LA BADIL LA BADIL: THE EFFECTS OF MILITARY OCCUPATION ON GENDER DYNAMICS IN SAHRAWI POLITICAL RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that the Moroccan military occupation of the Western Sahara has had a gendered effect on Sahrawi society, and consequently on the Sahrawi resistance movement. This argument is presented in three points: 1) the occupation impacts Sahrawi gender dynamics. This is exemplified by the significant increase in participation of women as frontliners and political figures from the start of this conflict in the early 1970s to the present day, and the explicit targeting of men as primary threats to the state; 2) the conflict and long-term military occupation led to the increased politicization of Sahrawi women’s leadership roles; 3) the occupation has created a generational shift amongst Sahrawi women of the older and younger generation regarding their desire to participate in public forms of resistance and political leadership due to the severe level of institutionalized discrimination throughout the Occupied Territories.
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Introduction

The Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara, located in North Africa between Morocco and Mauritania, contain one of the oldest nonviolent political resistance movements in the entire region. The Sahrawi residents of the Western Sahara are ethnically Arab-Muslim, but insist on the differentiation between Moroccan and Sahrawi identity. They emphasize their Bedouin customs of strict codes of honor, generosity, and social interactions in addition to important cultural symbols such as the tent, the tea ceremony, and traditional styles of dress\(^1\) that are not found in Moroccan culture. Additionally, Sahrawis descend from several tribes that maintained independence from Moroccan authority before and during the Spanish colonial regime.\(^2\) They are a historically marginalized population that has demanded their right to self-determination for decades, but whose pursuit of democratic statehood and human rights have been forcefully suppressed by the Moroccan occupation. Due to the difficulty of accessing the territories for research purposes, very little scholarship exists relating to the activists within the territories, the current state of the conflict, and the roles that Sahrawi women fill as they lead the resistance movement.

Unlike many conflicts from around the world that have been analyzed through a gendered lens, the conflict in the Western Sahara and the resistance movement does not suffer from a hyper-masculine character. Many scholars have noted that in times of war and conflict women step forth from the private sphere to participate in revolutions, rebellions, and armed conflict to fight against a common aggressor. However, following the height of armed conflict women often

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\(^1\) Traditional styles of dress refers to the melkhfa for women, which is a large single piece of colorful cloth that is draped over the head and wrapped around the body, and the dera’a for men which is a robe that is white or light blue with intricate gold embroidering.

find themselves fighting against a patriarchal system and a hyper-masculine character of the resistance or opposition movement in order to maintain their representative gains. In Sahrawi culture and society, women have traditionally held prominent positions in both the public and private spheres regardless of war, conflict, or times of peace. They are not restricted to domestic duties and the confines of their homes as a social norm, but they are often leaders both in the family and in civil society. Sahrawi women’s prominence in society is clear when examining the gendered composition of the resistance movement and public protests, because these efforts are predominantly led by and composed of women, while Sahrawi men play supportive roles.

While this study initially set out to simply understand the reasons that Sahrawi women choose to participate in and lead the resistance movement against Moroccan occupation, it became glaringly apparent that a distinct generational difference exists in public participation among Sahrawi women. The movement is overwhelmingly represented by women of the older generation, who had lived through the transition between Spanish colonial rule to Moroccan occupation by force. Even clearer was the absence of Sahrawi men from public manifestations of the resistance movement. The Moroccan occupation and the protracted nature of this conflict has impacted Sahrawi gender dynamics and overall society in a very distinct way, and it is now having a profound impact on the younger generation of Sahrawi women’s desire to continue participating in public forms of resistance. This observation is what caused the overall research question to evolve, and so this study seeks to answer the question: how has the Moroccan military occupation of the Western Sahara affected women’s participation and leadership in the resistance movement?

This study argues that the occupation has had a gendered effect on Sahrawi society, and consequently on the resistance movement. This argument is presented in three points: firstly, the
occupation impacts Sahrawi gender dynamics. This is exemplified by the significant increase in participation of women as frontliners and political figures from the start of this conflict in the early 1970s to the present day, and the explicit targeting of men as primary threats to the state. Secondly, the conflict and long-term military occupation has led to the increased politicization of Sahrawi women’s leadership roles. Thirdly, the occupation has created a generational shift amongst Sahrawi women of the older and younger generations regarding their desire to participate in public forms of resistance and political leadership due to the severe level of institutionalized discrimination throughout the Territories.

The purpose of this study is to fill a critical gap in the empirical literature on gender and military occupation, gender and conflict, and on women specifically living in the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara. There is a dearth of scholarship focused on any aspects of the Occupied Territories due to the obstacles in accessing the region that are created by the Moroccan government for potential researchers. Accessing the territories for any extended length of time is extremely difficult, and therefore little information is shared about the social, political, and cultural conditions since the beginning of the occupation. This research is intended to serve scholars and policymakers alike, especially for understanding the heterogeneity of women’s lived experiences and treatment throughout the Middle East and North Africa

**Thesis Methodology**

The design of this study incorporates original and independent primary data collection, consisting of interviews with Sahrawi women activists and non-activists, participant observation, and focus groups. The data was collected during a six-week field study in the occupied city of Laayoune, Western Sahara. The research subjects included in this study were selected based on their willingness to participate, and their status as Sahrawi women living in the Occupied
Territories. Both activists and non-activists were interviewed in order to get a broader understanding of varying perspectives of the occupation from people who are actively engaged in resistance and those who choose not to be. The opinions and testimonies of Sahrawi men that are mentioned throughout this study were primarily collected through participant observation.

Access to the participants was gained through speaking with activist networks, which then connected me to friends, acquaintances, and led to activist functions where other interview subjects were found. In addition to utilizing activist networks, I gained access to non-activists by meeting Sahrawi women at the airport and other public spaces throughout my time in the field. From there, I met with their family members and friends and created a varied sampling from the dozens of interview subjects. In total, 35 Sahrawi women were interviewed for this study between the ages of 18 and 68 in the city of Laayoune, Western Sahara in Modern Standard Arabic, Hassaniya dialect, English, and Spanish. The respondents themselves were from all of the major cities of the territories: Laayoune, Smara, Dakhla, and Boujdour. Some respondents from the older generation, 40 years old and older, were born and raised in Tantan.

Interview questions began with basic and broad questions, often referred to as “typical grand tour questions,” where respondents give a verbal description of something they know well. For this study they were asked to describe a typical day in their lives. This is primarily for the purpose of gaining trust and allowing the respondent to describe something that imposes little pressure on them. Semi-structured interviews were the preferred method, which included many open-ended questions mixed with specific questions that all respondents were asked due to the

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3 Paraphrasing or quotations included throughout the thesis is translated into English from the original MSA or Hassaniya dialect by the author. Chants and slogans included throughout are transliterated in the text, with a translation included in the footnote.

fact that very little secondary data is available to consult regarding the occupation of the Western Sahara.  

Interviews were conducted in various settings according to the subjects’ choosing. As a general practice, meetings were based in private homes and neutral public spaces. I prioritized relative privacy and consistently ensured confidentiality between my research subjects and myself. Furthermore, interviews were not digitally recorded due to the security dilemma this would present in the Occupied Territories, which is under strict patrol by Moroccan security forces. In order to protect the identity and safety of my research subjects, I relied on handwritten notes that were promptly transcribed onto an online cloud device electronically every night. The online document and the cloud device were separately password-protected, and every respondent was anonymized and given a pseudonym.

In addition to the individual interviews, a total of three focus groups were conducted throughout the field-study. Two groups consisted of four to nine consenting Sahrawi women while one included three men, and they also took place in private homes or neutral spaces in order to build trust, guarantee their safety from security forces, and ensure confidentiality. The beginning of each focus group started with myself explaining the topic of my research, my academic background, and ethnic background followed by a detailed explanation of how the information gathered in each interview and focus group would be handled and recorded. One focus group consisted of an older generation of Sahrawi women activists that had been tortured and imprisoned during the war between the Polisario Front and the Moroccan government. Another consisted of Sahrawi women and men that work for humanitarian non-governmental organizations, and the last consisted of young Sahrawi girls attending secondary schools in the

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5 Leech, p. 665
territories. The topics discussed in each group focused on their upbringing, experiences growing up in the Occupied Territories, their political stances, their opinions on the political resistance, and how they believe the occupation has impacted their lives.

Following the data collected through human subjects, participant observation was also an important part of the field-study in the Occupied Territories. Although the security dilemma and hyper-surveillance of foreign visitors throughout the territories prevented daily and independent outings in Laayoune and beyond, participant observation was possible in a variety of settings, events, and interactions. Consistently living with activist host families allowed for a great deal of insight into the inner workings of the communications in Sahrawi political activism, and the way that families discussed political issues and restraints brought on by the occupation. In addition to observing the dynamics inside of private homes, observations were conducted at an activist press conference, an activist meeting commemorating Sahrawi martyrs, a nonviolent political demonstration, public parks, and plazas. The participant observation at the activist meeting and the press conference were especially important for the study because these events were not directly influenced or interrupted by research questions and the formality of interview settings.

Being that there was very little primary data available to consult regarding details of the political situation in the Occupied Territories, and even less detailing the nature of the political resistance and its projects, it was necessary to approach the study with an open mind and consult theoretical literature. The theories utilized throughout the study include settler-colonialism, military occupation, and gender during war and conflict. The study engages with theories of systemic rule, focusing specifically on settler-colonialism and military occupation, in order to understand the ways these systems impact occupied and colonized populations. The study then provides a human aspect to these theories of rule that often focus on primary political actors, and
have not traditionally focused on the impact of forceful rule on populations. Furthermore, the study engages with the literature on gender and conflict by examining a society that is non-patriarchal and that is still undergoing shifting gender dynamics amongst men, women, and generations of each.

Upon starting individual interviews, it became clear that there were distinct differences between different generations of Sahrawi women in Laayoune. The oldest generation of women interviewed was always inclined to discuss the details of what life was like during Spanish rule, and how it was affected by their imprisonment and torture during the war between the Moroccan state and the Polisario Front. This generation shared in common a narrative of fear and isolation during the war, and the youngest generation has always lived under occupied rule and had nothing different to compare it to.

Generational approaches to understanding the social impacts of occupation have proven themselves to be very valuable in scholarship on military occupations around the world. Maya Rosenfeld, for example, focused on studying the shifts amongst different generations of Palestinians that participated in political activism by identifying key historical events that greatly affected the generation’s youth at the time, such as the creation of Israel in 1948 and major changes in Palestinian leadership. Due to the importance of understanding how socio-political and historical events influence generations of people from participating in political resistance, this study will divide interview subjects into two generations:

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Older Generation: 40-68 years old  
Born in Western Sahara under Spanish colonial rule; directly affected by the war between Morocco and the Polisario Front

Younger Generation: 18-32  
Born in Western Sahara and have never known a political system free from Moroccan control; were either born during the war or during total occupation.

The methodological approach of combining primary data collected through human subjects and a thorough literature review of relevant themes allows this study to answer the research question of how the occupation has impacted women’s participation and leadership in the resistance movement. By understanding the socio-political context in the territories, which is shaped by a history of settler-colonialism and present-day occupation, it is possible to analyze how the gendered composition of the resistance movement evolved throughout the decades.

**Geography**

This study focuses specifically on the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara, and all field research was conducted within the occupied city of Laayoune in the north. It is important to note, however, that Sahrawis have been split into different regions in North Africa following the onset of the conflict. The largest population of Sahrawis is located in the

![Map of the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara, Morocco-proper, and the Liberated Zone controlled by the Polisario Front and known as the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Photo courtesy of PBS](image)
Occupied Territories.\(^8\) The next largest population is located to the east of the territories, in the Polisario\(^9\)-run refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees reports that there are 94,144 Sahrawi refugees living in the Tindouf camps, although the Algerian government officially reports that there are approximately 165,000.\(^{10}\) The are also sizable Sahrawi communities in Spain, Las Palmas which is a Spanish island off the coast of the Western Sahara, France, and Algeria.

The Occupied Territories and the Tindouf refugee camps are separated by a massive sand berm constructed by the Moroccan state to prevent the populations from joining together and to keep the Polisario Front on the other side. The berm is a 1,600 mile wall that is patrolled by Moroccan soldiers and surrounded by an estimated seven million landmines. Although the Moroccan state has long claimed that these territories are indisputably Moroccan, there are some distinct geographic differences between the way the monarchy governs within the legal borders of Morocco and in the Western Sahara. For the purposes of this study, the land that is located within the legal borders of the Moroccan state will be referred to as Morocco-proper.

The most starkly different characteristic between the Western Sahara and Morocco relates to methods of monitoring and security. The southern end of Morocco-proper is separated from the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara by a checkpoint that is policed 24 hours a day, seven days of the week. This is particularly different from the methods of policing in Morocco-proper because there are no checkpoints separating one Moroccan city from the next, however there is a distinct checkpoint between southern Morocco and the beginning of the

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8 Reports have estimated that a total of 500,000 Moroccan and Sahrawi residents populate the territories: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/12/31/could-war-come-back-to-western-sahara-some-of-algerias-sahrawi-refugees-think-so/
9 The Polisario Front is the only international recognized representative political body for the Sahrawi people in exile. They are based in Tindouf.
Western Sahara territories. There are checkpoints secured all throughout the Occupied Territories and they are located just outside of the city borders, so when entering or exiting one city in the territories for another you will encounter at least two checkpoints. In fact there are multiple checkpoints set up within cities as well. For example, in Laayoune there is an occasional checkpoint set up between the center of the city and the road leading to the beach. These forms of monitoring and security are not found within Morocco-proper and they reinforce the feeling of occupation and the feeling of being watched.

Some of the participants in this study, primarily from the older generation, were born in Tantan. This city is located in southern Morocco, and many Sahrawis were born there because their parents worked there seasonally. Prior to the occupation many Sahrawis created a sizable population in Tantan. Another city that many Sahrawis note travelling to before the start of the occupation or have lived in is Tarfaya, which is the southern-most city in Morocco that is near the border of the Western Sahara. Besides these cities located in southern Morocco, the majority of the respondents in this study were born and raised in the Western Sahara their entire lives. Those who travelled further into Morocco-proper are predominantly from the younger generation, and they lived in Casablanca, Agadir, Rabat, and Essaouira for their studies since there are no colleges or universities located within the Occupied Territories.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations that were clearly insurmountable at the start of this field study. The first relates to the level of surveillance throughout the Occupied Territories by Moroccan security forces. Due to the fact that the Moroccan occupation dedicates a significant amount of time to monitoring the movement of residents and the entry and exit of any foreign

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11 Anonymous interview: Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 2, 2014
visitors, it was very difficult to engage in participant observation in public spaces throughout Laayoune on a consistent basis. In order to avoid being detained or expelled, the majority of my fieldwork took place inside of private homes or disguised in large public spaces. This limited my ability to observe daily life for the residents of Laayoune, for both Sahrawis and Moroccans, and therefore this study relies upon the interview data much more than any other research method.

In addition to the impacts of the security dilemma on my fieldwork, it is necessary to discuss my positionality within this study. I was able to gain access to my initial research subjects and tune into a highly coordinated activist network with the help from Polisario Ambassador to the United States, Amb. Mohammed Yeslem Beisat. This was revealed at the beginning of every interview and focus group to ensure total transparency to my research subjects, and it could have influenced the direction of the interview. There is a possibility that the initial collaboration with a Polisario Front representative could have affected the level of trust between the respondent and myself. However, there is no way to accurately measure this possibility.

Finally, the lack of reliable data and statistics regarding employment, education, poverty, and economic inequality in the Western Sahara presents the greatest obstacle for crosschecking interview data. Therefore, all data provided throughout the study that is specific to the Occupied Territories is solely based on the claims of the respondents, unless otherwise cited by a secondary source.

**Study Organization**

Each chapter within this study presents a brief literature review that is directly related to the topic of that chapter. This is to situate the reader within the existing literature and understand how the topics and themes of this thesis have been approached in the past. Chapter One will
examine the intricacies of settler-colonialism and military occupation as two types of systems of rule, and it argues that the Moroccan state has successfully maintained rule over the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara because of a dual strategy that incorporated both settler-colonialism and long-term military occupation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief historical overview of the conflict, introduce the theoretical explanations for settler-colonialism and military occupation, and understand the socio-political and security context that Sahrawis have had to cope with on a daily basis because it has inevitably impacted every aspect of their lives.

Chapter Two provides a gender analysis of the Western Sahara conflict. This chapter argues that the Moroccan military occupation and the protracted nature of this conflict have drastically affected Sahrawi gender dynamics and the gendered composition of the resistance movement. It starts by introducing the literature examining the ways that gender is affected by war and conflict in a variety of cases, focusing specifically on Palestine and Iraq. The occupation has affected Sahrawi men and women in both similar and different ways, which partially explains why Sahrawi women are so much more engaged in the public sphere of resistance.

Chapter Three provides a generational analysis of Sahrawi women’s participation in public forms of resistance. It begins by understanding the explanations Sahrawi women of the older generation provided when asked why they engage in political resistance in their daily lives, and understanding the types of motivations that influence their desire to participate. Contrastingly, the younger generation of Sahrawi women explains their reasons for not participating in public forms of resistance and what motivates them to prioritize their education and careers over the resistance movement. The chapter argues that not only has military occupation impacted gender dynamics between Sahrawi men and women, but it has created a
significant difference between generations of Sahrawi women that is a result of the highly institutionalized forms of discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawi residents.

This study concludes by pulling together the three previous chapters in order to understand the various ways that war, conflict, and military occupation affect gender dynamics over time. The conclusion asserts that there is still a great deal to be done on these topics, and there is certainly still a great deal to be studied within the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara.
Chapter One: From Settler-Colonialism to Current Institutions of Military Occupation

“We lived through Spanish colonialism, and now we suffer with Moroccan colonialism. There is no international law here; there are no human rights. There is just struggle.”

First impressions of Laayoune

Upon entering the airport in Laayoune, the capital city in the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara, the arrivals are met with a large portrait of King Mohammed VI mounted high in the airport lobby. Just outside the building there are several Moroccan flags waving back and forth. The road that leads one from the airport to the city drives past a large open park, Mashwar Square, which is encircled by several Moroccan flags. Continue driving onto Smara Street, one of the main avenues that runs along the length of the entire city, and you will find another dozen Moroccan flags hung high much like you would find in the avenues of Tangier, Fez, and Rabat. It is easy to forget that you have entered a city that is known for its active resistance movement and fervent activists who oppose foreign rule. There is no doubt that the Moroccan state has tried to reconstruct the image of Morocco-proper throughout the cities of the Occupied Territories. From the representation of the nation through countless flags to the portraits of the monarch displayed in every restaurant, transportation station, and store—the occupation has prioritized the transformation of these territories to seem as superficially Moroccan as possible.

How to Approach the Conflict

The United Nations’ declaration calling for global decolonization and self-determination for colonized peoples in 1960 did not eliminate the possibility of future long-term military occupations and colonial interests. While it was a noble effort by the United Nations, after acknowledging the detrimental effects of colonialism in colonized lands, the declaration did not

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instantly create a postcolonial era and world order. Instead, countries acting in their own self-interest and seeking territorial aggrandizement have utilized aspects of colonialism and occupation to achieve their goals while relying on international alliances to escape criticism and legal repercussions. Scholars have noted instances in the 20th century where colonial interests manifested themselves in military occupations in Tibet, East Timor, Palestine, and the Western Sahara, or what Peter Stirk has referred to as a “modern form of indirect colonialism” 13.

Systemic analyses of different methods of rule, like settler-colonialism, allow people to understand the political and strategic interests involved. These analyses describe settler-colonialism as a type of rule that is an ongoing project consisting of critical interests ranging from economic, territorial, and security. However, what is largely missing from such analyses is the human aspect of this type of rule. Moving from the systemic analysis and focusing on the individual illuminates the responses and reactions of those who are colonized. Many scholars have adopted this focus in order to understand the effects of settler-colonialism, in particular, on those who are colonized. Residents of Occupied Palestine have been a focus of such research for decades. The Western Sahara is a particularly critical case to examine due to the settler-colonial roots of the conflict, the current conditions of military occupation, and the persistence of the political resistance to fight that is largely led by Sahrawi women. Therefore, this chapter seeks to understand how Morocco has maintained an illegal military occupation in the Western Sahara and consistently repressed a mobilized resistance movement for decades in what is an allegedly post-colonial era.

The central argument of this chapter is that Morocco has maintained control over the Western Sahara through a dual approach: settler-colonialism coupled with sustained military occupation. Both approaches have been deemed illegal according to instruments of international

law and the United Nations, but the Moroccan state has been able to suppress a political resistance movement for several decades due to the success in combining mass settler-colonialism and exclusionary policies of military occupation that have institutionalized discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawis. This historical overview is critical background information for understanding generational changes over time, since major historical events have significant impacts on the generation of youth that experience them. Before analyzing the differences between generations of Sahrawi women who participate actively in political resistance, it is necessary to first understand the historical and political events that greatly impacted their lives. Furthermore, after explaining the settler-colonial roots of this conflict and the current system of military occupation, generational change and the role of gender in contexts of conflict and military occupation will be the central focus of the following chapters.

**The Literature: understanding settler-colonialism & military occupation**

It is necessary to understand the analytical imperative for viewing settler-colonialism as significantly different from other traditional and classical forms of colonialism for an accurate understanding of the Western Sahara conflict, and how this history has influenced generations of Sahrawi residents. The model of settler-colonialism has led to the emergence of a Western Saharan society that is highly divided, not just between Moroccans and Sahrawis but also amongst Sahrawis themselves. It is also what has inspired a long-lasting resistance movement. Many scholars have written extensively on the intricacies of settler-colonialism from the 19th century to the annexations of territory that occurred in the 21st century in East Timor, Western New Guinea, the West Bank, and Crimea to name but a few. The common conclusion from
many scholars’ work is that settler-colonialism modifies the demographic composition of the colonized territory in severe ways that are much different to traditional and classical forms of colonialism.\textsuperscript{14} Once demographics are modified, there is a contestation over who has right to the land. This becomes especially contentious once a settler-colonial project lasts multiple generations, as is the case in the Western Sahara.

Lorenzo Veracini, a prominent scholar who has written extensively on the subject and published \textit{Settler Colonialism: a theoretical overview}, a comprehensive book on the theoretical aspects of settler-colonialism, provides a concise yet complex definition. He considers it a distinct method of colonizing that involves the creation and consumption of a wide array of territorial spaces by settler collectives on behalf of the colonizing state.\textsuperscript{15} According to Salah-Omri, settlements in colonial North Africa often mimicked the metropolis by constructing societies from the ground up that reflected the way of life and politics of the homeland.\textsuperscript{16} The settler collectives then claim and transform places by exercising their sovereign capacity, which is reinforced by their home country. The settler-colonial project incorporates building infrastructure and national institutions that are managed by the metropolis, and reinforced by state discourse and intensive settlement construction.\textsuperscript{17}

This form of colonialism is often framed in terms of being started in the name of national aggrandizement, which encompasses territorial expansion, economic incentives, natural resources, and the expansion of the colonizing population. It mobilizes thousands of people to physically and politically support the project. The expectation is that the colonial project will be

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p. 275
\end{flushleft}
irreversible and will transform the newly claimed territory into a legitimate part of the colonizing state thus making the colonized population invisible.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, understanding the impact of settler-colonialism on the colonized population requires the dismantling of the invisibility of colonized populations and those that are displaced. This process reveals the internal dynamics and institutions of colonial power that the colonizer obscures for its own interests.\textsuperscript{19}

The most widely studied case of settler-colonialism in North Africa is that of French colonialism in Algeria. While French colonial rule is typically cited as having lasted from 1830 to 1962, it was not until 1841 that France decided to annex Algeria and make it an official French territory. This was the year that tens of thousands of French citizens, known as colons, moved to North Africa and settled throughout Algeria. In 1841, there were approximately 37,374 colons and by 1954 there were nearly one million and they acquired a total monopoly of political and economic power throughout the country. The success of the colons is partially due to the use of tremendous force, since an integral part of French colonial rule was the enforcement of security and quelling the Algerian native opposition.\textsuperscript{20} However, in order to justify the annexation and massive settler-colonial project in Algeria, France embarked upon a mission of creating knowledge based on fieldwork that depicted Algeria as undisputed French territory and Algerians as savage natives.\textsuperscript{21} This led to the formation of the Arab Bureau from 1841-1871, a military institution that established, formed, and shaped French perceptions of Algeria through their extensive field studies and reportage.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, settler-colonial projects were not solely

\textsuperscript{19} Veracini, p. 3
\textsuperscript{22} Hannoum, p. 343
dependent on the use of force to sustain their rule but also on knowledge production to justify their presence.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to analyses of Algerian settler-colonialism, a great amount of the literature analyzing 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} century settler-colonial projects have focused on the relationship between Zionism and colonialism in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Some scholars claim that the mode of Jewish settlement in Palestine evolved over the years as it adapted to shifting political and economic realities in the territories.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, it is critical to draw upon these comparative cases in order to understand the resilience of Morocco’s occupation regime by analyzing simultaneous political and economic changes.

Military occupation is the second part of Morocco’s dual approach for maintaining control over the territory in a supposed postcolonial era. In Stirk’s work on \textit{The Politics of Military Occupation}, he states that scholars have conceptualized military occupation as a logical result of warfare between two states that ultimately leads to state-building projects. Other scholars analyzed the intricacies of military occupation in relation to violent resistance by inhabitants of an occupied territory, and do not consider it a logical result of warfare.\textsuperscript{25} What both of these slightly differing definitions share in common is the sense of temporary governance and temporary political authority that is attached to the concept of military occupation.\textsuperscript{26}

Military occupations are a problematic political phenomenon for several reasons. Firstly, they tear down many distinctions by which political life is organized and understood, including the will of the people, the function of state institutions, and state sovereignty.\textsuperscript{27} Secondly, under

\textsuperscript{23} Hannoum, p. 344
\textsuperscript{25} Stirk, p. 10
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 11
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p. 2
conditions of military occupation the distinctions between what is international and what is domestic, and between what is violence and what is political authority are blurred and difficult to understand.\textsuperscript{28} For the purposes of international law, the difficulty in understanding these distinctions make it nearly impossible to hold occupying governments accountable for their actions. Thirdly, military occupations break away from other similar legal distinctions, like conquests and annexations. Annexation is predominantly a term used in international law, which refers to a state acquiring territory that was not previously held under the sovereignty of that state.\textsuperscript{29} It is different from military occupation because annexed territories become fully incorporated into the sovereignty of the annexing state, whereas in military occupations there is only an extension of authority over the occupied territory that does not imply the type of permanent governance like annexation.\textsuperscript{30} Finally, the use of the term “military occupation” becomes a highly disputed concept from the viewpoint of the occupying state. Being that it is a negative categorization and is considered temporary, and in many cases illegal like in the Western Sahara, states have rejected its use.

Much like the Algerian experience of French settler-colonialism, the Moroccan state claims that the Western Sahara is historically part of Moroccan territory. It has produced various forms of colonial knowledge, from King’s speeches to textbooks to festivals celebrating Sahrawi culture as equivalent to Moroccan culture, in order to justify their occupation of the territory. By learning from the existing literature on settler-colonialism and recent studies of military occupations, it is necessary to understand the impact of the settler-colonial project in the Western

\textsuperscript{28} Stirk, p. 10
\textsuperscript{29} Annexation (2007). In Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought. Online resource: https://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=http://search.credoreference.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/content/entry/macpt/annexation/0
\textsuperscript{30} Annexation
Sahara by tracing how it came about, how it was justified, and the amount of Moroccan settlers that migrated from Morocco-proper.

**Settler-Colonialism as the First Phase of Conflict**

The Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara were formerly part of a Spanish colony. In 1884 Spain obtained a protectorate over the territory and assumed full military and administrative control.\(^{31}\) After the passing of UN General Assembly declaration granting colonial countries independence in 1960, Spain relinquished official colonial rule over the Western Sahara.\(^{32}\) In 1960, Spain accepted responsibility for preparing a referendum for the Western Sahara in which Sahrawis would be able to achieve their main goals of self-determination and independence.

Despite the importance of UN declaration 1514 and the emphasis placed on self-determination for formerly colonized populations, Morocco stalled the referendum process by submitting an appeal to the International Court of Justice on October 1974, arguing for rights to the territory due to historical ownership.\(^{33}\) The Moroccan state’s claims to the Western Sahara emerged due to the nationalist belief in the recovery of *terra irredenta*, claiming that its land had been contested and lost to European colonial ambitions for centuries.\(^{34}\) During the investigation into the factuality of Morocco’s claim, the ICJ only found some pledges of fealty to the Moroccan sultan in the nineteenth century by a few select tribal leaders bordering southern

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Morocco. The ICJ concluded that there was insufficient evidence to support any legal historical claim to the territory that would trump the Sahrawis’ right for self-determination and the referendum process. Although the ICJ rejected the Moroccan state’s appeal and supported the fulfillment of the application of resolution 1514 in the decolonization of Western Sahara, Spain negotiated a settlement with Morocco.

In October 1975, Spain granted Morocco two-thirds of the territory and by the 16th of the month King Hassan II authorized thousands of Moroccan citizens to march across the southern border into the Western Sahara. The Green March was the definitive beginning of Morocco’s settler-colonial project, where thousands occupied the territory and demonstrated popular political support for the monarchy. There were approximately 350,000 Moroccan citizens that settled in the Western Sahara, led in by tanks and the Moroccan military, by early 1976. In order to mobilize popular support in the hundreds of thousands, the king provided economic incentives for the settlers and they were given generous housing subsidies for their quick relocation. The king also delivered grandiose speeches rooted in nationalist discourse to inspire greater support for his project from the greater Moroccan citizenry:

“I recommend that your beloved country, your fatherland Morocco...safeguard its independence. Defend its historical territorial unity. Don’t tolerate that its liberty and integrity be touched one inch. Take care not to accept any bargaining concerning its safety and that of its inhabitants...In danger’s time, and when the enemy threatens your country, beat the head of its defenders."

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37 Zunes & Mundy
38 Zunes, p.50
King Hassan II intentionally framed the Green March as a nationalist project that was to preserve the territorial integrity of the Moroccan state. Furthermore, his speeches regarding the march and the occupation of Western Sahara are filled with divisive language that pits all Moroccans against those who oppose their project. Territorial integrity and unity are justifications still used today by King Mohammed VI to mobilize popular support for ruling over the Western Sahara. It was not framed to the public as a project for obtaining other self-interests such as natural resources or greater territory. Instead the march was to reclaim land that is undeniably theirs, regardless of the lack of historical evidence for such a claim. As the settler-colonial project was coming together, it was simultaneously silencing the Sahrawi population that already resided in the Western Sahara. The monarch was rendering the Sahrawi population invisible from the very start of the formation of the Green March, and this tactic of silencing and overshadowing the Sahrawi resistance persists today.

The Green March was, for all intents and purposes, a grand political strategy on behalf of the Moroccan government. The possibility of a Sahrawi referendum process deciding the future of the Western Sahara presented the greatest obstacle of achieving control of the territories. Therefore, the monarchy decided to complicate that possibility by incorporating hundreds of thousands of Moroccan citizens into the population. In the event of an actual referendum taking place, some of the settlers could claim the right to vote because some were of ethnic Sahrawi descent. There are some settlers that claimed they have ancestors from Sahrawi tribes that lived in the Western Sahara generations before. Although these groups of settlers of ethnic Sahrawi descent left the territories long before the Green March and identify solely as Moroccan, they

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41 Zunes, p. 50
believe to have a legitimate claim over the fate of the land.\textsuperscript{42} Over time it would become more and more difficult to establish a just referendum process that could exclude the entire settled population in the Western Sahara, which is precisely what has stalled this plan for the last 39 years.

King Hassan II and his successor, Mohammad VI, stress the legitimacy of Morocco’s claim over the Western Sahara. According to the Moroccan government and many of its citizens, the Green March is the critical moment in Moroccan history where the state embraced its post-coloniality and reclaimed all of its land from European colonizers.\textsuperscript{43} The reclamation of the Western Sahara is commemorated annually by a speech broadcast all throughout the state, and it is written extensively into every history textbook in the state.\textsuperscript{44} However, what this perspective does not acknowledge is the fact that an entire population lived in those territories prior to the Green March. The settlement of hundreds of thousands of Moroccans resulted in the forceful displacement of thousands of Sahrawis who have lived in refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria for decades. Many fled the areas in which there was live ammunition and confrontations, but Moroccan security forces through intimidation forced others out. In addition to the total lack of consideration for the Sahrawi population, there is no legitimate or substantial evidence that supports Morocco’s claim of historical control and ownership of the Western Sahara.

While the Green March and the start of the Moroccan settler-colonial project sought to severely modify the demographics of the Western Sahara, it also greatly influenced the strength and organization of the Sahrawi political resistance. The Polisario Front had already existed in the Western Sahara by the time Morocco entered; during Spain’s slow withdrawal from the territories and its reluctance to hand over administrative control to local leaders, the Polisario

\textsuperscript{42} Anonymous Interview: Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 28, 2014
\textsuperscript{43} Rhanem, online article.
\textsuperscript{44} Rhanem, online article.
Front was formed by al-Wali Mustafa Sayyid.\textsuperscript{45} As a response to the massive construction of settlements, the resistance group expanded their membership, organization, and determination to resist Morocco’s rule.

**Military Occupation as the Second Phase for Maintaining Control**

The Western Sahara conflict is not one of annexation or conquest, because unlike an annexation Morocco illegally entered and obtained control over the territories, and unlike a conquest it was not the result of a war between two state actors. However, the circumstances surrounding the conflict serve to complicate the ability to categorize it. Although the Moroccan government claims complete sovereign rule over the territories, this claim is not legally recognized by international organizations and institutions. Morocco is dedicated to establishing a permanent and stable political authority and claim to the territory. However, the fervent Sahrawi resistance movement in the territories and nationalist diplomatic efforts by the Polisario Front abroad are contesting Morocco’s goal and therefore prolonging the state of occupation. Due to all of the legal complications and the various actors involved in the contestation of Western Sahara, Morocco’s military and institutional presence is a case of occupation and subject to legal condemnation.

What truly complicates the ability to categorize certain territorial conflicts as military occupations is not the lack of consensus as to what constitutes a military occupation, but it is the attempts of occupiers to evade the title because it implies an eventual end to occupation that is accompanied by total withdrawal.\textsuperscript{46} Morocco has thus far been able to avoid demands for withdrawal by not only repeating its legitimate claim to the territory, but also claiming that

\textsuperscript{45} Jensen

\textsuperscript{46} Stirk, p. 2
withdrawal would be a crisis for Moroccan national security. This tactic consequently legitimates Morocco’s severe military presence throughout the territories and the need for local and secret police forces.\textsuperscript{47} Not only has this turned the Western Sahara into a concern for national security, but it also serves to marginalize and further disenfranchise the Sahrawi population. Out of the 38 Sahrawi women interviewed for this study, every single person claimed that the Moroccan security forces ensured security for Moroccans, and security \textit{from} Sahrawis: “If a crime is committed, the first thought is that a Sahrawi did it. Then they go from house to house. That is not an investigation. That is just discrimination.”\textsuperscript{48} The feeling of racial discrimination and persecution throughout the territories is a common grievance of many Sahrawis, whether or not they actively oppose the Moroccan regime. The settler colonial project-turned-military occupation has divided the territories between Moroccans, pro-Morocco Sahrawis, and pro-independence Sahrawis, which has further manifested itself in policies of exclusion within state institutions.

\textit{Policies of Exclusion \& Violent Suppression as Everyday Practice}

The Moroccan state has taken extreme measures to ensure that its control has penetrated every aspect of social, economic, and political life. The extensive security regime is present within every city throughout the territories, and the development of Moroccan institutions and infrastructure within the territories has established preferential treatment for Moroccan settlers and pro-Morocco Sahrawis at the expense of other Sahrawi residents. This tactic of maintaining control and enforcing stability is not unique to Morocco; in fact, Shalhoub-Kevorkian describes how Israel’s strategy of “security reasoning” has created a socio-economic exclusion of the

\textsuperscript{47} Agencie Marocaine de Presse
\textsuperscript{48} Anonymous Interview. Translated by the author from Arabic to English. Private room; Laayoune, Western Sahara. June 28, 2014
state’s “Other”, which in this case is the entire Palestinian population. Maya Rosenfeld’s work also presents the innumerable obstacles established by the Israeli Occupation for Palestinian residents. In Israel, the priority of maintaining security and suppressing the Palestinian opposition has led to the “formation and imposition of economic, political, legal, and spatial racial discrimination against Palestinians”. This is a critical strategy for military occupations around the world, for it ensures an imbalance of power and privileges the settled community.

Institutionalized discrimination and violent suppression of opposing political views are two common grievances for every Sahrawi activist and non-activist interviewed for this study. For example, one young woman expressed during an interview, “It’s important to be careful about who you talk to about politics. The rules are not to talk about that in public and never talk about that around Moroccans. You never know who people will tell.” There is a heightened sense of caution when discussing political issues and perspectives throughout the territories, and this is due to the overwhelming presence of security forces that closely monitor and censor Sahrawi political projects.

As a response to the fervent and organized political resistance, the Moroccan government implemented extreme measures of securing social stability and suppressing the Sahrawi political resistance. Human Rights Watch recently reported that Moroccan police have restricted all public gatherings that are believed to be organized by opponents of the Moroccan occupation, thus continuing to restrict public expression of political opinions and freedom of speech. The Moroccan security regime in the three main cities of Laayoune, Smara, and Dakhla consists of

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50 Shalhoub-Kevorkian, p. 158


secret police dressed in civilian clothing that drive civilian vehicles, state police, military soldiers, and riot police. Due to the civilian disguises they often use, they are able to penetrate both public and private spheres in the territories. During the monthly nonviolent protest, organized to take place at the same time and in each major city of the Occupied Territories, the security forces militarize protest sites and create 24-hour surveillance teams prior to the scheduled demonstration. They restrict Sahrawi mobility and access to protest centers. They verbally harass, physically assault, and video record all participants in the demonstration.

On June 15, 2014 a non-violent demonstration in Laayoune was organized to take place on Smara Street, which is the main avenue that runs across the length of the city. Activists had been organizing it for several days, making sure that they would filter out onto the street from different connecting streets in small groups. From the early afternoon onward, police and military vehicles lined Smara Street for several blocks. The neighborhood that is known for housing many prominent activists, Maatalla, was blocked off by military police vehicles, and patrolled by riot police. For the entire day activists were calling each other and exchanging information about the police surveillance. At precisely 6:30 p.m., activists from all directions made their way to Smara Street in groups of three to five. More than half of the activists heading toward the demonstration site were Sahrawi women and chanting, “La badil la badil 3an taqrir al-masir!” The demonstrators who successfully made it to Smara Street were instantly met with violent force.

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53 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, May 22, 2014
54 Participant observation, Laayoune, Western Sahara, Smara Street, June 15, 2014
55 Ibid.
56 Transliteration of the original Arabic chant, which is the most popular and widely used chant in the resistance movement; the translation into English is “There is no alternative, there is no alternative to self-determination!”.
Women were pushed backwards and knocked to the ground as taxi cabs maneuvered around them without stopping. Secret police officers embedded within the demonstration took pictures and videos of everyone’s faces with their camera phones. According to activists, the police did this so they could keep a record of who participated in the demonstrations on a regular basis, after which they follow them home to threaten them and their families. The violence only escalated when one woman, a popular activist in Laayoune and a member of the Equipe Media news team, was punched in the face after she was knocked to the ground. Her fellow female activists rushed her back into her neighborhood, and a group of 12 Moroccan secret police officers followed them. Throughout the entire duration of the protest, which lasted less than one hour, no Sahrawi protester was armed, aggressive, or violent towards any individual on Smara Street. Later that night, Equipe Media reported that 26 Sahrawi women were beaten, and four Sahrawi men reported injuries.

This particular protest was not an isolated event. On the contrary, it is representative of the violence inflicted upon nonviolent protesters all throughout the cities of the Occupied Territories. The Moroccan military occupation has sustained its presence within the Western Sahara by doing precisely what it did on June 15: suppress any and all possibility of political resistance. Sahrawis are totally unable to express their political opinions in public, and this reproduces an image of a Moroccan Sahara that is stable and legitimate.

The security regime does not solely focus on the Sahrawi population and resistance projects, but it also monitors and restricts visitors and tourists who enter the territories.

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57 Participant observation, Laayoune, Western Sahara, Smara Street, June 15, 2014
58 Equipe Media is a news team composed of Sahrawi activists and self-taught journalists that constantly publish their news stories, interviews, protest videos, and other forms of press and media on their website: [www.emsahara.com](http://www.emsahara.com)
59 This figure was shared with me during a focus group conducted with the news team the day after the demonstration took place, June 16, 2014, in Laayoune, Western Sahara.
Numerous Sahrawis recounted stories of journalists, reporters, and tourists who were followed, monitored, searched, and ultimately expelled from the territories shortly after their arrival: “We try our best to help foreigners get in and talk to us, see what is happening. But unless you are with a human rights group and have permission from the King, you cannot stay.” The Moroccan security regime maintains strict surveillance over all foreigners that enter the territories and make certain that their mobility is restricted so that little data is collected regarding the military occupation. In July 2014, a German journalist and his British colleague entered the territories to report on the monthly demonstration. Within hours they were searched, questioned, and sent out of the Occupied Territories back into Morocco-proper. Ultimately, the security regime has been highly effective at preventing tourists and journalists alike from witnessing public Sahrawi demonstrations for self-determination and their violent suppression by means of blunt force.

In addition to the Moroccan security forces that enforce the military occupation, ethnic and political discrimination is prevalent in all aspects of life including schooling, employment, college enrollment, and travel. In terms of schooling, there are trade schools in Laayoune, Dakhla, and Smara, but all colleges and universities are located within Morocco proper. Sahrawis must have the financial resources to move out of the territories and into major cities where the universities are located.

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60 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, May 22, 2014
62 Information is based on several interviews during which the question of access to education was specifically asked.
Moreover, there are no libraries in the Occupied Territories. Currently, the first library is under construction in Laayoune and set to be open within the next two years.63 According to a sign posted in front of the construction site of the building, both Moroccans and Sahrawis will be able to use the facilities in the library, which is at the outskirts of the city near the airport. However, to date, there has never been a library, college, or university within the Occupied Territories. Access to higher education, information, and research has been completely limited for the Sahrawi population, and discrimination within grade schools often dissuades Sahrawi children from finishing their preparatory education.

Out of the 12 Sahrawis interviewed between the ages of 18 and 26, all had experienced serious discrimination in grade school. Their teachers struck most of them with rulers, books, and their hands. One 19 year-old interviewee said that she did not finish middle school because of the physical and verbal abuse she suffered at school: “I had friends at first, but when my teacher started to yell at me and hit me in front of everyone, nobody wanted to talk to me. I had no friends, and I didn’t understand why.”64 Instead, she chose to stay at home to help her mother care for her younger siblings and complete other household duties. Another interviewee, 24 years old, had obtained her bachelor’s degree at a university in Agadir. She explained,

“I traveled to Casablanca to enroll in a graduate program in international relations because I had just finished my baccalaureus, but when I walked in the director asked me where I am from. I told him I am from Laayoune, and he asked where exactly that is located. He had a smile on his face the entire time, and I answered that Laayoune is in the Western Sahara. He told me that when the Sahara becomes Western then I can enroll for the program, and that I should return to the “Moroccan” Sahara. I have never been so angry in my life.”65

63 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 30, 2014 and Participant Observation: Driven by the construction site of the library and read the signs detailing its projected opening date, June 30, 2014
64 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 30, 2014
65 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private living room, June 7, 2014.
Instantly discouraged and angered, she walked away from the program she had wanted to pursue for years because of her political position on the conflict. For many outspoken Sahrawis, there is no upward mobility and freedom from discrimination in educational institutions.

In addition to the educational obstacles confronting the Sahrawi population, there are high unemployment rates across all age groups. This is particularly true for men and women between the ages of 40 and 68. Out of the 38 Sahrawi women interviewed for this study, 18 were within that age group. Only three of them are employed, one of which is self-employed. They believe that their failure to find employment in Laayoune is because they were all political prisoners in the 1980s while Morocco fought a war against the Polisario Front. They were accused of aiding, supporting, and sending intelligence to members of the Polisario Front prior to the start of armed conflict. Following these accusations, which were not accompanied by solid evidence, they were imprisoned from anywhere between eight to eleven years without trial or the ability to contact their families. In 1991, after the United Nations’ brokered a ceasefire, all but one Sahrawi man were released from the prisons. After reintegrating into society in Laayoune, they found it extremely difficult to be employed by any company, school, organization, or shop.

Unfair hiring practices and blatant discrimination are an important and common grievance among the Sahrawi population in the major cities. The number of Moroccans working in shops, supermarkets, cafes, and restaurants far exceeds the number of Sahrawis working in those sectors. Sahrawis are also underrepresented in the police force and education sector, both as teachers and administrators. One major employer in the Occupied Territories that

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66 The officially reported unemployment figure by the Moroccan government for the Western Sahara is 13%, however based upon other reports and interview data gathered from this study the discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawis indicates that their unemployment rate is much higher. Data available at: http://www.tradingeconomics.com/morocco/unemployment-rate and http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/world-jan-june13-wsahara_01-18/

67 The classification “Moroccan” here goes beyond the definition of nationality or citizenship, but instead refers to the population of people in Morocco/Occupied Territories that are not ethnically Sahrawi, but of Berber, Arab, or other ethnic origins.
has also failed to rectify the issue of unfair hiring practices is the United Nations mission based in Laayoune, MINURSO. According to two current Sahrawi employees, approximately 12 Sahrawis work for MINURSO in an official capacity throughout the territories, while the same mission employs over 150 Moroccans.  

Due to the fact that the conflict within the Occupied Territories includes ethnic hostilities, the percentages of Sahrawis and Moroccans working for MINURSO should be as close to even as possible in order to promote dialogue and mutual understanding, among many other benefits. However, employment discrimination is an institutionalized condition of society in the Occupied Territories that many Sahrawis cannot successfully overcome.

In order to provide support for those experiencing discrimination in Moroccan institutions, Sahrawi communities have attempted to create social networks and organizations that can help with coping and overcoming these obstacles. However, Sahrawis are not legally allowed to form any type of civil society organizations, regardless of whether they are focused on politics, social programs, or economic types of assistance: “Activists are forced to meet inside of each other’s homes, and make sure to avoid clandestine police forces. There is no political freedom here and there is no right to oppose the regime.” A 2013 report released by Amnesty International confirmed this by stating, “The authorities continued to target Sahrawi human rights defenders and advocates for self-determination for Western Sahara, and used excessive force to quell or prevent demonstrations in Western Sahara. They also continued to block the legal registration of Sahrawi civil society organizations”. The Sahrawi Association for the

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68 Anonymous Interview, MINURSO employee, conducted in English. Private room; Laayoune, Western Sahara. July 1, 2014
69 Anonymous Interview, MINURSO employee, conducted in English. Private room; Laayoune, Western Sahara. July 1, 2014
Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations (ASVDH) has particularly faced many obstacles in registering as a legal organization. Despite a 2006 ruling determining that the administrative decision to reject the ASVDH’s registration was unlawful, they continue to be denied legal recognition. The Moroccan government also rejected the recommendation from the UN Universal Periodic Review that called for the state to allow legal registration for NGOs advocating for Sahrawi self-determination. To further complicate the situation, there are few options for legal recourse for the Sahrawi community engaged in political resistance.

Being that the source of discrimination, political repression, and deprivation are Moroccan government institutions, there is very little incentive to file official complaints against the police, judicial system, school administrations, or employers when the institution that would handle these complaints is also accused of ethnic and political discrimination. According to one interviewee who was fed up with constant obstacles to her upward mobility, she explained “I do not report to the police or to the courts. I report to Spanish non-governmental organizations. They will represent me and I won’t go to prison. They hear our voices.” Several interviewees expressed this particular perspective, and it represents the extent to which the policies of exclusion throughout the territories have marginalized large segments of the Sahrawi population. They often only have their friends, family, and community to reach out to. Rosenfeld’s study on Palestinian refugees living in the Dheisheh camp recounted a similar situation:

“...in the absence of state institutions, particularly the absence of state-sponsored social services, and under conditions that undermine economic development and when military rule holds sway, individuals are driven toward a heightened dependency on the support of family and kin. Moreover, political parties, trade unions, and voluntary associations were either prohibited or subject to constant

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 21, 2014
military-political surveillance, leaving the family as one of the few groups not defined as an ‘illegal organization’.74

Although the Western Sahara does contain Moroccan state institutions and limited social services, they were primarily established to serve the large population of Moroccan settlers. Therefore, the Moroccan military occupation systematically excludes a major segment of the population living in the Occupied Territories by discriminating against Sahrawis. The situation in Palestine, where the levels of human insecurity caused by the occupation has forced many to cling tightly to their families can also be seen in the Western Sahara.

Conclusion

The Moroccan government’s dual approach to maintaining control over the Western Sahara by settler-colonialism and military occupation has proven itself durable, despite several decades of civilian political opposition. The Green March was the definitive beginning of the settler-colonial project under King Hassan II, and it evolved over time into an institutionalized and highly securitized military occupation. While there is a substantial amount of scholarship and literature on the theoretical aspects of settler-colonialism and military occupation, what is often missing is the human aspect of these systems of rule. There is a gap in the literature that focuses on the impact of systems of rule on existing populations, and how they influence generations of colonized and occupied peoples, specifically women, throughout the years.

In order to connect the literature on settler-colonialism and military occupation to the human dimensions of women’s lived experiences, it is necessary to examine the studies on gender in conflict zones. In recent years there has been a greater focus on gendered analyses during times of war and conflict. Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s work on militarization and gendered

74 Rosenfeld, p. 16
violence identifies the impact of military occupations on the roles of women, stating that women often become “resisters”, “warriors”, and “frontliners”\textsuperscript{75}. Furthermore, Shalhoub-Kevorkian emphasizes the need to examine the relationship between power, agency, and resilience for women living under military occupation. This thesis, therefore, seeks to connect the theoretical scholarship on military occupation to the literature providing empirics and gendered perspectives. Specifically it will examine the lives of Sahrawi women who are living under occupation and resisting it.

\textsuperscript{75} Shalhoub-Kevorkian, p. 1
Chapter Two: Impact of Military Occupation on Sahrawi Gender Dynamics

“Sahrawi women do not hesitate to rush into the streets and demand our rights. Some people may be scared of being beaten or kidnapped or imprisoned, but the security forces do not scare me. The Moroccan occupation does not scare me.”76

While the previous chapter established the way that Morocco implemented a dual strategy of settler-colonialism and military occupation to control the Western Sahara, this chapter proceeds to apply a gender analysis to this protracted conflict. The focus is on the ways that war and conflict impact gender dynamics in Sahrawi society and affect the gendered composition of the Sahrawi resistance movement. According to the literature, war and conflict compel women to participate in political resistance and conflict mitigation processes for a variety of reasons. These turbulent contexts often blur rigid gender roles in patriarchal societies, thus allowing women to become frontliners in the public and political spheres. However, scholars have noted in analyses of military occupations throughout the Middle East, particularly in Palestine and Iraq, that women often have the added obstacle in the post-conflict period of maintaining positions of authority and leadership. The struggle then shifts to fighting for greater public visibility and leadership rather than working on other post-conflict initiatives.77 However in the case of the Western Sahara and in Sahrawi society, women do not have to mitigate such rigid gender divides.

In order to understand the ways that the military occupation has impacted Sahrawi society and gender dynamics, the chapter starts by explaining the importance of considering gender as a unit of analysis in the contexts of war and conflict. After establishing the importance of the unit of analysis, the literature focused on women’s participation in conflict management and resistance will be presented in order to understand how this has been studied in other

76 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, May 30, 2014
conflicts in the Middle East. Ultimately, the chapter argues that the Moroccan military occupation has significantly impacted the ways in which Sahrawi women and men participate in political resistance, and that Sahrawi women’s prominence in resistance projects is both a reflection of traditional Sahrawi gender roles that have been reinforced by the on-going conflict, and an effect of the occupation because women’s roles have become increasingly politicized. This is evidenced in this study by the historical and consistent level of dedication of Sahrawi women to the resistance movement in both public and private ways, while men play secondary supportive roles.

**Literature: gender analyses of war & conflict and gender roles under military occupation**

Although there are many different analytical lenses to use for understanding the impact of war and conflict on societies, gender is particularly informative. Gender shapes relationships between people, daily practices, and social understandings that are often altered or blurred during times of conflict. Sharoni makes this very assertion in her work on gender perspectives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while she advocates the need to consider the “interplay” between gender and politics in order to understand the varied struggles of Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish women in the conflict.⁷⁸ Sharoni states that there is a need to theorize and document details about women’s political struggles from within their resistance movements. This theorizing requires an analysis of the social and political problems that impact women’s lives and provides a backdrop for understanding the greater scope of their resistance struggle.⁷⁹ In contexts of war and conflict women may not just resist foreign occupation, but they are also working within other social, political, and economic restrictions.

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⁷⁹ Sharoni, p. 2
The literature on gendered analyses of war and conflict not only establishes the analytical imperative for using gender as a unit of analysis, but it also describes how gender roles are often blurred during these turbulent times. This blurring can occur to such an extent that it is no longer reasonable to believe that solely men are the warriors and women are the peacekeepers. Historically, women move beyond their domestic roles in the private sphere and into the public sphere during times of conflict, where they actively engage in wars, revolutions, and rebellions. This transformation where women become active agents in conflict is certainly true for various cases throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Many scholars have acknowledged the impact conflict has on gender roles throughout the region, and there is a significant amount of focus on Palestinian and Iraqi women in regional analyses.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s work on militarization and violence against women in Palestine describes how women suffer but also fight back during times of war and conflict. Palestinian women exhibit a great amount of power and resilience in their resistance to Israeli occupation. While many have had to live through forced displacement, war, and persistent armed conflict, they have actively addressed these issues by participating in political activities and public demonstrations against the occupation. Palestinian women have also established a variety of women’s organizations that serve as platforms for them to express their political positions and address other social grievances. Many Sahrawi women have also lived through socio-political situations similar to that of Palestinian women, including displacement, war, and persistent conflict. Like Palestinian women, Sahrawi women also came to the forefront to establish women’s organizations and express their needs and grievances.

80 Afshar & Eade  
81 Ibid, p. 43  
82 Shalhoub-Kevorkian, p. 1
Among other studies analyzing Palestinian women’s participation in politics and resistance, Maria Holt’s work notes that resistance activities led by Palestinian women have evolved throughout the years in various stages. These activities evolved from basic supportive roles, like motivating men to join opposition group activities, into moving women towards leadership roles for establishing resistance groups, engaging actively in civil society, and publicly opposing Israeli occupation. The activities organized by Palestinian women have, however, remained consistent by revolving around issues of national struggle, dispossession, and exile. Similar studies have focused on women in Iraq during periods of conflict. Al-Ali and Enloe’s work on women under occupation in Iraq addresses the fact that many women had participated in politics prior to the US invasion and subsequent military occupation, and they continued to work towards being represented in political processes. Iraqi women’s movements, similarly to Palestinian women’s organizations, worked hard to promote women’s political participation and address their domestic and public grievances throughout the state. According to Al-Ali and Enloe, Iraqi women were not simply victims or heroines during conflict, but they were both and much more as they tried to shape Iraq’s political transition. What these gendered analyses of conflict in Iraq and Palestine show is that Arab-Muslim women have proved time and again to reject the dominant narrative of the downtrodden and helpless victim of war, and the Western Sahara provides yet another case that rejects the dominant narrative.

Similar to the lived experiences of Palestinian and Iraqi women living under military occupation, Sahrawi women have organized resistance activities, spoken out publicly about the

84 Ibid, p. 116
86 Ibid, p. 86
87 Ibid, p. 2
violence of the occupation, and formed groups of resistance activists over the years. Military occupations have united groups of women around the common concerns of dispossession, self-determination, and human rights thus framing their resistance movements and focusing their efforts.

As war and conflict compels women to participate in conflict mitigation, politics, and resistance, there is a deeper affect on gender dynamics during protracted conflict. When nations live under long-term military occupation, whether enforced by foreign or internal forces, traditional conceptions of feminine and masculine gender roles and spaces are broken down as well. Haleh Afshar’s work in Palestine describes occupying forces as knowing no boundaries while enforcing occupation, so they enter homes, private spaces, and public spaces indiscriminately which impacts men and women in similar ways. This shared experience of violation and oppression motivates both women and men to resist occupation and foreign rule, which is one important way that conflict and occupation breaks down rigid gender divisions where men are the fighters and women stay at home.

While both women and men mobilize to resist occupation and oppose oppressive rule, they do not experience violence in the same ways or with the same severity. Occupying forces utilize different forms of violence that is not just physical, but is also systemic. Systemic violence often goes hand in hand with military occupation because foreign rule necessitates the marginalization and submission of those who are being ruled. Populations living under occupation have had to come to terms with the constant intrusion and displacement that comes with foreign domination, which affects men, women, and children regardless of age or gender. Although the violence of the military occupation negatively impacts both men and women, it

88 Afshar, p. 48
89 Afshar, p. 48
90 Holt, p. 117
does so in different ways. During times of war and armed conflict, men are designated as enemies of the state and are more vulnerable to violent attacks and death. This has been the case in Iraq since the 2003 invasion as the post-war situation has been highly violent, unstable, and militarized. Men in the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara are also more vulnerable to physical violence and death and this is a major reason why Sahrawi women are so much more prominent in the public forms human rights advocacy and political resistance.

This brief review of the literature highlights the gendered effects of military occupation and the need for a gendered analysis of such protracted conflict. Most importantly, it exposes the ways in which women have led resistance initiatives and participated in political processes to oppose occupation, which is often a narrative that is pushed aside or overshadowed by narratives of suffering and victimhood. These themes set an important backdrop for understanding the conflict in the Western Sahara, and especially for understanding the ways in which the Moroccan military occupation has impacted Sahrawi men and women differently.

**Impacts of Military Occupation on Gender Dynamics in the Occupied Territories**

In the case of the Western Sahara, the occupation has lasted nearly 40 years shaping the life experiences of multiple generations of Sahrawi men and women. Currently there are still some members of Sahrawi society who lived under Spanish colonial rule, witnessed the transition from Spanish rule to Moroccan occupation, and lived through the entirety of the war. The Moroccan occupation does not stick to distinct boundaries in the battlefield or the public sphere, but it has infiltrated every institution, and security forces enter private homes at will,

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upsetting gender boundaries and infiltrating the lives of men and women.\textsuperscript{92} Although the Sahrawi participants in this study claim that Sahrawi women have always enjoyed a great deal of freedom, opportunity, and equality to their male counterparts, the Moroccan occupation has undeniably led to the politicization of leadership roles for women in the resistance movement.

Prior to the settler-colonial project launched by King Hassan II in 1975 and the subsequent long-term military occupation in the territories, the Western Sahara had been under Spanish administration for nearly a century. When respondents for the older generation were asked to describe what life was like before Moroccan rule, they often described what they remember doing on their free time. One woman shared, “We would spend a lot of time in the desert with family and friends. We [immediate family] had many animals and would tend to them. There was no hostility, no torture, and no violence like there is now”.\textsuperscript{93} When asked what the role of Sahrawi women was in politics, she replied, “There was no politics. Until we demanded the end of colonialism we did not worry about politics or leading demonstrations. That happened after Spain”.\textsuperscript{94} The majority of Sahrawi respondents from the older generation that lived through Spanish colonialism look back with fond memories of simpler times when life revolved around friends, family, and living in the openness of the desert. Until this generation witnessed the transition to Moroccan military rule, they believed that politics were not as important under Spanish rule. It was not until they were denied the right to vote in a referendum and decide the fate of their territories that politics and resistance became significant priorities.

With regard to the status of Sahrawi women during Spanish colonialism in the Western Sahara, every respondent from that generation claimed that there had been no change in their status. Women had always been considered the heads of their households, the decision makers,

\textsuperscript{92} Afshar, p. 48
\textsuperscript{93} Anonymous Interview: Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 16, 2014
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid
and equals to the rest of the members of their family. What did change was the fact that after Spanish withdrawal and the start of Moroccan rule and aggression, women became warriors and their leadership roles were more politicized.  

The emergence of political priorities is precisely where the Moroccan military occupation begins to impact gender dynamics and Sahrawi society overall. When Moroccan settlers entered the Western Sahara, many Sahrawis who had participated in the anti-colonialism movement instantly shifted towards opposing Moroccan occupation. Despite the fact that many members of the early anti-colonial resistance movement were Sahrawi men, women still played supportive roles in motivating men to join the movement and defend the territories. As the Moroccan’s began constructing settlements throughout the territories and “planting flags” all throughout, more women began to participate in the resistance movement in direct ways. Sahrawi women began organizing public demonstrations and publicly opposing Moroccan control of the territories at higher rates as Morocco’s presence in the territories grew. One respondent described, “At first it was just my mother, then it was my mother and my sister, then it was my aunt, and then I joined. Little by little more women saw that we had to join the resistance on the streets and help the Polisario”.  

After the start of settlement construction, armed conflict broke out. Throughout the initial years of the war between the Polisario Front and the Moroccan state, many pro-independence Sahrawis banded together to exchange information regarding the status and location of Moroccan security forces, which was then shared with members of the Polisario Front. Both men and women were integral actors in the opposition and they played similar roles in sharing

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95 Several anonymous interviews: Private living rooms, Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 21-July 2, 2014.
intelligence. Prior to the Moroccan occupation, both Sahrawi men and women were taking up roles as political actors, activists, and resisters. As the occupation became firmly established throughout the territories following the Green March and the construction of Moroccan settlements, these blurred gender roles where men and women worked side by side in politics and resistance became a part of everyday life. As the conflict has continued over the years and the decades of Moroccan occupation has infiltrated every aspect of social and political life in the Western Sahara, Sahrawi women have proceeded to lead resistance projects and promote activism.

Fast-forward to the present day strength and composition of Sahrawi resistance projects and we see that many activists have maintained their dedication to their struggle against Moroccan occupation, especially in the older generation. Sahrawi activists in the Western Sahara maintain a closely-knit social network that crosses city boundaries. Pro-independence activists in Laayoune are in contact with activists in Smara, Dakhla, Boujdour, Moroccan cities, and the refugee camps in Algeria. They coordinate demonstration dates with one another so that they coincide and have a greater chance of attracting media attention. Sahrawi women, of the older generation in particular, play a major role in facilitating this consistent communication between activists. They are often the ones making phone calls, putting activists in contact with one another, and circulating information to other activists about the dates and times of activist meetings and press conferences. One respondent explained, “It is not that men do not want to communicate, but we take it as our duty. It is my duty in the resistance for everyone to know what is planned and when”. Sahrawi women are prominent actors in organizing resistance

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97 Focus group, 7 anonymous participants, Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, May 28th, 2014.
98 Multiple anonymous interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 21-July 3, 2014
99 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 3, 2014
100 Ibid
activities, and motivate both Sahrawi men and women to participate and to coordinate. Whilst
the occupation compels them to rise up against it as leaders in political resistance, it is not the
only factor that explains their high levels of leadership and participation. The lack of rigid gender
roles in Sahrawi society dividing men and women into distinct segments of the public and
private sphere is the primary reason they are so prominent in leadership positions in general.
Their prominence in leading the resistance movement is a combination of fluid Sahrawi gender
roles, and the heightened vulnerability of Sahrawi men in comparison to Sahrawi women in this
conflict. Understanding this requires a context-specific analysis of Sahrawi society that
recognizes that although Sahrawis are an Arab-Muslim people, their society consists of fluid
gender roles, particularly in times of protracted conflict.

During times of long-term conflict and occupation, women emerge as leaders and
participants in resistance projects but in many instances have had the added obstacle of fighting
to maintain gains acquired during war and conflict once it is resolved. As previously mentioned,
scholars such as Afshar, Holt, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and Sharoni noted the fact that Palestinian
women had to struggle against the Israeli occupation while also combatting the hyper-masculine
character of the Palestinian resistance movement itself. Additionally, Al-Ali and Enloe noted that
Iraqi women had to consistently fight to maintain their political representation during times of
conflict and post-conflict reconstruction due to the growing strength of patriarchal structures in
Iraq. This, however, is not the case for Sahrawi women in the Western Sahara. There is no
hyper-masculine component to the resistance movement, and women are consistently applauded
for their strength, prominence, and participation in resisting Moroccan rule. During an informal
dinner with several Sahrawi guests present, a man commented while watching the Sahrawi Arab
Democratic Republic’s national television channel, RASD TV, “Look at that! They beat the
women in the street during every demonstration! They are the heart and the head of our struggle". RASD TV airs footage of public demonstrations that took place throughout the territories on a daily basis, where women are shown running away from security forces or being beaten by them. The channel also displays on a regular basis footage of women in the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic who serve in the military as they practice drills and march across the desert.

The majority of the footage aired on RASD TV is of Sahrawi women demonstrating, leading military drills, describing instances of police brutality, or speaking on behalf of a human rights organization. This particular source of information clearly communicated the prominent status of women in Sahrawi society and how they easily lead in the public and private spheres. However, what became glaringly obvious during these observations was the absence of the Sahrawi man. The military occupation, while it has not altered gender dynamics at the expense of women’s status, has certainly had an impact on the presence and representation of the Sahrawi man in the public sphere. Thus there are significant affects on gender dynamics within Sahrawi culture in this regard that are directly caused by the military occupation and protracted conflict in the Western Sahara.

While women in the contexts of war and conflict combat stereotypes where they are assumed to be passive bystanders that hope for peace, men also confront several serious stereotypes about their character as well. As mentioned in the literature, women are considered the nonviolent agents of peace while men are the violent combatants that engage in war and armed conflict. Due to these assumptions, state security forces often target men in times of conflict in order to prevent any destabilizing activity. Men are seen as enemies of the state, actors

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101 Participant observation: Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 30, 2014
that are prone to violence and disruptive opposition, and consequently their lives are impacted in very detrimental ways in the Western Sahara. Although Sahrawi men did join the war effort following the Green March and the construction of Moroccan settlements all throughout the territories, following the 1991 ceasefire they joined Sahrawi women in developing nonviolent tactics for resisting Moroccan occupation and opposing the status quo. Regardless of their dedication to nonviolent resistance over the last couple of decades, Moroccan security forces still heavily target them. Sahrawi men are the victims of state repression and subject to long-term unlawful imprisonment, detention, kidnappings, and disappearances. These types of severe consequences for supporting the opposition do not impact the lives of Sahrawi women like the do for Sahrawi men.

For instance RASD TV displays the names and photographs of unlawfully imprisoned Sahrawis that were detained during protests and for other various undisclosed reasons. Many of the Sahrawi detainees have been awaiting trials and legal representation for months, and in some cases years. During every commercial break, the channel would display between 3-5 Sahrawi detainees along with a message to stand in solidarity with them and not forget the injustice they are suffering. Throughout the six weeks this study took place, all of the Sahrawi detainees presented on television were men. Similarly, a list of all of the Sahrawi activists that have disappeared throughout the years only consisted of Sahrawi men. An organization of Sahrawi mothers that connects mothers from across the occupied cities who have reported missing children or loved ones have only reported the disappearances of Sahrawi men. Sahrawi women do not experience the same level of explicit targeting and physical violence by Moroccan security forces. Although Sahrawi women do not escape beatings by security forces during

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid
organized demonstrations, according to the respondents from this study they are not imprisoned as frequently for indeterminate lengths of time since the implementation of the 1991 ceasefire. Sahrawi men are the targets of long-term detainment and disappearances, which has impacted their decisions to publicly participate in resistance projects at the same frequency that Sahrawi women do.

As the military occupation targets Sahrawi men as security threats and risks to stability, it is directly impacting the gendered composition of the resistance movement and the gender dynamics in Sahrawi society. Many men in these communities throughout the Occupied Territories do not want to run the risk of disappearing, being detained, or unlawfully imprisoned for participating in public protests. During a family dinner one respondent explained, “During the war it was different for all of us men. We were fighting in an army for our independence. After the ceasefire the security forces kept attacking us after we gave up our weapons, and we can’t defend ourselves”. A friend then added, “We have to fight peacefully, but that doesn’t protect men from the security forces”. Many Sahrawis who were observed and interviewed for this study acknowledged the impact that the occupation has on their decisions. Due to the heightened danger for their livelihood, Sahrawi men that do venture out onto the streets during protest days do so only in order to aid and protect the Sahrawi women who are leading the demonstrations. They will assist women who are pushed down, beaten, or harassed. They drive by to pick up women activists so that security forces do not take them, and they secretly video-record demonstrations so that they can broadcast the footage on RASD TV and online. These types of supportive roles are crucial for the resistance movement, and are often roles that women have traditionally been believed to play. However, the military occupation in the Western Sahara

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105 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 3, 2014
106 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 3, 2014
has caused men to fill these roles because public participation in chanting and defying Moroccan rule has become too dangerous, and this has led to the increased politicization of Sahrawi women’s leadership roles.

Sahrawi women’s leadership roles are believed to occupy both the public and private spheres of social life. However, as the occupation has a gendered effect on Sahrawi society by targeting men, it has also politicized the types of leadership roles women play. As many women lead the resistance movement, engage in political discussions, and travel outside of the territories to collaborate with international non-governmental organizations they have been especially prominent in the political sphere of life. Part of their political leadership role consists of explaining the Sahrawi rationale for establishing an autonomous state in the Western Sahara. In addition to the legal reasons including self-determination and the right to a referendum for a non-self-governing territory, they emphasize the cultural differences between Moroccan and Sahrawi society. Several respondents in this study emphasized the “strength of Sahrawi women in the household”, and how “no man would ever dishonor himself or his family by abusing a Sahrawi woman”.

Contrastingly, they stated that Moroccan men physically abuse all Moroccan women, and this was a point that was cited to justify the autonomy of the Sahrawi nation. It is common for conflicts that are highly divided along ethnic lines to fall into this political project of defining their own identity against the identity of the other conflicting party. In this case, many Sahrawis engaged in politics and political resistance has defined their own identities and society in opposition to Moroccan society. While this is a total homogenization of the other, it is another gendered result of this conflict and the politicization of Sahrawi women’s leadership roles.

Not only has the military occupation impacted the gender dynamics between men and women in the resistance movement, but the protracted length of this conflict has also had

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107 Multiple Anonymous Interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, May 21-July 2, 2014
generational effects. This is evidenced by the distinct shift in public participation in resistance activities between the older generation of Sahrawi women and the younger generation.

**Conclusion**

While women leading resistance movements and participating in the political sphere throughout the Middle East have confronted issues related to patriarchal systems or a hyper-masculine character of an opposition movement, Sahrawi women live within a very different social context. Sahrawi society is not defined by rigid gender roles and the Sahrawi resistance movement is not characterized by a hyper-masculine nature or patriarchal arrangement. Since Sahrawi women have not had the added obstacle of dealing with cultural or social gender restrictions since the start of this conflict, it is necessary to examine other socio-political realities in the Western Sahara that impact women’s participation in the resistance movement over time.

The literature exploring the roles of women in the contexts of war, conflict, and resistance highlights the various public and private roles that women occupy. To a certain extent, it counters the dominant narrative proposing that women are always the most vulnerable individuals, alongside children, during armed and escalating conflict. What gendered analyses of war and conflict can provide are in-depth accounts of how women mitigate, resist, and resolve various types of conflicts that impact their lives. Additionally, these analyses can also reveal the dynamics between men and women in their struggle against military occupation or foreign rule.

In the case of the Western Sahara, the military occupation has persecuted men and women activists in different ways throughout the decades. The heightened danger for Sahrawi men of being indefinitely detained, tortured, or disappeared has made participation in resistance activities much riskier than it is for women. In the context of this occupation, pro-independence
Sahrawi men pose a greater threat to the security of the military occupation throughout the Western Sahara than women do, and therefore their active involvement in demonstrations is met with harsh consequences. For this reason the few men that do manage to enter demonstration sites are often playing supporting roles for women. Meanwhile, Sahrawi women continue to lead the pro-independence chants, advocate for human rights, condemn violence of the occupation, and demonstrate in public spaces in defiance of the Moroccan monarchy. Even though Sahrawi women have historically been described as prominent leaders of Sahrawi society, their leadership roles have become increasingly politicized due to the gendered effects of the Moroccan occupation.

However, the military occupation has had a separate impact on the younger generation of Sahrawi youth living in the Occupied Territories. This generation is not as publicly engaged in resisting the occupation as the older generation is. In fact, many younger Sahrawis consciously choose to avoid public participation and do not disclose their political positions. The military occupation has institutionalized discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawis throughout the years to such a degree that it functions as a deterrent to resistance activity. The risk of participating in public demonstrations or being interviewed for RASD TV no longer outweighs the possible benefits. The younger generation of Sahrawi youth has only lived under Moroccan military occupation and did not experience the effects of Spanish colonialism, the resistance against Spanish administration and the rise of nationalist discourse, and it did not experience the shock and displacement that came with Moroccan settlements following the Green March. Their socio-political context has not shifted as dramatically as it had for the older generation, and therefore the factors motivating and influencing their choices are much different. Consequently, the military occupation of the Western Sahara is the primary socio-political reality that has had

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108 Participant observation: public demonstration on Smara Street, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 15, 2014
some clear repercussions for the gendered composition of the resistance movement, the gender
dynamics in Sahrawi society, and the differences between the older and younger generations of
Sahrawi women.

The following chapter will provide a generational examination of the older and younger
generations of Sahrawi women living in the Occupied Territories that support self-determination.
It will examine the socio-political context in which the older and the younger generations of
Sahrawi women grew up, and discuss why Sahrawi women in the older generation have
dedicated their lives to public resistance, while the younger generation have been dissuaded from
these types of activities. Ultimately, the impact of the Moroccan military occupation on the
ability and motivation to participate in political resistance is most clear when examining the shift
that has occurred across generations of Sahrawi women.
Chapter Three: Generational Analysis of Women’s Participation in Political Resistance

Senia: a child of the older generation, and a mother of the new

On a quiet Saturday afternoon I sat in a sitting room with my host sister, Senia, who I had never had the chance to speak with privately although I had been introduced to her nearly a month before. Her mother is a very prominent Sahrawi activist engaged in the resistance demonstrations, a member of a large civil society organization, is regularly featured on RASD TV, and is considered a representative for the Sahrawi women who were imprisoned during the war. Senia has three children including a toddler who is always on the go, requiring her full attention. I noticed many characteristics of hers that did not overlap with her mother’s. Senia did not participate in any type of resistance activities, when fellow activists would visit the house she would excuse herself from the room, and when demonstration footage would play on the television she would ask her daughter to go get her something she had left upstairs every single time. I asked Senia what she thought about Laayoune and what she hoped to do in the next year so that she would not feel nervous about my interview questions. She told me that she hoped to build a second floor for her new home, and send her oldest daughter to private tutoring so she could learn English. Then I asked if she hoped to participate in a demonstration one day, like her mother always does. She instantly looked me in the eyes and said she would never participate in the resistance, and that she will never be an activist.

Senia’s reaction was slightly surprising. I asked her why she felt so strongly about it, and she explained to me how it felt growing up raised by her grandmother with no details about where her parents had gone. Senia was three years old when her parents were abducted and detained by Moroccan security forces. The family was no longer living in Laayoune at the time because her father was working for an automobile manufacturer in France. In 1983 they came to
visit family in Laayoune, and during that visit they were detected by Moroccan security forces and imprisoned. They were not given any prior warning and they were not allowed to contact their families to explain their situation. Senia had no idea where her parents were, and for eight years she did not know the answer. In 1991, when she was 11 years old, her parents were released along with the majority of Sahrawi political prisoners. She did not recognize them and was told for years that they had passed away. This traumatizing experience caused her to completely reject participating in any form of resistance against Moroccan occupation.

She looked at me and asked, “If I disappear, who is going to take care of my kids? How are they going to remember who I am? I won’t let them forget who I am”. As she wiped the tears off of her face with her melkhfa, I understood why she avoided conversations regarding activism and sent her daughter out of the room when protest footage aired—she is protecting her children from living a similar experience during their childhood, and does not want them to disappear either.

**Generational Impact of Military Occupation on Sahrawi Women**

The previous chapter explained the various ways that the Moroccan military occupation has affected the gender dynamics and the overall gendered composition of the resistance movement throughout the Occupied Territories. In addition to affecting Sahrawi gender dynamics, the protracted nature of the conflict has also had different generational effects. This is evidenced by the distinct shift in resistance participation between the older and younger generations of Sahrawi women. The socio-political contexts in which these generations grew up

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109 Anonymous interview with “Senia”: Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 19, 2014
110 First defined on page 1, footnote 1 in the Introduction
in are radically different, and have therefore influenced their desires to resist Moroccan occupation or pursue other goals in very different ways.

This chapter will focus on a generational analysis of Sahrawi women. It will examine the way in which conflict, war, and occupation has influenced the older and younger generations in different ways, and it will present the rationale and cost-benefit analysis of participating in the resistance movement for respondents of each generation. The main argument is that protracted conflict and long-term occupation has created a distinct shift across generations of Sahrawi women in ways of engaging in politics and resisting Moroccan rule.

**Literature: Sahrawi women as leaders, and women as key actors in conflict**

Sahrawi women have attracted significant attention from scholars and journalists alike because of their important roles in Sahrawi society and their consistently strong presence in the liberation struggle. Anne Lippert highlights the role of Sahrawi women in the public sphere during her research in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria. Her study focused on the older generation of women between 1976 and 1980. Lippert writes “in traditional Sahrawi life, as in similar nomadic traditions, women exercised real power and played a dominant role in the camp as well as in the tent”.

In the context of the Sahrawi refugee camps, the importance of Sahrawi women in the camps and in the home grew exponentially during the war between Sahrawi liberation forces and the Moroccan army that began in 1975. Most able-bodied young men left their families to fight in the war, leaving many women to maintain the community, raise the children, and make all necessary decisions in the household and in the tribe. Sahrawi society has been referred to as matriarchal due to the female-dominant structure within the

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112 Lippert, p. 639
refugee camps.\textsuperscript{113} San Martin’s work in the refugee camps also described how Sahrawi men and women work “together as equals” in order to enhance the likelihood of garnering international support for achieving an independent state.\textsuperscript{114}

Sahrawi women living in the Occupied Territories or in the refugee camps in Tindouf have maintained prominent positions in both public and private spheres despite living under military occupation or in a displaced community. Under Moroccan military occupation pro-independence Sahrawi women cannot openly express their political opinions free of repercussion, but they are still at the forefront of the movement and in the public sphere. In the refugee camps, Sahrawis govern themselves and administer their aid without the direct oversight of any other power or organization, and women have maintained their roles as leaders in politics and civil society. Despite these radically different socio-political contexts, Sahrawi women have not significantly lost their prominence. Furthermore, gender analyses of conflict zones highlight the increased participation of women on the front lines of war and their dedication to opposing violence, which is what we find in Sahrawi societies.\textsuperscript{115}

In her work on women’s roles, influences, and experiences in conflict transformation, Ann Jordan interviewed women from the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa.\textsuperscript{116} In her work, Jordan seeks to understand the variety of factors that influence women’s desire to participate in civil society activities and work with organizations focused on conflict transformation. Conflict transformation as a practice is deconstructing and reconstructing ways to frame socio-political conflicts in order to address them in novel ways and reach a resolution.

\textsuperscript{115} Shalhoub-Kevorkian, p. 1
Although it is quite different from conflict management and political resistance, Jordan’s framework for understanding and outlining the motivations that compel women to engage in the political sphere are useful for understanding the situation in Laayoune amongst Sahrawi women. I use her framework extensively to understand the reasons if and why Sahrawi women of different generations participate in the resistance movement and in which ways.

Jordan lays out four broad categories for understanding the ways that women participate in conflict transformation, which are supportive, directive, networking, and representing. The supportive category consists of enabling, assisting, facilitating, supporting, and accompanying opposition projects, similarly to the role that Holt described of Palestinian women in their early stages of participating in resistance projects. This includes women who begin participating in political opposition and resistance by supporting those efforts verbally, financially, and by convincing others to join and participate. The directive category consists of organizing, training, managing, advising, and providing resources and information. Networking consists of promoting, liaising, disseminating, and publishing materials promoting political resistance and opposition. The final category of representing includes acquiring the roles of ambassadors and advocates. Jordan’s paradigm for understanding women’s participation in political resistance and opposition is useful for understanding the roles of Sahrawi women because they are involved in each category of participation, and thus the paradigm will be applied throughout this chapter.

The existing literature on gender analyses of war and conflict and examining the factors that influence women’s participation in political resistance and conflict management provides a critical background for understanding how these subjects have been studied before. However, it

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117 Jordan, p. 137
118 Jordan, p. 137
is also necessary to understand how protracted conflict impacts communities and generations over time, in this case Sahrawi women living under a decades-long occupation.

**Generational Analyses in Sahrawi Communities**

Now that the population of Sahrawi refugees has grown to consist of multiple generations, scholars have recently been noting the generational differences between the older generation of Sahrawi refugees and the younger generation. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s work has focused on identity and politics in the refugee camps, and how nationalism and memory are shaped and passed down from one generation to the next.\(^{119}\) She analyzed the way in which the Polisario Front mobilizes younger generations of Sahrawi youth to act as “political brokers” for the cause of Sahrawi independence. She argues that a combination of factors compels the Polisario Front to seek support from Sahrawi children and youth for advancing their cause. According to her analysis, there are many characteristics in Sahrawi youth that the Polisario Front looks for when selecting representatives for the independence movement in the camps as guides for international visitors, and abroad as advocates. This has led to the active support of certain Sahrawi refugees who are seen as “good” or respectable role models for the Sahrawi refugee community, and the rejection and marginalization of those who are deemed unsuitable to represent the community.\(^{120}\) Fiddian-Qasmiyeh provides the example of how young Sahrawi women who studied abroad and had children out of wedlock are treated severely and


\(^{120}\) Ibid
marginalized in the refugee camps. She describes, “…these young women have been interned in a secure holding facility referred to as the ‘Centre for Maternity Assistance’”.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s other studies in the refugee camps have noted that this type of selection process is especially true for Sahrawi refugee women. The older generation of Sahrawi women leads civil society organizations, speak on behalf of the community for promoting self-determination, and are prominent in leadership positions. They are long-time members of the National Union of Sahrawi Women and have controlled the political sphere in the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s. Contrastingly, Sahrawi women of the younger generation who have studied abroad in Spain or Cuba are assumed to have misbehaved during their time outside of the camps and have reported feeling rejected and marginalized by their elders. This marginalization and stigmatization is attributed to standards of morality and the Polisario Front’s focus on presenting an idealized image of Sahrawi refugees.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s work exposes the generational divide that exists between older and younger Sahrawi women in the refugee camps. The leadership is predominantly led by the older generation that was displaced by Moroccan settlers and has lived in the camps since the start of the conflict. The younger generation, which did not experience the same war and armed conflict as the older generation, is subject to scrutiny and evaluation by their elders in order to deem them worthy of representing the desires of the Sahrawi community and the political agenda of the Polisario Front. The protracted conflict in the Western Sahara is the primary reason that this generational difference exists between Sahrawi women in the refugee camps, for without it the leadership throughout the camps would not have to prioritize projecting the image of Sahrawis as

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
the “ideal refugees”.

This example proves the importance of examining the socio-political contexts of each society, because living in exile within refugee camps that are largely dependent on foreign aid necessitates a different political approach than living under oppressive military occupation as is the case in the Occupied Territories. These starkly different contexts have produced significantly different results in the gendered dynamics of Sahrawi society.

A generational analysis of Sahrawi women in the Tindouf refugee camps has exposed the various consequences of living in displaced societies, and it provides a particularly enlightening way of understanding the social consequences of living under conflict. Although Fiddian-Qasmiyeh emphasizes the marginalization and stigmatization that younger Sahrawi refugee women experience in the camps, based on the data gathered for this study that is not a phenomenon that is occurring within the Occupied Territories. Young Sahrawi women who have lived and studied in Morocco, Spain, or elsewhere do not experience the same level of moral scrutiny and evaluation when they return home. It seems that the socio-political context in the refugee camps, where the Sahrawi population depends upon international aid and assistance to sustain camp life, has had a tremendous effect on Sahrawi social relations. However the context of the occupation has impacted the occupied population in different ways.

In Laayoune, Western Sahara there is a distinct generational difference among Sahrawi women who want to participate in the resistance movement and those who choose not to. First, it is necessary to understand the socio-political contexts in which each generation grew up because that shapes their outlook on what they are able to achieve in life, and what they aspire to achieve. Secondly, the chapter will present the reasons that the older and younger generation of Sahrawi women provided for participating or not in the resistance movement. Finally, it will be clear that the protracted nature of the Western Sahara conflict and the highly institutionalized Moroccan

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125 Ibid.
occupation has dissuaded the younger generation’s desire to resist foreign rule because the risk has become too great.

The Older Generation of Sahrawi Women: socio-political context and political activism

The older generation of Sahrawi women who lived in the Western Sahara during Spanish colonialism witnessed the influx of Moroccan settlers and lived through the 16 years of war and conflict, are notably active in political resistance. Out of the 18 Sahrawi women interviewed within this age group, 40 years to 68 years old, all are both actively and publicly engaged in the resistance movement. They are involved in each of the four categories Jordan differentiated for understanding women’s participation in conflict transformation. The Sahrawi women activists of this generation participate in public protests, organize and attend activist meetings and conferences, and provide testimony to local Sahrawi journalists for the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic’s national television channel RASD TV, to name but a few activities.

16 of the Sahrawi women in the older generation interviewed for this study were unlawfully imprisoned during the war between the Moroccan state and the Polisario Front. They were accused of collaborating with the opposition forces. Their prison terms varied, where some women who were very engaged in aiding the opposition from the start of the war were detained in 1980, and others were imprisoned in the mid to late 80s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Number of years in prison</th>
<th>City of Origin</th>
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One woman recounted,

“I had to help my brother send information back to the freedom forces during the war, and I could not live under Moroccan control or sit at home doing nothing. I would write letters everyday about how many soldiers were travelling through Laayoune and everything. One day, the Moroccans were waiting for me at my house and I could not run”.

She was imprisoned in 1980 and released in 1991 following the ceasefire established by the United Nations, along with the majority of other political prisoners. The experience of long-term unlawful imprisonment, which was accompanied by repeated instances of torture in most cases, did not dissuade this generation of Sahrawi women from actively resisting Moroccan occupation following their release. Instead, the mass violations of human rights and their treatment by the Moroccan state during the war solidified their dedication to political resistance.

It is crucial to understand the impact different socio-political situations have on life choices of different generations of people enduring conflict. Maya Rosenfeld’s study of

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126 Translated from the Arabic, “quwat at-tahrir”
127 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 1, 2014.
Palestinian refugees provides a generational examination for understanding social change over time, and is a useful analytical frame for examining the human impacts of long-term military occupations. Rosenfeld’s work shows that historical events, which alter socio-political conditions in a given territory, such as the large-scale construction of settlements throughout Occupied Palestine and the start of the Intifada in 1973, greatly influence generations of people and the life choices they make. After spending four years in the mid 1990s conducting field research, she sought to understand how the political economic system of the Israeli Occupation affected the actions of Dheishehian men and women over three generations. Rosenfeld’s methodological analysis divides the generations along the lines of gender to better address the complex issues of social change and traces them over time. She writes, “My main guideline was the attempt to apply research categories that would best reflect discernible and meaningful differences among the adult Dheishehian female and male population in terms of central determinants that affected the ‘life chances’ of these refugees”. For the purposes of examining the effect of protracted and long-term military occupation on generations of occupied populations, this methodological approach allows the researcher to trace impact over time.

Rosenfeld’s research determined that major changes in the socio-political conditions in the camp led to tremendous generational differences. For example, many refugees from the intermediate generation were imprisoned during the years 1975 and 1992 for political reasons. Upon their release, several social and political changes occurred that reshaped the way of life in the camp. The most significant of those changes was the growth in the number of refugees with higher education, especially women. Other changes included the emigration of many more

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129 Rosenfeld, p. 520
130 Ibid, p. 546
131 Ibid, p. 17
132 Ibid, p. 17-8
people in pursuit of professional and skilled employment in the Gulf region, the visibility of political organizations, and the “unprecedented spread of imprisonment”. These socio-political changes in the camp were a major determinant of the generational differences between the intermediate and youngest generation.

In the Western Sahara, experiences of state repression, unlawful imprisonment, losing family members, and being separated from their families for indefinite periods of time gave many Sahrawi women of the older generation a clear political objective: to rid themselves of repressive Moroccan control. During a focus group organized in the living room of a prominent Sahrawi activist’s home, a group of nine Sahrawi women activists came together to recount their experiences in secret prisons throughout Morocco during the war and what their lives have been like since their release over 20 years ago. One woman shared,

“I was arrested in the morning, and I left my three children at home. My mother lives in Tantan and my husband was fighting in the war. I spent six years in Kela’at Megouna and was not allowed to speak to my children, my family, my friends, nobody. When I got out, in 1991, I could not find my daughter and no one knew where she was. My sons were living in the streets, did not know who I was, and were addicted to drugs. I lost everyone I love, and now I have nothing else to lose, so I fight alongside my sisters. Our struggle is all I have left to live for”.

Every woman in that living room had lost friends and family members during their imprisonment, either in the fighting between independence forces and the Moroccan military, during imprisonment, or in the endless list of disappearances reported throughout the territories.

According to Ann Jordan, there are many reasons why women choose to participate in conflict transformation activities and why they are motivated and influenced. Jordan provides four categories of influence based on her fieldwork interviewing many women from around the

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133 Rosenfeld, p. 309
134 Tantan is a city in southern Morocco
136 Jordan, p. 138
world, and the categories are prior experience, pragmatism, emotional and spiritual motivation, and compelling need. For the Sahrawi women of the older generation there is a combination of prior experience in political resistance, emotional motivation after losing loved ones, and a compelling need to resist foreign military occupation.

The prior experience in political resistance is rooted in the Sahrawi decolonization movement of the early 1970s. Due to Spain’s reluctance to withdraw from the Western Sahara, the decolonization movement was organized and led by al-Wali Mustafa Sayyid, who is also the founder of the Polisario Front and a beloved martyr in the Sahrawi pro-independence community. As mentioned earlier, following Spain’s withdrawal, pro-independence activists and forces mobilized against the Moroccan state. Both Sahrawi men and women supported the fight against colonial and foreign occupation. While many Sahrawi women of the older generation were imprisoned during the war throughout the 1980s, they had already experienced political resistance and mobilized against a foreign power. One interviewee explained, “Morocco knows the Sahrawi woman. We can’t be silenced with prisons. We will always struggle against them until we obtain justice, like we did with Spain”. Their prior experience of supporting the Polisario Front and the political opposition is an influential factor in their decision to rejoin the resistance movement and engage in activist projects after their release.

The experience of living throughout the Occupied Territories during Spanish colonization and witnessing the transmission of power from Spain to Morocco left a significant impression on Sahrawis of the older generation. The older generation lived through the successful withdrawal of Spanish colonial rule and the removal of Spanish administration. This event in Sahrawi history is retold in a highly positive light, where their right to self-determination and the end of

137 Ibid, p. 138
138 Jensen, p. 11
139 Focus Group: Anonymous participant, Laayoune, Western Sahara, private living room, May 23, 2014
colonialism around the world allowed them to think about a future independent state. Several Sahrawi women shared their views on what an independent Sahrawi state would have looked like then. One woman shared, “We all thought we would be voting for our Sahrawi president, writing our constitution, and leading our future in an independent state free from foreign influence”.140 Following the end of Spanish colonization, the establishment of Moroccan settlements resulting from the Green March had a significant impact on the lives of Sahrawis all throughout the territories. It was described as a life-changing event in Sahrawi history by several interviewees of this generation, and consequently influenced many to actively oppose foreign occupation. Both those who had opposed Spanish colonization and who had not decided to stand against Moroccan rule.

The second source of motivation and influence in women’s lives, according to the categories provided by Jordan, is emotional motivation. The Sahrawi women of the older generation interviewed for this study who lived through the war of the 1980s lost family members, husbands, sons, and friends on the battlefield. In addition to losing loved ones as casualties of war, many Sahrawi women lost friends and family during their imprisonment throughout secret prisons in Morocco. Six out of the 16 women of this generation that were imprisoned throughout the war recounted stories of witnessing their friends die in prison from wounds sustained from torture positions. The most common torture position that they each experienced, which also caused many of their friends to die, is called “the chicken”. Their legs would be tied up at the ankles, their arms tied behind their backs, blindfolded, and they were hung upside down for several hours at a time.141 One woman shared, “I was tortured next to my

140 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private living room, June 7, 2014.
good friend, Ghalia\textsuperscript{142}. She was from Smara and was visiting me here [in Laayoune] when we were detained. We were tortured together, and one day she fell while we were hanging upside down and broke her neck. She died beside me\textsuperscript{143}. These experiences of loss and tragedy were retold in vivid and emotional detail. They are important sources of motivation for the women of this generation to continue the struggle against Moroccan occupation because they all vow to never forget the ones they lost.

Emotional motivation to resist the occupation has also manifested itself in the growth of Sahrawi civil society as a whole. Thus, Sahrawi women of the older generation do not just promote political activism, demonstrations, and public opposition to the Moroccan occupation, but they also focus on providing emotional support to others suffering from loss. Many women of this generation that were interviewed are founders, volunteers, and facilitators of different projects for independently run non-profit organizations that focus on Sahrawi social issues. The Association of Victims of Grave Violations of Human Rights Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH) is one such organization that documents human rights violations throughout the Occupied Territories.\textsuperscript{144} ASVDH passes information about human rights violations to affiliates in Spain and the Tindouf refugee camps, and facilities support groups for victims of rights abuses as a form of therapy since there is a lack of official institutional support provided by the state.\textsuperscript{145}

Another organization that is based in Laayoune documents the disappearances of Sahrawi youth throughout the territories and provides emotional support to grieving mothers.\textsuperscript{146} The founder of this organization is the oldest participant in this study, who was 65 years old at the time of the

\textsuperscript{142} All names included in this study have been changed to protect the identities of all interviewees.
\textsuperscript{143} Focus Group: Anonymous participant, Laayoune, Western Sahara, private living room, May 23, 2014
\textsuperscript{144} This organization is officially headquartered in the refugee camps in Tindouf, but has successfully recruited Sahrawis living in the Occupied Territories to record violations.
\textsuperscript{146} Anonymous Interview: Elder member of organization, Laayoune, Western Sahara, private home, June 28, 2014
interview. She brought with her a manila envelope that included dozens of small photographs of the missing Sahrawi youth over the years, from 1986 to the present.\textsuperscript{147} When asked why she kept a file with their photographs she replied, “They are not making headlines in the news and the world does not know them. Having all of their photographs reminds me of the injustice Sahrawi mothers suffer, and the reason I work”.\textsuperscript{148}

Participating in civil society organizations and leading the initiatives of these organizations is also considered a form of resistance for the older generation of Sahrawi women. Working within civil society on issues of human rights and building a supportive community for those suffering the loss of friends and family is, in itself, a form of resistance: “When I work with Sahrawis suffering like I do, it is a resistance activity. We are not sitting at home doing nothing”.\textsuperscript{149} Non-violent demonstration and political opposition do not rigidly define the resistance movement according to Sahrawi women of the older generation, but instead the movement encompasses a broader range of civil and social projects that are organized and facilitated by them. Emotional ties and empathy amongst Sahrawi women of the older generation is a driving factor in their dedication to various forms of political resistance.

In addition to prior experience and emotional motivation as being primary factors influencing participation in political resistance, there is also the factor of compelling need. While it is difficult to distinguish what qualifies as a compelling need and how influential it is for women deciding to resist Moroccan occupation, there were many instances throughout the interviews where this type of motivation was expressed. Many interviewees within this generation explained that there is an urgency and importance for resistance projects. When explaining this urgency and importance, they drew on international human rights principles that

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid
\textsuperscript{149} Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private sitting room, June 29, 2014
justified their unwavering dedication to refusing to submit to foreign rule. One woman stated, “There is no safety for Sahrawis in the territories, and there is no justice. We deserve self-determination and we have not seen that. Until that is obtained, we can’t stop our resistance”. Another woman said, “The world believes in human rights, decolonization, and self-determination except in the Western Sahara. We need to obtain these rights by ourselves, and that is our responsibility”. International human rights principles played a major role in the removal of Spanish colonial rule throughout the Western Sahara, and those principles continue to inform and motivate their dedication to resisting foreign occupation today. It is part and parcel of what Sahrawis believe is a compelling need to participate in political resistance.

**The Importance of Activism for the Older Generation: public & private forms of resistance**

According to the Sahrawi interviewees from this generation, there are two spheres of activism as a result of the military occupation: the public sphere and the private sphere. The public sphere encompasses public demonstrations, non-violent protest, and meeting with international human rights organizations. This sphere is primarily composed of the older generation of activists. The private sphere encompasses conducting private interviews, moderating private activist press conferences, organizing events, and disseminating information relating to police presence on demonstration dates. This sphere is primarily composed of the younger generations of Sahrawi youth, who choose not to publicly demonstrate or oppose Moroccan occupation for reasons explained in the following section.

The older generation of Sahrawi women recognizes that they are more highly active in the public sphere of political resistance and activism than Sahrawi men and youth. Many socio-

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150 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private sitting room, June 19, 2014
151 Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private sitting room, June 20, 2014
152 Multiple anonymous interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 21-July 3, 2014
political factors that contribute to this fact. One of them is that the older generation of Sahrawi women participating in political resistance projects and activities are unemployed. One woman shared during a focus group, “after we were released from prison, we could not find a job here [Occupied Territories]. We tried for years, but there was no success”. Their affiliation with the Polisario Front, whether it was actual or assumed, cast a shadow over their future employability throughout the Occupied Territories. Instead of succumbing to the frustration and monotony of unemployment they decided to dedicate their time to activism. Their unemployment allows them to not be concerned with losing their jobs or experiencing any negative consequences to their upward mobility because of their participation in political resistance. Their financial livelihoods are not directly affected by their political views. In fact, many interviewees said that resisting the occupation is their full-time job and it is a daily priority.

Although public participation in resistance activities does not impact their employment status, it certainly affects other aspects of their livelihood. The Moroccan occupation must maintain a certain level of social stability in order to prevent the Sahrawi pro-independence community from garnering significant international attention. Consequently, the Moroccan security apparatus is extensive in each city throughout the Occupied Territories. Their role in maintaining social stability and security is especially crucial on demonstration days, because they are required to disperse groups of Sahrawis from meeting on the street and chanting pro-independence slogans. They not only physically prevent Sahrawis from joining demonstrations and forcefully remove them from the street, but they also record and photograph the participants in order to keep a record of them. According to several Sahrawis, the security forces would review the footage and photographs and proceed to monitor the participants. In some cases, the

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153 Focus Group: Anonymous participant, Laayoune, Western Sahara, private living room, May 23, 2014
154 Multiple anonymous interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 21-July 3, 2014
155 Participant observation: public demonstration on Smara Street, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 15, 2014.
security forces would physically threaten the participants and their families if they continued to demonstrate in public.\textsuperscript{156} This was the case on June 12. There was a planned demonstration set to take place before the monthly protest on the 15\textsuperscript{th} to commemorate the Sahrawi martyrs who died in prisons during the war. On this day, I was not allowed to watch because there was a significant amount of security forces present throughout the neighborhood next to the protest site. However, I was told to stay in a nearby house within this neighborhood, Maatalla, which is well known for housing many active demonstrators. Security forces were patrolling the street, shoving children into houses, pushing them off their bikes, pushing women off of the sidewalks and into walls, shouting at them to go inside. At one point, four officers knocked on the door. As I waited in the closet they asked the elderly woman who stayed with me where “Hamida” was. The woman said she was out of town for the week, and the officers did not believe her. They yelled at her to say the truth, and when her response remained the same they spat in her direction and slammed the door. They proceeded to do the same thing at a house across the street while I watched.

The danger of being beaten, followed, or threatened for participating in public demonstrations does not dissuade Sahrawi women of the older generation from participating. It is a possibility that they openly accept, and support one another to endure. While this generation continues to struggle against Moroccan occupation on the front lines, they also acknowledge the importance of clandestine forms of resistance. Many women expressed the need to value the resistance activities that take place in the private sphere. One participant explained, “Our resistance is not only in the streets. It is in our homes and on our computers. It is by calling organizations in Spain. It is doing everything we can”.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{156} Anonymous Interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private living room, June 15, 2014
\textsuperscript{157} Anonymous Interview: Laayoune, Western Sahara, private sitting room, June 30, 2014
The Younger Generation of Sahrawi Women: the deterrence of military occupation from political activism & resistance

The older generation of Sahrawi women living in the Occupied Territories is much more united by a common experience of having lived through war and conflict that ultimately influenced their decision to oppose Moroccan rule. This common experience continues to fuel their dedication to resistance, however the lived experience of the younger generation is significantly different. Unlike the older generation, the younger generation of Sahrawi women living in Laayoune is not united by a traumatic experience of living through armed conflict, and many do not participate in the resistance movement in public ways. Their absence in public protest is glaringly clear; members of the older generation who were imprisoned, tortured, and lost loved ones during the war are the ones seen marching down the street chanting pro-independence slogans and demanding self-determination.

The distinct change in the levels of Sahrawi women’s participation and the types of activities they are willing to take part in is a result of the different historical and emotional contexts that generations of Sahrawi women experienced, and the impact the military occupation has had on their lives. The younger generation of Sahrawi women knows no other form of rule except occupation and Moroccan control. Living in a city that is known for its vocal and sizeable activist community, many have witnessed the lack of measurable gains for Sahrawi society and the lack of progress towards achieving self-determination. The possible benefits of participating in the resistance movement do not outweigh the risks involved. They have much more to lose than the older generation did at their time, and this has ultimately impacted their desire to participate in public resistance activities.

Setting the Scene: life under occupation and nothing else
The younger generation of Sahrawi women did not live through the transition from Spanish colonial rule to Moroccan rule. This generation did not live through the toughest years of the war in the 1980s since many respondents in this study had been born after the ceasefire, and those who had been alive during that time cannot recall the details of the war and the impact it had on Sahrawi society. This major event in contemporary Sahrawi history is also absent from their history textbooks. They are not taught the experience of Sahrawi soldiers during the war with Morocco but are taught the Moroccan perspective, which is rooted in the nationalist narrative of the state reclaiming territory that is rightfully theirs. This generation is educated in schools following a Moroccan state curriculum, and what they understand about the war from the Sahrawi perspective is based on what their families teach them at home or what they are able to gather from RASD TV. The younger generation of Sahrawi women does not feel a direct emotional attachment to the war and the start of Moroccan occupation, which fuels the older generation of Sahrawi women’s desire to resist.

In addition to the major difference in the historical and socio-political contexts that each generation experienced throughout their formative years, the experience of living under unwavering Moroccan occupation has impacted the aspirations and decisions of younger Sahrawi women. In chapter one, this study presented a description of the ways in which the occupation has institutionalized discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawi residents. The military occupation has polarized the Sahrawi and Moroccan populations to such a degree that it has effortlessly institutionalized discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawis in all aspects of life including schooling, employment, college enrollment, and travel. Meanwhile, pro-Moroccan Sahrawis experience lesser forms of discrimination. According to several respondents in this study, pro-Moroccan Sahrawis are predominantly located in the coastal occupied city of
Dakhla southwest of Laayoune and approximately nine hours away by vehicle. Dakhla is known for its lucrative fisheries, and has been converted into the economic and industrial capital of the Occupied Territories. Sahrawis in this city are most likely to find steady employment in the fisheries if they proclaim unwavering support for Moroccan rule, and therefore they do not experience the same level of targeted discrimination in hiring practices as pro-independence Sahrawis. The systemic discrimination against pro-independence Sahrawis is precisely the socio-political context that the younger generation has grown up in, and it is the reality that they have had to maneuver around in order to obtain an education or seek employment.

**Education and Employment as Key Factors for Public Participation in Nonviolent Resistance**

Many Sahrawi women from the younger generation expressed their concern over not being able to make a living if they engaged in public activism or expressed their political opinions. Being that Moroccan security forces record and document participants in public demonstrations and those who are suspected of anti-occupation activism, many young Sahrawi women are dissuaded from participating in the resistance. Activists and demonstrators are harassed by security forces, followed home, threatened, expelled from school and their college programs, and experience a wide array of consequences that affect their livelihood. Schoolteachers and school security guards target children and Sahrawi youth who are vocally anti-Morocco. These forms of institutional discrimination have impacted young Sahrawi women’s behavior and made them feel less free to express their political opinions. Additionally, it has made them view resistance participation as a risk that is not worth taking at this point in their lives. Out of the 17 respondents in the younger generation’s age group of 18-32, 16

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158 Multiple anonymous interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 21-July 3, 2014
159 Multiple anonymous interviews: Laayoune, Western Sahara, May 21-July 3, 2014
expressed serious concern about the impact activism and resistance activities would have on their futures. One respondent shared,

“I see women protesting on the streets, shouting chants against Morocco and demanding self-determination. What has that gotten them? I want an independent Sahara as much as they do. I chose to go to school, work hard, and become an engineer. That is how I am beating the occupation. If we achieve an independent state, what are we going to do with an uneducated population? We need young kids to focus on being doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers—not yelling in the streets.”

This particular respondent was 26 years old, from a fairly large family, and spoke five languages fluently. While she was very focused on getting an education and pursuing a career throughout her young life, she was also very vocal about her political views. Although it took a couple of weeks to gain her trust and schedule an interview, once she was no longer concerned about the potential security risks in sharing her political views she was very articulate and opinionated. She understood the amount of control the Moroccan state has over the territories and the importance of international alliances in maintaining the occupation. She also focused a significant amount of time on explaining her opinion on what the most important aspect of the resistance should be: educating the younger generation. In her opinion, there was a lot of attention placed on resisting Moroccan control by way of protest and activism, but very little thought given to educating a younger generation of Sahrawis that can achieve, lead, and manage a fully independent state. Education is therefore a method of resistance for her to delegitimize Moroccan rule while simultaneously making her successful and self-sufficient. This respondent is representative of a growing trend amongst the younger generation of Sahrawi women, who are prioritizing getting an education and establishing a career while still hoping for an independent Western Sahara.

160 Anonymous interview. Private living room, Laayoune Western Sahara, June 3, 2014
In this study, 7 Sahrawi women within the younger generation were in college and they were between the ages of 18-24. None of them engaged in public forms of resistance. One respondent explained, “I organize resistance activities for the community when I am in Laayoune, but I want to study. I will come back after I graduate from the university in Agadir, but until then I will not protest in public or let the security forces know who I am”.\textsuperscript{161} The interview with this particular respondent, called Asria for the purposes of this study, was long awaited. During an activist press conference, held on the rooftop of an activist’s home at the edge of the city, commemorating the martyrs that died in prison during the war, Asria was moderating the event, presenting the activists who were giving speeches, and would motivate the crowd to chant Sahrawi independence slogans in between speakers and performances. She was a very dynamic young woman, and was strikingly eloquent when she spoke at the podium. An interview with her was especially important because although I had been in the territories for 3 weeks by that time, witnessed a couple of public demonstrations, and met with many women in the activist community I had never come across her. During the interview, Asria explained that her work needed to remain behind the scenes because her education is her main priority at this point in time. She is studying law in a city in southern Morocco, and due to the institutional discrimination within her university she avoids revealing her political opinions in any public way. Her work in the resistance movement, instead, remains in the clandestine sphere of activity. She moderates events with fellow activists, exchanges information about protest plans, works as a journalist for the Equipe Media news team, and interviews Sahrawis who have experienced police brutality while remaining out of the camera’s view.

Asria’s methods of engaging in the resistance movement in clandestine ways is something that many more Sahrawi men and women have been doing over the last few years.

\textsuperscript{161} Anonymous Interview. Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 30, 2014
The danger of Sahrawi men being taken by security forces or experiencing long-term punishments for demonstrating on the street has led to their decision to participate in clandestine ways. Meanwhile, the institutional discrimination that exists all throughout the territories and in Morocco-proper has led Sahrawi women to participate in clandestine resistance activities as well. These activities include working with the Equipe Media news team, interviewing Sahrawis who have suffered at the hands of the Moroccan security forces, promoting human rights and self-determination for Sahrawis via social media, or focusing on their education and careers in order to serve the Sahrawi community in direct ways.

The three Sahrawi women interviewed within this generation who attended college but intend to pursue another graduate degree do not participate in public protests either. They each reached this decision by evaluating the risk of participating in the resistance against the benefit of receiving another educational degree. The majority of the women within this generation evaluated the risk of being of activist against the benefits of getting an education, and in many of these cases the benefits of education were considered the best option. This is also influenced by the lessons this generation learned from the older generation of Sahrawi women. They witnessed how difficult their lives have been while resisting military occupation on a daily basis, and that they have struggled financially since their release from prison to today. This lifestyle was not appealing to many respondents within this generation, and therefore it influenced their life choices and the ways in which they participate in the resistance movement.

Many activists and demonstrators have lost their jobs and been blacklisted from getting other types of employment throughout the territories. Institutional discrimination is most often based on Sahrawi political stances, however in some cases it is solely based on culture. Eleven

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162 Multiple Anonymous interviews. Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June-July, 2014
163 Anonymous Interview. Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, July 4, 2014
respondents from the younger generation reportedly felt like they had missed out on job opportunities or were offended during interviews when they wore their melkhfa.\textsuperscript{164} This feeling of cultural discrimination has caused many Sahrawi women to avoid wearing their melkhfa when studying in Morocco-proper and travelling throughout the state because it called less attention to them and dramatically decreased the instances of discrimination and harassment on the street.\textsuperscript{165} This blatant public discrimination coupled with institutionalized forms have deeply influenced this generation’s decision to limit public resistance, or express their political opinions in any ways. These factors, however, have also motivated them to resist the occupation in clandestine ways. The most popular of these clandestine ways is achieving new heights in their education and careers.

\textbf{The Women of the Younger Generation that Do Publicly Resist}

Although the shift toward clandestine forms of resistance within the younger generation is clear, there are still young Sahrawi women who choose to protest the occupation alongside the older generation. One Sahrawi respondent who is college-age does not plan to attend college, and does engage in public demonstrations and activism. She explained, “Resistance and self-determination is more important than leaving the territories for college. I can do that later”.\textsuperscript{166} Respondents who were not yet of university age shared similar sentiments, perhaps because they were younger and had not realistically considered the severity of the risks associated with public resistance activism.

It was clear from observing public demonstrations that there are few Sahrawi teenagers are engaged in the resistance and participate in public protest. Prominent activists of the older

\textsuperscript{164} Anonymous Interview. Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, July 3, 2014
\textsuperscript{165} Multiple anonymous interviews. Private homes, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June-July 2014
\textsuperscript{166} Anonymous Interview. Private living room, Laayoune, Western Sahara, June 27, 2014
generation recounted that they support their young daughters’ early activism, and this support significantly influences their daughters’ desires to join protests and scream Sahrawi independence chants in the streets. Their parents have deeply influenced their positive outlook on the resistance movement, but this potentially comes at a cost. The youngest participants in public resistance activities have possibly failed to recognize the risks political activism poses to their future.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the daughters of many prominent resistance activists choose not to resist the occupation publicly and stay far from demonstration sites. Due to this fact, it was not reasonable to conclude that the engagement of family members in resistance activities is enough to inspire women in the younger generation to resist alongside them. There is still a complicated process of considering the risks and potential benefits, and the larger trend occurring within this generation is that of younger women not participating in resistance activities, and choosing not to participate publicly and remain politically uninvolved.

**Resistance or Progress**

Though there are still Sahrawi women within the younger generation who consider the resistance movement the most important aspect of their life, and believe that opposing Moroccan occupation is the most pressing issue in society, the majority of the respondents in this generation have prioritized other aspirations. The vast majority of young Sahrawi women have learned that the system of Moroccan rule has placed numerous obstacles in their way if they choose to publicly oppose the system. Regardless of the influence that Sahrawi families may have in the decisions Sahrawi youth make, the occupation is undeniably having a greater impact on them. Institutionalized discrimination is an inescapable aspect of the socio-political situation.
in the territories and in Morocco-proper. For this reason, the younger generation has pulled away from participating publicly in the resistance movement. The dramatic experiences of military occupation on the younger generation of Sahrawi women has created a distinct generational shift. The protracted nature of this conflict has affected gender roles, gender dynamics in Sahrawi society, and most recently it affects the life choices of generations of Sahrawi women.
Conclusion

The Moroccan government’s military occupation of the Western Sahara has resulted in a significant human cost for the Sahrawi population. In addition to creating a sizeable refugee population in Tindouf, Algeria, the settler-colonial project affected the lives of numerous Sahrawis that remained in the territories throughout the war between the Moroccan government and the Polisario Front between 1975 and 1991. The generation of Sahrawi women activists that endured the transition from Spanish colonial rule, to Moroccan forceful settlement, and then to war have continued to dedicate their lives to political resistance regardless of their experiences with the brutality of 16 years of war, unlawful imprisonment, and torture in many cases. As this study focused on the lived experiences of Sahrawi women living in the Occupied Territories and how protracted occupation as a system of rule impacts their choices to resist, it exposed the complicated consequences and the human impact of the occupation on generations of Sahrawis.

This study attempted to explain the various ways that the Moroccan military occupation has affected Sahrawi gender dynamics and generations of Sahrawi women in terms of their public participation in the resistance movement. The study presents three main arguments, the first of which is the fact that the Moroccan military occupation has had gendered effects on Sahrawi society. This is exemplified by the severe targeting of Sahrawi men as enemies of the state, in addition to unlawful imprisonment, disappearances, and death. The second argument is that the occupation has increasingly politicized Sahrawi women’s leadership roles throughout the territories. Due to the fact that Sahrawi men confront severe punishments for their political activism, many more Sahrawi women have stepped forward into roles of political leadership. The third and final argument is that the occupation has also created a generational shift amongst Sahrawi women of the older and younger generations. The intense levels of institutional

167 Zunes & Mundy, p. 3
discrimination against pro-independence and politically active Sahrawis have caused many women to re-evaluate the ways in which they can resist the occupation in non-political ways. This generational shift, however, is not a sign of growing apathy towards the occupation on behalf of the Sahrawi community, but it is a result of the need to maneuver around the occupation and its methods of oppressing the Sahrawi population.

In sum, the occupation did not enable Sahrawi women to become leaders of the resistance movement. Scholars have recorded the fact that women have held prominent leadership roles in various aspects of Sahrawi culture and society for nearly half of a century. However, the occupation did lead to the increasing politicization of the leadership roles Sahrawi women occupy. Additionally, the greater vulnerability of Sahrawi men in this conflict explains why there are not as many leading the resistance movement in public ways as there are Sahrawi women. While many men are outspoken during meetings and press conferences, they refrain from leading the resistance in public demonstrations and in media coverage due to the severe risks involved. This is how the occupation has impacted Sahrawi gender dynamics for decades, and continues to do so.

Chapter 1 focused on describing the initial settler-colonial project undertaken by King Hassan II and fulfilled by the hundreds of thousands of Moroccan settlers who participated in the Green March. Following this successful settler-colonial project, the system of rule was fulfilled by long-term military occupation. In order to maintain total control of the territories, Morocco had to implement an oppressive system of occupation enforced by an overwhelming military and security presence. The fervent Sahrawi resistance movement eventually erupted into armed conflict with Moroccan forces in 1976, and the demand for self-determination continued even after the ceasefire in 1991 as activists used nonviolent means to oppose the occupation. In
furtherance of ensuring stability and security in the territories, the Moroccan security forces and the military never withdrew from within the territories and instead focused on cracking down on the ability of pro-independence Sahrawis to express their political opinions, demonstrate, establish civil society groups, or engage actively in the public sphere.

After establishing the history of the conflict and the systems of rule that were involved in creating the protracted nature of this conflict, chapter 2 introduced the utility of a gender analysis for understanding the human aspect of this conflict. Similar to many other studies of gender during times of war and conflict, there is a significant impact on the occupied and warring populations. Gender roles are disrupted when both men and women join resistance movements, armed forces, revolutions, and advocacy groups. Women living in patriarchal societies are especially compelled to participate in the war efforts and engage in the political sphere, although they eventually have the added struggle of combatting the masculine nature of resistance movements, war, and conflict.

In the Western Sahara, however, it is clear that Sahrawi women do not have the added struggle of mitigating the masculine character of war and conflict or battling for their representation within patriarchal society. Sahrawi society in itself is not considered patriarchal by any participant in this study, and has been notably studied in academic scholarship for being largely matriarchal. What restricts and negatively impacts Sahrawi women’s roles is the Moroccan military occupation itself, and within a broader scope of analysis the occupation has impacted the life choices of both Sahrawi women and men.

Following the gender analysis of the protracted occupation of the Western Sahara and understanding the gendered composition of the resistance movement, this study considered the socio-political context for the generations of Sahrawis living in the Occupied Territories -- one
that lived through decolonization, Moroccan occupation, and the decade-long war, and the other
generation that has only experienced the Moroccan occupation. The research shows that there is
a distinct change in the levels of Sahrawi women’s participation and the types of activities in
which they are willing to take part.

The generational differences amongst Sahrawi women and the gendered composition of
the resistance movement are results of the long-term military occupation enforced by the
Moroccan state. This is due to many reasons, including the historical context in which
generations grew up, emotional motivation to resist military occupation, and the changing
perceptions of whether the risk of resisting occupation outweighs the benefits of staying out of
the political sphere. Therefore, it was not only necessary to understand the reasons for the
gendered composition of the resistance movement that is dominated by Sahrawi women, but it
was also crucial to understanding the generational difference in resistance participation among
Sahrawi women over time.

Contribution to Existing Studies

One of the primary goals for this study was to contribute to the existing literature on the
Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara, and to provide more empirics for understanding the
Sahrawi resistance movement. However, another goal was to highlight to importance of re-
thinking the theories of occupation, war, and ethnic conflict and how they impact societies of
people, with a specific focus on gender dynamics. The conflict in the Western Sahara
problematises the ways in which we understand gender and notions of vulnerability during
military occupation. Recent studies have proven that times of war and conflict increase the
vulnerability of men, which is something that has received far lesser attention than examining the
vulnerability of women and children in these same settings. In this case, Sahrawi men experience a heightened level of vulnerability and state persecution that Sahrawi women do not experience. It is that level of vulnerability that has forced many Sahrawi men to refrain from political activism and resistance projects, because they directly risk imprisonment, disappearance, or death. In the Western Sahara, it is Sahrawi women that head the political leadership and it challenges many notions about women’s vulnerability in war and conflict.

This study sought to fill gaps in the literature on gender during war and conflict. While many studies focus on the added struggles women confront due to patriarchal societies, the Western Sahara conflict presents a different context for examination entirely. This study then serves as an in-depth analysis of gender dynamics under military occupation in a non-patriarchal society, which makes this one of the most significant contributions of this study to the literature.

Additionally, this study presents the ways in which the younger generation of Sahrawi women living under occupation is re-thinking the meaning of resistance. Since political activism and public demonstrations present a significant risk to their livelihoods and futures, many young Sahrawi women have focused on educating themselves, entering the work force, and starting a legacy based in economic and educational success in order to resist Moroccan oppression, subjugation, and military occupation. This is an example of how concepts of political resistance and opposition evolve over time during contexts of protracted military occupation.

**Final Remarks: where to go from here**

Given the contributions of this study to existing literature, there are still many more questions raised. Among these questions is the potential for a generational difference amongst Sahrawi men. How have their experiences shaped their willingness or disinterest in participating
in the resistance movement or politics in general? How focused are the Sahrawi men of the younger generation on education and the pursuit of a stable career? There is still much more to learn and to observe in other occupied cities throughout the territories in order to confirm that the situation in Laayoune is representative of a broader trend throughout the entire younger generation of Sahrawis living under occupation.

It cannot be emphasized enough that there is a need to study the various aspects of the conflict in the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara, and of the Sahrawi population that lives under occupation. This study solely focused on residents of Laayoune, with a few visitors coming from Smara, Dakhla, and Boujdour. Therefore, it is necessary to continue researching the effects of occupation on populations of Sahrawis living throughout the rest of the territories. While the Moroccan state does place many obstacles in the way of foreign visitors, journalists, and researchers, there are certainly ways to maneuver around these restrictions and produce more literature, reportage, knowledge, and critical analyses. There is a need to break through the endless coverage that focuses on the latest conflicts throughout the region because this long-term struggle for self-determination has continued in anonymity as a result.

The importance of research on the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara increases over time given the aging population of resistance activists. A majority of the women who participate in public forms of protest and are fully dedicated to activism are part of the older and aging population within the territories. Given the findings about younger women, it seems safe to assume that within another generation’s time the Sahrawi resistance movement will be significantly smaller than it is today. Along with these depleted numbers and the Moroccan state’s consistent rejection of Sahrawi civil society organizations, there will be little activism and resistance activity throughout the territories that could gain significant momentum for achieving
a referendum process. As the younger generation of Sahrawi youth decides to resist the
Moroccan occupation in varied and clandestine ways, scholars, journalists, and researchers could
offset the decreasing momentum by showing interest in the state of human rights, gender
dynamics, security, and daily life within the Occupied Territories of the Western Sahara.
Bibliography


