

Western Saharan and Southern Moroccan Sahrawis: National Identity and Mobilization

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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 Río 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 *Ahel 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, catchphrases, 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 Veguilla 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 Ouarkziz, 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.htm>].
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 Hafeed 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 Ziguinat (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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