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Western Sahara and Palestine: A Comparative Study of Colonialisms, Occupations, and Nationalisms

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ABSTRACT   *Occupation and colonization are terms that evoke an era of empires and great powers. Yet for two peoples, occupation and settler colonialism are not remnants of a time foregone; they remain the reality of everyday life. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is a high profile example of modern colonization, whereas the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara draws considerably less attention. This paper seeks to show that these two cases of colonialism over two Arab peoples have much in common. Both originated from colonial fumbling and produced significant refugee populations that would carry the mantle of their liberation movements. Morocco and Israel each maintain their occupations, however, utilizing similar means of control and eluding continual resistance from their occupied populations. International politics has contributed to the protracted nature of the conflicts, in the form of military and moral support from the United States to the occupying powers and, more significantly for Israel, in the United Nations' bestowal of legitimacy on Zionism as a suitably nationalist project. That, along with the salience of Palestine as an Islamic holy place, has caused the Palestinian-Israeli case to be more prominent than the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.*

Introduction

Occupation and colonization are terms that evoke an era of empires and great powers. Once so common, they were eventually replaced by other terms that entered into the global lexicon after the World Wars, such as self-determination and human rights. Yet for two peoples, occupation and settler colonialism – in Wolfe's sense of displacing or replacing locals – are not remnants of a time foregone; they remain the reality of everyday life.[1] The Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara draws considerably less attention than the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. However, as this paper will show, these two cases of colonialism over two Arab peoples have much in common.[2]

Although a quarter of a century passed between their inceptions, the occupied peoples

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[1] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (New York: Cassell, 1999).

[2] One similarity may already be apparent from the discussion. That is, both of these cases are colonizations maintained by occupations. Thus, these terms may seem to appear interchangeably, although the word choice shall be made as deliberately as possible within a given context.

bear similar scars left by European colonial mishaps: as the British and Spanish stumbled out of their respective territories, the moment was seized by the Zionists and the Moroccans. To maintain their subsequent claims on the territories, the Israelis and the Moroccans violently confronted the native populations, caused protracted refugee situations, and devised the machinery of occupation that would maintain their dominance over the subject peoples. In turn, organic nationalist movements among the Saharawis and the Palestinians have consistently contested the occupations and demanded the right to self-determination. Yet Moroccan and Israeli domination persists, due in part to the support of the United States and the accepted discourses of the international community.

Morocco and Israel have each maintained their right to occupy these territories, but it is indeed their respective nationalist claims that also constitute the place where the narratives diverge. The international community deemed Zionist nationalist claims legitimate based in large part upon the discourse of nationalism that predominates in our current world order; some years later, Moroccan claims were denied legitimacy by the international community. A review of some of the most prominent literature on nationalism provides a basis for understanding the contrast between Zionism's modern nationalist discourse and Morocco's arguably deficient national claims. The initial judgments of the international community were pivotal in delineating the aspirations of the subject peoples, specifically in regards to the resolutions proposed to end the occupations. Because of the international community's legitimization of Zionist nationalism, Palestinians are relegated to demanding a limited portion of their original land, while the Saharawis may potentially reclaim the entirety of their country.

Author's Note

In a comparative study like this one, there is a danger of understating the many significant differences between the two cases. Western Sahara and Palestine bear distinct political, historical, and social attributes. Furthermore, they are located in separate political and social environments, are affected by varying regional and international machinations, and may very well see their occupations conclude in different ways. Rather than depriving either peoples of their agency by diluting their stories to comparative substance, it is hoped that the parallels drawn will elucidate the experiences of each, particularly that of Western Sahara, which receives significantly less scholarly and public attention.

The commonalities between the occupations of Western Sahara and Palestine are many, though very little literature treats them together. Randa Farah is one scholar who has endeavored to compare the two cases, concentrating on their respective refugee experiences. She makes an important contention that ought to be borne in mind, reminding us of the sensitivity of the subject matter. While the Palestinian occupation generally commands a consensus in the Middle East and North Africa as a vital 'Arab cause,' Morocco has managed to frame the Saharan issue as a 'separation movement' that is actually opposed to 'Arab unity.'[3] One observer implores:

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[3] Randa Farah, "Western Sahara and Palestine: Shared Refugee Experiences," *Forced Migration Review* 16 (2003): 20.

The world is familiar with the suffering of the Palestinians living in refugee camps for over fifty years but is less familiar with the plight of another Arab people also languishing forgotten in refugee camps, denied their right to freedom and dignity. The Kingdom of Morocco is one of the many champions of the Palestinian cause, and rightly so. Then, one should ask, why such different attitudes towards the Sahrawi people?[4]

This paper seeks an answer to that question.

Four Countries, Two Colonizations, One Narrative

Beginnings: Colonial Footprints

Our narrative begins with two powerful European kingdoms: Great Britain and Spain. The British assumed mandatory power over Palestine after the First World War, having divided up formerly Ottoman-ruled Arab lands between themselves and the French.[5] While in Palestine, the British were inundated by Zionist political appeals for increased Jewish immigration and the eventual establishment of a Jewish state. Britain's vacillation and equivocal decision-making increasingly complicated the situation on the ground, while ever-more Jewish immigration and Palestinian discontent coincided with broken contradictory promises made to Arabs and Jews alike for states on the same land.[6] At this point in history, the Spanish had already been on Saharawi lands, known as Spanish Sahara, for about half a century, having declared a 'protectorate' over regions in that territory in the 1880s.[7] This European sense of entitlement to Middle Eastern and African territories was standard protocol; the Spanish had been contriving tradeoffs and bargains with the Portuguese and others for Saharawi lands for hundreds of years.[8] Neither the Saharawis nor the Arabs in Palestine were content with foreign rule, nor, in the Palestinian case, with Zionist maneuvers. Accordingly, the Arabs rose up against British domination for three years, from 1936-1939.[9] In 1973 the Saharawis formed the POLISARIO Front, or the Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio do Oro, and initiated guerrilla warfare against the Spanish.[10] Both the Palestinians and the Saharawis successfully forced European responses.

Under pressure from within and without, the Europeans sought diplomatic resolutions to their problems. On the heels of the Arab revolt, the British issued the 1939 White Paper, a policy proposal that largely favored Arab demands such as the restriction of Jewish

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[4] Jose Ramos Horta, "Forward," in *Endgame in the Western Sahara* by Toby Shelley (New York: Zed Books, 2004), xi.

[5] For further reading on the United Kingdom's acquisition of Palestinian territory as part of the decisive division of formerly Ottoman territories among the UK and France, see David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989).

[6] For further reading on the contradictions and complications in British decision-making regarding Jewish and Arab claims over their Palestinian Mandate, see Victor Kattan, *From Coexistence to Conquest* (London: Pluto Press, 2009).

[7] Anthony Pazzanita, *Historical Dictionary of Western Sahara* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), xxv-xxvi.

[8] Ibid.

[9] For further reading on this and other formative events in the Middle East, see Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York/Boston: Warner Books, 1991).

[10] Yahia H. Zoubir, "Origins and Development of the Conflict in Western Sahara," in *International Dimensions of the Western Sahara Conflict*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir and Daniel Volman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 1.

immigration and land purchases.[11] Despite such regulatory measures, none of the parties in Palestine could control the events of the following decade. The Second World War inflamed Europe, enervating the British Empire (which would soon no longer assume that title), and towards the end of the war, the genocide of Jews under Nazi direction became known to the world. Hoping to free their hands of the debacle that they had largely produced in Palestine, the British turned to the United Nations, where a policy of partition – division into two states, one Jewish and one Arab – was agreed upon in 1947.[12] Before partition could become actual policy, the British withdrew from Palestine. The mandate was terminated one day after the Provisional State Council in Tel Aviv issued the Proclamation of Independence of the Israeli state in 1948.[13]

One day after Spain's formal withdrawal from Western Sahara, the POLISARIO Front proclaimed an independent state as well.[14] Yet for the Saharawis, it was too late. A decade earlier, in 1965, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution urging Spain to end its colonial domination over Western Sahara.[15] Like Britain, however, Spain acted hesitantly, and at this time was also maneuvering between rival claimants to the territory, namely Morocco and Mauritania. Rejecting Moroccan and Mauritanian claims, the United Nations sought a legal instrument to reflect the desires of the Saharawis, and ultimately decided that a referendum should be held under its auspices and with Spanish facilitation so that they may enable "the indigenous population of the Territory to exercise freely its right to self-determination."[16] The General Assembly adopted six more resolutions from 1967 to 1973 calling for a referendum.[17] Spain refused to comply with these resolutions. In 1975, the International Court of Justice rejected Moroccan and Mauritanian claims to the land. Nevertheless, in November 1975, Western Saharan territory was split between Morocco and Mauritania without a referendum.[18] As Palestinians lost the land mandated to them by the international community to Israel (and in the areas not conquered by the Zionists, to Jordan and Egypt), so too did the Saharawis to Morocco and Mauritania.

Refugees and Nationalists

One immediate outcome of the ensuing conflicts in both of these cases was the creation of refugee populations. As the violence of 1948-49 unfolded in Palestine, over 700,000 Palestinians sought refuge in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.[19] Aid and relief organizations coordinating with the UN provided minimal subsistence care to the uprooted refugees, ninety-seven percent of whom had nothing but UN aid on which to

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[11] Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader.* 6th ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 44.

[12] This in the form of UN General Assembly Resolution 181.

[13] Laqueur and Rubin, *Reader,* 81.

[14] Zoubir, "Origins and Development," 2.

[15] This in the form of UN General Assembly Resolution 2072. Tony Hodges, *Western Sahara: The Roots of a Desert War* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1983), 104-105.

[16] As quoted in Hodges, 106.

[17] Ibid., 106.

[18] Ibid., 107.

[19] For further reading on the *nakba,* or the "catastrophe," as Palestinians refer to the events of 1948, and a detailed account of Israeli instigation of the exodus, see Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

survive.[20] Under the guidelines of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN agency established exclusively for Palestinian refugees, the descendants of Palestinian refugees inherit refugee status. Thus, Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA today number 4.7 million.[21] In 1975, about 70,000 Saharawis became refugees in the violence that ensued after the Spanish withdrawal and when Morocco's King Hassan II led the infamous Green March into Western Sahara with 350,000 Moroccan civilians trailing their troops. Today Saharawi refugees number about 150,000-200,000.[22] Unlike the Palestinians, the Saharawis largely found refuge in one locale – the Algerian desert town of Tindouf. By 1979, the POLISARIO Front's fierce resistance successfully forced a Mauritanian withdrawal of its claims and presence from Western Sahara, thence leaving the conflict to rage on between Morocco and the Saharawi fighters until 1991.[23] Today, Saharawi refugees in Tindouf remain "totally dependent" on humanitarian aid mainly provided by the Algerian government. They also suffer from harsh climatic conditions, poverty, and many health problems.[24] While suffering the humanitarian costs, the refugee situations continue to drag on, as the Saharawis and Palestinians remain victims of political stalemate.

The direction of the refugee trajectories shaped the political activism and organization of the Saharawis and Palestinians. The distinct receptions of the Palestinians in each Arab host country would ultimately determine their refugee experiences. Palestinian resistance and nationalist movements grew up in exile, and despite a great deal of diversity and factionalism, they have generally coalesced around the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Their methods and ideologies added another dimension of contention to intra-Arab politics, and so their political organization often led to violent confrontation with host states. For example, in 1970 the Jordanian government conducted violent reprisals on Palestinian guerrilla fighters associated with Fatah – then and now the largest faction of the PLO – that amounted to what some observers call a civil war. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the Palestinians became immersed in the Lebanese civil war and suffered the repression of a Syrian state seeking to ensure its own dominant status in Lebanon. Fatah under the leadership of Yasser Arafat was eventually kicked out of Lebanon.[25] Such tensions continue to exist, but since the late 1980s Palestinian political activity has migrated into the West Bank and Gaza.

Conversely, Saharawi political organization remains at the core of the refugee experience. POLISARIO runs all of its operations from the camps in Tindouf, Algeria, and the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), the *de facto* state of the Saharawis, is based there. Algeria has actively encouraged their guests' political activities, not least because of its own tensions with Morocco. POLISARIO rarely appears in journalistic and scholarly accounts lacking the modifier 'Algerian-backed,' although their support has seemingly decreased over the years. The role of the host states in these refugee trajectories has been

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[20] S.G. Thicknesse, *Arab Refugees* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1949), 9.

[21] UNRWA, "About," *UNRWA*, http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=47 (accessed April 23, 2010).

[22] Farah, "Western Sahara and Palestine," 20-21.

[23] Thomas Kerlin Park, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), "Chronology."

[24] UNHCR, "Western Sahara Territory," *UNHCR* http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4861f6.html (accessed on April 23, 2010).

[25] For further reading on Palestinian refugee experiences, see Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2003).

definitive in terms of their political organization.[26]

Because of these distinctions in refugee politicization, the national liberation movements of each group are also quite distinct. Aside from some guerrilla activity conducted from host states, Palestinians did not become politically well-organized until after the 1967 war, when the Arab states lost to Israel all that remained of the original land of contemporary Palestine as delineated by the League of Nations in the first half of the 20th century. Palestinians reclaimed their national liberation struggle from the Arab states, but their activity was beset with factionalism from the beginning. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was at best an umbrella organization, not a political front. Randa Farah attributes this directly to the camp structures, explaining, "most Arab states regarded the PLO as a threat to be contained rather than a movement to be supported."[27] Palestinian factionalism has become so severe that since 2006 the two occupied territories have operated almost independently from each other, with the West Bank under Fatah rule and Gaza under that of the political Islamist group Hamas.[28]

In stark contrast, POLISARIO and SADR, with Algerian support, have developed a relatively unified political program. Farah describes them as espousing "democratic and egalitarian principles," practicing a tolerant Islam, and administering carefully institutionalized camps.[29] Perhaps the most progressive political stand taken by the POLISARIO is their determination to implement a multiparty system in Western Sahara "only *after* liberation."[30] This goal sharply contrasts with the PLO's factionalism, not least exhibited in the Fatah-Hamas division. Further, Fatah has entered into agreements with the Israeli government that have put them in control of the Palestinian Authority, a deficient and unrepresentative administrative apparatus in parts of the West Bank. Many refugees and sympathizers feel betrayed by Fatah's willingness to do so; their acquiescence has sharply impinged the prospects of their much-exalted right of return and excised them from the political process.[31] Thus it would appear that the tolerance and support (or lack thereof) from host states is a critical determinant of refugees' political programs.

Emblems of Occupation

For those Palestinians and Saharawis who remain in lands administered by Israel and Morocco, military occupation marks their daily lives. The presence of soldiers on the ground is one instrument of domination. In Western Sahara, the Moroccan *Forces Armees Royales*

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[26] It should be noted though, that Algerian backing has not seemed to alleviate the suffering incurred daily by the refugees; noting the political cooperation should not belie the poor humanitarian conditions. In Jordan and Syria, however, refugees have fared much better and claim similar living standards to their hosts. Regretfully, that has not been the case in Lebanon.

[27] Randa Farah, "Refugee Camps in the Palestinian and Sahrawi National Liberation Movements," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38:2 (2008): 79.

[28] Please note that the two parties were on the verge of reconciling at the time of submission.

[29] Farah, "Western Sahara and Palestine," 21.

[30] Emphasis original. Randa Farah, "Refugee Camps in the Palestinian and Sahrawi National Liberation Movements," 79.

[31] For further reading on the peace negotiations of the 1990s and the resultant exclusion of Palestinian refugees from the political process, see Joseph Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question* (New York: Routledge, 2006), especially 114-128.

numbered about 200,000 in 2001.[32] In the period 2000 to 2004, half of Israel's military resources were devoted to "low-intensity conflict, raids and reoccupations of Palestinian territory."[33] Both militaries impose their will by undertaking violent action against the occupied peoples. For instance, Morocco violated the terms of the 1991 ceasefire ninety-seven times (out of a total of one hundred and two violations) from February to May of 1992.[34] During an Israeli offensive in the West Bank in 2002, 4,000 people in Jenin refugee camp were rendered homeless, while about 600 people were killed in nearby Nablus.[35] In addition, Israeli and Moroccan soldiers arbitrarily detain their subject peoples without charge or accountability. Abduction was a common – and now admitted to – practice of the Moroccans in the 1970s and 80s, and to this day there is little information about hundreds of disappeared Saharawis.[36] Since 1967, about 650,000 Palestinians – or about 40% of the present male population – have been held prisoner by Israel.[37] These statistics, while telling, are only numbers; they cannot reflect the emotional and psychological toll paid by the witnesses of such atrocities, the families of the dead, disappeared, and imprisoned, nor the general population that lives at the whims of military administrators.

Morocco and Israel both undertake more deliberately corrosive measures to maintain their occupations as well. Both regimes have built walls around their subject populations to maximize their power. In the 1980s, King Hassan II proceeded to erect a 900-mile long berm, or defensive wall made out of sand, dissecting the territory of Western Sahara.[38] The effect of the berm is profound, as illustrated in the following passage:

> The walls are heavily fortified, mined, and radar-guarded... built with the help of France, the United State [sic] and Israel... The walls appear to be designed for more than military purposes. They effectively isolate the Sahrawi people from their compatriots in the refugee camps, and from the rest of the world. The earthworks also close off the occupied areas to travelers, relief workers and human rights monitors without an entry permit.[39]

In 2002 Israel began erecting its own wall around and within the West Bank. The length of the 1967 armistice line – the purported border of a future Palestinian state – is 196 miles long; the projected length of the Wall is 437 miles.[40] The International Court of Justice, in its ruling on the illegality of the West Bank wall under international law, noted that this wall's purpose is also beyond military necessity, noting that "the infringements resulting from that route cannot be justified by military exigencies or by the requirements of national security or

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[32] Michael Bhatia, "The Western Sahara under Polisario Control," *Review of African Political Economy* 28:88 (June 2001): 291.

[33] Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Military Balance in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2004), 152.

[34] Yahia H. Zoubir and Daniel Voman, "The Western Sahara Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era," in *International Dimensions of the Western Sahara Conflict*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir and Daniel Volman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 232.

[35] Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 182-184.

[36] US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "2008 Human Rights Report: Western Sahara," *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,* February 25, 2009.

[37] Makdisi, 79.

[38] Farah, "Western Sahara and Palestine," 23.

[39] Teresa K. Smith, "Africa Rights Monitor: Human Rights and the Western Saharan War," *Africa Today* 34, no. 3 (1987): 62.

[40] Makdisi, 24.

public order."[41] These walls are stark manifestations of the wide divide between the objectives of the occupiers and the occupied.

Another powerful tool of domination is the implantation of settler populations to achieve political ends. For Morocco and Israel, creating demographic 'facts on the ground' is instrumental for ensuring that their territorial acquisitions are not squandered in future peace deals. Israeli settlements continue to deter peacemaking efforts, most recently arresting the Obama administration's initiative to resume direct peace talks in late 2010. Today, 121 illegal Israeli settlements are inhabited by 462,000 settlers in the West Bank and annexed Jerusalem.[42] According to B'Tselem, the settlements exert administrative control over 42 percent of the West Bank, given various Israeli bureaucratic procedures.[43] In facilitating the growth and development of Israeli settlements, the Israeli government is undoubtedly complicating any peace plan that considers a Palestinian state in the West Bank with its capital in East Jerusalem.

The settler population in Western Sahara creates similar obstacles to peacemaking. The number of settlers is nearly commensurate with the native population, ranging somewhere between 300,000 and 400,000 Berbers, Arabs, and Saharawis with Moroccan citizenship.[44] Like the Israeli government, Morocco subsidizes the settlers, luring them with economic incentives in these marginal communities.[45] This tactic is as purposeful and instrumental in the Moroccan case, considering that the proposed solution to the problem is to take the form of a referendum. In other words, if you implant the voters, you win the votes. There are many other dimensions related to the settler issue, including their economic dominance and poor settler-subject relations. Though a full exploration of these issues is beyond the bounds of the paper, they should be considered in the following discussion of resistance.

Resistance

Michel Foucault asserted that "where there is power, there is resistance."[46] Perhaps if Foucault were an Arabic speaker, he would exclaim that "where there is power, there is *intifada.*"[47] The Palestinians (in 1987) and the Saharawis (in 2005) have each engaged in *intifadas* against their occupiers, conducting mass and largely nonviolent struggles consisting of demonstrations, strikes, and other acts of resistance. These were the largest incidences of *intifadas* for each group. Later, in 2000, the Palestinians carried out a second *intifada,* usually called the *Al-Aqsa Intifada.* This uprising was of quite a different nature and utilized more violence than before. There is currently discussion amongst activists of a third *intifada* in the near future. Similarly, there was a Saharawi uprising in 1999 that is considered by some as

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[41] Pieter H.F. Bekker, "The World Court's Ruling Regarding Israel's West Bank Barrier," *Cornell International Law Journal,* 38:553 (2005): 5.

[42] Palestine Monitor, "Israeli Settlements," *Palestine Monitor* http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article7 (accessed on April 23, 2010). International law, especially the Geneva Conventions, indicate that occupied land is not to be altered nor its nature changed during the period of occupation.

[43] Makdisi, 19.

[44] Jacob Mundy, "Autonomy & Intifadah," *Review of African Political Economy* 33, no. 108 (2006): 262.

[45] Makdisi, 125. Zoubir, "Origins and Development," 4.

[46] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction,* vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, Random House 1978), 95.

[47] *Intifada* in Arabic connotes a resistance or struggle. The term translates literally to "shaking off," as in shaking off the occupation.

the First *Intifada,* although their demands for independence were not articulated until the second and more prominent *intifada* of 2005. And then again in 2010, Sahrawi youth began nonviolent demonstrations that were brutally suppressed in the worst violence between the occupiers and the occupied since the 1991 ceasefire.[48]

The Moroccans and Israelis utilized their military superiority to suppress the movements. From 1987-1993, the Israelis killed 1,100 Palestinians, wounded 100,000, and demolished 2,000 homes.[49] Casualties of the Saharawi *intifada* in 2005 were relatively limited. In 2010, POLISARIO contended that three dozen Saharawis were killed.[50] This comparatively low casualty count is likely one factor in explaining the lack of attention paid by the international community to the Saharawi case.

The Saharawi and Palestinian uprisings had significant implications for their national liberation movements. Both uprisings began without prior planning and were precipitated, rather, by a demeaning act of occupation. In 1987 an Israeli truck killed four Palestinian workers; in 2005, Moroccan authorities crushed Saharawi demonstrations over a prison transfer with a heavy hand.[51] Neither movement was – initially, at least – directed by the traditional nationalist movements. The *Intifada* was well under way in the Palestinian territories before the PLO, then still functioning in exile in Tunisia, embraced it as its own. For the Saharawis in the occupied territory, there was a significant disconnect from the POLISARIO leadership in the Algerian-based camps who encouraged but did not direct the activities.[52] The grassroots character of these movements actually shifted the trajectories of their respective nationalist movements inwards, making the focal point the occupied territories rather than the governments-in-exile. In the Palestinian case, this move inwards has meant that contemporary discourse focuses on a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and is less reflective of the objectives of Palestinians inside Israel and of the millions of refugees outside of Palestine. Further, the PLO now operates exclusively from inside the territories. As for the Saharawis, the POLISARIO leadership recognized that the uprising added a 'second prong' to their national strategy, the original one having long been the role of international pressure.[53] Prominent observers Jacob Mundy and Toby Shelley concur that the Saharawi nationalist movement has been moving into occupied Western Sahara and away from the camps.[54] Thus, the *intifadas* transformed the nature of the political programs of the occupied peoples and would force the occupiers to adapt on the inside.

Regional and International Contexts

The Moroccan and Israeli occupations of these respective territories take place in wider regional and international contexts. The regional settings of each are not wholly dissimilar, but the salience of the Arab-Israeli conflict is much greater. The establishment of Israel as a settler colonial state engendered opposition from Arab states and continues to be at the core

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[48] Jacob Mundy, "Western Sahara's 48 Hours of Rage," *Middle East Research and Information Project* 257 (Winter 2010).

[49] Jeroen Gunning, "Intifadah," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World.*

[50] Mundy, "Western Sahara's 48 Hours of Rage."

[51] Gunning, "Intifadah." and Mundy, "Autonomy and Intifadah," 264.

[52] Mundy, "Autonomy and Intifadah," 264.

[53] Ibid., 264.

[54] Ibid., 263. Mundy, himself a prominent scholar on Western Sahara, refers to Shelley's work *Endgame.*

of regional problems. Since 1948 this unresolved situation has sparked frequent conflict and war between neighbors, worsening international relations while also protracting the pervasiveness of military and emergency domestic atmospheres. For the newly-independent states of the region, the Palestinian cause became integral to the discourse of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, especially for the nationalistic regimes led by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. For example, the Manifesto of the United Arab Republic, the short-lived manifestation of pan-Arab unity between Syria and Egypt, reads: "unity is especially a revolution because it is profoundly connected with the Palestine cause and with the national duty to liberate that country."[55] Such rhetoric is still used by Middle Eastern regimes both to appeal to their populations and to rally against opponents in inter-regional rivalries underlined by pro- and anti-Western divisions. On a larger scale, the Arab-Israeli conflict played a central role in third world politics during the Cold War. Moreover, the Palestinian cause continues to derive support from Muslims and Muslim-majority countries around the world.

The rivalry between Morocco and Algeria has contributed to and prolonged the Western Saharan stalemate, but it has not achieved salience based on broader sentiments nor has it led to regional wars. Contending that the conflict was "between his kingdom and Algeria," King Hassan, "vehemently" refused to hold negotiations with the POLISARIO until 1988.[56] Toby Shelley illustrates the acrimony between the North African neighbors explaining, "to Morocco, Algeria's support for Polisario (which Algeria would style as support for the right of Sahrawi self-determination) is a conspiracy to contain the kingdom geographically, economically and culturally [...] to cripple the prospects of regional integration."[57] The rest of the continent, nominally represented by the African Union (formerly the Organization of African Unity), has maintained its opposition to the occupation, invoking the "principle of inviolability of inherited borders" enshrined in the organization's charter.[58] Yet there has not been collective regional military action and only limited diplomatic action.

On the international level, the United States and other international powers have helped sustain both of these colonizations.[59] There is no consensus in explaining the US's exceptional levels of support to the Israeli state, though three factors dominate the literature: the formidable influence of the Israel lobby on American foreign policy,[60] a religious and cultural empathy for the Zionist project and an ideological commitment to the state of Israel,[61] and the maintenance of a strategic foothold in the region to protect US interests.[62]

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[55] "United Arab Republic: Manifesto (April 1963)," in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds. *The Israel-Arab Reader* 6th ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

[56] Zoubir, "Origins and Development," 4.

[57] Toby Shelley, *Endgame in Western Sahara,* (New York, Zed Books: 2004), 28.

[58] Ibid., 131.

[59] France has been an unwavering ally in the Moroccan case.

[60] See John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

[61] For shared feelings of national and cultural destiny, for instance, see Douglas Little, *American Orientalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). For religious empathy, see Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy* (New York/London: WW Norton & Company, 2007).

[62] See Michael C. Hudson, "The United States in the Middle East," in *International Relations of the Middle East* 2nd ed. Ed. Louise Fawcett. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Bernard Reich articulates some of the underpinnings of the strategic commitment following the Cold War in *Securing the Covenant* (Westport, CT/London: Prager, 1995).

Explanations for US support for Morocco lean primarily toward geo-strategic interests. In addition to the key geographical positioning of Morocco between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean at the Strait of Gibraltar, successive US administrations have prioritized stability in the region and have thus supported seemingly stable monarchies against more 'radical' actors like Algeria and political Islam.[63]

In pursuit of these interests, the US provides huge quantities of military and economic aid to both states. Israel is the single largest recipient of US aid, amassing about $3 billion per year. The United States has pledged to maintain Israel's "qualitative military edge" over Arab states, thereby sponsoring, for instance, the most powerful air force in the region while quietly condoning Israel's nuclear capability.[64] Meanwhile, Morocco received one-fifth of all US aid to the African continent since the 1980s.[65] In 2005, Morocco was named a major non-NATO ally, resulting in massive increases in direct military funding. Alongside this financial aid, the US has lent its moral and political support to Morocco and Israel in diplomatic forums, significantly hindering resolutions that may favor the Saharawis and Palestinians.

Drawing Borders: National Distinctions

Two Meanings of Self-Determination

Some parties have expended significant energies seeking to ameliorate the chaos and achieve peace. Yet while diplomatic efforts towards conflict resolution in these two cases may appear similar, there is a significant distinction between the proposed settlements: the POLISARIO demands self-determination in all of Western Sahara based on relevant UN resolutions, but the PLO's objective (officially) since the 1990s has been the establishment of a 'mini-state' in the West Bank and Gaza, thereby precluding the UN-enshrined right of return for refugees to their territories inside Israel.[66] So while the Palestinians and Saharawis seek self-determination, their ultimate national objectives are distinct.

It was previously noted that Britain and Spain sought the intervention of the United Nations when their colonies became burdensome. Since then, the United Nations has been deeply involved in both cases. The UN actively addressed the issue of the Palestinian refugees from the inception of the conflict. The General Assembly has regularly reaffirmed the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the "right to national independence and sovereignty," granting the PLO representation at the UN in 1974.[67] In that same year, and every year since, the United Nations General Assembly has passed a resolution reaffirming the Saharawis' right to self-determination and insisting upon international facilitation of a

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[63] Miguel Hernando de Larramendi, "Intra-Maghrebi Relations," in *International Dimensions of the Western Sahara Conflict*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir and Daniel Volman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 189.

[64] Patrick Seale, "Hillary Clinton's Inverted Logic," *Agence Global,* May 3, 2010, http://www.agenceglobal.com/ article.asp?id=2311 (accessed May 5, 2010).

[65] Stephen Zunes, "The US in the Saharan War: a Case of Low-Intensity Intervention," in *International Dimensions of the Western Sahara Conflict*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir and Daniel Volman (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 53.

[66] Randa Farah, "Refugee Camps," 79-80.

[67] General Assembly, "3236 (XXIX) Question of Palestine," and "3237 (XXIX) Observer Status for the Palestine Liberation Organization," *United Nations* http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/29/ares29.htm accessed on April 24, 2010).

referendum to practice said right.[68] The UN Security Council has repeatedly weighed in on both situations, rejecting Israeli claims to Jerusalem and the West Bank, and as recently as 2008 reaffirming again the Saharawis' right to self-determination.[69] In 1991, the UN created a mission to Western Sahara, MINURSO, to implement the referendum. Although the General Assembly has repeatedly supported the call for a referendum since 1991, political deadlock has belied a resolution.

Despite this consonance of voices, the actual resolutions proposed by the international community are in fact wholly distinct; indeed, self-determination intimates two meanings at the United Nations. The conflicting claims over Palestine predate the formation of the UN, beginning as a conundrum for and a product of British imperial policy. When the British consigned the problem to the new international body, the choice was made to accommodate the Jewish people, and partition was agreed. Since that period, the existence of a Jewish state is considered given and approaches to resolving the conflict revolve around that premise. For instance, the Security Council iterated this stance in Resolution 242 in 1967, calling for a peace agreement that maintains the Israeli state within the territory conquered by Zionists in 1948. Today's discourse regarding a 'two-state solution' is only the contemporary avatar of the original resolution based on the premise of accepting a Jewish state on formerly Palestinian lands. Thus, self-determination for the Palestinians is confined to two noncontiguous territories, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Granted to the Saharawis, self-determination implies the right to practice their free will on all of their land. The idea of putting the question of independence to the Saharawi people harks back to the colonial period, when Spain agreed to hold a referendum in 1975.[70] Instead, an ailing General Franco submitted to US and Moroccan pressures to prevent the POLISARIO from coming to power.[71] After years of war and impasse, a ceasefire and plans for a referendum began in earnest in 1991 under a UN Security Council-ratified agreement in which "the Sahrawis native to Western Sahara would be given the choice of voting in favor of either independence or integration with Morocco."[72] Since that time, the terms of a referendum have not been agreed upon and the impasse continues. Thus, the more expansive notion of self-determination as applied to the Saharawis has not translated into better outcomes for their liberation movement. Indeed, in some ways it has made their plight more susceptible to politicking because it lends itself to zero-sum game calculations.[73]

These differing notions of self-determination reflect the international community's bestowal of more legitimacy on the Zionist project than on the national project of the Moroccans, due to a bias in favor of a nationally-defined world order. Indeed, a confluence of

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[68] General Assembly, "Resolutions/Regular Sessions: 1946-2009," *United Nations*, http://www.un.org/documents/ resga.htm (accessed on April 24, 2010).

[69] Security Council, "Question of Palestine," *United Nations*, http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/ security_council.htm (accessed on April 24, 2010). Security Council, "Resolution 1813 (2008)," *United Nations* (Distr: General 30 April, 2008).

[70] Zoubir, "Origins and Development," 1.

[71] Stephen Zunes. "Western Saharans Resist Moroccan Occupation." *Peacework* no. 375 (online). http://www.peaceworkmagazine.org/western-saharans-resist-moroccan-occupation (accessed on May 4, 2010).

[72] Ibid.

[73] Mundy, "Seized of the Matter," 145. Furthermore, as Mundy points out, it does not imply a more favorable position for the Saharawis in the negotiations where "the interests of Washington and Paris come first, those of Rabat and Algiers second, and those of the POLISARIO and its international support a distant third."

historical particularities have contributed to this outcome. These include a legacy of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in Europe, which occurred at the very time Zionism was gaining strength and European colonies were giving way to new nation-states in the post-war order. Similarly, in the 1960s and 70s, a climate in favor of self-determination and third world solidarity benefitted the Saharawis.[74] The international community's judgments reflect these issues, and that judgment should be understood as part of a general inclination towards properly modern nationalisms. The solutions sought by the international community in each case − full self-determination for the Saharawis and only partial self-determination for the Palestinians − are essentially derived from the international community's legitimization, or lack thereof, of the *national claims of the occupiers,* not of the occupied. The Moroccans have failed to convince the international community of their national claims to Sahara. The Zionists, however, succeeded in their case.

The "National Order of Things"

The UN's original assessments facilitated the Zionist establishment of a settler colony, whereas the Moroccan claims were refused. That is because the United Nations, by the nature of its constitution, is inclined to support nationalist sentiments that are in accord with their own conception of nations. For the UN and its members, there may not be an explicit consensus regarding the definition of a nation, yet there is at least an implicit understanding of nationhood (and more precisely, 'nation-state-hood') as the essence of the modern world order. Lisa Malkki describes the current territorial nation-state system as being taken for granted as a natural ordering of the world, opting to refer to it as the "national order of things."[75] A world order based upon nation-states is a modern phenomenon, as nationalism itself is "implicated historically in the processes of capitalism, state formation, and secularism."[76] Indeed, the United Nations is the embodiment of this nationally-bound world order, a notion made obvious by the name of the institution.

Understandings of a nation generally adhere to one of two schools: 'primordialist' and 'modernist'.[77] The primordialist approach, conceiving of nations as "organically grown entities... timeless, God-given, and/or implanted by nature," is little adhered to anymore in scholarship or intellectual circles.[78] The modernist, or 'constructivist' approach, in contrast, is both accepted and important for contextualizing the UN's legitimation of nationalisms. These theories are in concurrence in understanding nationalism as a modern political project in which nations are constructed, not given *a priori*. For Ernest Renan, one of the first intellectuals to pen a theory of nationhood, a nation is *not* based on common race, language, religion, interests, or even geography, albeit that nations may in praxis share all of these features. Rather, a nation *is* a spiritual project, enacted by people desiring to perpetuate a

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[74] Palestinians were also the beneficiaries of these sentiments, but the cause was often marred by traumatizing incidents in the 1970s such as civilian airplane high jacking by guerrilla fighters and a string of assassinations in Europe set off by the killing of Israeli athletes in the Munich Olympics Games of 1972. For more on this topic, see Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), esp 286-287.

[75] Liisa Malkki, "Refugees and Exile," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 516.

[76] Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 7.

[77] Karim Mezran, *Negotiating National Identity* (Roma: Antonio Pelicani, 2002), 29.

[78] Ibid., 29.

common heritage, and is a new feature of the modern age.[79] One of the most frequently cited theorists of nations, Benedict Anderson, defines his subject as an "imagined political community" in which a communal bond is sensed among a group of people, though the individual members of the group do not know each other.[80] Lisa Wedeen expounds upon the Andersonian conception, explaining that "the 'national community'... implies a recognizably distinct understanding of time as abstract and uniform; of space as territorial, sovereign, and circumscribed by both the reach of state institutions and by the formalities of international recognition; and of political personhood as premised on notions of a 'people.'"[81] The nation exists in an abstract but modern time and is defined by a sovereign territory over which state practices extend to a particular group of people.

Anderson allows for the imaginings of the political community to be steeped in spirit (Renan) or ethnicity. The latter imagining, the nebulous yet poignant notion of ethnicity, has been taken up by an influential theorist who takes a constructivist approach to primordialism. Anthony Smith asserts that nations and nationalism are new manifestations of old collectivities grounded in ethnicity. "*Ethnies*" construct their claims to a nation based upon certain shared ethnic and cultural characteristics.[82] The United Nations legitimated the Zionist political project that fulfills notions of modern nationalism, especially as understood by Smith. The Moroccan claim to Western Sahara, conversely, exhibits material and expansionary interests while failing to persuade of a national bond steeped in imaginings and old collectivities.

Territorial Claims Supported: Zionism

Modern Zionists effectively linked their claims to a particular territory by invoking *ethnie* national claims. Classical Zionist ideology is representative of a primordial discourse, at its heart an "eschatological purpose," messianism, and the theme of return to a homeland based upon a "bond between the people and its land." However, as Arthur Hertzberg has argued, modern Jewish nationalists infused Zionism with a "radically new meaning," whereby they derived their values from the "general milieu" of the romantic period – liberalism, national freedom, and progressivism. Furthermore, one of the forefathers of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, recognized the movement's need for the "assent and co-operation of the dominant political powers."[83] Thus, the cultural and religious claims that defined classical Zionism were downgraded from the discourse.[84] Zionism reconciled its classical and modern self by successfully utilizing the *ethnie* past that Smith characterizes as having six dimensions, namely a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity.[85] In espousing a

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[79] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" reprinted in *Nation and Narration,* ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8-22, and 10.

[80] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

[81] Wedeen, 10.

[82] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[83] Arthur Hertzberg, "Introduction," in *The Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (New York: Atheneum, 1959), 15-18.

[84] Herz'l's political project reflects only one strand of modern Zionism, but was the most influential. Other prominent thinkers maintained more cultural and primordialist notions of Zionism.

[85] Anthony Smith, 23-30.

nationalism that is understood by the modern world order as the norm, as the "national order of things," Zionists were more successful than the Moroccans at the United Nations, where they were offered a state. This acceptance into the modern national order of things contributes to Israel's legitimacy despite the numerous problems associated with its establishment. Without it, Israel would struggle to exist at all. Thus, legitimacy is another factor in the resonance of the Arab-Israeli question unlike Morocco's presence in Western Sahara, which is not existential.

Coincidentally, the Zionists did not contend against a strong nationalist rival that might have posed a more severe challenge to their claim. Several nationalist projects were developing in and around Palestine during this period, some in opposition to one another and none garnering robust popular support. One school of thought was the notion of a 'Greater Syria', reflecting a desire for the people of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan to remain as one country. Presenting this view to the American government, the King-Crane Commission recommended that, "the unity of Syria [namely contemporary Syria, Palestine and Lebanon] be preserved, in accordance with the earnest petition of the great majority of the people of Syria."[86] The American delegation went on to explain that the Syrian petitioners wanted a united, independent Syria and were in staunch opposition to the Zionist program. Yet the politics of Arab unity was but one trend, and was seen in some circles as a Syrian bid for regional hegemony. This period also witnessed formative territorial nationalisms. Rashid Khalidi establishes the existence of a distinct Palestinian national identity, dating at least to the early twentieth century, which was beset by British co-optation of elites, along with the divisions between traditional notable leadership and other more radical political and social groups within Palestinian society.[87] Palestinian territorial nationalism was too weak to undermine Zionist claims that were backed by the support of the international community.

Territorial Claims Denied

In contrast to the Zionists, Moroccan leaders failed to convince the International Court of Justice of their entitlement to Western Sahara because their claims did not amount to an acceptable form of modern nationalism. Like other fledgling states in the region, Moroccan nationalism was a precarious construction of nation building. During French colonization, forging a national identity hinged on a bid for independence, and the three main political groupings in Moroccan society – the Istiqlal nationalist party, the King, and the Berbers of the rural interior – recognized the connection. In line with this, the Arab Istiqlal sought to "assimilate the Berbers under a larger Moroccan identity". King Mohammed V also understood his title would be purely nominal unless he could rule over a sovereign nation, and many Berbers embraced the trend of Arab nationalism for the sake of independence.[88] Karim Mezran has contended that if not for the King's successful efforts in negotiating a national identity, the consensus among these groups and eventual success of Moroccan nationalism may not have been possible.[89] Shortly after achieving independence, King Mohammad V mounted a campaign to further his nationalist drive, this time looking south.

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[86] "King–Crane Commission," *Encyclopædia Britannica.* 2010. Encyclopædia Britannica Online http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/318409/King-Crane-Commission (accessed May 5, 2010).
[87] Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), esp. xviii-xix.
[88] Mezran, 65-77.
[89] Ibid., 65.

Moroccans contend that Western Sahara is "indisputably Moroccan," and that, prior to Spanish colonization, Morocco had authority and internationally recognized sovereignty there.[90] Indeed post-independence sentiments of "Greater Morocco" were far-reaching, extending to parts of Algeria and Mali, and to the entireties of Sahara and Mauritania.[91] To maintain at least some of these territorial claims, the King invoked tradition. He emphasized the various religious oaths and vows of loyalty – *bayʿa* – taken by Saharawi tribal leaders to the Moroccan sultan. But POLISARIO's leadership countered this claim and pushed out those Saharawis who had vowed loyalty to the sultan; they appealed to modernist conceptions of statehood by suppressing tribal identification.[92] The Saharawis' success in downplaying the role of religious oaths was a deathblow to the monarchy, whose legitimacy before and after independence has been derived from its dual religious and national authority.

The International Court of Justice was not swayed by Moroccan nationalist claims, as articulated in an Advisory Opinion in 1975. Conceding that Morocco maintained the allegiance of some tribes to Moroccan sultans, the justices disputed that this amounted to territorial sovereignty or Moroccan authority in Western Sahara.[93] Elucidating the Court's opinion, Tony Hodges has illustrated the marginality of Western Sahara for Moroccan sultans, contending that when certain Moroccan leaders did manage to make headway into the territory, it was to consolidate their advantage over trans-Saharan trade routes and, for certain leadership, to recruit slaves for their armies. This interest-driven attachment to Western Sahara simply does not invoke the emotional connection associated with modern nationalism. Indeed, the Court even called Morocco a "special kind of state."[94] Yet it was not the right kind of state – that is, a nation-state.

More pragmatic calculations taken by the monarchy, political and economic in nature, also undermined Moroccan claims to Western Sahara and further dampened their claim of a modernist national connection to the land. When the Istiqlal party encouraged expansion into Western Sahara, the King felt obliged to outpace the party "in nationalist fervor," calculating that the doctrine could "boost the monarchy's prestige."[95] When Hassan II, son and successor of Mohammad V, conquered Western Sahara, he was driven by similar legitimizing motives. In the 1970s he was politically vulnerable, a fact manifested in two coup attempts in the few years before the Green March. He sought a boost to his legitimacy by rallying his citizenry around an emotional issue that would pique their national sentiments. The second pragmatic calculation derives from the economic treasures Saharawi territory holds. Contemporaneously (and perhaps not coincidentally) with the propagation of Greater Morocco sentiments, the mineral wealth of the Western Sahara was discovered.[96]

Not only was the case for Moroccan nationalism weak on its own merit, but it was also confronted by several other nationalisms successfully forging their existence in the modern world order of nation-states. From the time Morocco won its independence in 1956 to the

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[90] Gregory W. White, "The End of the Era of 'Leniency' in Morocco," in *North Africa,* ed. Yahia H. Zoubir and Haizam Amirah-Fernandez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 95.
[91] Hodges, 85-86.
[92] Anthony G. Pazzanita, "Review: The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara," *International Journal of African Historical Studies,* 40:2 (2007).
[93] "The Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice" in Hodges Appendix.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 86.
[96] Ibid.

year it marched into Western Sahara (1975), sixty-four new nation-states gained seats in the UN General Assembly.[97] Among these were Mauritania, the entirety of which Morocco tried to claim as its own, and Algeria, whose newly forged borders contained territories to which Morocco also laid claim. Morocco's border wars with Algeria, initiated in 1963, illustrated a sharp contrast between the pan-Arab and anti-colonial secular nationalist sentiment Algeria's leadership was seeking to forge, and the "narrow chauvinism of the Greater Moroccans whose ideology had been astutely appropriated by the monarchy to glorify the Alawite dynasty."[98] Meanwhile, the Organization of African States effectively isolated Morocco, first recognizing the POLISARIO as a liberation movement, then accepting SADR as a member of their organization. Morocco subsequently withdrew its membership from the group.[99]

Finally, the nationalist sentiments of the Saharawis themselves challenged Moroccan claims. While Moroccan leadership tried to demonstrate the fraternal bonds between Saharawis and themselves, the persistent resistance and assertions of national independence of the Saharawis, mitigated only by a military occupation in which Moroccan troops "almost outnumbered the civilian population," clearly problematized Moroccan claims.[100] Indeed, it seems that the Saharawis have constructed a nationalist discourse that follows a modernist approach not unlike that of the Zionists. They emphasized a cultural uniqueness, as the Hassaniya-speaking men of the desert; moreover, they delved into a regional identity, a history of tribal independence, and a distinctiveness as "Ahel es-Sahel, the people in the Atlantic littoral... a zone whose *qabael* [tribes] had never been subservient to either the sultans of Morocco or the Mauritanian emirs to the south."[101] In the modern age of territorially bound nation-states that hinge on the imaginings of its members, Moroccan claims overstepped nationalist boundaries.

Conclusion

The experiences of the Saharawis and the Palestinians are at the heart of these two narratives. Despite contextual and historical differences, their recent histories have been filled with conflict and bloodshed. Concurrently, their national liberation movements have been indefatigable in demanding their right to self-determination, and have gained grassroots supporters and advocates worldwide. The Moroccan and Israeli projects share many traits and their territorial claims abet protracted conflict situations. Neither Morocco nor Israel could sustain their stances lacking the support of global powers and discourses.

The prominence of the Palestinian question in political and journalistic discourse eclipses the Western Saharan question. The Saharawis are further blighted by an Arab public that overwhelmingly supports the Palestinians, due in part to a discourse of Arab unity, and by Muslim communities for whom the Western Sahara holds little significance relative to a place like Jerusalem. And while Israel invokes existential sentiments connected emotionally

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[97] UN, "Member States," *United Nations* http://www.un.org/en/members/growth.shtml (accessed on May 4, 2010).
[98] Hodges, 281.
[99] Shelley, 133-134.
[100] Ibid., 291.
[101] Hodges, 149-150.

to prior ill-treatment of Jews in Europe, Morocco invokes little more than ambivalence. In both cases, the Saharawis and the Palestinians continue to be deterred from achieving self-determination, a reality that continues to problematize the basis for today's national order of things.

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