

Western Sahara: The Last African Colony

- ❑ Location: NW corner of Africa. 284,000 sq. km
- ❑ Bordered by Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania.

Western Sahara- North-West Africa

❑ WS



Natural Resources

- ❑ Rich in phosphate, iron ore, nickel, copper, platinum, uranium, and others.
- ❑ Fisheries: The Atlantic coast (1400 sq. km. long) is one of the richest fisheries in the world.
- ❑ Oil and Natural Gas: potential.

Natural Resources

- ❑ Animals: Camels, goats, birds, foxes, ostriches, gazelles, hyenas, snakes, rabbits, etc. (although much of animal life has been destroyed by wars and drought)
 - ❑ Desert Trees, shrubs and plants and seasonal cultivation of barley, wheat, millet, etc.
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Historical Background

- ❑ The Arab Empire began its expansion from the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century.
 - ❑ In the 8th century Arabs from the East, conquered and spread to North Africa.
 - ❑ The population adopted Islam.
 - ❑ The Berbers and Arabs intermarried and established a flourishing civilization.
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Historical Background

- ❑ In the 13th century: arrival of Bani Hassan and Bani Hilal tribes (Yemen) in North Africa.
 - ❑ The people of Western Sahara are the descendents of these tribes and the local Berber, African, and Arab populations.
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Historical Background

- They were nomads and fierce warriors.
- Engaged in ghazzi or ghazu (raids).
- Lived in a harsh desert/arid terrain.

Historical Background

- Distinctive culture: They speak a special dialect of Arabic known as *Hassaniyyah* which is not Tashelhit spoken by Berber populations.

Historical Background

- Until the beginning of the twentieth century, tribes were divided:
- 1. Shorfa: noble (claimed descent from P Muhammad)
- 2. Ahel mdafa: people of the gun
- 3. Znaga or lahma: paid horma (tribute) to protector tribes (above).
- 4. Iggawen and maalmin (bards and craftsmen)
- 5. Abid and haratin (slaves and ex-slaves) attached to other tribes.

Political and Social Organization

- The people of the region, saw themselves as *ahel al-Sahel* or the Atlantic Sahara.
- Also known as *trab al beidan* (land of the Moors) a cultural region that crosses today's borders.
- Trab al Beidan included areas in southern Morocco, the Senegal river and the bend of the Niger in the south, and areas in the east
- They are all descendents of Sanhaja Berbers, Arabs and sub Saharan Africans
- Pastoral nomadism, trade caravans, fishing, raids

Political and Social Organization

- The main tribes in 19th and 20th century were:
- Rugeibat
- Izarguien
- Oulad Delim
- Oulad Tidrarin
- Ait Lahsen
- Arosien

Political and Social Organization

- By the mid 1930s caste and protection system was eroded.
- But loyalty to tribes remained.
- All tribes were represented in the "Assembly of Forty" or *Ait Arb'een*.
- Leadership of the Assembly rotated.
- Decisions were based on a unanimous vote.

Political and Social Organization

- *Khaima* or (tent): smallest unit. Each family lived in a tent made of camel and goat hair.
- *Freeg*: (group) around five tents made up a freeg, or bedouin camp, a socio-economic unit.
- *Mahsar*: (groups) A number of groups (freegs) assembled together, 20-30 tents.
- *Hasra*: The largest assembly of tents.

Political and Social Organization

- The leader was chosen on the basis of: kinship, courage, wisdom, eloquence, resources, flexibility and integrity.
- Responsibilities: Defense against external attacks, solving internal conflicts, and the regulation of relations with neighbors.
- The harsh terrain and nomadic organization was not conducive to the emergence of a stable supratribal state structure



Socio-econ & Cultural Life

- Pastoral nomads, seasonal cultivation, fishing and trading.

- The centrality of the camel (and goats):
 - Hair to make tents.
 - Meat, milk.
 - Transportation.
 - Trading activities.
 - Conflict resolution.
 - Leather goods, utensils and artifacts

Socio-econ & Cultural Life

- Customs ensured redistribution of wealth, e.g. *Limneeha*, *Rfoud allaban*.

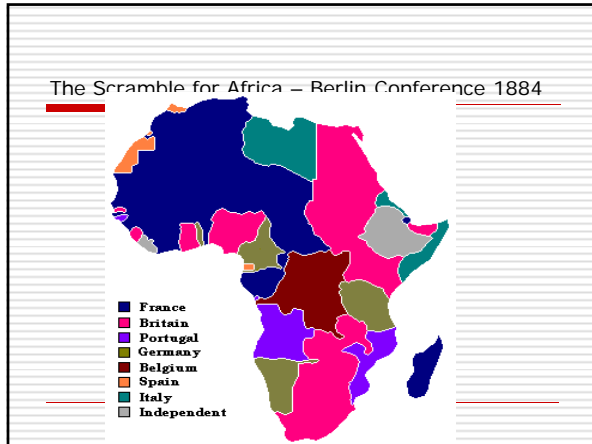
- Customs to resolve conflicts, e.g. *Irdha*, *T'argeeba*: Offering a camel.

- Celebrations, e.g. *al-'Urs*, *Al-Takhliya* (divorce), *Lisim*, *T'henni al-yad*.

The Berlin Conference 1884/5

- In 1884/85 European powers met in the Berlin Conference to partition Africa.

- Western Sahara was apportioned to Spain's 'protection.'



Spanish Colonialism 1884-1975

- December 1884: the Spanish army occupied Dakhla (named it Villa Cisneros).
- From 1500 – 1934 the (WS) Assembly organized the struggle against Spanish, French and Portuguese colonial ventures.



The French Connection

- ❑ **1958:** 'Ecouvillon' operation. Spanish and French military join forced to subdue Sahrawi resistance.
- ❑ All Western Sahara occupied by Spain.

Changes....

- ❑ Spanish colonialism destroyed much of the Sahrawi wealth and way of life.
- ❑ Forced sedentarization, contrary to their mobile way of life.
- ❑ The beginning of a Sahrawi national identity.

Changes....

- ❑ In the late 1950's there was an increased interest in WS's mineral resources.
- ❑ In the 1960s several exploration teams arrived looking for oil.
- ❑ But the most attractive was the rich phosphate reserve. 1.7 billion tons of high grade phosphate.
- ❑ In 1969 Spain established Fosbucra company (near the town of Bu-Craa).
- ❑ Spain began improving infrastructure to facilitate the exploitation and export of raw materials.

Changes...

- Spanish workers/settlers arrived. 1974 over 20,000 settlers
- 8000 Sahrawi wage earners, majority as unskilled laborers
- Growth of employment, trading and education (albeit v limited) and long periods of drought.
- Many Sahrawis abandoned pastoral nomadism by 1974 – population explosion and sedentarization.

Changes..

- Western Sahara with its administrators, soldiers, laws, schools and hospitals began to look like a country.
- Seeds of nationhood: all tribes faced the common denominator of Spanish colonial rule.
- Western Sahara now had its own governor-general responsible to the presidency in Madrid.
- In 1967, the Spanish authorities established a Sahrawi consultative territorial assembly known as the Djemaa – but they did not have legislative powers.

Changes..

- The presence of the djemaa created a sense of supatribal identity.
- A distinct Sahrawi colonial experience emerged.
- Morocco, however, claimed the territory and was not too displeased with the Ouragan operation (Ecouvillon)

The UN and conflict

- Dec. 14th 1960:** The United Nations adopted Resolution 1514 (XV), the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (right to self-determination).

 - 1961: Contrary to the UN Charter, Spain declares Western Sahara its 51st province.
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UN Resolution 1514 (XV)

And to this end Declares that:

- 1. The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation.

 - 2. All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development....
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WS at the United Nations

- 1965: The UNGA affirms the right of WS to self-determination.

 - Called upon Spain to end its colonial rule.

 - 1966: The U.N. ratified the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

 - Called for a referendum.

 - 1966: The OAU (today AU) called for the "freedom and independence" of Western Sahara.
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Sahrawi Resistance

- 1970: Demonstration for independence in the capital al-Ayoun (al-Zemla uprising).
 - During the uprising, the Spanish forces massacred civilians and arrested hundreds of citizens.
 - Bassiri, the national leader 'disappears'.
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The Polisario: Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el Hamra y Rio de Oro

- **10 May 1973:** The Polisario Front, a new national liberation movement is launched against Spanish colonialism.
 - Prohibited tribal affiliation and abolished hierarchies, called for equal citizenship and "women's liberation."
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The Referendum

- 1974: The Spanish government agrees to a referendum:
 - To **remain under Spanish rule**
 - Or, to opt for **independence**.
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Morocco and Mauritania's claims

- ❑ **1974:** Morocco (and Mauritania) make claims to WS.
- ❑ They requested that their claims be examined by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) through the UN.

The ICJ Verdict: 1975

- ❑ **"...the Court has not found legal ties of such a nature as might affect the application of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) in the decolonization of Western Sahara and, in particular, of the principle of self-determination through the free and genuine expression of the will of the peoples of the Territory."**

Morocco's invasion - 1975

- ❑ Morocco announces the "Green March" (invasion).
- ❑ King Hassan II orders 350,000 people to cross into WS – army behind.
- ❑ Condemned by the UN Security Council.

The Madrid Tripartite Agreement (1975)

- A secretly negotiated agreement is signed between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania (Nov. 14).
- Spain grants both Morocco and Mauritania *administrative* powers in WS.

Conflict and displacement 1975 -1991

- Moroccan and Mauritanian troops launch military campaigns.
- Saharawis flee the bombing (November 75-February 76).
- Eventually they cross into Algeria – Tindouf.

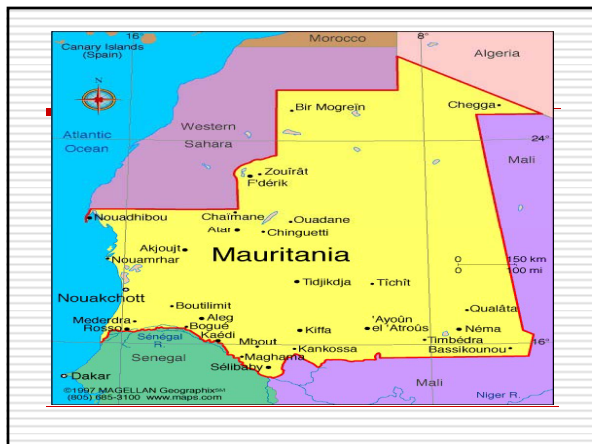


The State in Exile – SADR: 1976

- 1976: Spanish colonial presence officially comes to an end.
- On the 27th of February 1976 Polisario declares the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) – a state-in-exile.
- Morocco and Mauritania partition Western Sahara (April 14)

Guerrilla warfare

- The war spreads to Morocco and Mauritania.
- 1976 Umm Dreiga (Morocco bombs fleeing Sahrawis)
- Polisario fighters cross into Nouakchott and engage the Mauritanian army in a battle.
- 1979: Mauritania renounces its claim to WS.
- Morocco annexes the territory evacuated by Mauritania.



THE WALL (BERM)

- ❑ 1981: Morocco begins building 'the berm', a fortified wall.
- ❑ Approx. 2/3 of the area remains under Moroccan occupation and a 1/3 under Polisario.
- ❑ 1982 OAU admits SADR as a full-fledged member.

The Wall of Shame

- ❑ Morocco's 2,720 km long and 3 metres high wall, which cuts through Western Sahara.
- ❑ Made of rock and sand, barbed wire, millions of mines, trenches and radar detectors and soldiers.
- ❑ Morocco occupies two-thirds of the territory.
- ❑ Divides families and communities.



Cease-fire in 1991 and the failed peace plans

- ❑ A cease-fire declared in 1991. The 'Settlement Plan.'
- ❑ A United Nations Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was deployed in the territory to oversee the referendum set for January 1992, then 1996, then 1998, then 2000....

Morocco obstructs referendum

- ❑ Morocco sends thousands of **settlers** to the territory and attempts to rig voter's lists.
- ❑ Referendum failed despite several peace plans.
- ❑ The latest plan was in 2003 by James Baker.

Currently.. repression and uprising....

- ❑ The Sahrawi Intifada (uprising), brutal Moroccan repression.
- ❑ Stalement and tension continues...

Camps in the harsh desert

- ❑ Camps are located near Tindouf in the Algerian desert.
- ❑ One of the harshest and uninhabitable desert areas in the world.
- ❑ Temperatures in the Summer may reach over 50 degrees C.
- ❑ Sandstorms and wind can blow tents away.
- ❑ Every few years rains sweep the adobe huts made of bricks.

SMARA REFUGEE CAMP

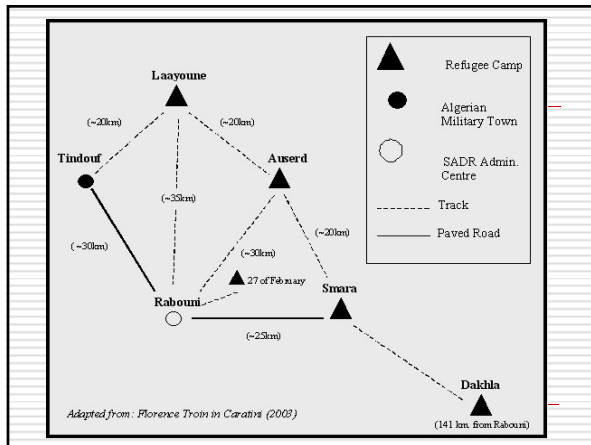


"unique refugee-citizens"

- ❑ Successful experience, because they took matters into their own hands.
- ❑ Political agency: Did not allow humanitarian organizations to reduce them to "refugees"
- ❑ A new historical narrative inscribed on the camp space
- ❑ Money as symbol of the missing sovereignty: 1000 Algerian dinars- Sahrawis use their own calculations based on Sahrawi dinars (20,000) which do not exist, but "object of desire".

Refugee Camps

- There are four camps/provinces and one smaller camp.
 - Smara
 - Al-Ayoun
 - Dakhla
 - Ausserd
 - '27th of February'.



The State in Exile

- Politically administered as a nation-state.
- The camp is called a Province (wilaya).
- Each province is divided into districts (daira).
- Each district is divided into a municipalities or neighborhoods (hayys).

The State in Exile

- P San Martin's article: how nationalism was reproduced "sedimented" by the structure of SADR in the camps.
- "routinized and hegemonic identity"
- Sahrawi nationalism under occupation meant to subvert attempts to hegemonize Moroccan identity.
- State functions symbolically.

Refugee Camps - Administration

- Each neighborhood is administered by a popular council.
- Camp committees in each district:
 - Education
 - Health
 - Industry (crafts)
 - Juridicial
 - Sahrawi Red Crescent

Refugee Camps - Administration

- Water cisterns, garbage barrels, and outhouses in each neighborhood.
- Areas allocated for livestock.
- Tents mostly those provided by UNHCR.
- Today, mostly adobe huts.

Refugee Camps – The state-in-exile

- ❑ On the 27th of February, the Polisario declared a state-in-exile, the SADR.
- ❑ Abolished the tribal system, prohibited all forms of discrimination based on color, gender, etc.
- ❑ Over seventy countries recognize SADR – most recently South Africa, Kenya.

Refugee Camps – The state-in-exile

- ❑ There are several Ministries.
- ❑ National unions for youth, women and workers.

Refugee Camps – Women

- During the war (1975-1991), women administered the camps.
- Men were at the battle front.
- Women enjoy a high degree of autonomy and respect.

Refugee Camps – Women

☐ National Union of Saharawi Women – NUSW

- ☐ Created in 1979 by the Polisario, today has 10,000 members.
- ☐ Directed by a National Committee.

Refugee Camps – Women

- ☐ Taboos against violence or abuse especially if directed against women.
- ☐ Married women especially are the 'queens of the tent'.

Refugee Camps – Education and Children

- ☐ Today in the camps one finds:
- ☐ Schools (up to grade six); skills training institutions and day care centers.

Refugee Camps – Education and Children

- To continue education, children are sent to study in Algeria and other countries.

- Some stay away from the camps for many years before returning to the camps.

Refugee Camps - Health

- Health care centers and a 'national' hospital.

- Today there are many Sahrawi doctors and nurses.

History, Territory and the Politics of Identity

- Stateless nation.

- The state in exile: the significance of territory in demarcating the state's sovereignty.

- The concept of "borrowed land" where camps are set up.

- The state functions symbolically? Do you agree with San Martin?

- Identity: how history/culture are instrumentalised in nation-building.
