

*Settling to Win: State Expansion in Post Colonial
Times in Western Sahara and Beyond*

Prepared for a presentation at the Lauder School of Government,
Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya
February 25th, 2008

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¹ The author wishes to thank: Robert J. Art, Boaz Atzili, Michal Ben Yosef, Steven L. Burg, Gary Goertz, Sean Lynn-Jones, Steve Miller, Robert H. Mnookin, Richard N. Rosecrance, and Steve Watts for their useful comments on earlier stages of this project

Abstract

The paper investigates why Morocco initiated a new colonization project in Western Sahara, outside of its sovereign boundaries, beginning in 1975; thus negating the international trend of decolonization and a set of international norms. The paper is part of a broader project that analyses state expansion under conditions of decolonization and is intended to generate the outline of a possible hypothesis in respect the anomaly of state expansion during decolonization.

Current explanations of state expansion, such as Morocco's in Western Sahara, focus mostly on unit level variables. Broader structural arguments leave out the internal variables and do not deal with expansion of mid sized states. In contrast, the paper offers a comprehensive analysis that includes the internal drivers as well as the external permissive realities. The paper argues that the Moroccan claims to Western Sahara, and the subsequent expansion into the region, were perceived in Rabat as a vital state interest. It served then, and still serves now, as a major source of legitimacy for the monarchy. The paper further explores the international permissive conditions that allowed Morocco to pursue its territorial aspirations: Decolonization that created material and ideational opportunities for expansion, bipolarity that allowed Morocco to overcome constraints to do so. Finally, the paper suggests that the emerging norm of self determination that shaped the nature of Moroccan expansion, and in particular, the use of settlers.

Introduction

Political scientists prefer to track and explain change; this paper, in a sense, deals with continuity. It inquires under what conditions did Morocco launch in 1975 a settler based expansionist project (Strategic Settlement Project-SSP) in the midst of decolonization.

Beginning in the period following World War I, but mostly following World War II, all traditional global empires had begun retrenching from their dependencies in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Caribbean.² The process, decolonization, included not only retrenchment but also the creation of new nation states based on the emerging norm of self determination. In 1960, the process was endorsed by a special UN General Assembly declaration³, and was further facilitated by set of institutions and other declarations that followed it.⁴ By the end of the 20th century almost all colonial dependencies had turned politically independent, totaling 130 new states (Strange, 486). This process, arguably, was the single most important one in shaping the number of the states in the current international system.⁵

Yet, four states took action that seemed to contradict this trend. Besides Morocco in 1975, Israel launched four separate SSP's in the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai and Golan Heights (1967); Turkey launched a project in Cyprus (1974), and Indonesia launched an SSP in East Timor (1975).

² Excluding the new empires, USA and USSR, that no longer placed sovereign sea based territorial expansion as part of their imperial designs.

³ General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV): Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

⁴ For example, Special Committee on Decolonization established in 1962. In 1990, the General Assembly proclaimed 1990-2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and adopted a Plan of Action. In 2001 the General Assembly extended, in effect, the decision.

⁵ Though imperial break-up was crucial in the process of imperial retrenchment, it was decolonization that assured that these territories would become numerous independent states.

For the purposes of this paper, *Strategic Settlement Projects (SSP's)* are state orchestrated population movements by a *settling state* to a *target territory*. These movements include both the actual relocation of citizens of the settling state into the target territory, as well as the development of the infrastructure to serve them. These projects are strategic because they are intended to advance a state preference (usually, expansion) in the international arena.

SSP's can be contrasted with two other types of state orchestrated settlement activity: Non strategic settlement projects and internal strategic settlement projects. In the case of the former, settlements are created primarily to house people, though they may also serve a secondary purpose. An example would be the creation of refugee camps following a war.

SSP's could also be contrasted with internal strategic settlement projects. These will be projects that lead to the creation of new settlements, and serve a broader internal strategic goals such as the creation of a new capital city.

A *Settling State* initiates and carries out the SSP in the *contested territory* and is also the original domicile of the settlers. However, the latter by itself does not qualify a state to be a settling state. For example, in the 1960's significant numbers of East Pakistanis (later, Bangladeshi citizens) migrated to the Indian state of Assam, as part of an effort by Assam's government to change the demographic composition there.. The newcomers came from East-Pakistan, but their government did not initiate nor took part in this population movement.

By *contested territory* I mean a territory in which the settling state is not the recognized sovereign by its own laws, international law and/or the majority of the international community. In all cases I study, the settling state had effective control over the *contested territory*. However, as noted, in all cases the state faces a dual challenge. It is not the area's

sovereign according to international law, and practically, it faces competition for both control and sovereignty from other states or national liberation movements.

As a practical matter, in three out of the four cases the contested territory is also contiguous to the settling state. In one case, Turkey's project in Cyprus, the contested territory is part of an island, in the immediate vicinity of the settling state.

SSP's clashed not just with the *Zeitgeist*, but also with international norms. First, the norms of territorial integrity, which, as Zacher observed (215) includes a "growing respect for the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries"⁶. Second, SSP's were carried in spite of specific prohibitions on colonizing activities contained within the laws of war. Articles 52 and 55 of the 1907 Hague Regulations forbid the creation of permanent property rights by an occupying state in an occupied territory, and Article 49 of the 1949 Geneva Convention prohibits the transfer of civilians from the territory of an occupying state to the occupied territory.

SSP's are also a costly activity. Maintaining an occupation army and introducing settlers into the new territories had proven to be heavy burden on all economies of settling states. The Moroccan armed forces grew from 90,000 soldiers to some 180,000 since it took control of the Western Sahara in order to respond to the demand of controlling the region. During the 1980's Morocco spent some US \$ 300 million a year only on the security related aspects of controlling the region (Durch, 157).

Settling civilians adds a further burden. In almost all cases newcomers were housed in new settlements, away from the existing habitats of the indigenous population. As such, SSP's entail significant investments in basic infrastructure including roads, energy supplies,

⁶ Other had called this norm "border fixity" or "territorial sovereignty". See: Atzili, Boaz. 2006/7. *When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict* International Security - Volume 31, Number 3, pp. 139-173. See there also a discussion about the nature of previous ownership and the open issue if the rule only applies between states.

and housing. Both the political instability and peripheral location of these areas forced governments to fund much of the development, as private capital is usually hesitant about investing there. It is estimated, for example, that the Israeli government invested about US \$10 billion between 1967 and 2003 in order to support its settlement projects in the West Bank and Gaza (Swirski, 164).

Finally, it is far from clear why a state would invest so much in an area it already controls. As mentioned above, in all cases, the settling state had direct control of the settled target territory. Moreover, in all cases the power differentials were overwhelmingly in favor of the settling state. In most cases, while there were opposing claims for the territory, there was no effective opposition in the target territory to foreign control. This question is especially baffling as SSP's are long term projects with an uncertain future. After almost four decades of settlement activity in the West Bank, Israeli settlers account for only 10% of local population and it is far from clear if their presence there will indeed secure Israel's territorial expansion. Settlement projects may even be counter productive. Analyzing the British and French failures to incorporate, respectively, Ireland and Algeria, Ian Lustick (1985) observed (vii) that these "failures were primarily due to the use of settlers...who interrupted the successful application of cooptive techniques that helped to legitimize and stabilize central state rule in other outlying territories."

Why is that important?

As noted, SSP's were used in territories that are the heart of some of the longest conflicts of our times: West Bank and Gaza, Western Sahara, Cyprus. In all three, the settlements emerged as the one of the most important factors in derailing the internationally supported peace plans of the 1990's.

The relationship between a settlement project and the difficulty of settling a conflict is perhaps most obvious in the case of Western Sahara. While both warring parties (the POLISARIO and Morocco) agreed in 1991 to the UN sponsored referendum as the mechanism that will determine the region's fate, they were unable to reach agreement over the eligibility to vote, and especially whether to include the Moroccan settlers in the pull of voters.

In Cyprus, the UN peace plan failed in a referendum in 2005 (on the Greek side) despite US, British, Turkish, and European endorsements. The reason: Many of the Greek-Cypriots resisted the plan's stipulation that some 120,000 Turkish settlers' would remain there. Finally, many observers, including US peace envoy, Dennis Ross, suggest that Israel's ongoing settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza during the 1990's was a significant reason for the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process (Ross, 765-766).

Left unresolved these conflicts may lead to further deterioration. Testifying before Congress, a senior US official warned in 2005 that:

“Unresolved, this dispute [Western Sahara] significantly impedes regional integration and leaves the Sahrawi people with a bleak and uncertain future. If the situation were to deteriorate, it could bring new suffering and hardship, threaten political and economic reform trends in Algeria and Morocco, and impose serious risks for the stability of the Maghreb, with implications for Southern Europe” (US Congress, 18)

Investigating the reasons that led to these settlement projects is crucial, then, both for analyzing how these conflicts unfolded, but also is dealing with a significant barrier to their resolution.

Theory: Why should we develop a comprehensive model for studying SSPs?

A comprehensive analysis of SSP's breaks free from the limited confines of existing comparative explanations; all of which are restricted to the internal arenas of the settling states. Most are grounded in the state formation literature. In these analyses, the primary actor is the political center of the expanding state and to a lesser extent, the settlers and indigenous population in the target territory. In turn, the state is analyzed either as a rational unitary actor that uses SSP's to advance its expansionist goals; or through the way in which its institutional makeup affects its expansionist goals and strategies. Levin (1994) suggests that a state's use of settlers is based on two separate rationales. First, settlers are encouraged to move to an outlying territory in order to speed industrial production there, thus creating an economic based association between the two areas (41). Second, she argues that deploying settlers in a periphery is a tool of social control as they create a "ready made collaborative class" (41-42). Here, Levine's argument is similar to Lustick's *In State Building Failure*. There, Lustick (1985) suggests that that English settlers in Ireland and French settlers in Algeria, provided their respective states with a class of people that both assisted in exerting control as well as securing long term incorporation. Lustick admits, however, that "the exact manner in which settlers were to transform the region...into an integral part" of the settling state was unclear (6-7).

These explanations have two major interrelated shortcomings. First, they reflect a vision of state expansion that is dependant mostly on the preferences of an expansionist state and its interaction with the indigenous population. However, state expansion is significantly affected by constraints and incentives embedded in the international environment in which it operates. Moreover, without a system based perspective, we lose the ability to make generalizations across time in respect to the frequency of state expansion and

the manner by which it is pursued. We can not explain why states expanded in the late 19th century, and ceased to do so a century later; or why the end of the cold war led to pressures on settling states to end their SSPS' as some did. This state of affairs leaves much of our reality unexplained. For example, if state formation is the prime reason for state expansion, why did the vast majority of the 20th century's new states not expand as they solidified? Recent actions such as the Kosovar Albanians effort to secure international recognition to their plight of independence, reminds us that states, new and old, think that the international community's response to their claims matters. If it matters to real actors in the world, it must matters to scholars who study them.

Second, both Lustick and Levine compare early English expansion to Ireland dating back to the 16th century, to French expansion into Algeria which begun in the first part of the 19th century, to Israel's settlements from the second half of the 20th century. All three cases occurred in vastly different environments. Beginning with the basic building block of what is a state, to the international norms in each period, to the power relations that surrounded each case. Such variation weakens the explanatory and predictive powers of these theories. Indeed, events of the last fifteen years seemed to challenge arguments made by Lustick and Levine. Lustick (1993) famously looked at hegemonic beliefs in the public (and the way in which political entrepreneurs capitalized on them), as the prime arena where decisions over state expansion would occur. Yet, following the end of the cold war, all four state expansion projects mentioned above faced international pressures, and were scaled back in varying degrees. Perhaps, then, there might be temporal and systemic explanations besides models based on internal dynamics?

We need, therefore, to try and develop other explanations for state expansion through SSP's; explanations that would control for the temporal aspect and will perhaps integrate a systemic perspective.

International Relations theory does indeed offer a systemic framework. State expansion is an important matter discussed in its realist strand. Both classical and offensive realists suggest that states are perpetually driven to expand -- "Nations...expand when they can" (Zakaria, p.9) -- and maintain that "conquering and controlling land...is the supreme political objective in a world of territorial states." (Mearsheimer, 86) Jack Snyder (1991) suggests that this approach is grounded in three strategic concepts: "Gains and losses are cumulative, the offense has the advantage; and offensive threats make others more cooperative."⁷

Defensive realists share with offensive realists the basic assumption of structural realism that the anarchic nature of the international system conditions state behavior (Mearsheimer, 2). Similarly, they accept the notion that states expand to enhance their security. Defensive realists differ with offensive realists over the consistency of the tendency to expand, and argue that states expand only in the face of threats: "They expand not when they want, but when they must." (Zakaria 1998, 9-10) While offensive realists see states as actively engaging in expansion in order to deal with future threats, defensive realists see states' strategies as responsive only to immediate threats.

Offensive and defensive realists further differ over the role of internal variables in state expansive behavior. Though both base their world view on the Waltzian structural outlook, defensive realist literature has been relaxing rigid structural notions and allowing a greater role for internal factors such as elite coalition building and ideology in its explanatory models

⁷ On occupation as adding to the cumulative quality of power see Liberman 1996.

(Snyder 1991) By contrast, offensive realists remain loyal to their intellectual origins and hold that it is the nature of the international system that conditions state behavior.

Yet, these debates offer us limited help in trying to understand post World War II state expansion and in particular, the use of SSP's. Much of the discussion about "state expansion" in the literature refers to the United States' use of force, including long-term deployment of troops away from America's shores. It does not refer to actual extension of American sovereignty into foreign lands. This definition reflects the world in which modern international relations theory, especially its largely dominant American component, evolved. By the time the modern discipline was launched in the twentieth century, the United States was no longer expanding its sovereignty.⁸ Its expansion was rather military-based and included either the temporary stationing of forces in other sovereign nations (Japan, Germany, Korea), or prolonged overseas wars (Korea, Vietnam, Iraq).

Second, as noted, state expansion in realist theory is a policy used only by well-established great powers. In the current international order, however, it is mostly a practice of mid-sized states such as Indonesia or Morocco.

We need therefore, an analysis that would both fit exciting realities, and include both a structural perspective and an understanding of the internal variables that affect state expansion. The following paper offers to do both, through the analysis of Moroccan expansion into Western Sahara. It uses the logic of historical analysis and is puzzle drive. It is historical in the sense that it attempt to identify the necessary causes of the Moroccan expansion and its nature in order to serve as a basis for a broader argument in respect to other similar cases. It is puzzle driven in the sense that it focuses on the particular question of territorial expansion in the era of decolonization, rather than on the advancement of

⁸ Though Hawaii and Alaska were accepted into the Union as late as 1959, they were both under American control for decades earlier.

theory. As such, it uses an analytical eclecticism perspective (Sue et.al, 4, Katzenstein and Okawara, 167-168)) that focuses on the problem at hand as it is experienced by actors, rather than as part of an effort to illustrate a theoretical argument. The approach that is sensitive to both internal and external variables, and uses both a realist power based framework alongside ideas drawn from norm based arguments.

Structure

The paper continues in five sections. The first provides necessary background to Morocco's acquisition of Western Sahara in 1975, and describes the settlement project there. The second analyzes the internal sources for the Moroccan acquisition of the territory: Its contribution of the regime's legitimacy, as well as the economic drivers. The third section analyzes the systemic phenomena that led Rabat to pursue its policy: decolonization that created an opportunity for state expansion, bipolarity that allowed Rabat to overcome constraints to expansion, and the emerging norm of self determination which created an incentive for Morocco to deploy settlers in order to secure territorial expansion. In the fourth section I summarize the model that arises out of the pervious sections, highlight the relationship between its parts, and offer a preliminary view into the model's applicability in other temporal cases.

I. Morocco and Western Sahara

General

The Western Sahara is located in North Western Africa. It is a territory of 266,000 Sq. Km⁹ that borders Morocco (443 km), Algeria (42 km), Mauritania (1,561 km), and the Atlantic Ocean (1,110 km). It is mostly a flat dry desert covered with sand and rocks.

From a Spanish protectorate to Moroccan control

With no clear political authority over the area, Spain was the primary actor that showed interest in this part of the Sahara desert. Beginning in the early days of exploration Spain occasionally set trading posts on the region's shores. The area's proximity to the Spanish controlled Canary Islands, shaped its strategic value for Madrid. Indeed, in 1494 Portugal, Spain's main contender for global territorial expansion, recognized the area as a Spanish sphere of influence in the Treaty of Tordesillas. However, Spain made little effort to gain actual control of the area due to the combination of inhospitable conditions, its focus on its empire in America and Asia, and the lack of any creditable competitor to its control there. Even occasional incursions from current day Morocco into the area did not change this threat perception, though they did contribute later to the Moroccans claim for the region (Naylor, 18).

The renewed European colonial expansion in Africa at the 19th century changed the Spanish approach. France, Britain and Germany all showed interested in North Africa and advanced their colonial penetration there. Spain responded by creating a number of coastal stations. Following the 1884 Berlin conference, Madrid proclaimed the area – called then Rio Del Oro and Saguia el-Hamra - a Spanish protectorate. In 1900, Spain and France signed the

⁹ About the size of Colorado and about 13 times larger than Israel

first of four conventions that demarked the borders between the Spanish and French colonial spheres of control, leaving all of Western Sahara as a Spanish protectorate (Naylor, 41). All the region's neighboring territories (current day Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania) were placed under French influence.

Generalissimo Franco used the area as a launching pad to his rebellion against the Spanish Republican government and it later became an important part of his regime's imperial ethos. Decolonization after World War II era posed a dual challenge to Spanish control of the area: A military rebellion by the Sahara liberation army (SLA), alongside international pressure to allow the local residents to exercise their right of self determination.

Once Moroccan independence was secured in 1956, sections of the *Moroccan Liberation Army* turned their efforts against Spanish control in the Sahara and the enclaves in controlled in Morocco (Infi, Tarfaya). These sections, renamed the *Sahara Liberation Army (SLA)*, were supported by the Moroccan government but not fully controlled by it. They also included both Moroccan fighters and local Saharan tribesmen. After a series of clashes, known as the *Infi War*, (October 1957-February 1958), that culminated with a joint French-Spanish victory over the SLA, Rabat and Madrid signed an agreement that regulated their relationship. Spain withdrew from the enclave of Tarfaya but retained Western Sahara and the enclave of Infi.

However the military victory did not safeguard international recognition of the legitimacy of Spanish control. In 1963 Western Sahara was included in the UN's list of the non-self-governing territories and in October 1964 the UN Decolonization Committee stated that Spain needs to launch a process of decolonizing in the territory. By December 1965, the UN General Assembly adopted a similar resolution (Durch 154-156).

Indeed, Madrid was listening. Despite Franco's earlier statement that he would never give up the territory Spain realized that it must find channels to express the indigenous population's voice. In 1963 the population was awarded the vote to the Spanish Parliament, in 1964 Madrid set up a local council of elders, and in 1966 Spain conducted a referendum that confirmed the population's willingness to remain under Spanish control. The UN did not consider the Spanish referendum to be a fulfillment of the right of self determination. In 1973 Spain declared that it is willing to begin the "necessary preparation" to start decolonization (Naylor, 23), despite the discovery that the region has rich phosphorous depositories. With the growing prospect of decolonization in the area, both Morocco and Mauritania made their demands for the area more vocal.¹⁰

Showdown

In May 1973 Saharawi activists, supported by Mauritania, formed a movement of national liberation, the POLISARIO.¹¹ The organization was the first effective local movement of national liberation and was preceded by a small number of other organizations such as MPAIAC, a movement that called for the liberation of the Canary Islands, and the MOREHOB, a liberation movement headed a Spanish agent provocateur (Lalutte, 12). The POLISARIO adopted , Brahim Bassiri, as its first martyr although In reality, Bassiri had his own nascent liberation movement as early as 1966, which faded once he disappeared in the late 1960's (Huges, 246).

Within a year, the POLISARIO demanded full and immediate independence for Western Sahara, though it agreed initially to cede some of the area to its host, Mauritania.

¹⁰ For further discussion the Moroccan claims see below

¹¹ Spanish Acronym for *Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro* (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro)

Once the organization gained Algerian support it expanded its territorial claim into the areas it initially considered Mauritanian. In 1974 Spain awarded Western Sahara the status of internal autonomy and gave the council of elders a legislative authority. In August 1974 Spain declared that by mid 1975, a referendum for self determination will be held. Madrid also acted on the ground with the hope of affecting the outcome by creating a local party (PUNS) that would support its rule. Morocco intensified its demands for the region that dated back to the late 1950's and argued now that Western Sahara was part of Morocco prior to colonization. In September 1974 Morocco announced that it would submit the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and by the end of the year Spain agreed to postpone the referendum in anticipation of the ICJ's decision. On December 1974 the UN General Assembly (Res.3292) voted on the matter and agreed to ask the ICJ for a non binding advisory opinion in order to ascertain if the area was *Terra Nullius* (belonging to no one) prior to colonization; and if not, what exactly were the ties between the area, Morocco and the Mauritanian entity. In October 1975 the court published its opinion that the region was not *Terra Nullius* at colonization; that both Morocco and the Mauritanian entity had legal ties to the area; but that these ties did not constitute territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity.

Morocco was quick to interpret the decision as conferring legitimacy to its claims for historical title. With official Madrid occupied with Franco's last days, Morocco launched on November 1975 a mass march (the *Green March*) of 350,000 of its citizens into Western Sahara. In negotiations that ensued, Spain, under some US cajoling, agreed to cede control of the region to Morocco and Mauritania. Upon Spain's final withdrawal in February 1976, the POLISARIO declared an independent Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and turned to a war against the invading forces of Morocco and Mauritania. Three years later,

Mauritania withdrew its claim to, and forces from, Western Sahara. Morocco, far superior to the POLISARIO, became the effective ruler of most the territory. As a result of the war, tens of thousands of Sahariws fled to Algeria. In 2007 there were 100,000-200,000 Saharawi refugees in Algerian camps.

Morocco in Western Sabara since 1975

Civilian

Upon gaining control of the region in February 1976 Morocco summarily annexed the new territory which was equal to about 60% of its pre 1976 area. Rabat incorporated Western Sahara into its existing administrative structure. The former Spanish colony was dismantled into five separate provinces some of which were merged with provinces in southern Morocco as to stress the region's complete integration (Thobhani, 210-211).

This Moroccan incorporation explains why in its own view, Rabat's actions do not contradict the specific prohibitions in respect to SSPs.¹² Both norms are part of the law of war, and pertain to rules of occupation. In the Moroccan view, its control in the Sahara is not an occupation, and therefore it should not abide by them.

Morocco also used tight control in order to quash any local resistance and to foster Moroccanization of the local population. Saharawis were prohibited from using their own local dialect, and students in the region have were forced to dress in traditional Moroccan attire. Contact with the outside world was seriously restricted including severe limitations on foreigner's ability to visit the area (Thobhani, 242-243).

¹² Articles 52 and 55 of the 1907 Hague Regulations forbid the creation of permanent property rights by an occupying state in an occupied territory, and Article 49 of the 1949 Geneva Convention prohibits the transfer of civilians from the territory of an occupying state to the occupied territory.

The Moroccan Settlement Project

Shortly after it gained control of the Western Sahara, Rabat launched an extensive settlement program of Moroccan citizens to the newly acquired territory. Indeed, the region's population grew 300% from 1974 to 2004, despite an unidentified number of locals that left the area upon the Moroccan invasion. By 2007, there were about 300,000 people residing in Western Sahara, of which 180,000 were settlers.

Morocco's SSP included three elements: First, Rabat created a set of incentives to attract Moroccans to move to the newly acquired region. Second, the Moroccan government invested in the creation of modern infrastructure in the area including an airport in the region's former capital, residential and commercial real estate, as well as roads. These projects supported the newcomers, were part of the incentives they were awarded, and advanced the integration between the different parts of greater Morocco. Finally, Morocco made an effort to contain international constraints on its actions. It made a great effort to limit the flow of information about its settlement project through a strict control system which successfully regulates contacts between Saharawis and outside visitors. Furthermore, Morocco claims that many of the settlers are in fact Saharawis that relocated from the Western Sahara during the colonial times and are now merely coming back to their ancestor land (Thobani, 103-171, Kroner, 10-12)

Morocco v. POLISARIO

As noted, upon the Morocco and Mauritanian entry into Western Sahara, the POLISARIO launched a 16 year long war against them. It also announced the creation of an independent Saharwi state, The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The state has effective control in the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria, and since 1979 in the largely

empty southern part of Western Sahara. SADR was recognized by over 80 countries¹³, has 13 embassies abroad and is a member of the African Union.

Following the 1979 Mauritanian withdrawal POLISARIO was able concentrate its resources on Moroccan forces in the region. For the next 12 years, the small organization was able to conduct an effective guerilla war in the desert, forcing Morocco to deploy, at times, 100,000 soldiers there (Durch, 155-157). Morocco also built an enormous (1200 KM long) separation barrier (Berm) between the areas it controls and the area under POLISARIO's control. Moroccan costs of the war were estimated in the late 1980's at \$ US 300-350 Million a year (Seddon, 22-23). In 1988 both parties accepted a UN peace proposal that reiterated the need to determine the region's fate through a referendum. Since then, despite the presence of a UN force (MINURSO) on the ground, and a later appointment of former US secretary of State James Baker as special envoy to resolve the matter, both parties are unable to agree who should participate in the referendum. The main bone of contention: Should the settlers be admitted or not? (Sola-Martin, 54-85). As the negotiations.

II. Morocco's claim to Western Sahara: Internal sources

Morocco's claim to Western Sahara was driven by three reasons: First, it served as a source of legitimacy to the crown's rule. Second, it allowed the king to outbid his nationalist political competitors and in particular the *Istiqlal* party. Finally, control of the region allowed Morocco to guarantee its secure its position as one of the most significant players in the world's phosphate markets.

¹³ The number dropped to 43 by 2007

Regime Legitimacy

Even before the French protectorate era (1912-1956), the Moroccan monarchy faced severe internal challenges and, in effect, shared its power with other actors, mostly feudal lords. By the early 20th century the Sultan's weakness was so great that "the question was not whether Morocco will retain its independence, but to which European power she would surrender it" (Halmsted, 11). The weak Moroccan monarchy succumbed finally to the French and by 1912 it agreed to become a French protectorate in the treaty of Fez. While the Sultan remained the titular head of state, the French exercised control over most aspects of governance (Reinehart, 44-45).

The struggle for independence after World War II, did not aid the monarchy's status. Moroccan nationalism was born and shaped by other actors: religious reformers that resisted French culture, and intellectuals that were affected by the Arab revival (Ashford, 261).

Moroccan nationalism galvanized in the period following World War II, around the Istiqlal (Independence) party. While it adopted Sultan Mohammed V as its symbol, it was independent of him. One observer went as far as to suggest that only his acquiescence to accept the nationalist desire to make him a symbol secure the monarchy. Otherwise: "Morocco may well be a republic today" (Waterbury, 144). The Sultan sent conflicting messages as he wavered between supporting the main nationalist party, the Istiqlal, and condemning it under French pressure (Ikeda, 571). The rise of anti (or non) monarchist revolutionary forces in Egypt (Nasser) and Algeria (FLN) had contributed to sentiments against the Sultan.

In March 1956 Morocco became an independent state with Muhammad V as its leader. The Sultan, soon to assume the title King, faced severe challenges to his political leadership. It was unclear whether if he would be able to manage the functional aspects of a modern state. The country was ill prepared for independence and lacked a substantial class

that could handle the tasks needed to manage a modern state. For example, there were less than 30 local medical doctors by the time of independence (Landau, 123). While the king enjoyed legitimacy as a religious authority, his political legitimacy was far weaker. His ambivalent position regarding independence, especially as contrasted with the vocal and effective Istiqlal party, hindered his ability to draw on Moroccan nationalism as source of support. The King further needed to invest many resources in order to integrate *Army of Liberation* into his newly created *Royal Army*, as was unable to control its splinter group that conducted the war in the Sahara against the Spanish (Ashford, 174). The king further faced challenges from local power brokers, mostly local feudal lords such as the de-facto ruler of Marakesh, El-Gloui, who was the prime force behind the Sultan's removal in between 1953 and 1955.

The claim for Western Sahara: A new national cause

Faced with these challenges to his legitimacy, Muhammad V, sought to shape a new vision that would cater to growing national sentiment. His adoption of the an expansionist stance in 1958 that included claims for Spanish controlled Western Sahara as well as French controlled Mauritania served to achieve that goal in a manner that placed the monarchy at its center. By doing so, the King was able to outbid the main liberation party, the Istiqlal.

Allal El-Fassi, the leader of the nationalistic Istiqlal party originally conceptualized the idea of Greater Morocco. In his view it included Spanish controlled Western Sahara, the whole of Mauritania, as well as parts of Algeria, Senegal, and Mali. El-Fassi's claim appealed to Moroccans sense of history. It was based on historical title, dating 900 years back to the days of the Marrakech based Almoravide empire that controlled all these regions as well as large portion of current day Spain. El-Fassi also appealed to basic notions of national

identity. In his view, the Sahara was the cradle of the Moroccan nation when he said that: "Our culture is the culture of the Sahara. Our civilization is the civilization of the Sahara. Our religion is the religion of the Sahara." (Time, 1).

Initially, the monarchy did not embrace the vision of greater Morocco, and only in 1958 did it decide to do so. Adopting Al-Fassi's agenda allowed the monarchy to outbid him a rival and co-opt him. By 1962, he agreed to join the king's cabinet as a minister. It also served to buy the loyalties of his close supporters. Shortly after the king's 1958 announcement, he created a special department in the ministry of interior to pursue expansionist designs. Al-Fassi's ally (and cousin) was named as its head. Finally, by leading the expansionist camp the fragile monarchy tried to portray itself as the paragon defender of Morocco's interests.

King Hassan II had further reasons to try and secure his base of legitimacy. Prior to his rise to power in 1961, crown prince Moulay Hassan (the king's previous name) was unable to substantiate an image of a serious leader. Hassan himself admitted much later that he knew that most observers thought that "he would not last for six months" (Hughes, 101). His perceived weakness was a result of both personal and institutional features. As a young man Hassan was contrasted to his father. While Muhammad V was a "devout, diffident, and dignified (Hughes, 101), much of the son's public image of an "extravagant hedonist" (Hughes, 101). Moreover, the process by which Hassan had become the crown prince, based on being his father's oldest son, allowed potential contenders to question as primogeniture was fairly a recent tradition. In fact, primogeniture was adopted into the constitution only after Hassan had become the country's sovereign.

With these challenges Hassan turned to a set of strict measures to consolidate his control once he became king in 1961. In 1965 he turned to direct rule and resolved the

cabinet. He also strengthened the secret police and adopted harsh measures against opposition forces, such as the famous assassination of opposition leader Ben-Baraka in France in 1965. In turn Hassan's repressive strategies created new opposition and in the early 1970's he survived two attempts on his life.

Making Western Sahara the centerpiece of its foreign policy allowed the regime to position itself at the center of a project that had a wide public nationalistic appeal, and provided much needed support to King Hassan II following years in which he suffered severe challenges to his regime. Indeed as Lalutte observed, "every political formation, legal and illegal took to the cry...strange things were happening...formerly lucid Marxist begun making statements of the most...national-bourgeoisie type" (11). Western Sahara had become, yet again, a way for the monarchy, to deal with internal opposition.

Expansion and economic resources

Morocco's' claim to the Western Sahara was not devoid of economic benefits. Western Sahara has large phosphate mines and Rabat wanted to make sure it gains control of them. This would ensure not only a larger source of income, but also allow Morocco to control the global prices of its own leading source of income. With the Western Sahara under its control, Morocco had nearly 40% of all phosphates exports in the world, and controlled the largest reserve for this commodity in the world (Davies, 37-38).

Internally, phosphates were a major engine of Moroccan economy, a structure much preferred by the monarchy. As the regime extracted the income created from production and export of phosphates, it allowed the king to expand patronage through expansion of the civil service. An alternative route of economic expansion would have been one based on the centuries old bourgeoisie, and especially the merchant class. However, such route could

have strengthened potential opposition to the monarchy and the king preferred for a one time to avoid it.

III. Decolonization: An opportunity for Moroccan State Expansion

Decolonization created material and ideational opportunities for state expansion. The disequilibrium created when colonial powers left and new states were born, created an incentive to potential expansionists to advance their goals. Morocco enjoyed enormous material and institutional advantages over the Western Sahara. Modern day Morocco was populated for thousands of years and was a separate political unit for over A millennia. The state was the center of Berber and Muslim empires that controlled, at times, most of North Africa and large parts of Spain. Morocco's location, between Africa and the Mediterranean secured its place trade route and a multicultural hub for centuries.

Modern Morocco had, in 1975, a population of over 17 Million people and security forces of some 100,000. In contrast, the region of Western Sahara had never been a separate political entity, had no major urban centers, and its total population in 1974 was only 74,000 people. Notions of local national identity developed only in the late 1960's, and indeed the POLOSARIO had only some 5,000 combatants in 1975. Sharawi national identity developed to a large extant, only .later, in light of Moroccan control the experience of the dispossessed in refugee camps in Algeria.

The opportunity that decolonization offered for state expansion had also an ideational layer. The process of creating new nation-states based on self-determination reflects a profound paradigm shift in respect to the normative framework that determines acquisition and transfer of territory. Since, at least, the pre-modern phase of the national states, the largely European-dominated world developed a set of rules, in respect to territorial questions. Past paradigms included, for example, transfer of territory based on marital relations between state rulers, discovery of *Terra Nullius*, and contractual arrangements such as land purchase. Yet, in the post-1945 world, most of these rules were outdated and replaced with the norm of self-determination: One which is based on the freely expressed will of the peoples in a delineated territory (Sharma, 212-213).

The new norm is embedded in numerous instruments of international law such as the introductory section of the UN Charter, the abovementioned 1960 UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and the 1970 UN Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations. Indeed, self-determination was the principle norm that underlined decolonization. In turn, decolonization had become the primary route for the exercise of self-determination. (Musgrave, 69).

The shift towards a new source of legitimacy for determining sovereignty created a triple opportunity. The moment of transformation from one paradigm to another meant that there was a lower barrier for entry for those who wished to contend it. Secondly, some units did to fit the new criteria easily. Finally, the former colonial ruler was the prime actor in making the decision how to implement the new principle. As such, colonial powers had brought their own set of interests when deciding how to do so, which had a profound effect on the outcome.

In the case of Morocco in the Western Sahara all three ideational variable were at play. First, Morocco offered a competing interpretation of the right of self determination in the case of Western Sahara, one which subordinates it to the right of territorial integrity. Rabat argued that prior to formal colonization in 1884, the region was part of Morocco. Hence, the UN's long standing position that Western Sahara's fate should be reflect the free will of its inhabitants, should be deferred in favor of Moroccan acquisition of the territory. Moreover, as Western Sahara had not assumed the status of a state, Morocco was able to argue that it is not violating the norm of territorial integrity, according to the interpretation that applies the norm to inter-state relationship.

Second, Morocco benefited from the fact that Western Sahara and its inhabitants did not fall easily into the definitions used for self determination. As noted above, the vast region was had a small population, much of its nomadic. The saharawis had little common history and were never of a separate political unit. The lack of any substantial urban centers, and classes with political awareness, contributed to a weak sense of national identity. The hand offs manner in which Spain managed its Sharawi territory, limited the possibility that local nationalism would be formulated around resistance to the colonial force.

Third, the implementation of the Saharawis right of self determination was largely determined by Spain. Madrid was originally committed to conducting a referendum in order to determine the region's fate. Indeed, it had conducted one in the 1960's in an unsuccessful effort to legitimate its own control of the region. Yet, by 1975 Spain changed its position due to a combination of American pressure and a desire to keep reaping the economic benefits of controlling the phosphate mines in the Western Sahara. In 1975 it signed the Madrid agreements in which it allowed Morocco to assume control of region, once it leaves, but also secured a 35% controlling share in the Western Sahara's phosphate mines. Madrid's material

interests determined then, that in implementing decolonization, preference would be awarded to Morocco.

IV. Decolonization under bipolarity

US-Soviet competition shaped American behavior in respect to the Western Sahara question. It led Washington to defend Rabat against the constraints that the international system placed on its territorial expansion and its use of SSP's. Though the 1970's were the era of Détente between Washington and Moscow, the two superpowers nevertheless continued to clash in the third world. Much of it was through proxies in episodes like the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the Angolan civil war that begun in 1975. From Washington's perspective, the Soviets were making headways in all fronts, especially in Africa. A classified report produced by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reflected In Washington's view of the 1970's as one on which the USSR enjoyed a real political and psychological momentum:

“This momentum developed as a result of the dissolution of the Portuguese empire, the Ethiopian revolution, and the increased soviet, Cuban, and East German military, political, and subversive activities. In the 1970s, Moscow was heavily involved in eroding Western influence” (DIA, 5).

In this context, Morocco was an old and trusted ally. The two countries had a long and amicable relationship that date back to 1777¹⁴, and its current monarchy was actively anti-communist. Morocco's geographic position, near the straits of Gibraltar, and its

¹⁴ Morocco was the first nation to recognize the American Republic in 1777. The US-Moroccan Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1836) is the longest unbroken treaty relationship in U.S. history. Indeed the American Legation in Tangier (until 1956, the location of the US Consulate there and now An American cultural center) is the oldest U.S. diplomatic property in the world. It is also and the only building outside the US, listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.

membership of both Arab Middle East as well as Africa, was deemed highly valuable for the US. The US also had a history of using Moroccan air bases (until 1959), and after it gained control of the Western Sahara it agreed to base US forces there again in a potential future deployment of US forces in the region (CBO, 1)

Moreover, the Moroccans supported other US policy objectives in the region. It was a moderate Arab actor and indeed later in the 1970's and 1980's it actively assisted Israeli-Egyptian and Israeli-Palestinian negotiation.

As opposed to the friendly Moroccan regime, the POLISARIO was viewed with much suspicion in Washington. Like many other movements of national liberation of the period, the organization adopted, initially, a constitution that hinted towards socialism, despite its claim that it is merely a nationalist front organization. Moreover, the fact that the organization's main backers were the pro-soviet (at the time) Algeria AND Cuba, added to this suspicion. Indeed, in a 1975 US Secretary of State declared, referring to Western Sahara that the "United States will not allow another Angola in this flank of Africa" (Kamil, 11).

American support was further tied to its efforts to strengthen the monarchy. The king suffered limited legitimacy amongst Moroccan elites and faced an active left wing opposition that took hold amongst some sectors of the armed forces. In the 1960s the Moroccan security forces were so concerned that they risked the treasured relationship with France by assassinating Mehdi Ben-Barka, the leading opposition leader to the monarchy on French soil. In July 1971 and August 1972, King Hassan II was challenged by military coup's.

By supporting Morocco on the Western Sahara issue, the US was both blocking a potentially hostile competition of the POLISARIO and strengthening the friendly Moroccan regime.

Publicly, Washington stated time and again that it was neutral in respect to the region's future. However, its actions, especially around the Spanish withdrawal in 1975 indicate that it was more supportive of the Moroccan position. Despite the Spanish's commitment to respect right of self determination of the local population, the US administration had worked to secure Moroccan control of the region once Spain leaves. Washington had also used its leverage in to support the Moroccan position in the UN (Kamil, 12).

In short: US support for Moroccan forceful acquisition of Western Sahara allowed Rabat to pursue its policy, despite the constraints placed on it by the international system. American position in turn, was affected by the strategic value of Morocco in the context of the competition with the Soviet Union. With the Moroccan monarchy basing much of its legitimacy on claims for great Morocco, and with the POLISARIO's left wing leanings, the US was willing not only to disregard Moroccan activities, but also to facilitate them.

V. The unintended consequences of Self Determination: Settling in the shadow of the norm

It is ironic perhaps, but the same norm that underlines decolonization – the right of self determination – also drove the contradictory state behavior we analyze here, strategic settlement projects. A traditional perspective of norms views them as a standard of behavior that actors follow, or prefer to avoid. The traditional existing divide in international relations theory is between a realist perspective that deems norms secondary to a world determined by power, and those who suggest that they indeed serve as a standard of behavior, either in the

service of states interests (Neo-Liberal institutionalism), or because they resonate (and affect) state identity (constructivism).

The following section suggests that is another way in which norms affects outcomes in international relations. Following on Mnookin and Kornhouser's (1979) insight, I argue that the Moroccan settlement project was a result of the international norm of self determination. While decolonization was largely a principle enforced from "above" (UN and to a lesser extent the US and USSR); in this case it had directed the actions of an actor "below", Morocco. While not abiding by the principle as generally understood by the UN, Morocco viewed self determination as the framework where the decision in respect to the region's fate will be determined. Hence, it sought to affect the outcome, by changing the demographic composition on the ground.

As self determination created new criteria for legitimizing sovereignty of new states in the former European dependencies, it had also led expansionist actors like Morocco, realized that their claims for new territories should be based on the same principle. While some expansionists (such as India's expansion into the former colony of Goa in 1962) could claim that their acts conform to self determination, others were intent to bring about a demographic change in an occupied region, in order to secure their expansion.

In All cases the expansionist state was cognizant that social control and an enforced polity will not be enough to secure expansion in the post World War II era. To do so, an expansionist would need international recognition. In turn, such recognition will need to reflect the wishes of the local population. And so in cases when such legitimacy deemed impossible to secure, expansionists acted to change the population's composition. In that sense, an SSP was an activity conducted in the shadow of the international norm: States were not faced yet with the norm's implementation, but were preparing to do so, through an SSP.

Indeed, international law had been an important element of Western Sahara situation. International pressure, especially in the UN, had been effectively applied on Spain. The latter's weakness in the 1970's with the decline of Franco's autocratic regime made it more susceptible for such pressures. International pressure for a referendum predated even the local national liberation movement and Spain had indeed conducted one in the 1960's. Morocco's strategy also included reliance on international norms. In 1975, the Kingdom chose to submit the question to the international court of Justice (ICJ), and was quick to argue that some aspects of the court opinion indeed supported its claim.

Finally, the accepted route to solving the conflict over the region incorporates international law and principle of self determination. In 1988, both POLISARIO and Morocco accepted a UN led plan to end hostilities between them and offer a resolution to the conflict. The central idea of the plan was a referendum in which the local population would decide whether to opt for independence or to become part of Morocco. In order to facilitate the referendum the plan gave significant powers to a special UN representative, including abrogation of local Moroccan laws and both armed and civilian UN force that would support the effort (Sola-Martin, 18-19). All parties thought that a referendum would advance their interests. As Mundy commented :”Nationalists saw self determination vote as the easiest way to achieve independence. Morocco saw self determination as the best way to legitimate its claim and keep Western Sahara. The International community saw it as a fair and agreed upon way top settle the conflict” (255).

With all roads leading to a referendum regarding self determination, the logic of Morocco's settlement effort becomes clear: affecting its outcome. The norm of self determination serves as a framework for Moroccan actions, but not as first order standard of behavior.

VI. Conclusion: Western Sahara and beyond

The paper above serves to generate the outline of a possible hypothesis in respect to state expansion projects during decolonization. It argues that projects are important as their legacy – the deployment of settlers in contest territories – had become a major stumbling block in trying resolving some of the longest lasting conflicts of our times.

Using process tracing, the paper argues that Moroccan expansion into Western Sahara since 1975, in the face of systemic constraints is a result of two sets of separate variables. Internally, Morocco embarked on expansion once it had become a vital state interest. The monarchy perceived expansion into the Sahara as crucial for its legitimacy. The Moroccan state further perceived control over phosphate deposits in Western Sahara as important to securing a favorable economic structure. First, it was Mohammed V that sought to portray the monarchy as a leading actor in a nationalistic project in the late 1950's; and later King Hassan II had who faced severe challenges to his regime in the early 1970's. Both realized the trumping the claim to the Sahara will assist in securing their legitimacy.

The internal reasons were necessary, but not sufficient; Morocco was able to pursue its expansionist designs due to a combination of external variables: Decolonization that created a physical and ideational opportunity for expansion, and bipolarity that allowed Rabat to pursue it due the American shield. Finally, the emerging norm of self determination shaped the nature of Moroccan expansion, and in particular, the use of settlers. Morocco sought to use the settlement project to affect the outcome of an agreed upon mechanism to resolving the conflict over the Sahara's sovereignty.

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