The Conveyor Belt to Nowhere:
Identity and resistance at a Western Saharan phosphate mine from 1973-1976

"power exists in all the varieties of the human social organization, more or less controlled, usurped, conferred from above or recognized from below, assigned by merit, corporate solidarity, blood or position."
-Primo Levi, *The Saved and the Drowned* (1986) p. 46

Full Abstract: *This article addresses the connection between identity, memorialization, and natural resources in the Western Sahara protracted refugee crisis. During the political transition years of 1973, Sahrawi miners extracted the largest amount of phosphates from Fosbucra'a while the Sahrawi separatists—called the Frente POLISARIO—began to campaign for independence. Their hopes were destroyed in 1975 when Spain signed the Madrid Agreements, granting the Kingdom of Morocco authority over the Sahrawi and their natural resources. As this agreement was in direct violation of the 1975 International Court of Justice's (ICJ) advisory opinion in favor of the Sahrawi, war broke out between Morocco and the newly formed Sahrawi government forcing Sahrawis to flee to refugee camps in Algeria in 1976. This article is organized from 1973-1976, bookended with the two largest acts of sabotage the Sahrawi promulgated against Spain and then Morocco. The centrality of the phosphate mines responds to a lack of legal and historical research addressing the connections between the power dynamics of the colonial administrations, resistance, and natural resources, which continues to impact the landscapes and psychologies of the Sahrawi people in their forty first year of exile. This analysis extends to understanding the current legal structures and local struggles over oil exploration by Moroccan and American companies from 2001 to present, which cannot be understood without a deep grounding in the sale and sabotage of phosphates as this industry has had a profound impact on the Sahrawi independence movement and Moroccan politics.*

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Fig 0.1: This map of the Western Sahara shows the important cities of the territory. Source: United Nations Map, 1981. Map housed at the University of Pennsylvania.

Introduction

On October 18th, 1974, a land rover, headlights turned off approached control station 7 at the Spanish owned phosphate mine, named Fosbucra'a. Seven Sahrawi men, all employed by the mines and affiliated with the Frente POLISARIO—the recently formed rebel militia determined to gain independence—descended from the car and followed the road on foot. They wore gloves, work jackets, and identical forty-one size shoes to avoid being traced. Just as the posts began to empty between 22:30 and 23:00, the men divided into two groups, each carrying ten liters of gasoline. They divided themselves between two stations, with an electrician at each to effectively disable the TT-40, devices that detected faults in the section of the conveyor belt that controlled each station. After knocking down the doors of station 7 and 8, each of the technicians carefully deactivated the TT-40s with a set of screwdrivers. They then ripped off the wooden panels that re-routed the electric cables, split them, and stacked them like wood. With black paint, they scrawled "The Sahara for the Sahrawis" and "To stop the exploitation of our wealth" and signed their handiwork: POLISARIO as their finishing touch. At 0000 hours they doused the panels with gasoline, set them on fire, and fled.[1]

Often overlooked, this event marks the beginning of the Sahrawi independence movement, which transformed the Sahrawi into refugees, permanently displaced from the Western Sahara and cut off from their rich natural resources of phosphates, fisheries, oil, and natural gas. Today one hundred sixty-five thousand Sahrawis—nomads indigenous to the Western Sahara—remain displaced, bitterly struggling for survival in Southern Algeria.[2] Their forty-two years of displacement marks one of the longest and most forgotten humanitarian crises to present, in spite

[1] Diego Aguirre, José Ramon. *Historia Del Sahara Español*. Madrid: Kayededa, 1988.
[2] UN Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme. "Update on UNHCR's operations in the Middle East and North Africa." (2013).

of International Court of Justice rulings affirming the Sahrawi claim to the Western Sahara. The exiled government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a remnant of the Frente POLISARIO, continues to operate from the five Sahrawi refugee camps outside of Tindouf, Algeria. While procuring support for their return to the Western Sahara, they continue to rely on the United Nations MINURSO task force to maintain a ceasefire with the Kingdom of Morocco, surviving on foreign aid in part derived from their former colonial administrator, Spain.

Due to the complexity of this humanitarian crisis, providing a historical account for the 1973-1976 period of transition allows scholars to better understand what has exacerbated this conflict into a permanent crisis. Unavoidably, the boom in Spanish induced phosphate production coincides with these years of conflict, adding considerable pressure to the Sahrawi request for independence and complicating the Kingdom of Morocco's stake in the Western Sahara.[3] Thus, historians must equally address this layering of events in order to provide consensus on the underlying and historically contextualized causes that have sustained this conflict for forty-two years.

Therefore, the aim of this research seeks to demarcate the relationship between these geurilla acts of organized resistance and Sahrawi political identities using this critical transition period and bound the Fosbucra'a mines as the heart of a contested territory. These acts of violence grant a rare view into the organization and implementation of the young Sahrawi resistance that the local political body, named the djemaa, does not provide, and thus serve as an invaluable link between global diplomatic oscillations and the struggle occurring on the ground. To provide this perspective, I employ participant observation from three months in Southern Morocco, two weeks of informal interviews and participant observation in the Boujador and Dhakla refugee camps in

[3] See: Natasha White (2015).

Algeria, the memoirs of Spanish soldiers serving in the Western Sahara, the correspondence and files of Secretary General Kurt Waldheim at the United Nations archives, WITNESS videos of Sahrawi phosphate protests, historical American, British, and Spanish newspaper publications, and a brief glimpse into the national Moroccan archives in Rabat. Although the archives that house materials related to this conflict remain sanitized of any contentious material, narratives connecting the local response to these larger global processes offer an opportunity to unravel the global commodity chain that has displaced the world's most forgotten refugee crisis.

With this in mind, the first section of this article explains how natural resource extraction and independence became synonymous in international diplomatic rhetoric by tracing how international bodies interpreted Spain's zealous development of phosphates in spite of their promise to offer an independence referendum. The second section shows how the labor at the Fosbucra'a mines produced a material culture that played a role in shaping notions about the pre-colonial Sahrawi identity into politically useful resistance and confederation. The third section examines how organized violence resulted in symbolism that have both inspired Sahrawi politics and added complexity to Morocco's continued development of the Western Sahara phosphates.

This research responds to the lack of any historical studies outlining the development and transfer of phosphates, which have become central in both the legal and economic positioning of the Kingdom of Morocco and the SADR in their larger struggle for sovereignty and continued contestation of natural resource development. At present, much of the literature on the role of natural resources in this conflict overlooks the lived experiences and identities that comprised the vital Sahrawi resistance.[4] I will show how identity became the battleground on which Sahrawi society chose to stake their continued survival, rendering the identity formation at the mines to be

[4] White (2015)

central in understanding all resource disputes and the sovereignty movement. As the djemaa became a Spanish proxy government and the POLISARIO cloistered themselves in secrecy, the stakes at the Fosbucra'a mines represent the clearest theatre on which international politics and resistance played out, which grants scholars an unexplored and clear picture into a humanitarian crisis that has devolved into the world's longest protracted refugee situation.

Section I: Extracting Irredentism

In 1958 a group of company geologists, sent by the Spanish government to map the Rio de Oro colony, validated the young Spanish Manuel Alia Medina's critical 1945 discovery. Medina had been prospecting the flat hardpack desert hamada, dating sediments and rock formations when he made the odd decision to test his specimens for phosphate content.[5] However, uncertain this his discovery would yield what he believed, the government deployed what would eventually become the colonial mining agency, Empresa Nacional Minera del Sahara (EMINSA), who validated that Medina had indeed discovered the world's largest phosphate deposit estimated at 1.7 billion tons. Located nearly thirty miles from the Sahrawi city Smara, the phosphates represented economic opportunity for the deeply indebted Spanish government.[6] The very same year, General Francisco Franco of Spain declared the Western Sahara a Spanish overseas department, tightening Spanish control over Western Sahara rather than granting independence concessions[7]

The Spanish government began pursuing networks of international investment, most notably from the Chicago-based company International Minerals and Chemicals, to begin building

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[5] Mercer (1976) p. 184

[6] Empresa Nacional Minera del Sahara. "Desubrimiento, cubicación y evaluación del yacimiento de fosfato de Bu-Craa (provincial del Sahara)." Biblioteca Nacional de Espana: 1966; "Estamación de las inversions, financiamiento y rentabilidad de explotación del yacimiento de fosfato." Biblioteca Nacional de Espana: 1965.

[7] Minahan, J., & Minahan, J. (2002). *Encyclopedia of the stateless nations : ethnic and national groups around the world*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

infrastructure. Most notably, they advertised an ambitious project to construct a the thirty-mile-long conveyor belt that would transport phosphates from Bucra'a sixty-four miles north to El-Auin. European governments and American journalists hailed the completed project as "the most spectacular industrial undertaking in the area of southern Europe and northwestern Africa."[8] International eyes began to focus on the economic and political significance of this project as phosphates were key in fertilizer production, both for global fears of diminishing food supplies and supposedly degrading soils, but also for the sovereignty seeking Sahrawi. In this way, the international discourse surrounding the Western Sahara shifted from independence considerations to development mandates. Noticing this shift in how journalists and politicians represented the Western Sahara, Sahrawis began to talk about the importance of natural resources, emphasizing that they belong to the Sahrawi populace.

Internationally, the 1960s and 1970s were periods of shifting power dynamics and neoliberalization. Within this context, phosphates offered Spain, Morocco, and the Sahrawi coalition the opportunity to participate in the Green Revolution. The biting food insecurity and Malthusian anxieties of this period looked to scientific invention, and thus the use of phosphate to create fertilizers in order to feed the globe. Further, the trauma of World War II forced international community to recognize and define the refugee from the colonial subject. Legal novelties that included the United Nations 1957 and 1961 refugee conventions and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) had begun to take effect as political capital, reifying the notion that "what ultimately is at stake is the post-World War II international legal system."[9] This legal system paradoxically recognized the right of every

[8] Tad Szulc. "Phosphate Plans for Sahara Fade." Special to *The New York Times* (1923-Current file); Feb 5, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 49
[9] Zunes and Mundy p. 12

colonized entity to self-realization while also asserting that colonial borders must be maintained. This period of twisting international order created a complex global atmosphere for the Sahrawi independence movement.

However, their movement was consistently confined to economic explanations of linear cause and effect within an international community that overlooked desert and nomadic communities. The headline of one New York Times article published in 1975 boldly declared, "Suddenly, Spanish Sahara Matters."[10] Ownership of the Spanish Sahara had become newsworthy because of the phosphate industry and adjoining potential for fisheries, natural gas, oil, and even solar energy. Suspicions grew that mounting tensions in the region were due to the new economic significance of phosphates, reducing the complex Sahrawi social organization to colonial subjects, there to extract. Journalist Clyde H. Farnsworth reported that "many specialists believe that the new interest by Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, in Spanish Sahara may in part be explained by these mineral riches and Spain's crash efforts to exploit them."[11] This would become a theme for the Sahrawi resistance in later years and the Moroccan government's claim.

This flattening of the Western Sahara was not unique to journalism and popular opinion in Europe and the United States, but extended to international governing bodies. Frente POLISARIO representatives and United Nations officials believed that phosphates suspended General Francisco Franco's implementation of the independence referendum, promised in 1966. In a letter between UN administrative assistant Mr. Henning and M. K. Pedanou, the UN representative of Namibia, he writes, "It was his intention to advise the Secretary-General that the situation in the Territory

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[10] Paul Ellman "Ownership Is Crucial" *New York Times (1923-Current file);* Aug 3, 1975; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 145

[11] Clyde H. Fransworth. "Sands hold Riches in Spanish Sahara" Special to *The New York Times* (1923-Current file); Nov 6, 1975; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: pg. 37

has become explosive in view of the attitude of the Spanish Government; because of some natural resources which have just been found, the Spanish Government is determined to consolidate its hold over the Territory through a puppet régime."[12] Spanish determination to tighten their grasp over the Western Sahara because of the 1958 phosphate discovery explains why General Franco did not follow suit with the rest of Europe in granting independence to the Sahrawi who were eager to throw off colonization. In official reports from the United Nations, journalist's articles, researcher's papers, and politician's rhetoric, the Western or Spanish Sahara became synonymous with phosphates.[13] Even the World Bank recognized the Western Sahara as the most resource rich country in North Africa.[14] Phosphates became synonymous with the Western Sahara conflict during this period.

Notably, the Kingdom of Morocco, under the kingship of Hassan II, made no claims on the Western Sahara prior to the discovery of these phosphates, but the Moroccan government began developing their own profitable phosphate reserves at a rate that alarmed many Moroccans.[15] By 1973, when Spain began exporting their first phosphates from Fosbucra'a, Morocco was battling with the United States to become the world's first producer, creating a de facto monopoly on phosphates. For example, a NYTs article reported "Following the example set by the Arab oil-producers, Morocco last year decided to take advantage of its position as the world's biggest exporter of phosphates, the basic ingredient of fertilizers and impose unilateral price increases

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[12] "Western Sahara." Country Files of the Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. 1974. Series 0904, Box 49, File 1, Acc. DAG 1/5.3.2.8. United Nations Archive, New York.
[13] "Western Sahara." F32, B10: 1973. Files of the Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, United Nations Archive: New York. "Transcript of Press Conference by Sec. Gen. Kurt Waldheim held at Headquarters on 26 Feb. 1976". "Western Sahara" 1977, 1978, 1980. SERIES: S-8108, BOX: 0032, 0009, ACC: 1990/00023. Country Files, United Nations Archive: New York.
[14] World Bank (1974), cited in P. Pinto Leite, 'International Legality versus Realpolitik: The Cases of Western Sahara and East Timor', in Olsson, The Western Sahara Conflict, p. 16.
[15] Zunes and Mundy (2015)

totally 450 percent over an 18-month period. However, Morocco's ability to keep prices high depends on being able to exploit a tight position on the world phosphate market. With Spain planning to expand production from the Sahara, the Rabat government fears that its own phosphate earnings might start to decline." [16] Partially based on these fears, the Moroccan government began to aggressively campaign for the reunion of Morocco and the Western Sahara. However, the Moroccan government's arguments markedly differed from the ongoing international chatter about the Western Sahara, asserting that the region historically belonged to Morocco.

This campaign took the form of lobbying the United Nations and Spain reunite Morocco with the Western Sahara, which resulted in King Hassan II formally requesting an advisory ruling from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 1975, the court heard oral and written arguments, which included the Moroccan government's historical emphasis that the Western Sahara had always been a part of Greater Morocco.[17] In these arguments, the Moroccan legal team insisted that their position was defined by historical borders that predated colonization.

The Moroccan legal team began with the notion that the Western Sahara was never *terra nullis*, but that the relationship between nomadic chiefs and the Sherifian Empire was not a European style of fealty, and thus had to be respected through a Moroccan interpretation of the law. In this fashion they asserted that historically, "Le Maroc est bien ainsi le possesseur immemorial au Sahara occidental."[18] The Kingdom argued with ferocity that Spain and France had torn apart and denied their traditional claim to the Western Sahara. They further indicated that

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[16] Paul Ellman. "Suddenly, The Spanish Sahara Matters." *The New York Times* (1923-Current file); Aug 3, 1975; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 145

[17] Greater Morocco is the notion that parts of Algeria, Mauritania, and the entire Western Sahara were all at one time a part of Morocco, but were divided by regional colonial administrators.

[18] "Therefore, Morocco is indeed the immemorial possessor of the Western Sahara." ICJ Morocco oral and written arguments, vol III. 1975. The Hauge. p. 129 1975

Spain only began to vigorously defend the Western Sahara in 1958, the year that Morocco achieved independence and the year that Spain discovered the phosphates, and begged the court to allow the Western Sahara to be repatriated to, her motherland, Morocco.

Fig 1.1 Shows the advisory opinions at the International Case of Justice with the Moroccan legal team on the right. Source: ICJ Online Archives.

Addressing Spain's economic claims, the Moroccan government argued that colonization had halved their traditional territory and damaged the Moroccan economy solely due to their interest in phosphates. They argued that "Since 1860, Spain has sought to control a strategic zone but also the exploitation, for its profit of Moroccan natural resources. Having begun with that of the fisheries, they have continued this pursuit through phosphates."[19] In this striking argument, the Moroccan legal team asserted that Spain was avoiding legal justice due to their own economic motivations. They pointed to the Spanish establishment of the Fosbucra'a mines as a means to undermine the Moroccan monopoly over phosphates and most strikingly, tried to convince the court that the acquisition of the Fosbucra'a phosphates was an act of continued colonization.

In their closing speech, the confluence of natural resources and decolonization again overlapped in this fashion. The Moroccan lawyer argued that "history thus shows that the current Spanish attempts to establish a so-called independent state are merely the continuation of a distant objective of dismembering the Sherifian Empire for the realization of commercial profits. Their

[19] lbid p. 137

wish of monopolizing phosphates has today replaced the commercial mirage of the late nineteenth century for Spain, but the means remain the same."[20] They continued to emphasize that decolonization was now accompanied in the Western Sahara by the foreign desire for natural resources. Throughout the ICJ oral testimonies, Morocco attempted to make it clear that phosphates were the impetus for Spain's denial of the sovereignty process.

After reviewing Morocco's arguments, the ICJ ruled on behalf of the Sahrawis and emphasized their right to a referendum. However, the Moroccan government was not deterred and when General Franco intoned that Spain would defend their holdings in the Western Sahara to the bitter end and he was met with a lack of enthusiasm and support, which translated into "a blank refusal" King Hassan II saw an opportunity.[21] Hassan II began to assemble the "Marche Verte" of one hundred fifty thousand Moroccans. In a tremendous show of nationalism, this group of Moroccans marched to Saguia el-Hamra, the region of the mines, asserting that the territory legally belonged to Morocco. Causing international uproar and fear of war between Spain and Morocco, King Hassan II's Green March catalyzed regional tensions. To avoid a military conflict, Franco's desire to hold the territory crumbled.

On November 14th, 1975 Spanish representatives secretly signed the Madrid Accords, granting Morocco and Mauritania sovereignty over the Western Sahara, sealing the Sahrawi fate. As explained by journalists "the collapse of the phosphate transaction comes at a time when Spain is in dire need both of foreign exchange and of new industrial investment to arrest the dangerously deepening recession here."[22] In defending their own industrial investment, Spanish representatives

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[20] lbid p. 202.
[21] lbid p. 145
[22] Tad Szulc. "Phosphate Plans for Sahara Fade." Special to *The New York Times* (1923-Current file); Feb 5, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. 49

included a special provision that the Spanish government would maintain a thirty-five percent stake in phosphate extraction and development. They held this share in the Moroccan company, Office Chérifien de Phosphates, until 2011.[23] After the signing of the Madrid Accords, King Hassan II's claim that phosphates had little to do with the Moroccan invasion of the Western Sahara in 1976 faded and Moroccan, Spanish, and American companies grappled for a slice.[24] This belief in a Greater Morocco came to occupy a central space in the telling of the history of Morocco. The Moroccan government continued to recite their argument, in public and private spaces, most notably of which the Archives Nationale du Maroc in Rabat. In 2016, the archives featured an exhibit titled "Le Maroc est dans Son Sahara et le Sahara et dans son Maroc" about the long connected history of the Western Sahara and Morocco. Although there is much to be said about the military programs, forced migrations of Moroccans, and the social and educational policies towards Sahrawis, this form of rewriting a precolonial history in order to justify the continued resource extraction of the Western Sahara continues to play a role in Morocco's defense of oil exploration and fishery contracts.

Section II: A Phosphate Polity

When Secretary General Kurt Waldheim's Western Saharan envoy landed in Smara after the 1976 Moroccan invasion, Ambassador Rydbeck saw the once vibrant intellectual center of the Western Sahara as reduced to empty ruins. In the first few days of visit to Smara, he attempted to establish contact with the djemaa, the POLISARIO, or anyone willing to talk, but encountered only frustration when the few Sahrawis he met were too frightened to speak to a United Nations official. Under strict orders from Waldheim to prepare a detailed report of what the Moroccan

[23] Fadel Kamal (2015) The role of natural resources in the building of an independent Western Sahara, Global Change, Peace & Security, 27:3, 345-359.
[24] King Hassan II. *Le Défi* (1979).

government refused to describe as a military takeover, Rydbeck pressed on. Finally, he met one man in a small gathering in Smara willing to talk to him. This Sahrawi miner presented Rydbeck with political tracts that explained the POLISARIO and Sahrawi position on this invasion. He passionately explained why Sahrawis had begun to flee en masse across the border and why they would continue to violently resist. Rydbeck felt relief, finally making ground in what he would choose to report to the Secretary General, but was surprised when the miner came to his United Nations secured lodgings during the night. Panicked, the miner exclaimed that he had publically said too much. Begging for assistance, he pleaded with Rydbeck to authorize and arrange his immediate delivery to friendly soil in Algeria. Considering the violence and instability Rydbeck had witnessed in his short time in the Western Sahara, he agreed. Ordering the miner's safe transit to Algeria where he would join the forming Sahrawi camps, Rydbeck believed, correctly, that this was simply the beginning of a long conflict.[25]

Scholarship about this period too often overlooks the deep local roots that tethered these global processes to those Sahrawi who continued to violently resist, organize, and struggle for statehood. Exacerbating this neglect, historians have some tendency to describe independence movements throughout Africa as an inevitable domino effect, as opposed to a process of struggle.[26] Drawing from the methodologies of other historical studies on Spanish colonial mining communities, the formation of identity at the Fosbucra'a mines created a cohesive and potent political identity on which Sahrawi refugees have staked displacement over assimilation. This section employs literature about mining in several contexts to focus on how the placed-based

[25] "Western Sahara" Country Files of the Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. 1976. Series 0904, Box 49, File 1, Acc. DAG 1/5.3.2.8. United Nations Archive, New York.
[26] Raben, Remco, and Els Bogaerts. "Beyond Empire and Nation; the Decolonization of African and Asian Societies, 1930s-1960s." [In English.]. (2012).

material culture of the Fosbucra'a mine created a polity who provided support to the Frente POLISARIO through their technical knowledge and organization, achieving a unified political identity.

The material culture that results from this interconnection between politics and labor hearkens back to Marxist tropes that span space and time.[27] Colonial historians have shown how distinct cultural, linguistic, and political identities were the product of a common struggle against colonization.[28] Anthropologist June Nash demonstrates how mining creates solidarity through the formation of a similar identity, which can then transform into political action through nationalism.[29] Coal mines in particular have long functioned as spaces where new relationships and social formations are produced, challenged, and dispersed.[30] Widely studied through a neo-Marxist lens, these structures are so pivotal because "in order to translate the desires and goals of the workers into a revolutionary movement, one must sharpen the sense of alienation against a

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[27] E. P. Thompson. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." 1971.

[28] Research about natural resources has occupied a particular subfield about this issue as Smith, Erik Hagen, Torres-Spelliscy, Joanna Allan, and Zunes, have all placed phosphates and oil reserves at the center of this conflict. The resources of Western Sahara include phosphates, currently Morocco's number one export (Morocco holds the largest phosphates reserves in the world, controlling over 35 percent of global exports of phosphate rock, and 51 percent of global exports of phosphoric acid.) fisheries and coastal access, potential oil and natural gas reserves, and most recently, solar resources as Morocco installed the largest solar panel in the world in the Western/Moroccan Sahara. In conversation, these articles explicitly agree that Morocco has continued the legacy of French settler colonization and Spanish resource extraction in the Western Sahara. In addition to scholarly resources, legal opinions and ICJ rulings verified that the resources of the Western Sahara are to be used solely for the self-determination and benefit of the Sahrawi people. These contradictory processes show how the phosphates of the Western Sahara remain at the center of this conflict and have the potential to respond to Zunes question of why this conflict has continued for over four decades. Zunes, p. 33

[29] June Nash, *I Spent My Life in the Mines* (1992); *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1993).

[30] Erwiza (1999)

system of exploitation."[31] A body of labor class Sahrawi had never before concentrated themselves into one body, as the Spanish administration coerced physically demanding and at times highly technical labor, reliant on solidarity for survival.

The Fosbucra'a mines began with the imported labor of Spanish workers, but gradually transformed into a top-down model, overseen by Spanish administrators and performed by Sahrawi laborers. By 1974, there were approximately 8,000 Sahrawis working at the mines. In terms of labor, 5,465 were unskilled laborers, 345 were industrial workers, 707 were drivers, 190 were office employees, 141 were teachers, and 1,341 were soldier and policemen.[32] This is significant because, in the words of Hodges, "a Saharawi working class was being born."[33] As many other historical narratives have demonstrated, this class expanded in meaning beyond labor and connected the ideological goals of the Frente POLISARIO with material realities of organized resistance, distilling a political identity in the process of a clear Sahrawi identity and goal.

Within colonial histories in particular, space and the redefinition of spaces into orderly zones of efficiency have come to occupy an important role in better understanding the deeper layers of colonization.[34] Building mining infrastructure that the Spanish considered modernizing the desert, the Spanish mining overseers from EMINSA provided the equipment for extracting, transporting, and shipping the phosphates from their inland location to El-Aiun.[35] Excavation machinery at the open-pit mine included excavators and trucks, which operated alongside a desalination plant. The Spanish government ensured this level of sophistication in order to clean the phosphates rock for

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[31] Nash (1993) p. 11
[32] Decree of January 23, 1953. See Francisco Hernandez-Pacheco and Jose Maria Cordero Torres, *El Sahara Espanol* (Instituo de Estudios Politicos, Madrid, 1962), p. 152.
[33] Hodges(1988) p. 130
[34] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (1988).
[35] Hodges (1988) p. 138

assured production. Warehouses for storage and a jetty for loading the mineral onto ships lined Bucra'a, complemented by the world's longest conveyor belt, stretching beyond El-Aiun at ninety seven kilometers.[36]

Fig 3.1: This image, from the Phosbucraa company page, shows some of the 1970s work at the mines. Source: OCP Online Company Archives.

These physical spaces of the mines created a new organization to the quotidian life of the Sahrawi laborers. The company town brought a single rationality to the daily life of working in the mine, housing the workforce and providing obligatory colonial education and hospitals.[37] Although this created a new space for Spanish authorities to surveille Sahrawis divided into the model mining town that overrode the previous small town of Bucra'a that pre-dated the mines, they inadvertently strengthened the formation of a Sahrawi body politic through community.[38] This newly designed mining town served as a concentrated loci for Sahrawi political activism and was equally connected to the nationalist stirrings in El-Aiun through a constellation of Sahrawi collectivity. Due to the proximity between Smara, the intellectual headquarters of the Frente POLISARIO, Sahrawi miners were connected to their sister city more than simply sending their children to the madrasas or buying weekly goods from the souq, but rather linked Smara, an ideological center happening in an under-surveilled city with less access to Spanish holdings, to

[36] Mark Drury: (Mercer 1976, 186; Hodges 1983, 126–27).
[37] Lbid p. 54
[38] For more on these institutions, see June Nash *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, (1990) p. 110.

Bucra'a, a mining center organized around concentrated and surveilled spaces that lay just on the edge of Spain's most prized territory in the Western Sahara.

Furthermore, prior studies have shown how society's perception of their mining communities are linked to conceptions of modernity, but more importantly, these communities can show scholars how larger national movements crystallized.[39] The Sahrawi miners came to embody the goals and tactics of the Sahrawi polity during these critical transition years. Scholars have portrayed how mining communities became institutions of social transformation as they brought together diverse communities. Empowered by this sense of collectivity and shared duty, these communities eventually became the loci for political mobilization and resistance against colonial violence.[40] Thus, rather than merely spaces of extraction and oppression, numerous studies have shown that mining communities are highly generative spaces, extending beyond labor movements. These spaces have created new forms of democracy, identity, sovereignty and temporalities.[41] The Fosbucra'a mines were a transformative space through which Sahrawi miners engaged with a democratically based system of organization and reliance that translated into directly outlining the democracy found in the SADR refugee camps today.[42] They were able to do so because of the unification and belief in a shared identity that Sahrawi leaders had not previously deployed and that Sahrawis in general did not believe existed until this period.[43]

This identity then becomes the key to understanding how the Sahrawi were empowered to violently resist the Spanish and later Moroccan administrations and explaining why the Sahrawi populace remains steadfast in their chosen exile. Research on the origins of the Sahrawi identity

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[39] Ferguson (1999); Donham (2011); Donham and Mofokeng (2011)
[40] See: Van Onselen (1976); Burawoy (1972); Van Holdt (2003)
[41] Mitchell (2012); Hecht (2014); Reno (1998); Hoffman (2011)
[42] Tony Hodges (2001)
[43] Semi-structured interviews. Dakhla Camp. Oct. 2016.

remains politically contentious, but generally agrees that the unification of so many nomadic groups into a one compelling nationalist identity was necessary as an anti-discourse to Spanish rule. On its surface, this argument appears to recycle problematic dualisms and base the Sahrawi identity solely on that which is not Spanish. However, the notion of unification due to the formation of dichotomies, such as colonizer/colonized and oppressor/resistor, did shape the overall formation of a coherent nationalist identity. Groups that can be identified as the precursors to Sahrawis were an aggregation of the Bafour, Zenata, Soninke and Saharan Sanhaja alliance, creating a lack of one clear answer to who the Sahrawi were prior to their 1884 colonial moment.[44] As the ultimate borderland along the outskirts of the Trans-Saharan trade route, no group called themselves Sahrawi prior to the 1950s.[45] As Joshua Castellino and Elvira Dominquez-Relondo explain, "one of the most visible complexities of identity with the western fringe of the Saharan desert is the nomadic nature of the population in search of survival, thereby preventing fixed 'territorial' links from crystallizing."[46] The political and social organization of nomadic identities and governing structures and their struggle have been central in understanding the complexities of this world region.[47] Therefore, when scholars assert that "before colonization, it was not possible to speak about the 'national identity' of the Sahrawi people" they are speaking to the fact that historians cannot measure a nomadic confederation by present nation state standards. Even the term "Sahrawi" derives from the Spanish Sahara and simply would have not existed before the mid-twentieth century.

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[44] Hodges (1983)
[45] Ghislaine Lydon. *On Trans-Saharan Trails*. (2009)
[46] Joshua Castellino and Elvira Dominique-Relondo. "The Identity Question: Who are the Sahrawis and What is their "home"?" Anouar Boukhars and Jacques Roussellier. *Perspectives on Western Sahara*. (2014) p. 159)
[47] Dawn Chatty, "Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 441-45.

Historians have described pre-colonial Sahrawi political organizations as adhering to nomadic clusters of governance that operated semi-autonomously. Pre-colonial Sahrawis were organized "politically and socially under chiefs competent to represent them" through the Eit-al-Arbain or Assembly of the Forty consisting of a government of forty members, elected amongst their own communities.[48] A regional gathering was rare, unless in times of severe insecurity as arid pastures required migrations in small groups. However, colonization, particularly the forced labor and taxation system, changed these structures in ways that historians are still striving to understand. These governing and societal structures suffered a radical transformation with the appearance of the Spanish, such as the role of sedentarization. The impact of forcibly drawing Sahrawis to metropolitan and sedentary life cannot be understated, especially during the 1968-1974 drought that caused the death of nearly half of Sahrawi camels, who were essential for their nomadic survival.[49]

Therefore, affirming the identity of the Sahrawi became a central theme in the Sahrawi struggle. In 1988 when Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO agreed to hold a three question referendum, fighting broke out over who would be considered a Western Saharan. Further, as an indication of how little scholars understand the vitality of Sahrawi identity, researchers and politicians have asked why the Sahrawi would not assimilate into countries that demonstrated solidarity with their cause, ranging from nearby Algeria to radical Cuba, and even extending to Morocco after the truth commission following King Hassan II's death. However, the answer lies in the fact that Sahrawis do not identity as Algerian or Cuban any more than they do Moroccan. They feel that to abandon their state is to abandon who they are as a people.[50] Many scholars have

[48] ICJ Ruling, Oral Arguments Vol. III. 1976. The Hague.
[49] Hodges p. 131
[50] Semi-Structured Interviews 20 October 2016. Dakhla Camp.

thus debated the identity of the Sahrawis prior to colonization as the topic has been seen by many as the key to unraveling who the Western Sahara rightfully belongs, as if such a thing existed.

Noting that the majority of research agrees that there continues to be little concrete evidence of a cohesive nationalist identity prior to colonization, the mines became a space for the formation of a collective identity through solidarity. As the Spanish government forcibly conscripted Sahrawi workers, the material culture at the mines solidified a shared identity and a subsequent moral economy.[51] Elias Mandala and Allen Isaacman argue that control over the labor process itself is the most fundamental terrain of struggle and the most appropriate approach for analysis. Labor is appropriated both directly and indirectly by the market and the colonial state. In turn, social relations within local communities seek to control labor. For example, White argues that phosphates became "key in a shifting terrain of struggle, playing a role both in terms of economic incentives and in weaving the socio-political fabric of colonial settlers and an increasingly sedentarized indigenous population."[52] The labor process then becomes the arena of the day-to-day struggles by individuals and communities to maintain autonomy.[53]

The type of labor that colonial officials conscripted Sahrawis to undertake generated identities meaningful to the individuals and the larger Sahrawi community through solidarity, resulting in political movements. Sahrawis were forced to abandon nomadism due to colonial legal and tax requirements that further constricted their movements. In a process similar to the corvée labor in Algeria and the British tax codes in Nigeria, these financial pressures significantly forced

[51] For other research on mines and the formation of identity see: "The Creation of Identity: Colonial society in Bolivia and Tanzania." Robert Jackson and Gregory Maddox; June Nash *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1993)
[52] White (2015) p. 345
[53] Elias Mandala and Allen Isaacman p. 276

Sahrawis into looking for work and education in the mining towns of Fosbucra'a.[54] Hodges and Philippe le Billon have closely detailed how "from this inchoate social formation, a nationalist movement developed."[55] Le Billion goes as far as to assert that "as Sahrawis recognized in this economic bonanza the prospect of an economically viable or even prosperous country, the assumption that Morocco was after their new-found mineral wealth served to mobilize resistance."[56] The space of the mines and the prospect of independence created a worthwhile cause for implementing their recent organization.

As evidence of the new development of this national consciousness, the Sahrawi national archives, currently housed in the SADR refugee camps begins in 1973. This year in particular marks the beginning of Sahrawi flight and resistance, and these acts of resistance brought the Frente POLISARIO onto the global stage. As Drury emphasizes, "the study of natural resources lends itself to theorizing the politics of nature and the politics of time."[57] The Sahrawi cause became unified with the production at the mines and Sahrawi history began with the mines. Thus, when pinpointing the starting point of Sahrawi political identity, the opening of the Fosbucra'a mines coincides both with production and with the Frente POLISARIO's newfound effectiveness.[58] This also explains why the Sahrawi continues to vigorously defend the natural resources they are displaced from controlling.

In this way, these miners represented the opposite of everything that the Moroccan government and public believed of Saharans: they were sedentary, they worked with

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[54] White (2015) p. 343
[55] Hodges p. 130 and White p. 343
[56] P. Le Billon, 'The Geopolitical Economy of "Resource Wars"', Geopolitics, 9(1) (2004), p. 18.
[57] Drury p. 119
[58] See: Joanna Allen (2016); James Fairhead (2003); Jeffrey Smith (2015)

technologically advanced machinery, many of them were literate, and they comprised the heart of a politically vibrant community that began to form a vibrant and powerful political identity.[59] Because of this, the Frente POLISARIO found within the Fosbucra'a miners the same cause and an opportunity to coordinate their repelling of the Spanish government. The majority of POLISARIO affiliated saboteurs were in fact young skilled workers in their early twenties, graduates of the General Alonso secondary school or of the Promocion Profesional Obrera who worked for Fosbucra'a as electricians, computer staff, and engineers.[60] The POLISARIO relied on the politically active organizational structures of the mines to carry out their acts of resistance in a way that would truly harm the Spanish government. In spite of the risks, Sahrawi miners perpetuated noticeable attacks. They lit several stations on fire, debilitated the conveyor belt, and set off blasts that left the Spanish company on edge, potentially contributing to their acquisition of the territory. The unified Sahrawi identity that these miners formed became so critical that they were willing to stake their survival on the autonomy of the Sahrawi confederation.

These rebels carried their fierce nationalism into Algeria as Morocco drove even the most committed saboteurs to flee to the refugee camp that would become their home for forty-two years. White notes that their particular form of nationalism, "has emerged largely as an idea among the working classes of the mining towns and struggle against Spanish colonization."[61] However, one of the most significant products of this period is that these miners formed such a critical polity that a staggering high number went on to serve in the exiled SADR government as ministers. Former miners comprise approximately one third of the current Sahrawi government.[62] Their experiences

[59] For more on labor and democracy see: Timothy Mitchell *Carbon Democracy* (2012)
[60] Hodges p. 162
[61] White (2015) p. 345
[62] SADR Ministry of Culture, 2016. Tinduf, Algeria.

and dedication at the mine not only created an internal political identity, but also inspired Sahrawi cohesion in a way that led to high rates of former miners being democratically elected. This memorialization will be explored in the next section.

Section III: Returning to the Mines

As aforementioned, following the announcement that station 7 and station 8 had been lit on fire by the Frente POLISARIO, the Spanish military police quickly concluded that the fire was an act of Sahrawi sabotage against the colonial administration. At first, the regional officers were stunned. They could not believe that the Frente POLISARIO, a newly formed group of student separatists, could possibly be responsible for carrying out such a risky operation that would entail conscientious planning and a complex execution. Higher ranking officers knew the impact that this event of resistance would have on a region that had been calling for independence, first quietly and then loudly, with the subtle backing of the United Nations since the 1957-58 insurrections.[63] In order to suffocate more violent resistance, Spanish officials launched a massive investigation into the event.

After examining the calcined apparatus at the two stations, the authorities finalized their investigations, realizing that the technical skill of the sabotage required an electrician. As Spanish authorities raced to catch the perpetrators, the POLISARIO commanded their men not to flee in order to take ownership over this event, forcing authorities to recognize the Sahrawis. By the time he learned that the Spanish military police were hunting for him, one of the electricians disappeared against POLISARIO orders, but the POLISARIO was determined to find him. They eventually uncovered his hiding place in a grara, an extension of bushes that can reach up to two meters high, south of El-Aiun. “You have two alternatives,” they told him. “You surrender, resist the torture

[63] Julain Delgado Aguado. *Morir por el Sahara.* (2001)

and deny everything for three days, which is the maximum time for interrogation, or we all flee to Zuerat."[64] Embarrassed by his cowardice, he claimed that he would allow himself to be detained but would resist.

For three days, a Spanish captain, a lieutenant, two sergeants and a Sahrawi tropas nomad named Mahamud tortured the electrician at the prison in El-Aiun. There was also a doctor, who stopped the beatings when the blows affected vital areas and monitored the electrician when he lost consciousness. Other prisoners reported that they could hear him screaming and believed that because he had not spoken, the torture intensified. According to one soldier's account, on the fourth day, the electrician gave in after officers resorted to sexual torture using the end of a broom handle wrapped in barbed wire. That very night the Spanish authorities arrested each miner that had assisted in the attack. After twenty-four hours of detention, the victims and saboteurs were drenched in blood, their confession confirmed.[65]

This event, and the many others that followed, demonstrate the communal cost of resisting Spanish and Moroccan rule, that bore immense significance in the critical 1973-1976 transition period and also into the future. In this way, the lived realities and social symbolisms of these Sahrawi resisters offers a glimpse into the cultural significance of the Fosbucra'a mines. Indeed, the Sahrawi cause subsists on memory, and the Fosbucra'a mines became a critical site for shaping this larger social conscious. Therefore, this section seeks to understand how violence at the mines both complicated Moroccan motivations and founded a memorialized historical discourse through the symbolism of resistance in a way that is still powerful today.[66] In this way, the mines became

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[64] Delgado (2001), p. 163.
[65] *Barbúlo, Tomás. La Historia Prohibida Del Sáhara Español.* Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 2002. p. 136-141; Delgado, Julián. *Morir Por El Sahara*. Malaga, Spain: Sepha, 2009.
[66] For further discussion on Ted Gurr's three-factor model of conflict onset, motivation, opportunity, and identity, see: T. Ellingsen, 'Colorful Community or Ethnic Witches' Brew?

a symbol of a colonial apparatus of power that Morocco was eager to seize and deploy, such as through the forced migration and settlement of impoverished Moroccan workers in the 1990s. This focus also responds to the continued presence of the Fosbucra'a mines in Sahrawi protests and political symbolism.

In 1976, the Spain administration recoiled from the Western Sahara several months early in spite of the Secretary General's pleas, stepping aside for rapid Moroccan military and economic expansion into the region. By February of that year, the Moroccan military promulgated human rights violations, such as the use of white phosphorus bombs and napalm, that have continued to remain central to the Sahrawi fight for the Western Sahara. Before the Frente POLSISARIO fully evacuated to Algeria, they coordinated one final large scale attack with POLISARIO members who had continued to hold out in Bucra'a and Smara. The remaining Sahrawi miners lit the largest coordinated attack of in-site bombs, debilitating the mines and the conveyor belt with damage that took the Moroccan government over a decade to undo. In these instances,

Fig 3.1: This image is a POLISARIO ad, memorializing the fifth anniversary of their flight from the Western Sahara.

Multi-ethnicity and Domestic Conflict during and after the Cold War', Journal of Conflict Resolution, 44(2) (2000), pp. 228 –249; P. Lujala, N. Gleditsch and E. Gilmore, 'A Diamond Curse? Civil War and a Lootable Resource', Journal of Conflict Resolution, 49 (2005), pp. 538–562; C. Arnson and W. Zartman, Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed and Greed (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2006).

violence "became a source of meaning and memoires that fueled the drive for independence."[67] This final attack cemented the importance of the miner in the Sahrawi political body.

King Hassan II's government viewed the mines as a form of legitimacy, an expansion of his historically preserved sovereignty, and the chance for profits in spite of a harsh market crash depleting the value of phosphates. In rebuilding the mines after the 1976 attack, the Kingdom began considerable reconstruction on a project that in two decades has not provided considerable returns.[68] Yet, in spite of Hassan II's assertions that phosphates had little to do with his interest in the Western Sahara, he committed the Moroccan government to rebuilding the mines, resettling hundreds of begrudging Moroccan workers at Bucra'a, and violating the ICJ's clear advisory decision in 1975.[69] Historically, Moroccan driven forced migration of impoverished Moroccan workers into Bucra'a, appears parallel to several settler colonial processes, from France in Algeria to British penal colonies in Australia.[70] For the recently independent Kingdom of Morocco, controlling the mines may have been less about producing a profit and more about presenting a symbol of progress, strength, and sovereignty to the Global North. Morocco was still recovering from its own period of colonial trauma and presenting a strong state in control of a wide portfolio of trading goods granted Morocco soft power in the post-World War II order.

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[67] White, p. 346

[68] Smith, Jeffrey J. "The Taking of the Sahara: The Role of Natural Resources in the Continuing Occupation of Western Sahara." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 3 (2015/09/02 2015): 263-84.

[69] Hassan II. *Le Défi: Mémoires*. Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1976.

[70] See: Elkins, Caroline, and Susan Pedersen. *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century : Projects, Practices, Legacies* [in English]. New York: Routledge, 2005. Nicholas, Stephen. *Convict Workers : Reinterpreting Australia's Past* [in English]. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Cooper, Frederick. "Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective *." *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 2 (2008): 167-96. Lorcin, Patricia M. E. *Algeria & France, 1800-2000 : Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* [in English]. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006.

The mines have thus remained at the center of the Western Sahara, demarcating a critical place-memory nexus. Indeed throughout the Sahrawi experience, colonial encounters are remembered, embodied, and forgotten in ways that stain memory studies.[71] Elizabeth Jelin emphasizes this tension between memory and history, writing, "memory, truth, and justice blend into each other, because the meaning of the past that is being fought about is, in fact, part and parcel of the demand for justice in the present."[72] For the Sahrawi, the spaces they were forced to leave continued to hold cultural and historical significance. Similarly, Pierre Nora's *Rethinking France* identifies how sites of memory are critical in weaving images, people, and facts into a larger history. As symbolic places, Nora explains that physical spaces, as markers, contain the remains of memory and proposes that these "sites" have been reduced to "commemorations of patrimonial heritage."[73] Fosbucra'a is such a place. Nora details that, "the relationship between historiography, heritage, politics, and memory sites encourages the development of thematic areas linked to identity, particularly national identity."[74] In this process, Sahrawi national identity was partially formed by this experience at the mines in such a way that impacted Sahrawi elections in the refugee camps as these miners went on to become politicians. These Sahrawi saboteurs achieved local fame and importance to the point that they have been elected at higher rates than any other group in SADR elections.[75] These miners were elected by a society of Sahrawis who trusted the symbolism and sacrifice that these workers had undertaken prior to the Sahrawi exodus in 1976.

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[71] Argenti 2007; Cole 2001
[72] Elizabeth Jelin p. 29
[73] Nora p. 32
[74] Nora p. 17
[75] Semi-Structured Interviews. Dakhla Camp. October 21 2017.

In this way, the Fosbucra'a mines and the struggle over the Western Sahara's natural resources embodied more than economic opportunities, to both Morocco and the Sahrawi, but rather represented colonialism and the chance for sovereignty. The struggle for Western Saharan autochthony hinged upon competing symbologies that continued to have meaning even after the Sahrawi became refugees.[76] For the Frente POLISARIO they were a theater on which they could publicly and meaningfully dismantle a symbol of colonialism and oppression in a way that inspired other Sahrawis and caught international attention. Symbolism of the 1976 human rights violations and following violence has come to hold immense cultural and political meaning for Sahrawi governing officials and the Sahrawi public. For example, when the Moroccan government disbanded and burnt down the Sahrawi protest camp, Gdem Izek, established outside of El-Aiun, the pain of this event has not faded. Rather, this experience has been memorialized, as each year Sahrawi officials hold a symbolic recreation of the camp. Hundreds of empty tents are set up to symbolize the protest camp and they are in turn violently burned in front of the media after a rally to strengthen the Sahrawi nationalist call to remember. Similarly, Sahrawi refugees hang images of Bassiri, the POLISARIO ideological founder and a Sahrawi hero killed by Spanish soldiers after a protest, throughout government buildings and at expositions. Sahrawis call the Berm—the wall and minefield physically separating the Sahrawi from their territory—the wall of exile in Hassaniya and the SADR arranges symbolic protests in front of the wall each month. The actions at the mines are equally symbolized, embodying a painful but critical period of political action that has inspired the continuation of this struggle.

Further, depictions of the mines as highly profitable have obscured the more culturally complex story of decolonial independence, resistance, and the creation of a Sahrawi national

[76] For more on Saharawi democracy and elections see: Alice Wilson (2016)

identity. This causality neglects the centrality of the mines in Sahrawi politics and oversimplifies the Kingdom of Morocco's own decisions by relating their policies to European colonial policies, solely driven by economic interests. Other scholars have insightfully addressed how land seizure is not always a product of economic needs, and can be a product of socio-cultural factors at play, and a number have focused on natural resources.[77] What these works share is their focus on how *Europeans* are only capable of the powerful cultural nuance that a civilizing mission requires. However, paradoxically Morocco similarly harnessed the tools of colonization that had been used to torture the Maghreb for nearly two centuries prior to independence. This argument thus responds to why the Kingdom of Morocco poured resources, civilians, and legal defiance into a project that required enormous rebuilding of infrastructure that has yet to pay back its costs.

For the Sahrawis, these acts of resistance represent an important glimpse into their political motivations and firm commitment to sovereignty. Studying the djemaa does not offer a conclusive view of the Sahrawi desire for sovereignty and contemporary research on the SADR non-violence policy overlook Sahrawi dedication to their cause. Non-governmental organizations that currently partner with the SADR, on whom the displaced Sahrawi people rely for survival, impose their policies of non-violence on the Sahrawi government. Thus, this transition period offers a rare glimpse into the beginnings of Sahrawi political expression and raw resistance. As Sahrawi protestors proclaimed in April, 2016, "Buying our resources means buying our pain, suffering, and

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[77] Zunes, Stephen. "Western Sahara, Resources, and International Accountability." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 3 (2015/09/02 2015): 285-99. Jeffrey Smith (2015). Erik Hagen (2015). James Fairhead (2001). Campos Serrano, Alicia. "Oil, Sovereignty and Self-Determination: Equatorial Guinea and Western Sahara." *Review of African Political Economy* 35 (2008): 435 - 47. Allan, Joanna. "Natural Resources and Intifada: Oil, Phosphates and Resistance to Colonialism in Western Sahara." *The Journal of North African Studies* 21, no. 4 (2016/08/07 2016): 645-66.

tears."[78] Natural resources are not a relic of the past life in the Western Sahara, but occupy a space in the imagination of contemporary Sahrawi youth who are losing faith in non-violent processes.

As previously mentioned, following their February 27th 1976 independence proclamation, the Frente POLISARIO began to organize one final act of sabotage at the Fosbucra'a mines in collaboration with the remaining miners. Just before leaving the Western Sahara forever or dying in the process, they agreed that the Kingdom could not benefit from their resources. An unknown number of miners used their technical knowledge, which would be employed again in the Zouerate mine attacks in Mauritania that largely caused the Mauritanian government's surrender. They set off to the momentarily abandoned mine to explode eight of the eleven command booths of the mine. In order to stop the Moroccan OCP, they succeeded in debilitating the conveyor belt so thoroughly that the Moroccan government was unable to resume production until 1986, asserting their legitimacy before the world.

Conclusion

Because of these socio-cultural and political ways in which the Fosbucra'a mines necessarily remain present in the Sahrawi political story, I have argued that this 1973-1976 period of phosphate mining remains a particularly generative space for investigating the articulations of resistance, identity, and practices of colonial administrations that were produced in historical relations between Spanish, and later Moroccan administrators and Sahrawi miners who became politicians.

Following nineteen years of war, a twenty-two-year old stalemate between the SADR and the Moroccan government dictates their precarious political relationship. Scholars of the Western Sahara have drafted histories as contested as the land itself, with the SADR wielding their

[78] "Sahrawi Protesters." El-Auin. 2016. WITNESS video.

autochthony against the Kingdom of Morocco's claims of pre-colonial fealty agreements. Meanwhile, nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the United Nations referendum force, MINURSO, poorly maintains the 1991 cease fire and provides basic needs for the one hundred thousand sixty-five thousand Sahrawi who are confined to their forty first year of exile in the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria. The Sahrawi government urges the international and academic communities to pay attention to this struggle because "if we could administer a nation-state in the harsh desert environment with very little resources, we can manage even more effectively with resources and in our own territory."[79] This research centralized the importance of local and international discourse and history in this conflict in order to provide a response to the current gaps about identity formation and the material culture of the mines as it relates to Sahrawi autochthony .

This article has attempted to reconfigure existing historical interpretations of a story of displacement to be rearticulated by labor relations in a colonial mining context in order to understand resource extraction in the past and present. In addition, by focusing on the use of concrete terms and imagery in the historical record to construct an environment, this research has the potential to make a significant contribution to the existing literature of mining in North Africa. Though earlier studies have examined the role of mineral rights, other meanings that arise from these complex spaces have been relatively understudied or taken for granted. I suggest that the quotidian life of a Sahrawi miner during these critical years may have implications far beyond the bounds of this one field site. By inventing new hybrid analysis of both the material and the cultural significance of mines, this project's attendance to the emergent political and memorialized forms

[79] Randa Farah. "Refugee Camps in the Palestinian and Sahrawi National Comparative Perspective." (2009) p. 81.

that miners utilized and continue to use can thereby potentially complicate and expand the existing literature on mining in displacement in the Saharan region in general. Further, this narrative addresses the deeper historical roots of energy conflicts in independence contexts throughout the continent of Africa.

In a separate justification, one pressing concern for recording these stories is to respond to the older Sahrawi generation's quotidian experiences, histories, and connections to space, which are fading for the younger generations. This is anxiety inducing for two reasons. For one, the older generations fear that if the dream of returning to the Western Sahara is realized, the younger generations will be unable to reclaim their former way of life. Even more concerning, older generations have noticed an eagerness in the younger generations to abandon their non-violence cause. SADR statistics show that over eighty percent of Sahrawi youths support abandoning non-violence as a policy and returning to war. However, the older generations who lived through the war with Morocco, are unanimously and staunchly against any return to violence. When asked to explain this divide, older Sahrawi men explain that the younger generation simply does not remember the brutality of the 1976-2001 wars. Remembering these contestations, these spaces, and what was lost is thus essential in order to preserve ways of life and commitments to realizing their cause of sovereignty without bloodshed.

These types of stories may plant the seed for historians, political economists and ecologists, and development studies scholars as the chain of explanation continues to go unsolved. How Sahrawis ended up stranded in the Algerian Sahara living off of food donations from wealthy first world countries, who are often the consumers illegally extracted Western Sahara phosphates, continues to be a story worth telling. In the meanwhile, as Australians and Americans continue to

fertilize their fields with this contested rock, Sahrawis continue to fight from refugee camps and a police state for their independence. This article is simply one more story on their side of the Berm.

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