to identifying the “authentic” native/indigenous body, there can be every reason (great stakes) to need to “fake” it. As Jensen’s book indicates, there were suspicions and accusations of invented kin ties between both warring sides, each locked in a battle to determine the authenticity of their bodies to their legal claims to soil. The ICJ’s final decision in its advisory opinion seems very much like the Abrahamic parable of the Judgment of Solomon.

This leads to the oft-asked question: who/what is “the Sahrawi”?¹¹ As with kinship, anthropology has long found that people subscribe and unsubscribe to various ideas about nationalism and nationalist identity. Furthermore, people can subscribe to several ideas at the same time and the analytical complexity can often lie in the temporal and spatial idiosyncrasies of people’s changing everyday lives, aspirations and life trajectories. This may not seem helpful to other academic disciplines looking for more concrete explanations and patterns. But this is the messiness and richness of the everyday, the grounded, the local and the micro data.

For those in the Tindouf camps, and in the view *from* Tindouf *between* kin across the region, the identity term “Sahrawis” contemporaneously means those who subscribe to and are connected in the idea of a nation of people who support the self-determination and independence thesis. To be Sahrawi is to subscribe to this. How this translates into everyday subscription to the idea of self-determination varies; for instance some say, “Let’s just get on with the vote—then we will know the final decision,” where the vote is a means of knowing how much of the Sahrawi really exists and its ultimate positionality. Others are convinced the group vote will swing to independence. Certainly, the Tindouf camps pretty much contain self-determination/independence supporters. There really is no other reason to stay in the camps unless one has subscribed to these ideas. It is certainly not the case that the Polisario “forces” anyone to stay—the majority of residents have bought into the battle for homeland. Staying is a collaborative act of survival to keep the fight for international legal principles alive. They know if they leave the camps, the Sahrawi thesis would collapse because the camps constitute and symbolize the “headquarters” of the war, nationalism and statehood.

Across the region is a widely dispersed Sahrawi population that does not noticeably appear upon the radar. What is different about this part of the population is that although there are fervent subscribers to the

self-determination thesis, there are also those who nominally subscribe to it as they go about their daily lives in towns and cities far from the headquarters (the Tindouf camps). However, this nominalism contains its own force. Their narratives suggest they might spring to action in response to the immense opportunities that would open in the formal recognition of sovereign soil and a fully fledged nation-state. But what is very clear in their nominal everyday interest in the Sahrawi thesis is that they are not interested in the Moroccan thesis—the “Other” is not an option. On the ground across the region, the general sentiment is that this is where the most subscriptions could erupt from in the event of a self-determination vote (i.e. the “Algerian” and “Mauritanian” Sahrawis). The sentiment on the ground is that it is this very ethereal quality of subscription that is such an unknown for Morocco as the “Other”—the ICJ did not give it the baby, and an attempt to legally split the baby in half could trigger the appearance of the baby’s family. As the UN voter identification-registration attempts discovered, the ethereal nature of desert kinship has its own customary and time-honored gestalt, linear perspective and vanishing points.

Then there are the Sahrawis in the Moroccan-occupied territory of Western Sahara. The view from Tindouf is that this is the muddled domain (as Jensen showed) because this is the only place where the Moroccan thesis contains its “human capital” claims to autochthony. Inscribed into this geography is a long history of colonial interventions and shifting cartographies (such as the above-mentioned Ifni). These are *external* interventions in contradistinction to customary ideas about zones of influence. For instance, some of the old tribes such as the Reguibat and Awlad Delim had very large territories which make their precise zones of influence difficult to gauge, and likely in any case to have fluctuated along the historical continuum (as *internal* interventions). As the ICJ attempted to do, trying to pinpoint exactly who constitutes Sahrawis depends on who was allied with whom at the time of calculation. For the Sahrawis, the answer is deep kinship ties that are embedded into particular geographical places which serve as calculations of autochthony. Furthermore, the view from Tindouf as to how far and wide the geography of subscription to self-determination lies is the likelihood of oversubscription to the far-greater attraction of governing the “Self” rather than “being governed” by Morocco.

This is particularly linked to the Sahrawi characteristic of *asabiyah* as a predilection for accretion. It involves a high degree of social and structural cohesion by assimilating weaker or defeated individuals or groups. Mercer (1976) noticed this predilection among the biggest Sahrawi tribes, as a

pact between tribes, taking in members of another tribe or the vestiges of a whole tribe perhaps decimated in battle or natural catastrophe. The Reguibat appears to have received the most legendary attention from other scholars (Hart 1962; Damis 1983; de Chassey 1977; Caratini 1989a,b) who also ascribed the Reguibat's rapid expansion in the late nineteenth century to this cohesive assimilation. The Reguibat and other tribes will have thus had overlapping zones of influence, as well as (and often missed) regularized routes of travel through each other's zones. There is only one way this can be maintained (made and broken and remade) along a historical continuum, and that is through kinship.

It has become unequivocally apparent that over the years, Morocco has been moving settlers from its own nationals to inhabit the occupied territory. This has created the emergence of another entity, the "Moroccan Sahrawis," and this is where, in the view from Tindouf, the above-mentioned overlays of human geography over time and kinship become the most serious tool of calculation. The nationalist Sahrawis (including those living under occupation) see Morocco as engaging another tool of war—the (mis)appropriation of cultural practices and identity to create another claim to autochthony, and thus a voting constituency (Jensen 2005). It is clear in the Tindouf camps that families comprise near and distant relations that are cartographically positioned (or have origins/other relational links) inside Morocco's present-day borders, but these postcolonial borders do not correlate to customary ideas of their consanguineous historical cultural geographies. Thus, the occupied territory and southern/desert areas in Morocco-proper contain a complex kaleidoscope of "real" Sahrawis and "non"-Sahrawis within the category of "Moroccan Sahrawis", all of whom will be subscribers to one of the two legal positions. Who thinks who the Other is, is of course subjective to their kinship positions and aspirations and to the ways these might change along their life trajectories.

SAHRAWI WOMEN'S POLITICAL ARCHITECTURE AND THE CALCULATION OF AUTOCHTHONY

Today in Tindouf, the *quality of being* that is so central to the Sahrawi persistence in seeking self-determination is still retained and maintained in a customary system of calculating autochthony (and its culturally idiosyncratic ways). The domestic-reproductive domain of women is one private locality that Spanish colonizers and UN voter identification tools did not

enter. While men may know their genealogies, women literally make them; maternity certainty will always be more confident than paternity certainty.

Thus with regard to that old question “who/what are ‘the Sahrawi?’”, another way to look for the answer is through women. In everyday practice, *asabiyah* is made through familial absorption, family being the domain over which most women preside (Caratini 1995; Amoretti 1987), especially mature women and grandmothers. Fieldwork in the Tindouf camps and the extended familial webs across nomadizing families in the desert and in Mauritania found a strong cultural preference for matrilocality, creating discrete female kin clusters. This preference and marriage-divorce practices enable women to be property holders of the tent/household and children and retain these upon divorce. Regardless of the absence of men (economics, death, divorce and so forth), women are surrounded by and delimited by other women. This has the potential to create matricentric coalitions, but which may not be immediately visible in the distortions of close proximity, urban-like amalgamation, or when cast widely across the desert during nomadic movement and dwelling. A further aspect of the calculation of autochthony is its topographical nature—being able to name places in relation to happenings of kinship, places that may not have made it onto colonial cartographies or do not appear on modern maps anymore, but are retained inside genealogical transmission.

Sahrawi *asabiyah* signifies accretion through alliance-making and is legitimated by women who preside over the tent/household where, in a desert society, hospitality is vital to survival and carries sociopolitical significance as a “point of reception”. Women’s tents are a customary domain of politics, but appear invisible in analyses of “high politics” because they are located in the tent.¹² The Sahrawi concept of “under the same tent” brings all this together—the political reproductive capacity to produce and regulate society. Sahrawi anticolonialism sentiments began in the tent, long before refugeehood. It is no coincidence that women’s tents (providing men with political space) are the original and principle built structure in which the first ideas, radio transmissions and political subscriptions to self-determination and war were heard, discussed and decided upon to envisage a new postcolonial future. In practice, in the Tindouf camps today, women’s tents still live alongside each other in the daily practice of *asabiyah*. Foregrounding Sahrawi women illuminates the significance of the household as the central structure—both corporeal and symbolic—providing men with private political space and in which the consanguineous nature of national coalescence is enable.

While tents do constitute the domestic familial place in all its stereotypes, for nomads in an “empty” desert the tent structure is the only built structure and is entirely mobile. It simultaneously forms the heart of male political centrality. Women do not just own but make, put up and take down, move, manage and protect this heart of male investment because men are frequently on the move. Women are capable of and do move these tents themselves, albeit in shorter-range mobility than conventional male long-range movement. Women preside over these tents as their property in which men invest. Women are protected because it is precisely what they hold (the matri-genealogy) as trustees. This female political architecture casts a wide geographical web to protect the resources brought into them. Likewise at the higher organizational level, women’s assembling or summoning of kin and tents is a female structuration of society. This casts women in a very different light from the hidden, domestic, apolitical female, only caught sight of briefly flitting in the background of male action: they are architects in their own right who design and structure society.

The Tindouf refugee camps constitute a type of battle *frig* (collections of tents, pl. *firgan*), in which stratigraphic layers of society have assembled in response to a group-wide territorial threat. So too are they a Saharan city-state growing up from and persisting as important regional economic nodes in the trans-Saharan flows, reminiscent of the historic *qsar* (settled oasis or defensive fortified trading center, pl. *qsur*) from which emerged the early Mauritanian emirate city-states such as Adrar and Trarza, as well as Ma al-Aynin’s confederation in Smara.

The Sahrawis in Tindouf are gathered in a modern battle to fight for what is ancient territory and are engaged in a newly required vocabulary (international law) and social reconfiguring (the nation-state) to do so. The nature and vocabulary of *asabiyah* is not so far removed from the contemporary nature of nationalist consciousness, where the social organization of different types of population is the glue that holds the idea of the legal self together. The glue is kinship and this has been cast by desert women across a region considered to be heartlands. The kinship behind the Sahrawis is found in how they coalesce—and it is women’s tents that undergo the visual and symbolic fission and fusion of such coalescence.

Thus one way to see the ethereal enigma of the Sahrawis is the physical coalescence of tents as women’s property, through blood and milk as legitimated in the tent, not by men-only groups in an open desert. Furthermore, despite the highly stratified society defined by colonial scientists, a gathering of tents in a desert setting, by the very nature of that

ecological setting, will historically have needed to contain a stratigraphic mixture of castes, hierarchies and genealogical reckonings, as a range of specializations, to survive and maximize group survival. None of the Middle Eastern “tribal mountain villages” in the Sahara contains just one tribe, nor are there residential units that contain one hierarchy or caste. Moreover, tents move, and they move through a wide geography through which other tents move. Genealogical reckonings pass by each other; they may make fusing actions (such as marriage) or fissioning actions (from ordinary migratory distancing to those full-scale battles romanticized by the Western gaze).

It is, therefore, not far-fetched for different tribes, hierarchies, castes and any other classificatory labels assigned to externally perceived aspects of Sahrawi society to join forces in the face of adversity and to gather with the emphasis on the alliance-making of nationalist sentiment. This is why an analytical recontextualization of the Tindouf camps is necessary. Whether as battle *frig* or trading *qsar*, the political architecture of coalescing tents involves base units of families that form assemblages of the self-identifying population cast across the territory. The Arabic term *bayt* (room, house and dwelling) has been anthropologically translated as clan and family, but also implies something constructed. The population of single tents may expand in numbers and area to form large inter- and intra-familial “confederations” and then fragment and disperse again. The mutability of genealogies enables larger units to coalesce when necessary in order to deal in strength, thus making nomadic genealogies highly mobile, which Caratini (1995) observed among the Sahrawis (see also Bamyeh 2006). This paradox of the ritual reinforcement of blood ties is against a backdrop of a largely separate existence of small nomadic units scattered over vast areas (see Salzman 1980: 8–9).

This capacity for fission and fusion is finely tuned and analytically crucial: each tent is a miniature of the larger social system. What is different from the Western default model of central political organization is the ability of these large coalitions to fractionate into micro-sections without disturbing the overall social model. This gives the society a mobile resilience and adaptability (Murphy and Kasdan 1959) in the face of adversity and specialization over wide geographies. This is also reflected in Khuri’s (1990) concept of “the world as family”, linked through chains of alliances creating “constellations”.

CONCLUSION

The Western model of nation-states may be seen as single constellations, anchored in situ, requiring their populations to be nested inside that single unit. This is where the Moroccan thesis fell apart in the ICJ's collation of legal and anthropological data on the legal ties of body to soil, and why the 1990s UN voter identification process became so frustrated. What the Sahrawis perceive they have constructed in Tindouf is a nation-state model adapted to many and highly mobile constellations that can be cast and managed over a wide geographic area. The matri-focused nature of these constellations is what helps to tie the Sahrawi thesis together and enable it to circumnavigate borders, berms and blood ties and cannot be replicated by a Morocco unwritten consanguineously into this *quality of being* "Sahrawi". The view from Tindouf is one of a desert-wide, Sahrawi search for new strategies by exploring different social movements and questions about political organization, but one aspect is clear; such arguments are driven by the *shared* desire for self-determination. That desire is what separates a "Sahrawi" from a "non-Sahrawi", and the very ambiguous nature of these assemblages seems to be what holds Morocco back from the self-determination table.

NOTES

1. In my anthropological estimation *terroir* would be one way to attempt to describe the deeply phenomenological attachment the Sahrawis have to their *badiyah* as "beloved desert heartlands".
2. See also Heathcote's perceptive discussion on voicelessness in the international legal arena (2012: 119).
3. See Mundy's (2010: 127–138) perceptive point that there is in fact no "question" still outstanding; the ICJ determined the answer.
4. ICJ Reports (1975) p. 68, para. 162. <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?p1=3&p2=4&code=sa&case=61&k=69> and Botha et al. (2010).
5. Especially see Mark Granovetter's (1973) thesis on "the strength of weak ties".
6. Deleuze and Guattari (1993: 25) "The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be'", but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and ... and ... and ...".
7. This has been well theorized in the fields of critical refugee studies, postcolonial and subaltern studies.
8. *Asabiyah*: solidarity, social cohesion of a group to form community. See Gellner (2007: 203–18); Tibi (1997: 139); Weir (2007: 191); Rosenthal's (2005) translation of Ibn Khaldun's *The Muqaddimah*.
9. See Isidoros (2015) on the problem of "tribe".
10. Just as, on the flip side, biological relatedness can be purposely ignored and uncalculated.

11. Sahrawi in Arabic/Hassaniya originally means a dweller “of the” Sahara/Sahel. There is some disparity with the translation of Sahel into coastal/littoral. It may not necessarily mean the Atlantic coast, but the desert “shore” along the fertile edges of the Sahara Desert. See also respected scholars of the Western Sahara story: San Martin (2010), Zunes and Mundy (2010), Pazzanita (2006), Shelley (2004), Hodges (1987), Norris (1986).
12. The transformations of war, refugeehood, occupation and contemporary diasporic migration mean that the cultural and political significance of the Sahrawi tent may change. *Al-khayma* (the tent) has become an important cultural symbol to be communicated to the outside world (and appropriated by the Moroccan state’s communications of its own thesis and tourism marketing). And certainly the transition to urban-like and “fixed” dwellings in towns and cities means a material shift between different types of architectural “rooms”. In the Moroccan occupied territory, nationalist Sahrawis have put up a tent on the flat roof of their contemporary house and apartments in symbolic resistance.

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“For Us, Parliament Is a Tool for Liberation”: Elections as an Opportunity for a Transterritorial Sahrawi Population

Alice Wilson

When it comes to voting and the people of Western Sahara, the story which stands out for most observers is that of the repeated failure to hold the longed-for (at least from the point of view of Sahrawi nationalists) referendum vote on self-determination in order to achieve decolonization. The contours of the failure to hold such a vote are worth rehearsing briefly here: at the time of writing, the people of Western Sahara have been demanding for more than forty years the chance to carry out self-determination via such a vote. The UN first called for the decolonization of Spanish Sahara in 1965. Whilst it is not a prerequisite that self-determination for decolonization be achieved by means of a free and fair referendum, in the following years the former colonial power, Spain, took steps to prepare for a referendum on self-determination. In 1974, with a view to deciding the electorate for an eventual referendum, Spain conducted a census of the Sahrawi population living in the territory (*Sahara Español Gobierno General de la Provincia* 1975). Once the decolonization process was derailed, however, by the partial annexation of Western Sahara by

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Morocco and Mauritania, a referendum was out of the question as long as the war lasted. The ceasefire of 1991, and the subsequent establishment of a UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), seemed to bring the chance of a referendum back on the table. The UN even went so far as to vet the applications of 244,643 voters. By 2000, the UN had approved 41,150 voters from Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara, 6,875 from Morocco, 33,998 from the refugee camps near Tindouf and 4,389 from the diaspora community in Mauritania (Zunes and Mundy 2010: 214). Millions of dollars were spent ostensibly in the name of bringing about the referendum. But each of the UN's plans and frameworks for holding a referendum fell through (Jensen 2005; Theofilopoulou 2006; Zunes and Mundy 2010; see also Theofilopoulou in this volume). Since 2004, when Morocco made clear its refusal to continue with a referendum that would include independence as an option, the staging of a referendum on self-determination has been unambiguously off the table.

Beyond this story of persistent failure to stage the vote on which nationalist Sahrawis are so bent there is nevertheless another story in which Sahrawis have indeed availed themselves of opportunities to vote, time and again. Since 1976, a displaced Sahrawi civilian population, and over time an increasingly transterritorial community of Sahrawis, has taken part in elections organized through the national liberation movement for Western Sahara, Polisario Front (henceforth Polisario) and the state authority, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (RASD), which Polisario founded in 1976 for Western Sahara (Sahrawis living under Moroccan control also have the opportunity to take part in elections in Morocco, as the chapters in this volume by María Angustias Parejo Fernández and Victoria Vegailla del Moral explore). In the challenging conditions of a life in exile often marked by material shortages, the leadership of Polisario and RASD—a governing authority which, in practice, often functions as a fusion of the two entities—has expended considerable energy on what we might call the “work of elections”: planning and holding elections at local, municipal and national levels, setting out electoral laws for procedures and the eligibility of candidates, reforming those laws over time, introducing new ways of disseminating information about candidates to the electorate and devising ways of reaching out to a geographically complex community of Sahrawi nationalists spanning annexation, exile, Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara and diaspora communities. This essay explores what this intensive “work of elections” has allowed Western Sahara’s liberation movement to achieve.

In taking as my object of study some of the implications of the fact of holding elections, I follow a different path from conventional studies of elections which might typically focus on who competes, who votes, who wins and who loses. Anthropologist Jonathan Spencer (2014: xvii–xviii) suggests somewhat provocatively that “Scientifically, elections tend to be apprehended as statistical events, and the bulk of academic study consists of tables and calculations and mountains of figures [...] The analysis of elections is usually profoundly teleological; who won, and by how much, is taken to be the only really interesting question.” He nevertheless counters that “elections are also cultural, and therefore moral, events” (Spencer 2015: xvii). It is this broader and anthropological approach to elections that I pursue here. For instance, heeding Mukulika Banerjee’s (2014, 2011) exploration of how Indian voters experience elections as *communitas* or the temporary suspension of daily inequalities and hierarchies, I ask what kind of community the “work of elections” organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps allows Sahrawi voters to experience. Likewise, mindful that technologies of elections, such as the casting of a secret ballot, have been interpreted as enactments of an idealized relationship between governing authorities and enfranchised citizens (Willis and el Battahani 2010), I examine the relationships between governing authorities and governed constituencies that Sahrawis are able to enact through their electoral technologies. In addition, and in line with the wider interests of this volume, I ask what sorts of connections may be made between the local, national and international levels of the Western Sahara conflict through the “work of elections” as engineered from the refugee camps.

The following analysis draws on my ethnographic fieldwork carried out with Sahrawi refugees, with a focus on the refugee camps, between 2006 and 2014, including two years of fieldwork in 2007–09.¹ First I offer a brief overview of how the precolonial period, Spanish colonial times and then the conflict period have seen the mobility of those who have come to call themselves Sahrawis go from a mobile pastoralist to transterritorial setting. Next, acknowledging prior histories of voting and the selection of political figures amongst Sahrawis, I describe the nature of the elections organized from the refugee camps and some of the limitations for a researcher wishing to study those elections. I then analyse some effects of the “work of elections” for nationalist Sahrawis. These include the possibility for Sahrawis to “imagine” (Anderson 1983) themselves as a transterritorial national community; the embodiment through electoral constituencies of an idealized vision of the structure of Sahrawi

society; and the opportunity to forge connections between Sahrawis, and with other national and international audiences. I conclude by reflecting how, ultimately, the “work of elections” offers Sahrawis, in the camps and beyond, the chance to put into practice the notion of a Sahrawi national electorate, even in the absence of the staging of a referendum on self-determination.

FROM MOBILE PASTORALISM TO TRANSTERRITORIALITY

The people who currently commonly refer to themselves as Sahrawis have long been invested in mobile lifestyles.² The Saharan areas of northwest Africa where Sahrawis have traditionally lived—which in today’s terms span the disputed Western Sahara and parts of southern Morocco, northern Mauritania and southwest Algeria—were suited to the mobile husbandry of livestock (sheep, goats and camels according to varying climatic conditions). Mobile pastoralism and related activities such as raiding, trading and long-distance transportation were the main sources of livelihood for Sahrawis into the mid-twentieth century. Particular tribes or groupings of tribes dominated different areas of territory in the precolonial context (see Caratini 1989; Lydon 2009; López Bargados 2003).

Spain officially acquired the colony that it would name Spanish Sahara at the Berlin Conference of 1884–5. The borders of Spanish Sahara were only delineated over time (see San Martín 2010), and Spain’s territorial control beyond the coast only increased after what, in colonial terms, is referred to as the “pacification” of the tribes in 1934. Sahrawi sedentarization is generally reckoned to have taken off from the 1950s when Spain’s exploitation of mineral and fishing resources accelerated (Hodges 1983), although some Sahrawis were still moving herds and tents across the pasturelands at the time of Spain’s 1974 census.³ Indeed the enforced end of inter-tribal warfare under Spanish rule meant that new possibilities for mobile pastoralism emerged, including the novelty of nomadic encampments composed of a mix of tribes (Molina Campuzano 1954: 8).

From the outbreak of the dispute that, since 1975, has played out between Polisario and Morocco for internationally recognized sovereignty over the territory, Sahrawis have adapted and deployed mobility in a novel and challenging context—and this context itself has naturally altered over the course of the conflict. From late 1975, several thousand Sahrawis fled from the partial annexation of the territory by Morocco and Mauritania. From early 1976, these displaced Sahrawis gathered in refugee camps that

were formed near the Algerian military base of Tindouf, some 50 km from the border with Western Sahara. As Morocco went on to consolidate its annexation of the larger, westerly, coastal portion of Western Sahara while Polisario's army, the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army (ELPS), took control of a smaller, easterly portion of Western Sahara (the two parts being divided by a Moroccan-built military wall or berm), the Sahrawi population found itself separated, divided between annexed and exiled Sahrawis. After the 1991 ceasefire, there began to be greater freedom of movement for the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria. Some refugees, tired of the harsh conditions in the refugee camps, made long-term migrations to Mauritania, Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara—which entailed taking an oath of loyalty to the Moroccan king—or, from the late 1990s, Spain or other European destinations such as France, Italy and Belgium.⁴ Nevertheless, as we shall see shortly, such migration does not necessarily mean that the persons involved have disengaged from the refugee camps and nationalist politics. From the early 2000s and the easing of border restrictions between Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara and northern Mauritania, it became easier for both annexed and exiled Sahrawis to make short-term visits to see relatives from the “other” community—although Sahrawis living under Moroccan rule who planned to return to the annexed areas would have to conceal these visits from the Moroccan authorities in order to avoid reprisals on their return. Refugees also enjoy making short-term trips to and from the Polisario-controlled pasturelands. In addition, several generations of Sahrawi students have studied abroad, hosted by “friendly” countries (including Algeria, Cuba, and, prior to the Arab Spring, Libya and Syria). As I have described elsewhere (Wilson 2014), the refugee camps can be thought of as an anemone, with persons making cyclical movements away from, and back to, the camps.

As a result, Sahrawis have become a transterritorial community, spanning a population living under Moroccan rule, an exiled population in Algeria and diaspora communities of migrants and students in North Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.⁵ Nationalism is conventionally associated with a fixed territory, and indeed in the Sahrawi case, Sahrawi nationalism focuses on the desire to liberate the perceived home territory of Western Sahara. As we shall see, however, the Sahrawi nationalist leadership has introduced innovative adaptations which allow Sahrawi nationalism to flourish across a transterritorial community. The organization of elections is one such area.

ELECTIONS ORGANIZED FROM THE SAHRAWI REFUGEE CAMPS

A wide range of elections are organized from and through the Sahrawi refugee camps. Yet Polisario and RASD did not introduce the notion of an electorate composed of those identifying as Sahrawis. Rather, an electorate comprising Sahrawis, specifically those resident in the territory now known as Western Sahara, came into being under Spanish colonial rule. Elections were introduced as one means of facilitating Spanish rule during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. More broadly, Spain (like other colonial authorities) also sought to facilitate its rule by enlisting the support of indigenous political authorities—even if this entailed creating such authorities. Sahrawi tribes had tribal leaders, *shuyukh*, but as Pablo San Martín (2010: 44) observes, Spain found it necessary to imbue tribal leaders with authorities that had previously not been within their purview.

A Sahrawi electorate for Spanish Sahara took shape from 1963 with the holding of local elections for El Ayun and Villa Cisneros. In 1967, the first elections for a Spanish-instigated council of tribal leaders, called the Djemaa, were held. These electorates were composed only of Sahrawi men—although, as shown in Joanna Allan’s ([forthcoming](#)) research on feminist nationalism under Spanish Sahara, Sahrawi women’s associations campaigned for women to be included in voting. For instance, a Sahrawi women’s group demanded that women be granted the right to vote from age 14, the age at which they were legally allowed to marry (Allan [forthcoming](#)).

Whilst formal suffrage was introduced under Spanish colonialism, the notion of popular participation in decision-making (albeit not in the guise of formal voting) was not unfamiliar to Sahrawis. At least some Sahrawi tribes operated a tribal council (*djemaa*) for collective decision-making (Caro Baroja 1955: 23–4). Nevertheless, such a council is perhaps best understood in terms of what Pierre Bourdieu (1962: 16–24) has called a “gentilial democracy”, composed of members who conform to an elite profile—in the Sahrawi case male tribesmembers enjoying a prestigious reputation. Women, weak males and dependents would have been excluded.

The practice of holding elections for Polisario and RASD officers can thus be helpfully understood as drawing on at least three prior traditions of popular participation in decision-making. These would be long-standing local principles of consultation and decision-making through a tribal

council, but updated to include a wider remit of citizens; the precedent under Spanish Sahara for an electorate of all (male) Sahrawis; and thirdly the socialist revolutionary tradition of elections, with which the vanguard of Polisario would have been familiar and eager to disseminate amongst the wider population. The third of these traditions heavily influenced the form and institutions in which elections took place. In particular, Polisario set out to emulate the popular committees and congresses of Muammar Qadhafi's population revolution, as launched from 1974 in Libya (see Vandewalle 1995).

There are two main parallel areas of electoral activities in the refugee camps. On the one hand there are elections that are specifically for Polisario events and offices. These include the system of congresses. Most important is the Popular General Congress (PGC), which is a Polisario (and not a RASD) event. At the time of writing, the most recent PGC was the 14th, held in the Dakhla refugee camp in December 2015. In addition, every few years congresses are held for the workers', women's, youth and student unions. In the 1980s, there were also local-level congresses held at the level of a district (*daira*) within each refugee camp or province (*wilaya*): El Ayun, Smara and Dakhla and, from 1985, Ausserd.⁶ On the other hand, there are also elections for specifically RASD positions. These include the Sahrawi National Council (SNC), or what is colloquially known amongst refugees as the Parliament. The SNC elections are usually held a few months after the PGC.

In the organization of the elections and their statutes, a division is clearly made between RASD and Polisario institutions. Nevertheless in practice the two channels of elections are connected. Persons voted into office within Polisario can go on to be appointed to a RASD position. For instance, PGC delegates elect from amongst their number the members of Polisario's National Secretariat as well as the Secretary General of Polisario. Whilst it is not a requirement that a RASD minister be appointed from amongst the members of the National Secretariat, many ministers do enjoy the prestige of having received (indirect) popular endorsement through election to the National Secretariat. In the case of the Secretary General of Polisario, the person elected is appointed by virtue of that role to the position of President of RASD. From 1976 until his death in 2016, Mohamad Abdelaziz was re-elected and reappointed to both positions.

In both the Polisario and RASD systems of political participation and representation, there is a shared principle of encouraging “participatory democracy”. This is the idea that decision-making and policy making

should be made open to the input of as wide a range of people as possible. Thus, elections in either of the two channels described are preceded by discussion meetings. At such meetings, the grassroots of the constituency concerned are invited to attend and make comments, criticisms and suggestions. Elsewhere I have discussed how these meetings can be understood as a recycled version of a tribal council or *djemaa*—but staged in the context of the liberation movement, rather than in the context of a particular tribe (see Wilson 2016). Refugees do avail themselves of such opportunities to speak out, as I was able to observe when I was invited to attend such meetings during my fieldwork. In the case of the meetings preceding a PGC, the comments from the floor are recorded into a report which is read out at the end of the meeting. Attendees can say if they think that the report is a fair reflection of the discussion and request amendments if they feel otherwise. This report then gets “handed up” to the next meeting level of the representatives just elected. So the comments, in theory, do not “disappear” but are raised and discussed until, finally, the PGC delegates vote on policy decisions.

Another important feature of the elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps is that the criterion on which a person is incorporated into an electoral constituency is not residency. Instead one’s electoral constituency is decided according to how one is perceived to participate in the work of the liberation movement. As a consequence, in any given household the adult members may actually vote in different constituencies. For instance, if the father is in the army, then he votes in an ELPS constituency. If a mother works for the Ministry of Education, then she votes in the ministry constituency. Migrants living in one of the diaspora communities for the purposes of work or study are invited to vote in a diaspora constituency. There is, in addition, what I call a “home front” category. This constituency accommodates refugees in the Sahrawi refugee camps whose perceived contributions to the liberation movement are performed through work from their home. This constituency concerns mostly women (on which more below). Such work might involve hosting visitors to the refugee camps and participating in public services at the local level—but also, on a more fundamental level, the work of domestic reproduction in the harsh conditions of exile in the desert.

Elections organized from the refugee camps are not contested between multiple parties. Polisario envisages allowing multiple political parties after the achievement of independence, but until then all candidates stand as members and supporters of the liberation movement. This does not mean

that the elections are not contested, however. Voters are encouraged by electoral officials to select candidates after weighing up different notions of qualification for candidacy, such as experience, education and competence (Wilson 2016). There is also the controversial question of the extent to which, at least in some cases, a candidate's chances of election may be influenced by his or her tribe as well as their position within the status groups that are characteristic of Sahrawi society (the influence of which Polisario has sought to undermine) (Wilson 2016). Whilst I was able to observe voters discuss such questions amongst themselves, I also became aware that on many issues surrounding a “teleological” approach to elections—such as who won and by how much—the governing authorities in the camps favoured discretion. To my knowledge, the detailed results for polls were read out once, unrecorded for the media, in a particular constituency. As a result, it is very difficult for a researcher—or a refugee—without privileged access to electoral officials to obtain a detailed picture of electoral outcomes for all the constituencies. Nevertheless to the extent that these elections were “cultural” and “moral” events (Spencer 2014), they were very much available to the observation of researchers (and refugees). The next sections suggest some of the ways that these elections elaborated a repertoire of significant imaginary and material practices for Sahrawi nationalists within and beyond the refugee camps.

A TRANSTERRITORIAL ELECTORATE

How much does nationalism, and indeed the claiming and staging of state power, depend on the identification of a claimed national territory? Benedict Anderson (1983: 19–20) has linked the rise of nationalism and that of territorial approaches to sovereignty (as opposed to other ideas of sovereignty legitimized on divine or dynastic grounds). In his study of how contemporary concepts of territory arose, Stuart Elden (2013: 323) observes that “the relation between the nation and the state takes place within the spatial framework that the concept of territory produces”. Yet Elden cautions against assuming that territory is a necessary precondition for nationalism, writing that even if the “idea of the state and territory [...] preceded the nation”, at different historical moments “in practice it was much more complicated and geographically variegated” (Elden 2013: 323).

In the contemporary world, studies of globalization (e.g. Sassen 1996) and diasporas (e.g. Lavie and Swedenburg 1996) have problematized the

notion that territory is the necessary bedrock of national sovereignty and national identity respectively. In a sense, though, cases of long-term displacement and/or diaspora where there are major obstacles to the claiming or full international recognition of a homeland, such as for Sahrawis, Tibetans, Palestinians or Tamils, suggest an ambivalent relationship between nationalism and territory. The place of territory is apparently confirmed to the extent that the nationalism of each of these is firmly attached to a territory. In the Sahrawi case, this corresponds to Western Sahara/former Spanish Sahara. At the same time, though, the dispersion of a population across discontinuous territories due to exile and diasporic migrations highlights how nationalism may flourish in the absence of an embodied experience of access to territory. As Sidi Omar has observed of Sahrawis living outside Western Sahara, “[...] though they have had to live in various exilic, diasporic and transnational spaces, the Sahrawis have been able to construct a national identity through their everyday performance of that identity and their engagement in the political struggles attached to it” (Omar 2012: 152).

Omar (2012) discusses how the institutions set up by RASD have been instrumental in allowing Sahrawis to experience membership in a Sahrawi national community. If national communities “are to be distinguished [...] by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1983: 6), here I highlight how the practice of elections, and the attendant discussion meetings and congresses, allows Sahrawis to “imagine” themselves as a transterritorial community comprising Sahrawis in the homeland *as well as* those in exile and in the diaspora. For instance, during preparations for a Popular General Congress, pre-PGC discussion meetings to raise items for the agenda and to elect delegates are held not only in the refugee camps but also in the diaspora communities such as those of Mauritania, Spain, France, Belgium and Cuba. In elections for the SNC, voting booths are staged not only in the refugee camps but also in the Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara. Members of the ELPS who are stationed on military duty at the time of the elections vote in those stations—in the physical territory of Western Sahara. (For military personnel not serving in the Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara, there are also military voting stations in the refugee camps.) At the time of the 2014 SNC elections, plans were also discussed for the future roll-out of voting to civilians living in the new towns of Polisario-controlled Western Sahara.⁷ The inclusion of Sahrawis living in Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara faces the challenge that pro-Polisario activists there risk persecution by the

Moroccan authorities (Human Rights Watch 2012; Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights 2015). Nevertheless, annexed Sahrawis are implicated in the PGC to the extent that the National Secretariat, formally elected at the PGC, includes the membership of persons from the Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara whose names are kept secret for their own safety. In addition, at the 13th PGC in 2011, representatives from Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara attended the Congress for the first time since 1991 (United Nations Security Council 2012: 2).

Elections are of course not the only means through which Sahrawis in different locations have the opportunity to imagine themselves as a transnational community. Where resources and travel documents permit, Sahrawis readily make physical trips between different communities of Sahrawis. There are also virtual means of keeping connected. Conducting fieldwork between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s, I was able to see both the end of the circulation of cassette tapes sent from Sahrawis in one location to another (via a friend or relative making the physical trip) and the beginning of mobile phones and other means of real-time communication (e.g. Deubel 2012: 303). In addition to such physical and virtual networks, the manner of staging of elections brings the added dimension of allowing Sahrawi nationalists to imagine themselves and indeed *act* as an activist, transterritorial political community.

EMBODYING AN IDEALIZED COMMUNITY

Through elections, an electorate is not only called upon to come together; it is called upon to come together *in specific forms*. An electoral system, including the definition of who is awarded a vote and how constituencies are organized, is a powerful means of constructing and mapping the political community—and a means that is explicitly endorsed by the governing authorities in question. The principle of each person having one vote, which has become the norm for elections to be considered democratic, is a strong statement prescribing the equality, in principle, of each voter as compared to another. This is what makes elections so special in India, Mukulika Banerjee describes, despite the fact that for the most part the results of the elections do not change the poverty in which so many millions of voters live. For the day of elections, each person’s vote counts as much as, and no more or no less than, any other person’s vote. She continues:

Elections therefore emerge as aesthetic and ritual moments that allow for the inversion of the rules of normal social life. The resulting *communitas* created a heightened awareness of what was missing in everyday hierarchical life, while simultaneously providing a glimpse of democracy's ideals of egalitarianism and cooperation. (Banerjee 2011: 95–6)

In elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps, the principle of one vote for each person is observed. But the criteria on which the electoral constituencies are formed are unusual in taking a functionalist approach. One is incorporated into the electoral constituency where one is perceived to be making one's own contribution to the efforts of national liberation, whether this is the head of a household, a ministerial employee, a soldier in the army, a student, a worker abroad or a nationalist Sahrawi living under Moroccan rule. This functionalist approach as a means of structuring electoral participation carries its own implications. Perhaps most immediately, the structure of electoral constituencies brings into being an idealized embodiment of the Sahrawi national community. In this idealized vision, each Sahrawi is an activist, in some way, for the national cause. Everyone is involved. This is an extremely important component of an idealist vision of the national cause. By the 2000s, in practice many refugees (and indeed the Polisario leadership) experienced concern that not everyone was interested in being involved in the same way, and at the same personal cost, as had been the case in the past. Refugees looked back with nostalgia on the early days of exile when they recalled that “everyone” had worked for the liberation movement—whereas by the 2000s schools and healthcare centres in exile were understaffed because some refugees prioritized going to work in other, more lucrative areas. Migration from the refugee camps to Europe had been perceived in the 1990s by the Polisario leadership, and some refugees, as a form of betrayal (Gómez Martín 2011: 53). It was therefore a shift that, in the 2000s, Polisario officially recognized migrants in the diaspora as playing a part in the national cause (Gómez Martín 2011: 120). The structuring of electoral constituencies thus presented an idealized embodiment of the Sahrawi national community where “everyone” could be committed to the liberation cause, even if in practice there were ongoing concerns about how some people seemed to be prioritizing the pursuit of greater material security over working directly for public services in the refugee camps.

Another effect of the structuring of the electoral constituencies can be interpreted as egalitarian—in the sense of suggesting not merely that

each person is equal to any other, but also that each way of contributing to the liberation movement deserves recognition, alongside other ways of contributing. An alternative aspect can be interpreted as less equalizing, however. The design of the electoral constituencies reinforces that Polisario operates a deeply gendered division of labour in its conceptualization of contributions to the national liberation. Some constituencies are exclusively male. This is the case for the military constituencies and also for the Consultative Council (a SNC constituency in its own right), which is the RASD body composed of tribal leaders and therefore exclusively male. Ministerial constituencies, though mixed, have more male than female voters (at least according to my observation in some ministerial pre-electoral discussion meetings). This is a reflection of the wider gendered division of labour endorsed by Polisario whereby the “home front” constituencies are overwhelming composed of women. This reiterates the notion that domestic labour, as given official recognition by Polisario, is construed to be primarily a female domain. Domestic labour in the Sahrawi refugee community (which is extremely onerous, given the harsh desert conditions and lack of mains electricity for most refugee families) is at least being recognized at the national level—which cannot always be said of other national discourses. But, in the view of some feminist critics, official endorsement of the feminization of domestic labour would run counter to Polisario’s wider official policy of promoting the emancipation of women.⁸ Through the electoral constituencies, the elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps conjured up the idealized Sahrawi body politic, at least as officially endorsed by Polisario. This body politic was activist, gendered and reproduced through the very act of holding elections.

PARLIAMENT AS A “TOOL FOR LIBERATION”

Thus far I have considered how elections performed important work for the internal regeneration of the community of Sahrawi nationalists. These elections allow Sahrawi nationalists to imagine themselves as a transterritorial national community. The elections furthermore embody an idealized version of the Sahrawi body politic. Yet the elections also allowed specific institutions and bodies to be produced, such as the delegates for the PGC, the National Secretariat and the SNC (the legislative body). If we consider the latter, we can also see that elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps allow not only “internal” benefits (that is, imagining a transterritorial community and embodying an idealized political community) but

also what might be considered “external” or outward-looking benefits. Specifically, elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps allow the Sahrawi nationalist leadership to make connections across local, national and international contexts.

At the local level, we have already seen that the electoral constituencies are designed in such a way as to foster connections between geographically disperse Sahrawi communities: in exile, in the Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara, in the Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara and in the diaspora communities. For making connections at national and international levels, the SNC was especially important. The fact that the Sahrawi exiled community had a directly elected legislative body allowed these Parliamentarians to strike up connections with other Parliamentarians. Thus, the SNC was not only a body for discussing and approving legislation and for holding members of the RASD government to account (see Wilson 2016). It was also an outward-looking body poised to forge connections with equivalent bodies. This facet was prominent in the mind of candidates for the SNC whom I interviewed in the 2008 elections. Whilst I found that most candidates were unspecific as to particular policies that they proposed to pursue should they be (re)elected (Wilson 2016), several volunteered their thoughts on the importance of the parliament as a diplomatic device for the promotion of the national cause. As one incumbent MP stated, “for us, Parliament is a tool for liberation”. The SNC was a body with which other national parliaments of countries which recognized RASD could engage in an official capacity. Formal occasions relating to the SNC are also opportunities for inviting national and international parliamentary dignitaries to visit the refugee camps. At the 40th anniversary of the SNC (founded in November 1975), the SNC welcomed delegations including members of the Algerian Parliament as well as representatives of the Commission of the African Union (of which RASD is a full member) (Sahara Press Service 2015). Foreign parliaments could also offer training to SNC parliamentarians. Some SNC members mentioned to me, for instance, that they had benefited from the training in human rights offered to them through the Algerian Parliament.

There is perhaps greater potential for making connections at national and international levels through the fact that elections are organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps. Although RASD members of the Pan-African Parliament had the opportunity to take part in electoral observation on the part of the African Union, to my knowledge the governing authorities in the refugee camps do not currently avail themselves of the opportunity

to invite electoral observers from the African Union to their own elections. In 2008 and 2012, I came across members of the Algerian press covering the RASD elections, but no official delegations from other national or international parliamentary bodies. The fact that the elections in the refugee camps do not accommodate multipartyism, which is currently generally considered to be a procedural minimum for democratic elections, may be a factor discouraging the Sahrawi nationalist leadership from bringing wider international attention to its elections.⁹ Whilst RASD elections do not conform to this norm, those held in the kingdom of Morocco do accommodate multipartyism. In a context where Morocco and Polisario each consider their own measures towards democratization to be a means of legitimizing their claims over Western Sahara (Clarke 2006; Messari 2001), arguably it is not in Polisario's interests to overexpose itself to a wide public area in which it does not meet some of the internationally recognized standards of democracy that are observed in Morocco.¹⁰

CONCLUSION: REHEARSING A NATIONAL CONSTITUENCY

Many in-depth aspects of the preparation for, carrying out of, and aftermath of elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps remain little known to external audiences. Nevertheless, the manner in which these elections are conducted, and the fact that they have taken place continually over the decades since the onset of the partial annexation of Western Sahara, has had significant consequences for the Sahrawis whose representation these elections seek to serve. I have considered three aspects in particular here: how the roll-out of these elections allows Sahrawis to imagine themselves and act as a transterritorial community of nationalists; the manner in which the structuring of electoral constituencies projects an idealized vision of the Sahrawi body politic; and the extent to which the very fact of holding elections and producing institutions through elections helps the nationalist leadership to make connections with local, national and international audiences in order to reiterate the Sahrawis' quest for self-determination and national liberation.

In these cultural and moral aspects, elections organized from the Sahrawi refugee camps are an important means through which Sahrawis—whether located in the refugee camps, in annexed areas or in the diaspora—can participate in what Jacob Mundy, writing of the Sahrawi exiles in Algeria, has called “performing the nation” and “prefiguring the state” (Mundy 2007) and what Fiona McConnell, writing of Tibetans in India, has called “rehears-

ing the state” (McConnell 2016). In both cases, from contexts of exile, a governing authority seeks to provide for the welfare of a displaced community, coordinates and fosters nationalism and embarks upon the international diplomatic representation of this national community. In the case of Sahrawis, “the camps became a microcosm, a pre-figurative lived model, of what an independent Western Sahara would, and still could, look like” (Mundy 2007: 275). The prospect of a referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara is, for the moment, decidedly bleak. But by organizing internal elections for a transterritorial community, which takes on idealized characteristics through the very organization of the elections, Sahrawis repeatedly rehearse their existence as a national electorate—as if rehearsing for the referendum itself. Such rehearsals fall short of the changes in the international political sphere that would be necessary for the holding of a referendum to become feasible. At the same time, such rehearsals make it all the more likely that Sahrawis will insist that, in any solution to the conflict, they, as a national electorate, will have been consulted.

NOTES

1. My research on elections in the Sahrawi refugee camps is part of a broader research project. I examine how the attempted making of the social relations of state power in exile entailed the complex manipulation and recycling of the social relations of tribes. I apprehend tribes, at least at specific historical moments in what became Western Sahara, as an alternative “project of sovereignty” to state power (see Wilson 2016).
2. “Sahrawi” is a contested term (see Zunes and Mundy 2010: 92–3, 110–1), since the word has a wider meaning in classical Arabic of pertaining to the desert. Some commentators consequently prefer to write of Western Saharan nationalism. I follow the common practice of Sahrawis themselves in using Sahrawi to describe the Hassaniya-speaking people who identify with the territory of Western Sahara as a homeland—nevertheless recognizing that there are Sahrawi communities whose historical places of residence included neighbouring areas of present-day Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania.
3. Konstantina Isidoros (2015: 173–174) nevertheless suggests that Sahrawis themselves may not have perceived that they were settling in urban environments, but may have experienced the move to colonial towns as a temporary response to drought and conflict.
4. On Sahrawi migration to Spain, especially from the refugee camps near Tindouf, see Gómez Martín 2011. On the complex political and economic nuances of Sahrawi refugees’ movements from, and back to, the refugee camps, see Wilson 2014.

5. It is notoriously difficult to assess the size of the respective communities of Sahrawis (as well as Moroccans living in Western Sahara) due to the lack of public access to census data compiled using reliable access to the communities in question (even if such data exist). The UN results for potential adult voters in 2000 for various communities of Sahrawis were cited earlier. Gómez Martín (2011) estimates that in the 2000s Spain hosted some 10,000 Sahrawis (hailing from both the refugee camps and the Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara). Spain's community of Sahrawis is generally considered to be the largest of the diaspora communities in Europe. Sidi Omar (2012: 152) considers the diaspora communities to be “relatively small but active”.
6. In 2012, the camp that had begun as a residential women's school, named February 27 after the date of the founding of RASD, was made into a fifth wilaya, Boujdour.
7. On the creation of new towns in Polisario-controlled Western Sahara, see Wilson 2014.
8. Polisario's policies of (claiming to) promote women's emancipation have received considerable scholarly (and activist) attention. Whilst some accounts are largely laudatory (e.g. Rossetti 2008, 2012), important criticisms have also been made (e.g. Allan 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014).
9. The notion that multipartyism is a prerequisite for democratic practice has been questioned by scholars (e.g. Whitehead 2002) as well as by electorates desirous of greater participation in meaningful deliberation (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1997).
10. The presence of multipartyism per se does not guarantee a transparent and accountable political administration. In Morocco's case, despite a multiparty electoral landscape, powers remain concentrated in the hands of the monarch (see e.g. Ottaway 2011).

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Conclusion

Conclusion

Francesco Cavatorta

In a 2016 piece, the Moroccan journalist and academic Omar Brouksy (2016) detailed how Morocco was embroiled in a diplomatic spat with the USA over the United Nations (UN) Security Council's resolution 2285. The spat begun when Morocco expelled the civilian personnel of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) from the disputed territory under its control over the use of the word "occupation" by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during a visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria. The USA were far from impressed with this decision and the resolution, which US officials drafted, included a statement fully supporting "the commitment of the secretary-general...towards a solution to the question of Western Sahara" (UN Security Council 2016). This latest crisis, irrespective of the long-term impact it may or may not have, demonstrates again the centrality of the conflict in Western Sahara in its global, regional and domestic (state/national and local) implications. It is precisely these three dimensions that the chapters in this book deal with.

The conflict in Western Sahara is one of the protracted conflicts around that have been with the international community for decades and whose final resolution always seems out of reach. The end of the Cold War

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contributed indirectly to the resolution of conflicts that had arisen in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s across the globe, including territorial disputes and civil conflicts from El Salvador to Nicaragua and from Cambodia to Angola and Mozambique. The conflict in Western Sahara, however, did not benefit from the end of the Cold war, although there were quite high hopes at the time that the “new world order” President George H. W. Bush envisaged would also compel the actors involved in it to finally come to an agreement over this disputed territory. The conflict thus continues to this day to characterize international politics, although it is often neglected because of more urgent and admittedly dramatic crises occurring across the globe. The global dimension of the conflict, however, is a good indicator of wider trends in international politics with its shifting alliances, conflicting national interests and attempts at repositioning. From this it follows that the international actors involved in the conflict, be they nation-states or international organizations, look at the conflict both through a set of assumptions about it and through the selfish interests they are promoting, which are not necessarily linked to the conflict itself.

Since the end of the Cold War and, increasingly, since the declaration of the War on Terror the USA and Algeria have become much closer than they used to be. This has inevitable implications for Morocco because the USA can employ the issue of Western Sahara to signal to Algiers potential shifts in international alliances. The same behaviour, in reverse, can be seen in the shifting attitudes of Russia, which is increasingly challenging US hegemony globally and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) specifically. Rather than voting for resolution 2285 in April 2016, Russia decided to abstain signalling to Morocco that Moscow might want to build better relations with Rabat. In turn this behaviour led Mohammed VI to rail indirectly against the USA in the wake of resolution 2285. In short, while both the USA and Russia might have a “normative” view of the conflict in and how it might be solved, the latter is also hostage to the shifts occurring at the global level because per se it does not seem to be very important or destabilizing for the international community. Western Sahara does not feature very prominently in global political discussions and in the foreign policies of the leading actors of the international community. This allows them to treat it often as an instrument to achieve objectives on different and more important diplomatic tables. In addition, the conflict in Western Sahara does not enjoy the media coverage or the engagement of global civil society nor does it have the spillover

consequences of what are deemed civilizational conflicts (i.e. Arab-Israeli conflict for instance).

It is interesting to note that at a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meeting to which he was invited following the April 2016 diplomatic row with the US Mohammed VI complained to his hosts that the relationship with the USA over Western Sahara is complicated in light of the changes in administrations in Washington. Mohammed VI's complaints make sense from a Moroccan perspective because they suggest a degree of unpredictability in the behaviour of a crucial partner and actor in the conflict and it is also, incidentally, a dig to the unpredictable nature of democratic politics. The statement the king made indirectly confirms a problematic feature of the conflict in Western Sahara, its relative irrelevance for big powers. It is precisely this relative irrelevance that allows the USA to change position over the issue when administrations or even state department officials change. We do not see the same level of "unpredictability" emanating from Washington on issues—in particular conflicts—that affect core national interests or domestic constituencies. In this respect, the international "irrelevance" of Western Sahara is both a blessing and a curse for the actors involved in it and wishing to find a permanent solution. It is a blessing because local dynamics to solve the conflict could be potentially unencumbered by the weight of international pressures. At the same time it is also a curse because it means that there is very little genuine and sustained engagement on the part of leading powers, which is in turn problematic for UN initiatives insofar as they tend not to enjoy the diplomatic support they need to succeed.

The regional dynamics, as the book illustrates powerfully, are all the more complicated. Central to this is the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco. Dating back to the immediate post-colonial period when the two countries fought a brief conflict in 1963 (the Sand War), the rivalry has been a prominent trait in the region before and after the Cold War. Algeria's support for the Polisario Front and opposition to the annexation of Western Sahara on the part of Morocco rested on two broad intertwined pillars. Firstly, Algeria was a socialist Arab republic committed to anti-imperialism and while not fully integrated in the Soviet bloc, it espoused a third-worldism (Malley 1996) that pitted the country against those accused of the "crime" of imperialism. Morocco, despite belonging to the same Arab world as Algeria did, fitted the bill because it prevented the self-determination of the Saharawi people and was aligned with the imperialist West in the Cold War. Secondly, Algeria believed it should be the leading power

in North Africa and began competing with Morocco immediately after independence to claim this mantle. Undermining Morocco in Western Sahara had therefore both an ideological dimension, but, crucially, also a strategic one. The end of the Cold War put to rest Algeria's ideological commitments to socialism and it was therefore expected that significant changes would occur in the country's foreign policy as well. Without the diplomatic support of the Soviet Union and the conservative Arab states, Algeria needed to find alternatives to its diplomatic isolation. Quite quickly the country adapted to the post-Cold War international environment and considerably improved its relations with France, the USA, the European Union (EU) and the Gulf monarchies, intervening for instance to mediate in the Iraq crisis of 1990–91 (Cavatorta 2009).

This re-direction on the part of Algeria and the fact that Morocco found itself on the winning side of the Cold War seemed to suggest that a rapid solution to the conflict in Western Sahara, which would be favourable to the Cherifian monarchy, would be found. In addition to this, during the first decade of the 1990s, the Algerian regime had to worry about its own survival and could hardly be concerned with the fate of the Sahrawis. Despite these favourable circumstances for ending the conflict, new regional dynamics intervened to prevent this from occurring. Firstly, Algeria's internal problems lasted for a considerable time and prevented the country from engaging meaningfully with Morocco and the wider international community, leading it to prefer the status quo. Secondly, internal problems affected Morocco as well, with the "gamble" of the so-called "alternance" occupying full-time domestic political actors and notably the monarch. The politics of succession to King Hassan II, however smoothly the process went, did distract in some ways from Western Sahara, an issue Morocco seemed to see as settled given the favourable international environment. Thus, despite a potential convergence in international relations between Morocco and Algeria, the rivalry persisted and, paradoxically, increased over time when the US-led War on Terror was launched. Both Algeria and Morocco became crucial actors for the USA in the region and the two countries vied for some sort of preferential treatment in order to bolster their role in the region. Rather than having a rapprochement under the leadership of the USA to which both countries are now close to, the rivalry intensified and the issue of Western Sahara became a focal point of mistrust once more.

In this context, the priorities of the USA in the War on Terror during the 2000s trumped all other issues with Morocco and Algeria becoming

crucial partners. There are three points that need to be underlined in this context and that explain the continued rivalry between the two countries. Firstly, the USA entertained strong bilateral relations with Algeria and Morocco, but did not make any serious effort to promote cooperation between the two countries, at times not even in the crucial domain of anti-terror intelligence. In this respect, the USA functioned exclusively as privileged partner and not as a facilitator for the rapprochement of Algeria and Morocco. This behaviour led the two North African countries to intensify their rivalry because each wanted to be the “stand out” ally of the USA in the region to derive material and diplomatic benefits from it. Secondly, the policy and behaviour of the USA found similarities with what the EU did during the 1990s and 2000s, namely strengthening bilateral relations without pushing strongly for a framework of south-south cooperation that would have contributed to ease the tensions between Morocco and Algeria with positive repercussions on Western Sahara. Thirdly, the presence of the USA in the Sahel area increased tensions because the War on Terror, conducted with its allies, has had a tendency to render the wider security environment more volatile with an increase in ideological extremism that has had consequences on wider regional dynamics (Keenan 2009).

In this context, the Western Sahara issue has “returned” as a source of tension between Morocco and Algeria whose respective constructions of the Sahel as an area of competition reflect their necessity to fulfil the role the USA have in mind for both countries rather than the possibility of collaborating. The absence of south-south cooperation and the intensity of the rivalry render a solution to the conflict more difficult because both Morocco and Algeria prioritize other policy objectives. This in turn means that Algeria privileges the status quo because it realizes it is unable to achieve the objective of Saharawi independence, while Morocco operates as if the issue were settled only to realize, periodically, that this is not the case because one incident or another demonstrates that this is not the case. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) is an empty shell that does not allow for meaningful cooperation and the absence of international pressure on North African countries to integrate perpetuates mutual suspicions. This is an aspect that has not been sufficiently examined.

The USA would have an interest in pushing for much closer collaboration between the armed services of Morocco and Algeria as well as their intelligence services to share information and collaborate because it would likely enhance the capacity of state actors to control effectively the vast Sahel area where all sorts of problems—terrorism, trafficking

and irredentism—have arisen in recent times (Lacher 2012). The USA, however, does not seem to be interested in fostering such widespread collaboration and still privileges, as mentioned, bilateral relations. It would certainly be difficult for the USA to enable Algeria and Morocco overcome decades of mutual mistrust, but no genuine attempt has been made despite the benefits this might provide. The necessity of cooperation in North Africa on these matters has become all the more relevant with the collapse of Libya and Mali and the attempts at destabilizing Tunisia. For its part, the EU is also guilty of undermining efforts at south-south cooperation especially when these efforts are far and genuine, as is the case in North Africa. The EU is unwilling to foster such cooperation despite its rhetoric for two principal reasons. Firstly, the EU prefers to conduct bilateral relations with countries in the MENA because it can extract greater benefits. Thus, pushing for south-south integration might strengthen the bargaining power of countries that are currently dependent on the EU for trade and investment would be self-defeating even if such south-south cooperation were to have a beneficial influence on the issues that currently divide North African states, including Western Sahara. Secondly, the EU is riven with conflicts and conflicting interests among member states. This prevents the EU from pursuing integrated policies that might endanger the key national interests of its members.

The domestic dynamics of Western Sahara are particularly important for Morocco. As some of the contributions clearly highlight the Moroccan monarchy sees sovereignty over this territory as a *fait accompli*. Questioning Moroccan sovereignty is a red line that Moroccan actors cannot really cross without expecting some form of sanction. The monarchy has attempted at various times to present plans that would solve the issue once and for all in the context of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory, but this has not met with much success and the territory remains contested. Aside from the genuine belief that the territory belongs to Morocco, the issue of Western Sahara allows the monarchy to employ the issue in order to solidify its rule. The nationalist credentials that Western Sahara provides the monarchy with are difficult to measure with any exactitude, but it is beyond doubt that deviant voices on the issue are not tolerated on the Moroccan political scene. This red line therefore constitutes an opportunity for the monarchy to present itself as the guarantor of national sovereignty rather than simply the guarantor of its own survival. Many ordinary Moroccans have internalized the sovereignty of Western Sahara and are therefore immune to any attempt at problematizing the

issue. It follows that the political parties and social movements that one might think would try to highlight the issue outside the nationalist framework would be “punished” for doing so. There is therefore a rush to rally to the flag and this prevents meaningful policy opposition. It is of course a condition of political participation in Moroccan politics that the parties not challenge Moroccan sovereignty in Western Sahara and this should be particularly relevant for left-wing movements that in theory at least should be attached to notions of equality and human rights. This does not occur and the nationalism surrounding the issue benefits the King in his role as protector and defender of the nation.

In addition to the benefits derived from depriving the opposition of a meaningful weapon to contest his power, the King draws benefits from Western Sahara by delegating security in the region to the a military that might have to be otherwise occupied through the provision of material goods, as is the case in neighbouring Algeria. However, what the King might gain in domestic standing does not play as well internationally. Since his accession to the throne, Mohammed VI has been busy projecting a democratizing and liberalizing image of Morocco abroad. The protests that erupted in February 2011 coinciding with the uprisings elsewhere in the region shook the image of a democratizing Morocco for a short time given the intensity and size of the demonstrations. For a few months, Morocco experienced what some might call a revolutionary moment. It ultimately failed because the monarch was able to contain the protests through a mixture of coercion, co-optation, manipulation of the opposition and the launch of further democratic reforms (Benchemsi 2012; Dalmasso 2012). Such reforms did not lead to genuine political change despite the promulgation of a new constitution and the monarchy remains the ultimate decision-maker in the country.

While the international image of Morocco as a democratizing and successful Arab state does not seem to have suffered publicly from the uprising of 2011 because the monarchical institution was not singled out for criticism, doubts have arisen about its genuine reformist drive. In fact the issue of Western Sahara damages the monarchy when it comes to transnational civil society in European countries in particular. While the EU and the government of both Spain and France do not much care about the fate of Western Sahara, the issue is relevant for an admittedly small number of civil society organizations that can potentially damage the international reputation of Morocco abroad by insisting that their government take the plight of the Sahrawis seriously. For the moment this has not occurred

for three reasons. Firstly, the Sahrawis are not very good at “selling” their cause because it does not much resonate when much greater crises and injustices exist in the region and beyond. Secondly, the role of Algeria in the crisis does not generate any enthusiasm or support among western governments because Algeria does not enjoy the same support as Morocco does. Finally, Western government have other priorities. All this, however, cannot prevent small but potentially influential pro-Sahrawi group from engaging their own domestic governments on this issue, creating problems for the image of Morocco.

In conclusion, the dynamics described point to the continuation of the “conflict” and the persistence of the status quo because current geopolitical conditions are unlikely to change in the short term. However, the certainties of the past have been shaken to the core before in the MENA and this might apply to Western Sahara as well.

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