Settler Colonialism as a Structure: Interpreting Historic Moroccan Actions in Western Sahara

Amanda Taheri

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Settler Colonialism as a Structure:
Interpreting Historic Moroccan Actions in Western Sahara

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of the Arts
in
Ethnicity, Race and Migration

Amanda Taheri
Yale University
Advisor: Professor Wyrtzen
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Glossary of Terms
Below is a list of common terms that are used throughout my thesis. This page will serve as a reference for some terms, but these definitions are not complete by any means. These definitions serve to orient the reader, not explain the entirety of the terminology in a few sentences.

- **Nation**: A collection of people united by their belonging to the ‘imagined community’ as theorized by Benedict Anderson.
- **Nationalism**: Identification with an ‘imagined community’ of members who share similar experiences, histories and myths. Produces an ‘other,’ and can be utilized as a mobilizing ideology.
- **Sahrawi**: The indigenous population that inhabits the surrounding area of Western Sahara. Sahrawis consider themselves to be ethnically different than Moroccans and do not speak the same dialect.
- **Green March**: On November 6th, 1975 Morocco ‘peacefully’ invaded Western Sahara with civilians carrying Qurans, Moroccan Flags, and photographs of King Hassan II.
- **Black March**: How Sahrawis label the Green March, indicating the bad intentions and subsequent military invasion that occurred in the Northwestern part of Western Sahara.
- **Madrid Accords**: Following the Green March, Mauritania, Morocco and Spain signed a treaty essentially removing Spain from Western Sahara and instead giving the land to Morocco and Mauritania, with Spain maintaining some economic profits from the local industries. Sahrawis were strategically not included in the Accords.
- **The Berm**: A military sand wall that divides Western Sahara into the Occupied Territories and SADR. Created by the Moroccan Military from 1981-1987, the Berm is comprised of six separate military walls.
- **Front Polisario**: Sahrawi liberation and resistance movement founded in 1973 in opposition to colonialism. Works under the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, headquartered in Tindouf refugee camps.
- **Settler Colonialism**: An overarching structure of domination rather than a singular event, as theorized by Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini. Goal is the elimination of the native and replacement with settlers.
- **Colonialism**: Process of obtaining control over another population for the purposes of exploitation.
- **Irredentism**: an ideology that a territory must be restored to its previous boundaries. Historical restoration claims.
Chronology of the Region

1502  Spanish land in Western Sahara
1524  Area surrounding al-Daklha/Villa Cisneros informally returned to Saadian rulers
1884  The Congress of Berlin resulting with European powers dividing Africa
1884  Capitan Emilio Bonelli Hernado reconquered Villa Cisneros and established a military fortress, La Factoria
1936  Communist prisoners from the Spanish Civil War are transported to live in Villa Cisneros
1947  Spanish civilians begin settling in Villa Cisneros
1947  Bou Craa phosphate reserves were discovered, but not officially mined yet
1960  Global decolonization period as dictated by the United Nations
1963  Sand War between Algeria and Morocco over border claims
1973  Establishment of the Front Polisario
1974  Bou Craa mining operation begins to boom
1975  Moroccan Military invades the Northeast corner of Western Sahara on October 31st
1975  The Green March, ‘officially’ occurring November 6th
1975  The Madrid Accords on November 14th
1976  Morocco Napalm bombs camps in Western Sahara, Amalga.
1976  Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), Republique arabi sahraoui democratique (RASD) is declared
1979  Mauritania withdraws claims to Western Sahara, SADR only fighting Morocco for territorial claims
1980  Morocco begins the first wall construction of the Berm
1987  Morocco completes the sixth section of the Berm
"I’m indigenous, this is my land and I have been here for hundreds of years” Mansour pronounced as the skype screen crackled.¹ Pride and determination were laced throughout his words. This quotation could be placed into multiple different geographies and contexts, most commonly associated with Native American tribal claims and Palestinian territorial assertions; however, this assertion came from a local Sahrawi, an indigenous person from the contested region of Western Sahara. Mansour is a Sahrawi living in the Western Sahara capital city of Laayoune (El Aaiun), a city currently under Moroccan occupation. Mansour, his family and many local members in the community continue to make indigeneity and sovereignty claims to their homeland by mobilizing members in opposition of colonialism, specifically countering Moroccan settler colonialism in their homeland. Often overlooked on an international scale, Western Sahara has been cited as ‘Africa’s last colony,’ and remains to be a highly contested site in terms of administrative power, physical warfare, and livelihood.

Mansour’s citation references the longevity of his family history in the region but because of Moroccan historic and contemporary rule, Mansour and his family are deprived of their homeland. While it is globally recognized that Spain dominated Western Sahara’s colonial past, this thesis will argue that after Spanish forces left the region in 1975, instead of experiencing liberation, Western Sahara became a site of Moroccan settler colonialism that was enacted through the means of nationalist rhetoric. In order to make this argument, the connection of nationalism and settler colonial theory will be applied to specific sites of Moroccan colonial power. Specifically, this thesis will examine how Moroccan nationalist rhetoric has framed the settler colonial situation as a nationalist crusade.

¹ Mansour is a pseudonym from a Sahrawi I have been communicating with. For the purposes of his security and Yale IRB exemption, his real name will remain unknown and instead will be referenced as Mansour.
Western Sahara, or depending on what maps you are referencing, Moroccan Sahara, the Southern Provinces, and/or the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR/ RASD), is a disputed territory located to the south of Morocco along the Atlantic coast (Fig I). The map below visually depicts the proximity of Western Sahara to the Canary Islands, Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania. The latter three countries play foundational roles in the history and fate of the indigenous Sahrawi people. The current and historical situations in Western Sahara are both rooted in colonialism and the relationship between European powers and local African leaders of ambiguously defined territories. The definition of and creation of boundaries are a result of

Figure I: Map of Western Sahara with Spanish influence
previous colonial mapping practices and projects. Fig. I explicitly highlights the role of colonial powers, specifically Spain, as the towns and provinces are written in the colonial language, Spanish. This explicit strategy is apparent with the decision to label the Northern province Rio de Oro, meaning ‘River of Gold’ in Spanish, instead of designating its Arabic name, Oued Ed-Dahab. It is notable that this map specifically places a strong border line between Western Sahara and Morocco, articulating the political lean of the map creator.

Mapping, when analyzed as a practice, is a tool of empire as it actively dictates who is included and excluded, typically determined through the lens of economic value rather than by natural divisions and collective identity. The legacy of colonialism expressed through active mapping practices in the region implicates several separate empires, notably, Spain, Mauritania and Morocco, making Western Sahara a palimpsest: a site of historic and present colonial practices building on top of each other. This thesis will present several different maps that display the deliberate effects of mapping on indigenous populations and the nationalistic processes behind mapping.

To locate Western Sahara in a political realm it is necessary to comprehend which pieces of land mass are controlled by the Moroccan government versus which areas are controlled by the self-proclaimed nation of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR)/République arabe

*Figure II: Four Different Ways to Show Western Sahara and the powers controlling the specific regions*
sahraoui démocratique (RASD). Figure II illustrates the four most common ways to actively map the region. The first map on the left side depicts two separate nations, Morocco in red and Western Sahara in green. The hard border line emphasizes the sovereignty of each party, whereas the second map presents a dotted line indicating the disputed nature of the territory. The green coloring indicates the presence and desires of indigenous people to mobilize behind SADR/RASD. The third map exhibits the political situation in Western Sahara since 1975. The boundary where the red region, under Moroccan control, meets the green region, RASD, is explicitly cut by the location of the Berm, a massive wall dividing the region. In the red region lie the phosphate mines and fish-rich waters. Lastly, the fourth map shows how the Moroccan state views the Southern Provinces; fully integrated as part of Morocco. These maps introduce the geography through different nationalistic lenses.

Politically, the region of Western Sahara underwent regime changes in 1975 that led to the forceful displacement of the majority of Sahrawis due to Moroccan military force. A vast number of Sahrawis who were displaced from the Moroccan invasion currently still live in massive refugee camps outside of Western Sahara. The most notable agglomeration of camps are in the Algerian Tindouf province, located to the Northeast of Western Sahara. The exodus to the refugee camps was a direct product of displacement by the Moroccan military and settler colonial campaigns conducted after the Green March and signing of the Madrid Accords of 1975. Some Sahrawis even cite this experience as similar in memory to the offensive that produced the al-Nakba in Palestine. This correlation between the traumatic exoduses of indigenous populations accentuates the collective experiences settler colonial structures have had.

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4 Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 2, 2019.
on indigenous identity. Generations of Sahrawis have been living in refugee camps, with most of the younger generations having never actually visited and lived in their real homeland of Western Sahara, yet, through the national imaginary they are able to maintain a sense of nationalistic belonging. Sahrawis extended stay in these camps for over forty years and the inability to easily return to their homeland is partially a product of the militarized maintenance of the Berm, a 2,700 km wall laced with landmines, a physical exemplification of Morocco utilizing map making as a tool of reinforcing empire and militarizing this structure to further emphasize their colonial dominance.

The field of settler colonial theory typically operates through an Anglo-oriented lens when determining the application of settler colonial theory to a geography. There exists a substantial gap in the literature as there are few cases where the terminology is administered to ‘non-Western’ actors’ colonial activities, dovetailing with Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism. This thesis will expand the seemingly skewed and biased application of settler colonial theory to incorporate the Moroccan government’s military and civilian actions that have promoted, and continue to, the structures of settler colonialism in the disputed region of Western Sahara. It is possible that the lack of international awareness and reporting on Western Sahara is a result of a disconnect between settler colonial theory and its application to the territory. It is also plausible that the lack of settler colonial literature surrounding the region has led international actors, like the United States and France, to continue to financially and militarily support Morocco, indirectly promoting a settler colonial campaign. It is with this understanding that I approach this thesis as a forum to expose Moroccan colonial actions in Western Sahara that have occurred, and are still ongoing, with the aspiration of adding to the settler colonial scholarship and awareness of the situation in Western Sahara.
For the purposes of conciseness, this essay will focus on a specific time period of the conflict: November 1973 to April 1987. These dates encompass prominent institutional and physical alterations that occurred during the conflict, particularly the founding of the Front Polisario/Frente Popular para la liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Rio de Oro in 1973, the Green March of 1975 which led to the Madrid Accords (1975) and finally the construction of the last section of the Berm in 1987. While these events and periods of history will serve as the basis for this paper, it is essential to comprehend some historic precursors to the conflict, particularly the relationship between Algeria and Morocco and a separate relationship between Morocco and Spain. Born from colonial legacies and irredentist claims, the 1963 Sand War erupted between Algeria and Morocco over border disputes. The motives of this war, mainly irredentist claims, largely mirror the rationales behind the resurgence of conflict between Algeria and Morocco in 1976. This political tension between Morocco and Algeria has further played out in the Western Sahara question and oftentimes intertwines with claims that Algeria is aiding and harboring supporters of a ‘terrorist’ group in the refugee camps, referring to Sahrawis who support the Front Polisario, and on the flipside, that Morocco is a colonizing power. Ultimately, the conflict in the region has prohibited individuals like Mansour, who come from generations of native, nomadic families from accessing their own homeland in its true, liberated form. The current state of contestation in Western Sahara is rooted in the politics of settler colonialism that was initiated by the Green March of 1975, implemented by the Madrid Accords and was further enforced, physically and symbolically, by the Berm. These structures have fundamentally shaped the relationship between Western Sahara and Morocco.

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Chapter I: History of the Region In Published Literature

“Locked in a fierce war with Morocco, the Sahrawi are engaged in an international diplomatic battle for self-determination. Overwritten by colonial cartographies, their ancient desert heartlands are sharply divided by the world’s longest fortified sand berm following Spain’s abandoned process of decolonization and Morocco’s military invasion and occupation.”

– Konstantina Isidoros

To delve into the complexities and rich history of the Western Saharan conflict, it is necessary to understand the published literature and reported historiography of the region. Tony Hodges’ Western Sahara: The Roots of a Desert War (1983) provides an ethnographic and anthropological report of the situation in Western Sahara with a strong emphasize on the colonial history in the region. Hodges examines the mid-twentieth century to the 1980s, analyzing the political and social climate to discern the foundations of the contested nature of Western Sahara. In his book, Hodges highlights the role of previous colonizers and international actors, mainly focusing on Spain’s role due to the time period of concern. Hodges work is very useful in examining the tribal structure of Sahrawi society and the subsequent changes Sahrawis underwent during Spanish occupation.

The global colonial period is typically recognized as ending in the late 1960s, with the 1990s rendering the last colonies sovereign; however, this essay will argue that a ‘post-colonial’ period has not yet been achieved on a global scale. For Sahrawis, the indigenous population in the disputed region, their territory was colonized by the Spanish as early as 1502; however, it wasn’t until 1884 when the Spanish officially declared a protectorate over the region of Rio de Oro and exercised constant force and administrative power.7 It was at this time that the Spanish established Villa Cisneros (present-day Dakhla) as a military fort to anchor Spanish rule in the

7 Besenyő János, Western Sahara (Pécs: Publikon, 2009), 49.
Prior to the colonial founding of Villa Cisneros, from the 1500s to the later half of the 1880s, the territory of Western Sahara was not cohesively ruled by the Spanish, but rather certain areas received more military and economic attention, notably Laayoune (El Aaiun, Al-’Ayyun) and Dakhla. Areas that were less affiliated with the colonial regime and did not possess a military fort could, for the most part, continue partaking in traditional livelihood practices and expressions of their culture without Spanish involvement. This liberty that detached pockets benefited from was later revoked under more stringent sedentarization campaigns, a concrete illustration settler colonialism’s societal impacts.

By the 1960s, Spain was under significant international pressure to decolonize Spanish Sahara, which was at the time composed of two provinces ‘established’ in 1924: the Rio de Oro and Saguia el-Hamra. The Spanish administration did not want to relinquish their Atlantic stronghold as they saw both economic and strategic value in securing Western Sahara as a colony. In 1973, while Western Sahara was still under Spanish occupation, the Polisario Front (Frente Polisario) formed as a national liberation movement of Sahrawis mobilized with arms against Spanish colonizers. By 1975, the deteriorating health of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco paired with the rising discontent with the Spanish regime in Western Sahara, led Spain to yield control over Spanish Sahara to focus on internal political factions.

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8 Besenyő János, *Western Sahara* (Pécs: Publikon, 2009), 49. Once Spanish claims to the region were solidified, Spanish fleets began fishing in the rich waters. Due to its proximity to the Canary Islands (Spanish Archipelago), Western Sahara was often frequented for fishing matters. In 1884, a Spanish fleet that was headed by Captaini Emilio Bonelli conquered Villa Cisneros (Dakhla) and created a large Fort, la Factoria. Once the fort was established, Spanish leaders began the process of registering Sahrawis in the Spanish census and encouraged, possibly forcefully, sedentary lifestyles. Due to the lack of Spanish civilians inhibiting the fort, most interactions with native, Sahrawis were militarized exchanges.


Moroccan King, Hassan II, exhibited an astute understanding of Spain’s volatile control in the region during the early 1970s, and saw the problems with the Franco regime back home to be an invitation for intervention. Aware of the two eerily close assassination attempts in 1971 and 1972, King Hassan II organized the Green March as method of uniting Moroccans and gaining support for himself.¹³ Foreseeing the unlikeliness of Spanish immediate withdrawal, King Hassan II orchestrated the Green March and mobilized 350,000 Moroccans to deliberately journey into Western Sahara.¹⁴ A week later, on November 14th, 1975, Spain, Morocco and Mauritania signed the Madrid Accords, officially establishing a tripartite treaty and unsurprisingly excluding indigenous voices in the former Spanish Sahara.¹⁵ This diplomatic measure solidified the lack of indigenous recognition in the international realm and has resulted in decades of colonial subjugation of Sahrawis under Moroccan rule.

The contested geography and situation in Western Sahara extends into present day with increased censorship and militarization of the Occupied Territories, but for the purposes of this thesis most of the archival resources and personal accounts will be centered around the founding of the Front Polisario (1973), the Green March (1975), and the construction of the Berm (1981-1987). These events and actions highlight the monumental role nationalistic rhetoric plays on mobilizing Sahrawis and Moroccans to claim and/or reclaim this geography. I have selected these three larger moments to help ground an argument postulating that Western Sahara has been a site of Moroccan settler colonialism since 1975 that has employed nationalism as a mobilizing ideology and justification for invasion. Applying settler colonial theory and nationalism theories together, this essay will highlight how the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara is in actuality

an act of settler colonialism despite the fact that the main actors are non-Anglo. It is possible that the overlooked plight of Sahrawis is correlated to the lack of application of settler colonial theory to the contested region. This site internationally draws parallels to the situation in Palestine, aligning liberation movements and the awareness of settler colonialism in the twenty-first century.

*Chapter II: Methodology*

“Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority.” – Edward Said

In this thesis, I will combine theory with historical analysis and interviews. The first chapters of this paper will be concerned with the historical rootedness of this situation and the actors involved as a way to situate Western Sahara both geographically and ideologically. The second section will encompass a literature-review of nationalism and settler colonialism theories and then lead into the projection of theory onto a specific geography. This application will highlight the relationality between the history of Western Sahara and the active role settler colonialism has played in the country’s fate. The third section will merge these two areas by citing historical events like the Green March and the Berm construction as expressions of nationalism conjoined with settler colonialism. The application of settler colonial theory to physical representations of Moroccan ‘nationalism’ in the contested region of Western Sahara will serve as the premise for this thesis. The fourth section will introduce a comparison to the settler colonial situation by examining Israel/Palestine.

To approach the claim that Morocco has acted as a settler colonial force in Western Sahara since 1975, I will engage with theoretical frameworks that focus on the foundations of settler colonialism and its connection to nationalist sentiments. While Western Sahara has been
reported on, there is a significant gap in the connectivity of theories being applied to the geography. This thesis will make a theoretical intervention by putting together nationalist ideology, settler colonialism, and the overlooked aggressive role of the Moroccan military in conversation and then apply these theories together to the contested geography of Western Sahara. It is essential to look at these strands of literature and theories in conjunction with one another to better understand the history of the conflict and the present day status of the disputed region. The application of settler colonialism will also push colonial studies to incorporate non-Anglo actors, and through the labeling of the situation as settler colonialism, might bring more attention to the region. Edward Said’s words stating the goal of expanding a field of knowledge suggests that the narrow scope of settler colonial studies application geographies should be broadened. For both the historical and analytical application sections, I will incorporate and engage with secondary sources deriving from humanitarian reports, books, and official government and United Nations documents. These sources will be placed in conversation with different forms of primary sources including maps, original pamphlets, and interviews with local Sahrawis.

By scanning Facebook, Twitter, and non-governmental organizations in the region, I have connected with several Sahrawis living in the Occupied Territories. I was capable of conducting several interviews via Skype. Most interviews were conducted in English, however, some were conducted in Arabic with a local Sahrawi providing the English translation. All translated interviews will be noted in the footnotes with a disclaimer suggesting that it might not necessarily be an exact replica of the interviewee’s words. Interviews provided a local perspective, with Sahrawis reporting on their own experiences their family histories. Engaging with Sahrawis provided them a forum to express their voices and opinions that have been dramatically suppressed in Morocco. Ideally, these personal accounts will bring more attention to
the region, as Mansour and other interviewees have explicitly articulated why it is necessary for more people to become aware of the settler colonial situation in Western Sahara. This interview methodology received Yale IRB exemption approval.

Cartographic expressions of colonialism will be utilized throughout this essay as examples of political and geographic intel. The maps used will highlight the location of natural resources, the pre- and continual colonial boundaries of the contested region, and the division of the area by the Berm. Irredentist claims are made by multiple parties and are dependent upon a form of colonial mapping that reconfigures the boundaries established at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Maps produced by the Moroccan government and by the Front Polisario conceive of a much broader empire that exceeds beyond the previously defined individual country borders. The politics of mapping play an essential role in Moroccan nationalistic promotions of Western Sahara. The Moroccan government’s website overtly uses mapping techniques to incorporate the Southern Provinces into its borders. Google Maps partakes in the politics of mapping, as depending on an individual’s location, the border line changes, highlighting maps intensely political nature.

Lastly, the examination of a more widely publicized contemporary example of settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine will serve as a comparison and differentiation point of the situation in Western Sahara. There exist notable similarities to the contestations presented in the situation in Israel/Palestine as those present in Morocco and Western Sahara in terms of indigeneity and nationalism, but the lack of international awareness of Western Sahara as a contested geography highlights the apparent differences in the conflicts. This failure of prominent international display of the conflict may be connected to the fact that Israel might be considered a more ‘Western’ power, at least relative to Morocco. The role of religion in the
Israel/Palestine debate might also play an essential role in the awareness of the settler colonial situation.

This thesis does possess multiple limitations, with the sample size of interviewees as one of the largest limitations. I was only able to interview a handful of Sahrawis which significantly restricts the information I received. Another limitation is my positionality, as I am neither Sahrawi or Moroccan, I do not possess the power and experience to speak about the conflict from a personal perspective. It is because of this positionality that I relied on interviews to better illustrate the realities of Sahrawis. Thirdly, classifying what comprises Moroccan and Sahrawi identity and nationalism is another limitation, as both of these concepts are individualized and therefore could have been overgeneralized by my conclusions. Despite these limitations, I believe the successful placement of interview quotes, maps, official documents, and theories discussed together, creates new knowledge that can be applied in this contested geography.

Chapter III: Nationalism and Settler Colonialism Theory

"In its postulation of a necessary linkage between political legitimacy and ethnic identity, the concept of self-determination of nations contains the seeds of a radical redrawing of today’s political map.” – Walker Connor

Part I: Nationalism Theory

Nationalism is often incorporated as an important mechanism of settler colonialism as it has the ability to mobilize a large mass of people under a united identity. When analyzing nationalisms, it is important to understand that there is not one consolidated and agreed upon nationalism for an entire people, instead there exists a multiplicity of contested nationalisms. For the purpose of this thesis I will be referencing the nationalism developed and promoted by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic which may not necessarily be the nationalistic identity of every Sahrawi, but might, for the large part, constitute a majority of Sahrawi nationalistic
thought. In terms of Moroccan nationalism, I will be examining the promotion of the official Moroccan state nationalist rhetoric, which also might be extremely different than some nationalistic identities of some Moroccans. Sahrawi and Moroccan nationalisms are not necessarily positioned as polar opposites as they do share many similarities; however, they are both contested nationalisms that compete with each other in the region which oftentimes results in the production of a tense, sometimes violent environment.

Anthropologist Benedict Anderson’s conception of a nation will provide a theoretical framework to analyze nationalisms and what encompasses nationhood. Anderson posits a nation to be an ‘imaginary community’ that can transcend any geographic and physical boundaries. This interpretation conceives a nation to be a collective identity that can be constructed without all of the nation’s members knowing each other, but because of their similar experiences, shared histories, cultures, and values, it does not matter that individuals do not personally know all the others. The shared values and experiences unite the people in an imaginary alliance regardless of their personal connections, or lack thereof, a fundamental attribute to allow nationalist rhetoric and thought to transcend vast territorial space. Walker Conner, a political theorist, adds that the essence of a nation is intangible because of the psychological bonds and subconscious processes of the members that conjoin together to create the nation in and of itself. An essential ‘ingredient’ of the national psychology is the belief in the collective’s origin and evolution so as to differentiate itself from neighboring areas.

For Sahrawis, the ability to connect through national rhetoric is essential due to the fragmentation of their land as the Berm divides the Occupied Territories and the refugee camps.

The imaginary community and collective identity functions around the Berm as a way of uniting Sahrawis living under Occupation and Sahrawis living in exile. National connections can be made through shared histories and myth making. Applying this to Western Sahara, the role of common myths and historical memories serve as crucial mobilizing actors that coalesce to fend off colonial claims to ‘their’ land. This creation of a national identity in contrast to the Moroccan construction of colonial structures has resulted in contested nationalisms to be present in the region.

The role of the imaginary is essential in both Sahrawi and Moroccan nationalism. For the Moroccan state, the ‘imagined community’ exceeds the internationally recognized boundaries of the country with the envisioned ‘Greater Morocco’ engulfing almost all of Mauritania and large portions of Algeria and Mali (Fig. III). The grey shaded region is the Moroccan Monarchy’s holistic vision of Morocco’s borders in a post-colonial age where irredentist claims should be heavily considered. The black area is the actual Kingdom of Morocco, and the dark red is considered the Occupied Territories, or Occupied Western Sahara, leaving the bright red to be the Front Polisario self-run Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The notion of ‘Greater Morocco’ or ‘national territory integrity’ is rooted in irredentist thought that sustains Morocco’s boundaries should be reverted to pre-French and Spanish colonial divisions and serves as a foundational component of Moroccan state-sponsored nationalism. Interestingly, while this map identifies the vision of ‘Greater Morocco’ to include the entirety of Mauritania and large

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21 Tony Hodges, "The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism," Third World Quarterly 5, no. 1 (1983): 38, doi:10.1080/01436598308419678. "King Mohammed V had formally endorsed Allal el-Fassi’s ‘Greater Morocco’ theses… on 25 February 1958, he had pledged to ‘continue to do everything in our power to recover our Sahara and all that which, by historical evidence and by the will of its inhabitants, belongs as of right to our kingdom.’ He has done so to prevent the Istiqlal Party from outpacing the monarchy in nationalist favour and because, by glorifying the conquests of the more powerful of Morocco’s pre-colonial sultans, Allal el-Fassi’s ideology could easily be turned to royal ends, to boost the prestige of the monarchy.” This citation illustrates the immense role nationalism played in the actions and thought processes of King Mohammed V and later its impact on his son, King Hassan II’s decision to invade Western Sahara.
segments of Mali and Algeria, the Morocco government recognized the sovereignty of these nations and stopped pursuing their territory. By 1969 Morocco had formally recognized Mauritanian independence and relinquished that aspect of the ‘Greater Morocco’ vision; however, possibly due to the fact that Western Sahara was not organized in a nation-state formation, Western Sahara was not recognized as independence like the neighboring countries and therefore Morocco continued the quest of completing a ‘Greater Morocco’ vision.

Morocco’s national rhetoric promotes the belief that RASD is a state operated by guerilla terrorists who are blocking the reunification of the Moroccan nation. In the Morocco

![Figure III: A map depicting 'Greater Morocco'](image)

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government’s view, the ‘imagined community’ is one which encompasses Western Sahara and Sahrawi people as a subset of Moroccan identity. This becomes evident in the Moroccan Constitution of 2011 where it employs “Saharan-Hassanic” as a linguistic subset of Moroccan identity, but fails to acknowledge the terminology of Sahrawi as that would indicate that Sahrawis possess a different identity than Moroccans. The omission of incorporating Sahrawis into the constitution illuminates the Moroccan government’s understanding of Sahrawis to be Moroccans who speak a different dialect but are not necessarily comprised of an entirely different identity and separate ethnic group. This reinforces national rhetoric as mobilizing settler colonial actions in Western Sahara, as in the eyes of the Moroccan government, they are in fact uniting ‘the people’ as there exist no identity divisions.

For Sahrawis, the nationalist imaginary reconstructs the spatial distance between Sahrawi refugees and Sahrawis living under occupation. The enormous Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria exemplify the role of nationalist imaginary where exiled and displaced Sahrawis have renamed the settlements according to important cities in Western Sahara. Despite the fact that the Sahrawis living in the camps are removed from their territory and home, they actively connect to the Sahrawi imaginary through the process of home-making and remembrance by naming entire wilayas (districts) at the camps after towns in Western Sahara; Dakhla, Smara, Laayoune, Aousserd and Cape Bojador. Not only are the Sahrawis commemorating five major towns in Western Sahara, but they selected five cities that are specifically housed within the Moroccan controlled area of Western Sahara. This deliberate choice underlines the targeted message of resistance and promotion of nationalism that is bred out of SADR.

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Sahrawis who have shared similar experiences, traumas, values, and specific relationships to the territory comprise of SADR, the ‘imagined community.’ Alicia Campos-Serrano and Jose Antonio Rodriguez-Esteban’s article “Imagined Territories and histories in conflict during the struggles for Western Sahara, 1956-1979” underlines the historical foundations that have resulted in the creation of a specific Sahrawi identity and an imagined community. Campos-Serrano, Rodriguez-Esteban, and authors of the book War and Refugees: The Western Sahara Conflict Richard Lawless and Laila Monahan, all identified the colonial powers’ discovery of natural resources to be a turning point in the formation of Sahrawi collective identity. The increased interest in resource extrapolation resulted in the Spaniards’ development of cities and mines, altering the entire social and economic landscape of the region. Subsequently, the change in urbanization and employment industries shifted the Sahrawis nomadic lifestyle, thereby emphasizing the social alterations that resulted from colonial regimes.

The social integration of Sahrawis into mines and cities, resulted in an increased visibility of the social segregation and discrimination against local indigenous populations. Campos-Serrano and Rodriguez-Esteban assert that it was this explicit pressure and subjugation which catalyzed the articulation of a Sahrawi nation and a separate Sahrawi identity rather than existing as a subset of Moroccan identity. This differentiation in visions and conceptualizations of ‘imagined communities’ functions as a driver of division between the two nationalist rhetoric and can be further explored to understand the relationship between nationalism and settler colonialism.

Moroccan rhetoric and political actions often indicate that the lack of Sahrawi collective identity and organized resistance movements documented before the Green March imply that SADR did not and does not possess a legitimate claim to the region. As Tony Hodges notes, there were no historical antecedents to Western Sahara, as no pre-colonial nation of Sahrawis
was ever formed.\textsuperscript{26} He further states that Sahrawi nationalism is rooted in more recent events and conflicts;\textsuperscript{27} however, simply because the Sahrawis were functioning on smaller tribal affiliations before and during much of the Spanish colonial period, that does not preclude SADR from making a nationalist claim to the land at a later time. Moroccan claims are entrenched in the idea that in order to claim sovereignty and indigeneity there had to previously had been an organized collective, which in the case of Western Sahara was not in existence. The lack of Sahrawi collective identity prior to the Green March has resulted in Morocco’s delegitimization of Sahrawi land claims. Due to Morocco’s reliance on a system of nation-state organization that is formulated in contrast to tribal affiliation, Sahrawi indigeneity and land claims appear to be irrelevant in protecting the sovereignty of Western Sahara.

Sahrawi nationalism and nation formation is a product of colonial interactions. Campos-Serrano and Rodriguez-Estaban introduce the notion of an alternative Sahrawi-imagined territory and community referred to as Al Badia, which connected Sahrawi kabilas that spoke Hassaniya Arabic that shared many cultural practices together to formulate a collective Sahrawi space.\textsuperscript{28} Despite Sahrawi nationalism that was constructed in opposition to colonialism, the representation of the imagined nation promotes territorial claims that are superimposed on previous colonial boundaries. This was a result of the Sahrawi movement’s inability to make land claims to regions that were already internationally proclaimed ‘sovereign,’ such as Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, or Mali; however, this also shows the paradoxical nature of boundary making.\textsuperscript{29} This phenomenon of rejecting colonial boundaries, but in actuality relying on colonial borders, emphasizes the power of mapping as a colonial tool as well as the

\textsuperscript{26} Tony Hodges, \textit{Western Sahara: The Roots of a Desert War}, Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1984.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid}, 149.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid}.
intertwined nature of Sahrawi and Moroccan nationalisms since Sahrawi nationalism is constructed in opposition of a Moroccan ‘other.’ Despite the physical borders that are dividing the population, the “Sahrawi nation is now imagined as a transnational community spread across different spaces, from the refugee camps to the Moroccan-occupied territory,”

emphasizing the creation and maintenance of an ‘imagined community.’

In terms of further developing an understanding of what a nation is, theorist Ernst Renan proclaims that “a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle” which is composed of two separate, but necessary temporal parts; the past and the present. This conceptualization underlines the inherent privileging and perpetuation of certain traditions and heritages as the premises of what continues to constitute the nation are determined based on the memorialization and continuation of certain historical events into the present. Utilizing this theory of nationhood, shared histories, myths, heroes, events and legends would all serve to unite an ‘imagined community’ and therefore create a nation, whether it be physical or ideological. Connor theorizes nation formation as a recent phenomenon that is a function of mobilizing the masses from individual ethnies. Applied to Western Sahara, this would suggest that nation formation of Sahrawis began once tribal affiliations were placed on the periphery to allow for collective identity to form. He contends that nationalism is inherently laced with ethnic character and therefore should be classified as ethnonationalism. Walker Connor pronounces that “while an ethnic group may, therefore, be other-defined, the nation must be self-defined,” implying that the Sahrawi Arab

31 Ernest Renan, Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?, République des Lettres, 2012.
33 Ibid.
Democratic Republic, which was self-proclaimed, is a nation that distances Sahrawis from Moroccans, regardless of Morocco’s perception.

Part II: Settler Colonialism Theory

Settler Colonialism is often cited when referencing the creation of Israel and the subjugation of Palestinians or Native American Indigenous communities, but less frequently is the terminology of settler colonialism applied to Western Sahara. This thesis intervenes at a crucial point in settler colonial studies, where the focus of settler colonial examples is Anglo-oriented and fails to account for non-Western powers colonial actions. For the purposes of defining the ‘Orient’ the term referred to will reference Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism. He situates the so-called Orient as a group of people with specific racial, cultural and political characteristics. This term is often juxtaposed to the ‘Occident’ or ‘West,’ typically following white, Anglo categorization. Settler colonial studies tends to focus on situations where the colonizer is a white, Western nation-state power and the colonized is a racialized, less structured, ambiguous body of people. This is particularly true when examining North American and South African settler colonialism.

While certain ‘orient-orient’ settler colonial subjugations are frequently overlooked and not featured in the field of study, there is international recognition of internal colonialism occurring in the ‘Orient.’ For example, Ba’athist Iraq and the Arabization campaigns that occurred in the Northern Iraq were internationally condemned; however, with regard to settler colonial global intervention, most of the focus is relegated to situations engaging with ‘Western’ actors. Typically, settler colonial studies focuses on examples of white settlers intervening in another country such as, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and

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Israel/Palestine. When analyzing the situation in Western Sahara it is interesting to note that prior to Moroccan colonization, Spain, considered a ‘Western’ power, had colonized the region and received significant amount of global dissatisfaction with their ongoing colonial actions. This scolding of the Franco regime highlights the prejudices of settler colonial theory applications, as only when a so-called Western actor was involved did the international community respond by labeling the situation colonialism. This thesis will push the boundaries of settler colonial theory by applying the terminology to a ‘non-Western’ actor: Morocco. Both parties, Morocco and Sahrawis, are non-white, non-Anglo, non-Western actors and because of these demographics it appears that this contested geography receives less international attention.

Patrick Wolfe, a trained anthropologist and ethnographer, has become an established theorist in unpacking settler colonialism by focusing on the settler colonial history of New Zealand. He interprets settler colonialism to be a holistic, long-term situation, where “the colonizers come to stay -- invasion is a structure not an event.”35 This interpretation does not preclude events from playing integral roles in settler colonial regimes, instead this nuanced understanding of settler colonialism emphasizes the role of structural factors coming together to produce a situation of settler colonialism, such as administrative decisions, military actions, settlement creations, etc. It is through Wolfe’s comprehensive lens that this thesis will examine the Green March as an ongoing process not only limited to November 6th, 1975, but rather, a structure that has present-day effects on the settler colonial situation in Western Sahara. By interpreting the Green March as a structure, it expands the analysis of the Green March to encompass more than a single snapshot moment when Moroccans physically entered the territory, and instead broadens the Green March to also comprise of the period of militarization before and after the Green March. This interpretation emphasizes the longevity of the colonizers

intended stay and eradicates the notion of Moroccan temporary, limited control. This application of Wolfe’s conceptualization of settler colonialism removes the historical temporality of settler colonialism, as the structure of Morocco’s colonial presence continues to persist and influence social formations beyond their origin, whereas events are typically relegated to a specific time period.

Employing Wolfe’s understanding of settler colonialism to Western Sahara, the Green March and the construction of the Berm serve as two structures that maintain the hierarchies fabricated by the colonizer. He situates the role of altering social structures and societal dynamics as the colonizer utilizing the “logic of elimination.” While typically the terminology of elimination connotes violent genocide, he clarifies that there are other more ‘subtle’ forms of achieving the eradication of the native. I would argue the process of elimination is inherently violent whether it be physically, emotionally or psychologically. While many people and states would not classify Morocco’s actions as a physical genocide, Mansour’s friend, Mamain, stated, “The genocide had begun militarily, and now there is a new genocide in the sense of obliterating culture, identity, and the demographic of the people in Western Sahara.” Mamain works for a local non-governmental organization alongside Mansour, exposing the realities of the Moroccan regime through journalism and photographs. His citation above alludes to the potential ongoing cultural genocide, aligning Wolfe’s understanding of settler colonialism as a structure that is actively altering society by culturally purging it. Wolfe contends that the motivation for settler colonialism is not racism or discrimination on the basis of religion and

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37 Similar to Mansour, Mamain is not the interviewees real name. To preserve his identity, he has been given the name Mamain.
38 Mamain, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 12, 2019. [Note all interviews with Mamain were translated by Mansour as I cannot speak Arabic.]
ethnicity, but rather a desire for the access to territory. This understanding of settler colonialism interprets the Moroccan invasion as an act of reclaiming territory rather than an act of discrimination against the Sahrawi people. This hierarchy of discriminatory motives will be further explored in the context of the Green March, the Berm, and the location of natural resource reserves where the motives of territory collection become starkly evident.

A second settler colonialism theorist to place in conversation with Patrick Wolfe is Lorenzo Veracini, who highlights the importance of space in understanding settler colonialism. He concludes that a defining feature of settler colonialism is that the colonizer possess the ability to move across space whereas the colonized is almost entirely restricted in their ability to freely move. He also explicitly focuses on the differentiation between settler colonialism and colonialism, declaring that the different forms of colonialism possess different end goals. Proclaiming that settler colonialism’s trajectory is to create and alter a society so much that it is no longer identified as a settler colony, Veracini situates the eradication of ethnic diversity as an end goal of settler colonialism. To further discern the distinctions in the colonial forms of dominance, Veracini paraphrases Wolfe, stating that unlike colonialism, settler colonialism is not a master-servant relationship marked by ethnic difference, but rather the goal of settler colonialism is centered around land acquisition. This differentiates settler colonialism from colonialism where obtaining a large, native work force for purposes of exploitation are the top priorities. The resulting discernment is that settler colonialism is more focused on replacement of the native, whereas colonialism is fixated on exploitation. In the Moroccan/Western Sahara context, replacement does not necessarily mean replacing Sahrawi with Moroccans, but could

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
also mean that the Sahrawis living in Western Sahara are Moroccans and thereby ‘replacing’ them as ethnic others.

While examining the case study of Israel/Palestine, Veracini discusses the intimate relationship between migration and settler colonialism which contends that “settlers are made by conquest, not just by immigration,”

expunging the possibility of settler colonialism occurring haphazardly in an act of migration. In his analysis, he outlines twenty-six different forms of settler colonialism, with Administrative Transfer most closely replicating the situation in Western Sahara. Veracini defines Administrative transfer as

“when administrative borders of the settler polity are redrawn and indigenous people lose entitlements… in this case, as the settler entity retains the sovereign capacity to draw and enforce administrative boundaries, it is rights -- not bodies-- that are transferred, and indigenous peoples become the subject of a transfer that does not necessarily displace them physically.”

This understanding of settler colonialism can be applied to the population of Sahrawis living under Moroccan rule in the Occupied Territories but is less useful when applying to the diaspora living in Tindouf, Algeria. This theory of Administrative Transfer highlights Morocco’s imperial capacity to draw boundaries where indigenous people ‘lose entitlements’ such as phosphate reserves, established cities, rich fishing areas and the liberty of mobility. Morocco utilizes the Berm as a physical enforcement mechanism of altering administrative borders. While Veracini’s Administrative Transfer theory does not apply to the thousands of Sahrawi refugees who fled to refugee camps, it does explain why and how there are Sahrawis living in the Occupied Territories, as their rights—not their bodies—have been transferred. This includes their rights to mobilize, dissent, learn their own history and engage in liberation activities. The removal of Sahrawis’ rights conjoins with Wolfe’s conceptualization of the ‘logic of elimination,’ and replacement as mobilizing forces behind settler colonialism.

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45 *Ibid*, 44.
Part III: The Convergence of Nationalism and Settler Colonial Theory

Nationalism and Settler Colonialism are intimately related terms, and while independent, they do, especially in this specific geography, fuel one another. Nationalism can be explored as a motive for creating settler colonial structures. On the other hand, settler colonialism can be considered a physical exemplification of nationalism and an active response to threats of nationalism, such as the alteration of collective myths, shared histories or land acquisitions. This enmeshed relationship that twists nationalism and settler colonialism together is distinguishable in the Moroccan state’s rhetoric. For example, by citing the Sahrawi tribes’ previous allegiance to the Sherifan Empire, Morocco concludes that there existed a significant relationship between the people of the Southern Provinces and Morocco, therefore, through religious linkage, Morocco subsumes Sahrawis to exist as a category of Moroccan identity. \(^{46}\) The relegation of Sahrawi to only constitute a subset of a larger identity, actively utilizes nationalism and nationalist thought to fabricate the structures of a settler colonial society. In Zunes and Mundy’s analysis of the situation, they reported that Morocco claims, “Western Sahara had ‘always been linked to the interior of Morocco by common ethnological, cultural and religious ties’ that had been severed by European colonization,”\(^ {47}\) emphasizing the recuperation of the Southern Provinces as a form of reunifying the nation to its original form. The concept of Sahrawi tribes having sworn allegiance to the Sultan introduces the question of whether the tribes that aligned themselves with the political entity of the Sultan and his ‘spiritual authority’ were partaking in a


form of ‘civic’ nationalism. Sahrawis and Moroccans answer this question differently, showing the tension between the two parties and their interlocking history.

The convergence of settler colonialism and nationalism is displayed in the Moroccan government’s use of anti-colonialism as a mobilizing nationalist ideology. Essentially, the Moroccan government utilizes a specific historical lens to construe the Southern Provinces in a certain historical light, and by doing so, blurs the binary of anti-colonialist/colonialist. This is best exemplified by the Moroccan government’s motivations and subsequent actions culminated by the Green March of 1975. To justify the civilian and military invasion, King Hassan II emphasized the necessity to liberate the Southern Provinces from the Spanish colonialists and thereby engage in an anti-colonialist campaign. King Hassan II politically altered the region through his military commitment to anti-colonialism which subsequently reified Moroccans with a sense of purpose. By employing nationalist rhetoric that implicitly painted Morocco as an anti-colonial savior and liberator of the contested region, Morocco commenced the initial settler colonial invasion into Western Sahara with the Moroccan peoples’ support via exploiting their nationalistic support.

Another example of Morocco employing nationalist ideology to create structures of settler colonialism, is the Moroccan claim that the reunification of the provinces was part of an anti-colonialist struggle against European colonial-dictated boundaries, thus combating settler colonialism by redrawing the map of Morocco. In this framework, the restoration of the is Kingdom viewed as a struggle against colonialism and therefore engages with nationalism to produce settler colonial structures. This framework mirrors the Front Polisario’s nationalist framework in the sense that they both utilize anti-colonialism as their motivator. Despite the

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similarity in frameworks, the two nationalisms compete due to their opposite claims of what constitutes anti-colonialism.

The Moroccan Kingdom’s website includes a map of Morocco which encompasses all of Western Sahara, illustrating the deep rootedness of this nationalistic, irredentist thought (Fig. IV). In addition, the government has specific economic development plans outlined on their website, such as the Azur Plan that aims to optimize tourism to the Southern Provinces, specifically at sites like Dakhla.50

Figure IV: The Official Map of Morocco as found on the Moroccan Government Website

Chapter IV: Sahrawi Identity and Political Formations

“In primary schools we were forced to speak in the Moroccan accent, taught untrue facts, and had to draw the map of Morocco including Western Sahara. This is a problem of identity; obstructing our culture.” – Mansour

Identity and identity formations are inherently complex and seemingly impossible to detangle as there are a plethora of sources, experiences, and components that coincide to produce a singular identity. With regards to Sahrawi identity there are several factors that constitute a collective identity which in turn plays a fundamental role in Sahrawi nationalism. Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy situate Sahrawi identity as extending “beyond the Moroccan territorial and relational understanding, as it can incorporate blood and shared history as an ‘ethnos’ in addition to land claims.”51 A shared history of blood ties, language and pastoral nomadism are common threads weaved into Sahrawi identity.52 Some Sahrawis and archival ethnographies have indicated that “the actual Sahrawis are direct descendants from tribes that originated in Yemen.”53 However, according to Mansour, not all Sahrawis are descendants from Yemeni tribes as some Sahrawis have Arabs and Amazigh ties, although their Yemeni roots are often considered a distinct attribute of Sahrawis that differentiates them from Moroccans.54 Tribes and tribal affiliations are still prevalent in Sahrawi society with 22 official tribes, although they now play less of a leading role in society since the collective resistance movement and collaborative environment of the refugee camps the affiliations are second to Sahrawi collective identity.55

In Alice Wilson’s Sovereignty in Exile she traces the historical prominence of Sahrawi tribal

54 Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 16th, 2019.
affiliations prior to a united Sahrawi resistance movement. Proclaiming that the Front Polisario emphasizes a united, uniform Sahrawi identity, she situates that the current form of resistance and mobilization disregards previous historical affiliations.\textsuperscript{56}

Zunes and Mundy contend that the concept of a \textit{Sahrawian} people as a collective identity is a relatively new development as it was not until the twentieth century that Sahrawis from different tribes started to unite to resist colonizing powers, largely a result of sedentarization.\textsuperscript{57}

Prior to the formation of the Front Polisario, Sahrawis were rarely unified outside of their tribal formations, as they mainly partook in tribal nomadic lifestyles. Sedentary lifestyles were heavily privileged and coerced under Spanish colonial rule particularly with the discovery and subsequent exploitation of phosphate found at Bou Craa which encouraged many Sahrawis to work in the phosphate industry and lead sedentary lives.\textsuperscript{58} Campos and Rodriguez identified the recent factors that had led to the sedentarization of Sahrawis, most notably the Spanish discovery of phosphate mines, the subsequent establishment of mine cities and the horrific drought of 1953-1963, which killed approximately 46 percent of the country’s camels.\textsuperscript{59} Census data reports indicate that 18% of the Sahrawi population lived outside of urban centers by 1974.\textsuperscript{60} Fig. V displays this information visually by showing the growth of three large towns, El-Ayoun, Smara, and

\textsuperscript{56} Ethnically speaking, Sahrawis share mixed descendants from Berbers, Arabs, and Black Africans. Sahrawis speak a specific Arabic dialect, Hassaniya, that differs from Moroccan Arabic or Darija Hodges article states that “Besides their distinctive way of life as great camel-herding nomads and their total political and military independence, their language—the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic—marked them off from the Tashelhit- speaking Berbers to the North,” further emphasizing the importance of their linguistic distinction from neighboring tribal groups.

\textsuperscript{57} Jacob Mundy and Stephen Zunes, \textit{Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution}. Syracuse: Syracuse Univ Press, 2010.


\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.} and Tony Hodges, "The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism," \textit{Third World Quarterly} 5, no. 1 (1983): 30, doi:10.1080/01436598308419678. In Hodges article he describes the monumental impact the discovery and exploitation of phosphate reserves had on the Sahrawi population. He notes that by 1967 there were 9,726 Spanish civilians in the territory and by 1974, with the opening of Bou Craa there were 20,126. But many Sahrawis also entered the work force to gain wages rather than maintain their nomadic herding practices.
Villa Cisneros between 1967-1974.\textsuperscript{61} Despite the efforts to sedentarize Sahrawi populations through the development of larger cities and the construction of the Berm, a foundational aspect in Sahrawi identity is mobility.\textsuperscript{62} The Moroccan government directly combats Sahrawi mobility through the construction of the Berm as a physical barrier which eliminates Sahrawis from partaking in a nomadic lifestyle and traditional forms of animal raising.\textsuperscript{63}

Another core component of Sahrawi identity is the collective experience of displacement from their homeland after the Green March and subsequent military control. Once Spain signed over Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania at the Madrid Accords, there was a mass exodus of Sahrawis. This led to an involuntary state of exile where Sahrawis are constantly reinforcing their nationalistic views through the Front Polisario. Estimates suggest there are approximately 173,600 Sahrawi refugees living in the Tindouf refugee camps.\textsuperscript{64} The magnitude of Sahrawis living in the diaspora has influenced Sahrawi identity to be largely shaped around

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
 & 1967 & 1974 \\ \hline
El-Ayoun & 9,701 & 28,010 \\ \hline
Smara & 1,916 & 7,280 \\ \hline
Villa Cisneros (Dakhla) & 2,364 & 5,370 \\ \hline
Total: 3 main towns & 13,981 & 40,660 \\ \hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{The Growth of the Urban Sahrawi Population}
\end{table}

\textit{Figure V: A table showing the growth of the Sahrawi population in three urban centers from 1967-1974}

\textsuperscript{61} Tony Hodges, "The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism," \textit{Third World Quarterly} 5, no. 1 (1983): 36, doi:10.1080/01436598308419678. Tony Hodges examined this collective sedentarization as unifying Sahrawis since, "the Sahrawis, whatever their tribal background, faced the common denominator of Spanish colonial rule" (36). This unification was the first step towards forming the Polisario Front and later mobilizing against Moroccan colonial rule.


\textsuperscript{63} Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.

managing their exilic lives where they are militarily separated from their homeland and families. Alice Wilson’s book *Sovereignty in Exile* delves into how daily life is organized in the refugee camps. Her remarks on the camps autonomy emphasizes the ability for Sahrawis living in the camps to unify beyond tribal affiliations and instead, coalesce under a larger umbrella of national Sahrawi identity as promoted by the Front Polisario. Unlike most refugee camps, the camps are self-organized and governed by Sahrawi refugees themselves, typically Front Polisario members.

Alice Wilson notes the difference in schooling that Sahrawis receive in the camps and the educational content Sahrawis living in the Occupied Territories experience. The greatest difference being the infiltration of Moroccan historic accounts blurring over the historic past in Western Sahara and emphasizing the Moroccan brotherhood with the Southern Provinces, whereas history textbooks in the Tindouf camps celebrate Sahrawi tribes historical resistance against colonialism. In the self-governed camps in Tindouf, Sahrawis are active in the process of home making and claiming their new territory as exemplified by the decision to name entire wilayas (districts) after cities in Western Sahara. There are five wilayas in the Tindouf camps: Laayoune, Awserd, Smara, Dakhla and Cape Bojador. Importantly, these five cities are housed within the Moroccan controlled area of Western Sahara, emphasizing the active message of resistance and nationalism that RASD is promoting despite the displaced nature of its population.

It wasn’t until 1957-1958 that thousands of Sahrawis began to unite under an umbrella of anticolonial struggle as a result of an insurrection by the Moroccan Army of Liberation. A few

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68 Ibid.
years later in the 1960s and early 1970s, Sahrawis began powerfully mobilizing under a fiercer anti-colonialist cause that shifted tribal affiliations to the periphery to assume a more ‘national consciousness’ forged against an oppressive, colonialist ‘other.’ The founding of the Front Polisario and national Sahrawi resistance movements dates back to the sedentarization of Sahrawis and the assumed social and political subjugation and hierarchy that appeared during Spanish colonialism. Mohamed Sidi Ibrahim Basir established the Organizacion Avanzada para la Liberacion del Sahara (Advanced Organization for the Sahara Liberation) in the late 1960s and promoted the notion of autonomy for the region in his speeches and in print newspapers. This organization was the first articulation of a Sahrawi nation independent from Spain, Morocco and Mauritania. Notably, Basir was a journalist and Qur’anic teacher, which resulted in his decision to publicize his words in newspapers which ultimately spread the nationalist sentiments to Sahrawis in different neighborhoods and cities. Benedict Anderson pronounced print culture, such as the dissemination of Basir’s vision, to be a defining feature of the success and ability to connect peoples across boundaries and land masses, resulting in the creation of an imagined community.

Anderson believes that the development and flourishment of print culture has largely been responsible for the ability to develop an imagined community and sense of nationalism as depicted by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (la république arabe sahraouie

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70 Tony Hodges, "The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism," *Third World Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1983): 31, doi:10.1080/01436598308419678. “…thousands of Sahrawis became part of a broad, trans-frontier anticolonial struggle only as recently as 1957-1958, when they responded to the insurrectionary appeals of the Moroccan Army of Liberation (Jaich at-Tahir).”


72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

In 1973, three years after the Zemla Intifada, a bloody massacre of a civilian protest which resulted in the ‘disappearance of Basir,’ Sahrawis living in exile in Zuerat, Mauritania, mobilized and founded the Front Polisario under the leadership of El-Ouali Mustapha Sayed, on April 29th, 1973. The group’s mission focused on disturbing the colonial powers and their actions included sabotaging phosphate infrastructures, attacking border posts, and forming mutinies in colonial troops. Later, the Polisario Front, maintaining its crusade against colonialism, altered its focus to Morocco and Mauritania. The Front Polisario employed guerilla tactics and urged Sahrawis to join the anti-colonial fight. Seven days before the Green March, on October 31st, 1975, the Front Polisario was confronted by the Moroccan army as they entered the Northwestern region of Western Sahara. Since that altercation, the Front Polisario has been fighting both militarily and diplomatically against Morocco, with the short exception of also fighting against Mauritania until 1979.

The Front Polisario declared the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR/RASD) in 1976, a year after the invasion of the Green March and three years after the establishment of the Front Polisario. Most of the Front Polisario’s propaganda is constructed around an

Figure VI: A propaganda image that is centered around civilian militarization

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armed/peace paradigm, with Fig. VI illustrating the paradoxical nature of the Front Polisario’s goal and mechanisms to achieve said goal. Fig. VI states “[the struggle continues to impose national independence and peace]”\textsuperscript{77} with presumably an AK-47 or a M16 serving as the image centered in the text. The image is a call to arms for civilians with the purposes of bringing peace, a paradoxical claim that engaging in violent conflict will result in peace.

However, many Sahrawis don’t see another choice other than militarizing as the international community pays minimal attention to the contested region and diplomatically Western Sahara does not receive enough support. A second example, Fig. VII, is an illustration of a Sahrawian mother and infant closely entwined with an AK-47 or M16 resting right on the mother’s shoulder. As Konstantina Isidoros exemplifies in her book, \textit{Nomads and Nation-building in the Western Sahara: Gender, Politics and the Sahrawi}, women play a central role in Sahrawi culture and the fact that a woman is centered in this political call to arms indicates that the fight for independence is not gendered, but rather all members of society can partake.\textsuperscript{78} In addition to the machine gun, the SADR flag is in the corner, emphasizing the fight

\textsuperscript{77}“La lutte continue pour imposer l’indépendance nationale et la paix”
\textsuperscript{78}Konstantina Isidoros, \textit{Nomads and Nation-building in the Western Sahara: Gender, Politics and the Sahrawi} (S.l.: Bloomsbury, 2019).
for liberation and self-determination of the people for this specific territory. These images reify that the Front Polisario is a resistance movement developed by a common people with the goal of self-determination through means of arming civilians to self-govern SADR. The Moroccan government engages with forms of militarization to combat this ‘guerilla warfare’ group.

Chapter V: Green March (Al Massira) 1975

“The Green March led to the Madrid Accords: the beginning of another colonizing power.”

– Mansour

The Sahrawi perspective of the Green March is rarely heard on an international scale in contrast to the Moroccan and Spanish projection of the event which is widely acknowledged; however, despite these fabrications, the Green March cannot be relegated as a ‘peaceful’ expression of heroism by the Moroccan army. Officially occurring on November 6th, 1975, the Green March (al Massira in Arabic) served as a prop to hide the violent intervention and physical force deployed by the Moroccan administration and military elsewhere in Western Sahara. Grabbing the attention of Moroccans through radio and television, King Hassan II rallied his people to participate in a march reclaiming Moroccan territory.79 His speeches employed rhetoric like “récupération du Sahara”80 to instill a nationalistic notion of heroism and brotherhood. He depicted the process of reclaiming the Southern provinces as actively protecting them from a colonial ‘other,’ Spain. Concocted as a ploy to regain political power and legitimacy after the two coup attempts in 1971 and 1972,81 the Green March served as a uniting event for

80 “Les actuels Sahraouis sont les descendants directs des tribus originaires du Yemen,” Le Dossier du Sahara Occidental: association des amis de la république arabe sahraouie démocratique, Yale Manuscripts and Archives, MS 1351: The Pamphlet Collection
Moroccans that was mobilized by nationalistic and religious beliefs. Through his promotion of the need to liberate the Southern Provinces, King Hassan II was able to gather a cohort of 350,000 Moroccans to march into Western Sahara with the intention of forcing the Spanish colonizers out. Marchers were not equipped with arms, but rather carried Qurans, posters of the King’s face, and large Moroccan flags (Fig. VIII).

The March was titled ‘Green’ in reference to the symbol of Islam as depicted by the Quran which allowed the marchers to be “armed only with ‘the Holy Book of Allah’”82 reiterating the peaceful nature of the march. Tony Hodges underlines the accentuation of the religious element of the Green March, as marchers “were encouraged to regard themselves as

![Figure VIII: Moroccans participating in the Green March of 1975 carrying Qurans, Flags, and photos of the King](image)

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mujahidin, or warriors of God, in a holy as well as a national crusade to drive colonialist infidels from Islamic, Moroccan soil.”

It was through this mobilization of religion and its connection to deep rooted nationalism that settler colonialism took place in the region.

Despite the presence of the Spanish military in the territory the marchers were not fired upon when trespassing into the territory. The Moroccans and Spaniards engaged in a peaceful encounter and later, King Hassan II ordered the marchers to recoil. Francisco Franco’s deteriorating health was a fundamental factor that led to Spain reluctance to be implicated in any physical conflict. Several days later on November 14th, Morocco, Spain and Mauritania signed the Madrid Accords, ending the official colonizing role of Spain in Western Sahara. Mansour’s citation identified the Green March as the beginning of another colonizing power where the Moroccans replaced the Spanish officially by the 14th of November with the singing of the Madrid Accords, which notably bestowed Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania. In exchange for ‘giving up the colony,’ Spain would maintain the right to 35% share of all future mineral exploitation, mainly phosphate, and some rights over specific fisheries, further exploiting the land and refusing the Sahrawis their own resources.

The Green March’s historic prominence largely comes from the international remembrance of the event as a peaceful demonstration that eradicated the Spanish colonial power from Western Sahara; however, numerous local sources defy and disprove this conception. In a report titled, *Le Dossier du Sahara Occidental: Association des Amis de la république arabe sahraouie démocratique*, it stated that

“[Even before the Spanish colonizer withdrew itself, the King of Morocco had launched his offensive against the Sahara. The Green March, which took place in the west, hid the

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military intervention of October 31st, 1975, where Moroccan troops were entering in the positions who had just been abandoned by the Spanish army.]"\(^{86}\)

This newsletter highlights the rarely mentioned Moroccan military invasion into territory of Western Sahara before the Green March. This invasion heavily contradicts King Hassan II’s speeches surrounding the March as not only was the March not peaceful, but it also was not directed against the Spanish colonizers, but rather the local Sahrawis. Specifically, the citation highlights that the invasion occurred in areas that were no longer populated by Spanish military, thereby intentionally seeking to combat the Front Polisario. The fact that military conflict occurred between the Front Polisario and the Moroccan military before the Green March emphasizes the Moroccan Monarchy’s goal of colonizing the territory as opposed to being concerned with the liberation of the indigenous people. Even more so, the Moroccan forces were actually combating the Sahrawis as they encountered the civilian organized Front Polisario. The dossier goes on to state that “[10/31/1975: Moroccan military invasion in the north east of Western Sahara (violent fighting at DJARIA-- FAR-SIA- HANZA)]”\(^{87}\) specifying that the invasion was centered on specific Spanish abandoned posts located in the northeast of Western Sahara, therefore implying that the Moroccan government knew they would come into conflict with the Front Polisario. This further diminishes the argument that Morocco only intervened in the region to stop Spain from colonizing the territory, as it is evident that Spain was not even in the region where Morocco invaded. The map, Fig. IX, highlights the path of the Green March in green arrows, with the majority of the participating Moroccan members convening at Tarfaya to marching to Daoura. The map also exemplifies the military invasion that occurred in the more

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\(^{86}\) Le Dossier du Sahara Occidental : association des amis de la république arabe sahraouie démocratique, Yale Manuscripts and Archives, MS 1351: The Pamphlet Collection, Box 198. “Avant même que le colonisateur espagnol se soit retiré, le roi du Maroc lance son agression contre le Sahara. La marche verte qui se déroule à l'Ouest cache l'intervention militaire du 31 octobre 1975, les troupes marocaines entreront dans les postes qui viennent d'ètre abandonnés par l'armée espagnole.”

central part of the region near Haouza, Farsia, and Idiriya on October 31st, 1975. This military invasion coupled with the Green March served as the catalyst of intense militarized settler colonial policies in the region.

An interview with Mansour corroborated the information of a covert, Moroccan military invasion before the Green March. He further went on to proclaim that “before the so-called Green March, soldiers came to Western Sahara and killed hundreds.” This information supports the dossier but also addresses the local perspective of the Green March through the terminology being employed to describe it.

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**Figure IX:** A map that outlines the two different invasions that occurred in Fall 1975. The Green line indicates the official Green March, the red line highlights the military offensive taken by the Moroccan government.

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88 Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 16th, 2019.
Throughout the interview with Mansour, he continued to refer to the events on November 6th, 1975 as either the ‘so-called Green March’ or the Black March. This terminology illuminates the Sahrawi perspective of Moroccan actions as not entirely ‘peaceful.’ According to Mansour, Sahrawis instead refer to the event as the Black March, named after the fact that “the symbol of black in Sahrawi culture means the badness, evil.” This labeling of the March correlates the Moroccan invasion with the commencement of Sahrawis’ subjugation by Morocco instead of interpreting the invasion as an action to ward off Spanish colonizers.

The Green March is central in both Moroccan and Sahrawi identity and memory because of its significant and intense rippling effects. For Sahrawis, the Green March marks the initial moment of settler colonialism and invasion into the territory and the subsequent refugee exodus. This massive exodus led to the establishment of multiple refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria. It is in this Southwestern province of Algeria that thousands of Sahrawis are living in exile. As previously noted, the forced displacement and separation of Sahrawis from their native land has played a central role in configuring Sahrawi identity. After the creation of makeshift refugee camps for Sahrawis, a newsletter reported that the Amgala camp suffered from severe napalm bombings,

“The Amagla camp had been bombarded three days in a row at the end of the month of January. There had been battles all over the region… For a few days, the places were surveying the camp, then all of a sudden the planes arrived: the napalm bombs rained. The children, the elders were burned.”

Napalm bombs are an incredible cruel weapon of war that is typically associated with the horrors of the Vietnam War and bombings in Cambodia. Napalm can severely burn civilians due to its ability to “stick to the skin and melt the flesh.” Using Wolfe’s understanding of ‘the logic of

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89 Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 16th, 2019.
80 Le Dossier du Sahara Occidental : association des amis de la république arabe sahraouie démocratique, Yale Manuscripts and Archives, MS 1351 : The Pamphlet Collection, Box 198, “[January 1976- February 1976: napalm bombings of refugee camps.]”
elimination’ the bombing of a refugee camps that poses no security threat to the Monarchy, can serve as an example of militarily eradicating the native and embarking on a violent settler colonial campaign. Additional accounts of the bombing include,

“…at the end of January when Moroccan planes bombed and strafed the desert refugee camps. Tifariti and Bir Lehlou were bombed with napalm. Other camps were subjected to heavy rocket and machine gun fire. An eyewitness account of the siege of Amgala in January reported that Moroccan machine gunners slaughter the women and children of the camp as they attempted to escape the bombardment of their tents.”

These gruesome details emphasize the inhumanity of the Moroccan regime and undeniable fact that Morocco’s intention for invading Western Sahara was not to liberate the indigenous Sahrawis, but rather to exert physical and administrative dominance over the people and the land.

In a documentary titled *Sons of the Clouds: The Last Colony* (2012) Sahrawi individuals recount the violence inflicted upon them and their neighbors after the Green March. A member of the National Union of Sahrawi Women, Fatma Mehdi, recounted, “at that time I was 7 years old. We were playing and suddenly we saw something. We thought it was a bird, a crow, but soon it began to drop bombs and everything started to burn around us.”

The Moroccan crude military tactics that targeted Sahrawi civilians received very little exposure in the international community. Sahrawis like Fatma were fleeing Moroccan invasion and were met with violent bombing, a fact that is widely overlooked by the international community. In fact, a significant portion of the Moroccan military arms and weapons were either funded by the United States, or were actually U.S. weapons. Other international actors aided Morocco, implicating numerous actors in the construction of a settler colonial regime in Western Sahara.

The Green March and the subsequent militarization of the region emphasizes the settler colonial goal of replacing the native and obtaining the territory, rather than taking a colonial

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92 Le Dossier du Sahara Occidental : association des amis de la république arabe sahraouie démocratique, Yale Manuscripts and Archives, MS 1351 : The Pamphlet Collection, Box 198.
approach and subjecting the native to serve as forced laborers and subordinates. In a comprehensive view, all of these secretly militarized events compile the structure that Wolfe is indicating, a structured invasion where there are multiple affronts to alter society and the landscape, thereby constituting settler colonialism.

The Green March does not only exist as an event of the past, but rather is constantly living in Sahrawi and Moroccan memory, again situating it as a structure rather than a singular, historic event. For Moroccans, November 6th is a national holiday commemorating the Green March and since Morocco is administratively controlling the Occupied Territories, November 6th is a mandated holiday in the non-Front Polisario controlled Western Sahara. An illustration of the Green March is printed on the 100 Dirham banknotes (Fig. X).

The imagery on the Dirham includes multiple doves flying up above the nationalistic men carrying Moroccan flags, reemphasizing the ‘peaceful’ nature of the March. Sahrawis remember
the Green March in a similar vein as the Palestinians remember the al-Nakba where Mansour proclaimed “The Nakba we have here too [Western Sahara] from the Green March/ Black March.”95 In a broader sense, there exist many similarities in the plight of Palestinians and Sahrawis. Sahrawis will also always remember the Green March as the beginning of leaving their homeland, a mass exodus that then led to an influx of refugees and the formation of the camps. Mansour emphasized this when stating that “each family some members are missing, maybe died, maybe in refugee camps,”96 illustrating the uncertainty of Sahrawis locations and the disconnected nature of the territory since the Moroccan invasion.

Chapter VI: The Berm

“No one has any idea where the landmines are, there are no maps to locate them. When it’s raining and the rivers drain the landmines change and makes it even worse and harder to find them.” – Mansour

Morocco has militarized the colonial space and reinforced their settler colonial power through the creation of the Berm. The Berm is comprised of a series of six separate walls, that together is approximately 2,700 kilometers long, second only to the Great Wall of China.97 Construction on the first wall commenced in 1980 and was completed in 1982 (Fig. XI).98 The subsequent walls were built from 1982 until 1987 with the completion of the sixth wall. Fig. XI highlights the different defensive walls that were created by the Morocco army during guerilla warfare with the Front Polisario. Each wall slowly isolated the regions, with the sixth wall finalizing a concrete borderline between the Occupied Territories run by Morocco and the region

95 Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 16th, 2019.
96 Ibid.
98 Figure XI
belonging to RASD. When referencing the Berm, most typically it is referring to the long, sixth wall. Composed of sand and stone, the Berm appears as an almost ‘natural’ barrier cutting through the arid, desert land. Fig. XII shows an aerial view of the Berm continuing into the horizon for thousands of miles. However, despite its seemingly unthreatening appearance, the sand Berm has been heavily laced with thousands of land mines, eradicating any conceptions of the Berm as a natural barrier. Estimates regarding the number of land mines range, with Mansour claiming that “10 million land mines divide Western Sahara, preventing Sahrawis to cross and meet.”99 It is difficult to exactly know how many land mines lace the region, but most estimates exceed one million. Al Jazeera has approximated that at least 2,500 individuals have been wounded. 100 The wall is currently the perimeter that separates the Occupied Territories from SADR, disconnecting Sahrawis from each other and militarizing the settler colonial space.

The Berm is an exemplification of Theorist Lorenzo Veracini’s understanding of settler colonialism where the colonizer dictates who can freely move about and the Berm only allows the Moroccan army to fluctuate their position. In contrast to the Moroccan military, Sahrawis living in the Occupied Territories often find it almost impossible to get to the Tindouf camps safely, and many nomadic farmers have been physically harmed by loose landmines while herding their animals. The Berm physically carves up the territory in a way similar to how colonizers previously carved Africa in the Berlin Conference; arbitrarily and to the benefit of the colonizer for land use. An interview with Mansour explains that the Berm is not only a military tactic, but is also a way to subjugate and attack Sahrawis and their culture as it limits the freedom to practice traditional nomadic herding techniques.101

101 Mansour, interviewed by Amanda Taheri, February 16th, 2019.
The construction of the Berm and its impacts employ the tactic of colonial mapping as a tool of empire by declaring which regions should be handed to Morocco and which regions are not deemed as fruitful or necessary and therefore can be under the SADR’s domain. When examining the region of the Occupied Territories, it becomes clear that all of the coastline that is flooded with rich fishing waters and the more centrally located phosphate reserves are being extrapolated by Morocco, reiterating Wolfe’s proclamation that settler colonialism is about territory and the benefits of obtaining that territory. In general walls serve military and symbolic purposes as, “at times walls manifest a power that borders on the violent. They have the power to divide space, configure place, and create new domains. Walls are the most basic elements of

Figure XI: Map of Western Sahara highlighting the different time periods of wall construction on the Berm
architecture, but they can also be the most enriching.\textsuperscript{102} The power behind the wall is reflected in the ability to separate indigenous populations and through Morocco’s military advantage through the use of landmines and military outposts throughout the region. The wall serves as a constant reminder of Sahrawi entrapment, whether it be in the refugee camps or in the Occupied Territories.

The cartographic role of the Berm emphasizes the settler colonial infrastructure that Morocco is implementing. Figure XIII exposes a military map, highlighting the different areas that the Berm weaves in and out of and the military path of constructing the Berm. This map emphasizes the omnipresence of the Moroccan army in Western Sahara, as seemingly most of the territory has been traversed by Moroccan

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{Figure_XII.png}
\caption{Aerial view of the Berm}
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\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{Figure_XIII.png}
\caption{A map depicting Moroccan military defense lines throughout Western Sahara}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{102} Tadao Ando, \textit{Wall: The Time’s (sic) Building, 1984}," PERSPECTA 25, p. 211
military vehicles. Ultimately, the Berm is a physical assertion of Moroccan settler colonial dominance.

Chapter VII: Similar Situations and their Application of Settler Colonial Theory

“Do you see the Sahrawis situation as similar to Palestinians?” - Amanda
“In some way yes, it is all about the struggle for self-determination.”- Mansour

Israel/Palestine is an internationally recognized site of contested nationalisms and settler colonialism. By the nature of these two characteristics, the territory shares many similarities with the situation in Western Sahara, particularly because of their experiences with colonial mapping practices. There are, however, fundamental differences in the conflicts, mainly the role of religion and the appearance of Israel as a ‘Western’ actor. Israel was officially deemed a nation-state in 1948 after the traumatic al-Nakba forced thousands of Palestinians to be displaced. Like the Green March, the al-Nakba continues to live in memory and identity, but also as a current structure of settler colonialism. Author Walid Salem proclaims that Israel is actively continuing the situation of the al-Nakba daily through Palestinians losing residency rights, violent attacks against Palestinians in Gaza, and the land confiscations. This notion of the continuation of a structure parallels the aforementioned argument of the Green March as not being relegated to the past.

Unlike the Moroccan regime, the motivator behind Israeli structures is often Zionism, a Jewish nationalist movement that consists in a multitude of forms: religious, political and cultural. Zionism aspires to create and maintain a Jewish national state in Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel. This form of nationalism has produced a form of settler ‘indigeneity’ with regards to

the location, meaning that Jews in Israel assert their right to be in their ‘homeland.’ Lorenzo Veracini identifies this form of settler colonialism as “Narrative Transfer: when ‘settlers are also indigenous people’ claims are made.” While this is a different specific form of settler colonialism, it is nonetheless settler colonialism, a power structure that dictates the fate of both Palestinians and Sahrawis.

Through the mobilization of Zionist nationalism, settler colonial structures such as the al-Nakba, the creation of 125-mile wall that excludes Palestinians from accessing parts of Jerusalem, and the militarization of the colonial space, mirror tactics of the settler colonial regime in Morocco. While there are apparent differences in the situations, and no two conflicts are mirror images, there exist clear similarities between the two conflicts.

Sahrawis are aware that Palestinians receive more international attention. I believe the reason is twofold: first that Israel/Palestine is often reduced down to a religious and ethnic battle between Jews and Arab Muslims and secondly, that in the international circles Israel is considered a ‘Western’ actor, or at least more Western than Morocco is classified as. Non-coincidentally the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic flag (Fig. XIV) is almost identical to the Palestinian Flag (Fig. XV). The Palestinian flag was founded in 1948 and the flag of SADR was founded in 1976, both founded shortly after their traumatic exoduses occurred and the foundation of their resistance movements. Both flags strongly associate with the Arab Revolt flag which is

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associated with the Pan-Arabism movement, possibly joining these two resistance movements together in a collective. The SADR flag has the Islamic crest as the only addition that separates the territories flags apart.

While Palestine and Western Sahara are not in replica situations, they do reflect the notion that a post-colonial era has not yet been achieved, and indigenous populations in the Middle East and North Africa are living under settler colonial regimes. Israel receives much more international attention and collaboration from Western actors, and it is possible that this difference in connectivity between American Jews and Israeli Jews influences the close relationship between the two countries and impacts the international awareness of Israeli and Palestinian actions.

Conclusion

The historical scope of this thesis provides a framework to analyze the current situation in Western Sahara where Morocco continues to maintain and reinforce structures of settler colonialism. Forty-four years since the Green March and Moroccan invasion, the site of Western Sahara still exists as a region of contested nationalisms and settler colonialism. Thousands of Sahrawis are either living in exile in Algeria or are living under a repressive regime, both groups unable to access their homeland in its pure, liberated form. My conversations with Mansour and his friends led me to produce this paper, as their silenced voices lack the international network to expose the daily discriminations and atrocities they face. Understanding the historical roots of the conflict can help address the present regime and the injustices conducted on this contested geography needs to be exposed.

The current situation in Western Sahara can be traced to the central structural role of the Green March of 1975. Mansour said to me, “As a young man, belonging to the third generation under occupation, I could clearly see through the stories of the people I know from the
generations before me how their identity was effected by the Black March. I live it now as an indigenous man who is living as a stranger in his homeland” eloquently remarking on the active role the Black March (so-called Green March) has had on the past and current generations of Sahrawis. Mansour, like thousands of other Sahrawis, is “living as a stranger in his homeland” because of the settler colonial structures employed by Morocco in Western Sahara.

The combination of colonial mapping projects, creation of the Berm, manifestations of nationalism, and the militarization of the colonial space have allowed Morocco to sustain its settler colonial regime in Western Sahara. Morocco continues to garner international support, financially and militaristically, to maintain these settler colonial structures, thereby implicating the United States and other international actors in a scheme of settler colonial actions. Due to the lack of international awareness, which is closely tied with the notion of non-Western actors participating in colonial actions, subaltern voices like Mansours are rarely expressed to international networks. This is an attempt to bring light to Sahrawi voices in conjunction with nationalism and settler colonial theory.
Bibliography


