



## Bourdieu's capital and insurgent group resilience: a field-theoretic approach to the polsario front

Claire M. Metelits

To cite this article: Claire M. Metelits (2018) Bourdieu's capital and insurgent group resilience: a field-theoretic approach to the polsario front, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29:4, 680-708, DOI: [10.1080/09592318.2018.1488407](https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1488407)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1488407>



Published online: 10 Aug 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 21



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# Bourdieu's capital and insurgent group resilience: a field-theoretic approach to the polsario front

Claire M. Metelits

School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC, U.S.A

## ABSTRACT

The conflict between the rebel group, the Polisario Front, and the Kingdom of Morocco is nearing its 43rd year. Though under-reported, the conflict itself garners attention for the resilience – some would say tenacity – of the ethnically Sahrawi Polisario Front. Despite shifting regional and international politics and the nearly 150,000 Sahrawi refugees waiting in nearby Algerian camps, the rebel group has survived. What explains its resilience? This article uses Bourdieu's 'forms of capital' to understand the Polisario Front's persistence. Based on field research in Algeria, Western Sahara, and the United States, it finds that social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital may provide an explanation.

**ARTICLE HISTORY** Received 12 January 2018; Accepted 18 May 2018

**KEYWORDS** Polisario Front; Western Sahara; Bourdieu; Capital; Morocco; Algeria; Spain; Insurgency; Resilience

Discussions and writing on the conflict in Western Sahara are often accompanied by such phrases as 'forgotten' or 'frozen'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the conflict that the Polisario Front wages against Morocco over this territory is one of the longest-running disputes in Africa's post-colonial history. The resilience of this insurgent group and its self-declared state-in-exile, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), presents a puzzle to those who study non-state armed actors and state-building. On a continent where armed groups splinter on a regular basis (i.e. the various South Sudanese rebel groups currently fighting the government of South Sudan, the myriad groups in eastern Congo, the various groups operating in North Africa), the Polisario Front remains largely united and, even after more than 40 years of crisis, garners substantial local and international support.

This paper takes a meso-level approach to the analysis of the Polisario Front through a discussion of the cultural, institutional, organizational, and social characteristics that contribute to the group's internal cohesion. It also examines the space the Polisario Front occupies in the international system,

and identifies the wider dynamics at play in explaining the group's continued existence. I argue that the Polisario Front's resilience can be explained by capital that the insurgent group and its state-in-exile – the SADR – acquires. I draw from Bourdieu's forms of capital and demonstrate how international and local resources facilitate the armed group's continued existence.<sup>2</sup> Capital can be found in such elements as networks with international organizations, bi-partisan support from wealthier countries, financial and material support from Algeria, the role that women play in Sahrawi society, governance of thousands of refugees who have lived for decades in Algerian camps, and the focus the rebel group and the Sahrawi state places on education, even while in exile.

This article contributes to understanding insurgent resilience. It does so by providing an application of Bourdieu's forms of capital that is both unique and useful for others who study armed actors. This project brings together concepts based in critical theory and applications to real-world problems. Critical theory and critical security studies are often criticized for their lack of problem-solving utility and for remaining marginalized from both policy and mainstream academic studies.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to balance the discussion on insurgent group survival, going beyond widely-held accounts such as greed and resource curses.<sup>4</sup> My hope is that this will spur a new direction of research on conflict and non-state armed actors.

More specifically, this article brings a unique approach to the study of the Polisario Front and non-state armed groups. An understanding of the Polisario Front's use of capital as a tool of resilience even amid outside actors competing for resources (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, illicit trading networks, etc.) can be helpful to those who study intractable or frozen conflicts. This study may also be useful in exploring alternative tools for the resolution of such enduring wars. In so doing I hope to contribute to understanding how rebel groups can weather inception, growth, and local and international challenges during war and exile. I also pose future research questions that are relevant to how types of capital may contribute to entrenched conflicts.

## Methodology

Research for this article was conducted using primary and secondary sources. I conducted first-person interviews with residents of the refugee camps and Polisario members in Algeria and Western Sahara. I also spoke with the Polisario's political representatives in Washington D.C. and New York City, as well as Americans involved in past negotiations between the Moroccans and the rebel movement. I interviewed lobbyists for Morocco, and political activists both in the United States and abroad. My time spent with a Sahrawi ambassador to the United States also gave me insight into the types of international networks the group engages. While I spoke with one

DC-based Moroccan involved in his country's politics, Moroccan government officials would not respond to numerous requests for meetings.

In addition to the testimonies of the Sahrawis, a large part of the background of Western Sahara and the conflict comes from secondary sources. This includes reports from international aid organizations, the United Nations (UN), human rights reports, and political analyses by academics who study the region. I also relied heavily on primary material from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Polisario communications to various international governing bodies, US government documents to include congressional testimony, as well as various news sites and Sahrawi blogs.

## **The polisario front and Western Sahara**

Western Sahara lies on the north-western coast of Africa and is directly south of Morocco, north and west of Mauritania, and west of Algeria ([Map 1](#)). Currently, the population in Western Sahara approaches 150,000. The people inhabit a desert that is comparable to the size of Great Britain or the American state of Colorado. Vegetation in Western Sahara is sparse, with the average yearly rainfall often reaching less than 5 cm per year, and sandstorms are common. The waters off the coast of Western Sahara offer quality fishing and the land holds significant levels of phosphates and other mineral deposits.<sup>5</sup>

The Polisario Front fights on behalf of the Sahrawi of Western Sahara. Sahrawi is Arabic for Saharan and is a broad political and geographic designation. The most accurate definition of the Sahrawi is a social grouping – one may call it a 'confederation' or 'tribe' – consisting of the Hassaniyyah-speaking peoples in and around the region of what is today known as Western Sahara.<sup>6</sup> The word 'Sahrawi' may not have been a distinctive identity prior to colonialism, as there is not a record of it registered prior to this period.<sup>7</sup> Sahrawis can be found in southern Morocco, western Algeria, and northern Mauritania. While all Western Saharans are Sahrawi, not all Sahrawis are Western Saharan natives, though few Western Saharan nationalists make such a distinction. Morocco usually treats the Sahrawis as merely another minority group within its borders, much like the Berber-speaking populations.<sup>8</sup>

## **Colonialism**

Spain made claims to Western Sahara in 1884, though European explorers and their patron governments initially showed little interest in the region; the advancement in naval technology meant that countries could circumvent trade or use force to alter the flow of goods through the Sahara to their advantage. Furthermore, the discovery of the Americas diverted Spanish attention from the area.<sup>9</sup> It was not until the European 'scramble for



**Map 1.** Western sahara today.

Source: <http://ontheworldmap.com/western-sahara/large-detailed-political-map-of-western-sahara.html>

Africa' during the nineteenth century that Spain's interest in Western Sahara ignited. Spain had a firm presence in northern Morocco, in Ceuta and Melilla. Southward expansion began when the government made claim to Ifni.<sup>10</sup> By the end of 1884, the Spanish government declared a protectorate over what became known as 'Rio de Oro' (Map 2). Spain's minimal coastal occupation of Western Sahara was subsequently recognized at the 1884–85 meetings of the Berlin Conference, which formally delineated the African continent's borders. Coastal occupation was recognized as 'extending into the interior'.<sup>11</sup> While the Spanish engaged with various anti-colonial forces prior to 20<sup>th</sup> century decolonization in Africa, it held onto its land through



Map 2. The Spanish occupation of western Sahara.

Source: <http://mapsof.net/western-sahara/western-sahara-walls-moroccan>

investments and what appeared to be the ability for select Sahrawis to consult on Spain's governance of the territory.

The 1960s brought a wave of decolonization and the spread of nationalist movements throughout the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, according to some analysts, Sahrawi nationalism owes little to the spread of nationalist movements, and more to the discovery of mineral reserves.<sup>12</sup> The discovery of phosphate in Western Sahara during the late 1960s increased Spain's desire to retain the region as a colony. By 1972, mining in Western Sahara looked as though it would gain a dominant position in the global phosphate market.<sup>13</sup> As Spain began investing in phosphate development, several Sahrawi resistance movements – claiming the resources as their own – began calling for

independence. Though Spain suppressed most these movements, one group – the Polisario Front – developed significant momentum.<sup>14</sup>

The Polisario Front began its war for independence from Spain in 1973. In 1974, Spain announced its decision to decolonize the area in a referendum. Morocco, in the wake of domestic turbulence, summarily annexed Western Sahara, claiming that it was merely restoring its territorial integrity that had been disrupted by French and Spanish colonialism.<sup>15</sup> Morocco was also interested in the area's natural resources and, fearing that the Sahrawis of Western Sahara would choose independence, requested an opinion on the matter from the ICJ on its own historical claim. A day after a UN observation team visiting Western Sahara reported that there existed overwhelming support for independence under the leadership of the Polisario, the ICJ announced that the Sahrawis' right to self-determination superseded historical and legal ties to Western Sahara between the sultan of Morocco and Mauritania.

The Court's conclusion is that the materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity. Thus 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.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after this judgement, Morocco's King Hassan II initiated a march of 350,000 Moroccan civilians into Western Sahara to claim the territory as its own. This event became known as the Green March for the green-coloured flags that represented Islam. With an ailing Spanish leader, Francisco Franco, and little prospect of UN Security Council support thanks to the Moroccan-allied and veto-wielding US, both France and Spain were compelled to negotiate with the king lest they face the prospect of war. In November 1975, Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania announced the Madrid Agreement whereby the latter two acquired administrative control over the territory.<sup>17</sup>

## ***Beginnings***

In many ways, the inception of the Polisario parallels other African independence movements. The group took shape out of Sahrawi students attending university in Morocco who met to discuss Western Saharan independence during the 1960s. While the insurgents were described early on as Marxists – a narrative often promulgated by Morocco during the Cold War to gain support for its occupation of Western Sahara – the group aligned itself with Islam under the leadership of El Ouali Mustapha Siyed.<sup>18</sup> One can argue that this outward link to Islam was an effort to garner support from similar

organizations in the area.<sup>19</sup> With Algeria's influence and support, along with Libyan supplies of Soviet weaponry and the group's relations with Cuba and other communist regimes in the developing world, the Polisario Front earned an unfavourable reputation among Western nations.<sup>20</sup> Yet, the group did not identify itself as Marxist, claiming its ideological focus was the decision of Western Saharans, not a 'vanguard party'.<sup>21</sup> In one of its more strategic moves, the founders of the Polisario decided to move away from traditional tribal structures and organize itself in a way that seemed more inclusive. Tribalism, they believed, would lead to factionalizing and thus could be an impediment to unifying the Sahrawi people. The group needed a pragmatic solution to the challenge that tribalism presented to the formation of Sahrawi nationalism.<sup>22</sup>

### ***The conflict with morocco***

When Spain seceded Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania in February 1976, the Polisario Front already had several years' experience fighting an insurgent war. Following the Madrid Agreement, an armed Moroccan-Mauritanian invasion forced nearly half of the Sahrawis in Western Sahara to flee to Tindouf, Algeria. While Western Saharan nationalists living in Moroccan-Mauritanian occupied territory (herein referred to as the Occupied Territory) faced repression, refugees in Algerian camps began building a society in exile.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Developing a state***

In 1976, the SADR declared itself a government-in-exile in Tindouf and established a governing body consisting of judicial, legislative, and executive branches. The highest office in the SADR is the president, who appoints the prime minister of the republic. The prime minister leads a cabinet called the Council of Ministers. The president appoints members of the judiciary. The legislative body is called the Sahrawi National Council (SNC). The SADR's constitution, which has seen several iterations over the years, upholds a separation of powers between the branches of government. The constitution also dictates that an independent Western Sahara will operate as a multiparty democracy, though until then the Polisario is the only party and remains entangled in the republic's structure.<sup>24</sup>

In many ways, the SADR reflects a participatory (though limited) Western-style democracy.<sup>25</sup> The leadership of the Polisario are elected in a secret ballot at a National Convention (also called a Congress) that is usually held every three years. The Convention is the highest authority of the Polisario and defines the coming year's diplomatic and military policies. More than two thousand people are chosen as delegates to



the National Convention.<sup>26</sup> The SNC possesses several checks on the power of the executive. Currently it has 53 members, 11 of whom are women.<sup>27</sup> Members of the SNC are elected by the voting public with universal suffrage for everyone age 18 or older.

There are 22 ministries within the SADR government as well as several individual ministers. The heads of these ministries do not sit for a fixed period of time. Instead they are subject to periodic parliamentary assessment. Parliament has the power to censure individual ministers or the government with a vote of no confidence, thus certifying accountability. The prime minister coordinates the work of the government and is accountable to parliament for the government's ministerial successes and failures.<sup>28</sup> Throughout its history as a state, the SADR has had two presidents. Mohamed Abdelaziz served as president from 1976 until 2016 when he died of cancer. Following the 40-day mourning period, 2,000 delegates representing Sahrawi civil society, as well as the Popular Congresses of individual camps, elected Brahim Ghali, a founding member of the Polisario and the ex-Minister of Defense.

At first, the model of state governance adopted by the Polisario and embodied in the SADR appeared to be an eclectic mix of socialist rhetoric and an emphasis on the region's Arab character. The Polisario created a narrative surrounding the SADR that portrayed it as an umbrella movement for all Sahrawi people who gathered for the same goal of independence no matter their political persuasions.<sup>29</sup> To its people, its internal organs touted inclusivity, equality, and respect for family and education. The Polisario proclaimed that Islam was the religion of the state and social justice was its goal; it claimed to support an individual's right to vote, attend school, and to have access to health facilities. Sanctuary was pledged for political refugees and the inferior status of women was denounced.<sup>30</sup>

According to the senior leader of a Sahrawi women's organization, the Polisario Front changed society quickly with its 'new ideas'. The liberation movement, she explained, worked for the Sahrawi people's dignity regardless of colour, gender, or political opinion. This was a new concept for the people and had a unifying effect.<sup>31</sup> Political participation had traditionally been limited to elder men. When the Polisario formed, it encouraged a broad spectrum of the Sahrawi people to participate. There was a union of workers, women's groups, and youth groups.<sup>32</sup> According to a SADR official, this style of governance allowed them to remain united and avoid fragmentation.<sup>33</sup> A group of former and current Polisario soldiers claimed that the founders chose democracy as a framework because they did not want people to divide into factions.<sup>34</sup> 'Because we are facing a challenge to [our] survival, we put aside tribalism' the official stated, 'Our tribe is our nation'.<sup>35</sup>

Backing from Algeria during the 1970s emboldened the Polisario, and the group was able to control a substantial amount of Western Sahara. By 1981, Morocco controlled only two enclaves: A triangular-shaped area in the far north-western corner of the territory around the capital al-Ayun, the phosphate mines of Bukra, and the city of Smara. The other area of control encircled the coastal city of Dakhla in the south.<sup>36</sup>

However, the Polisario Front's advantage began shifting as Morocco acquired financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and France (under Mitterrand) as well as the Reagan administration. Morocco expanded its control over Western Sahara by constructing a series of concentric defensive barriers that stretched from original enclaves. This strategy denied the Polisario access to southern Morocco and limited the group's ability to continue its hit-and-run raids. Upon completion of these barriers (often referred to as 'the berm'), the Polisario found it difficult to launch major attacks against Morocco except along the defensive wall itself (Map 1).<sup>37</sup> Still, while Morocco controlled approximately 80 per cent of Western Sahara, it could not defeat the Polisario without invading the southern areas of Algeria where the Polisario had its base – a clear violation of Algerian sovereignty. Likewise, the Polisario found that it could not hold territory against Morocco for an extended period and thus could not win a war of attrition. By the end of the 1980s, the two sides had come to a stalemate with a clear need for other alternatives.

### ***Ceasefire***

From 1990–1991, the UN Security Council approved a settlement plan that aimed to (a) negotiate a ceasefire; (b) repatriate Sahrawi refugees in Algeria; and (c) and hold a referendum where voters would choose either independence or integration with Morocco. The Secretary-General also appointed a personal envoy for Western Sahara to bring the parties to an agreement.<sup>38</sup> The UN also established the Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) whose members would act as peacekeepers during the transitional period in preparation for a referendum. Today, after numerous rounds of negotiations, the conflict remains at a stalemate, stalled in part because the sides cannot agree on how to determine who is Western Saharan and thus who can participate in the vote.<sup>39</sup> The five camps outside of Tindouf, Algeria now house approximately 150,000 refugees. Non-violent demonstrations against Morocco occur in both the camps and in the Moroccan-occupied territory often resulting in the arrest or disappearance of protestors. Meanwhile, MINURSO continues to enforce the 1991 cease-fire agreement.<sup>40</sup> In 2017, tensions briefly climbed when Morocco

crossed the berm and began paving a road from its position to Mauritania. Eventually, the Moroccans drew back.

### **The Polisario front's capital**

With a large proportion of its people living in refugee camps and with limited financial resources, how is it the Polisario Front has survived for so many years? The answer, I argue, can be found in the group's capital. Bourdieu's conception of capital represents a broad view of resources that exist in both monetary and nonmonetary dimensions. 'Capital,' he writes, 'in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and ... is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible'.<sup>41</sup> Bourdieu argues that the dominance of certain forms of capital characterizes different types of social fields.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it is not specifically the quantity of capital the Polisario Front has, but the type of capital it possesses.

The Polisario Front operates in two fields: the international and the domestic. The international field refers to the world of states, international organizations, and international law – anything that includes operation outside the realm of its constituency. The domestic field refers to the Sahrawi population living in the camps and the portion of Western Sahara occupied by Morocco. Some capital possesses more relevance in the international field, while others demonstrate comparatively more importance in the domestic one. The SADR presented itself as a liberation movement domestically that was both a democratic and social revolution, while abroad it portrayed itself as a non-aligned organization.<sup>43</sup> This strategy made the Polisario Front and its objective more palatable in the international arena. The establishment of SADR as a non-aligned state highlights the leadership's awareness of the region's political environment – and those in other parts of the world.

This section describes the Polisario Front's social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital and the group's ability to distinguish between the international and national fields as it acquires such resources.

### ***Social capital***

Social capital is the amount of actual and latent resources that can be summoned through membership in social networks of actors and organizations.<sup>44</sup> Social capital encompasses the world of social obligations that can be converted into economic capital.<sup>45</sup> According to historians, the Polisario Front made 'extraordinary efforts' in the field of public relations.<sup>46</sup> This early recognition of the need for a wide base of support developed into a characteristic of openness to foreigners and journalists. Early on, the

insurgent organization invited delegations from sympathetic countries to attend their celebrations and anniversaries, and escorted journalists to the 'liberated territory'. 'Without exception, what became a routine excursion into the Sahara was highly successful in terms of favourable reporting'.<sup>47</sup> The camps' accessibility to foreigners, and the Sahrawis' hospitality to visitors continues today.

The Polisario Front's ability to connect with outsiders while raising awareness for the Sahrawi cause helps it mobilize social capital. The Sahrawi story attracts foreign attention in many ways because it is the story of an underdog – a classic tale of David versus Goliath where the powerful, wealthy, and influence-wielding Morocco fights an exiled people who want the ability to govern themselves.<sup>48</sup> Over the years, NGOs outside of north Africa have raised awareness for the Sahrawi cause. During the late 1980s, several European Parliament members created Peace for the Sahrawi People, a group aiming to draw attention to the conflict. The group claims that the issue is nothing more than a de-colonization problem over a non-autonomous territory.<sup>49</sup> Peace for the Sahrawi People remains active, organising hearings, conferences, and visits to the refugee camps to keep the European Union (EU) community informed of the situation.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the US-based Defense Forum Foundation (DFF) raises awareness of the Sahrawi cause throughout Washington, DC. The DFF organizes junkets for politicians to visit the refugee camps.<sup>51</sup> Since 1993, it has sponsored 48 US Congressional fact-finding missions to the camps. These missions are composed of key Congressional staff members, journalists, humanitarian organizations, and other non-governmental organizations.<sup>52</sup> In 2017, a bi-partisan US Congressional delegation visited the Sahrawi camps to show the residents that American legislators had not forgotten about their situation.<sup>53</sup> The bi-partisan nature of support from the US Congress is important to the Polisario because it shows to its constituency in the camps that it has the attention of one of the most influential states in the international arena. Such trips also act as reminders to US politicians of the unresolved conflict.

The Polisario Front also accumulates social capital by channelling its message through popular culture. For example, well-known movie stars and directors such as Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz take part in the annual Sahara International Film Festival held in the camps, along with other Spanish actors including Pedro Almodóvar, Luis Tosar, and Victoria Abril, and Peruvian film director Javier Corcuera. Bardem also spoke on behalf of the Sahrawi at the United Nations.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the SADR's Secretary of State for Sport hosts an annual marathon, now in its 18<sup>th</sup> year. The group calls this 'an international sport event to demonstrate solidarity with the Sahrawi people'.<sup>55</sup> The race takes place every February and attracts runners from around the world.<sup>56</sup> Part of the

nearly week-long event is a tour around the camps where runners visit a school, a dispensary, and the Sahrawi History Museum, and attend a celebration of the anniversary of the Sahrawi Republic.<sup>57</sup> The marathon itself goes through all five camps and the surrounding desert to show race participants the reality of life in the desert.<sup>58</sup> The Polisario also accumulates capital through social media platforms. There are over 10 Facebook pages dedicated to the Sahrawi, their culture, or their cause. These include the Sahrawi Spirit, Free Western Sahara, Friends of Western Sahara, and the Sahrawi Civil Society Project. There are also at least seven Twitter accounts that address the Sahrawi issue, such as @saharawi, an account started by the founder and president of the Saharawi Women's Association in Europe, which raises awareness about the decolonization challenges of the Sahrawi; @SAHARAWIVOICE; and @novaws2016, an account dedicated to nonviolent action in Western Sahara. The ability of the Polisario Front to make use of popular culture and its ability to hold events that appeal to a wide audience helps raise awareness for its cause and creates a connection with foreigners who would not otherwise know of the Sahrawi.

Within the international arena, the Polisario emphasizes human rights abuses committed against the Sahrawi and carried out by Moroccan security forces. International monitoring organizations and high-profile supporters highlight mistreatment and mysterious deaths of Sahrawis. International figures testify before governments, writing reports that detail human rights abuses, lobbying for Sahrawi rights, and holding events that focus on the crisis in Western Sahara. International organizations such as the UN, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International publish reports, and some of their representatives testify to governments about the abuses. Working within her position as president of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, Kerry Kennedy visited Morocco-controlled territory in 2011. She later testified to the US Congress on the violations of human rights abuses she witnessed.<sup>59</sup>

To attract bi-partisan awareness of human rights abuses against the Sahrawi, the Polisario Front has developed a significant network in the United States, despite Morocco's alliance with this country in the 'war on terror'. The Polisario's ambassador to the United States takes a bi-partisan approach in raising awareness of the group's cause. The result is an often-rare cross-party example of US congressional advocacy. Democratic Congressman Donald Payne condemned the imprisonment of a human rights activist for meeting with American officials from the US Embassy in Rabat. He testified that several 100 Sahrawis disappeared after being arrested between the mid-1960s and the early 1990s and are still missing.<sup>60</sup> Republican Senator James Inhofe accused Morocco of 'continued violation of human rights' and asked that the Sahrawis living in the territory be treated 'with the dignity and respect all people deserve.' He cited reports that claim Moroccan authorities beat, arrested, and in some circumstances killed peaceful protestors in the occupied territory and called on Morocco 'to

stop this reported injustice immediately'.<sup>61</sup> In a demonstration of bi-partisanship, the former leader of the National Rifle Association – a right-wing organization in the US – David Keene, protested the abuse of rights in Sahrawi camps. In an opinion-piece, he described how Moroccan security forces broke up a peaceful encampment of Western Saharans inside Moroccan-occupied territory, arrested hundreds, and attempted to cut off communications and press access to the area.<sup>62</sup>

There are also several Sahrawi institutions within the camps that work to protect human rights. Sahrawi refugees established AFAPREDESA in 1989 with the purpose of monitoring the human rights situation in the camps, in the territory in Western Sahara under the Polisario's control, and in the area controlled by Morocco. According to reports, the association's primary goal is to monitor the state of affairs as it relates to the disappeared, or to prisoners of Moroccan security forces. The AFAPREDESA's work reminds outsiders of the conflict and the continued refugee status of the Sahrawis.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Symbolic capital***

According to Bourdieu symbolic capital presents itself as codified forms of superiority such as honor.<sup>64</sup> The Polisario Front accumulates symbolic capital from several key areas including international legal opinions on its right to self-determination through its state-like behaviour and through its recognition as a state by several countries.

### ***Legal superiority***

The ICJ's decision reinforcing the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination is the well-spring from which the Polisario Front gets most of its internationally sourced symbolic capital, even while Morocco continues to counter this claim.<sup>65</sup> As previously mentioned, following the ICJ ruling, Morocco marched approximately 350,000 of its citizens, accompanied by 20,000 of its security forces, into Western Sahara, 'to gain recognition of [its] right to national unity and territorial integrity'.<sup>66</sup> This event helped the Polisario Front accumulate capital because it added to the David vs. Goliath narrative, which the two parties to the conflict symbolized. Morocco was an aggressive, hostile country, while the Sahrawi (and the Polisario fighting on their behalf) were the righteous victims.

Legal backing for Sahrawi self-determination continues to be important for the Polisario's accumulation of capital. Several legal scholars support the decision of the UN and the ICJ. Omar argues that given that self-determination is considered international law defined and categorized by norms of the international courts and the UN, the denial of Western Sahara to actualize its self-determination is a crime.<sup>67</sup> Hanauer considers the Sahrawi to be in an advantageous position because they have the legal argument of self-determination on their side as a result of the Spanish definition of territorial

boundaries of Western Sahara.<sup>68</sup> In further support of its legal claim, last year a European court ruled that Western Sahara should not be considered part of Morocco in EU and Moroccan deals.<sup>69</sup> While the American government has withheld outright support for the Polisario's effort for self-determination, Washington, Madrid, and Paris have expressed their understanding of the need 'to address both the substance of a political solution and the means of achieving self-determination'.<sup>70</sup> US Senator Inhofe testified in support of the Sahrawi, saying that 'Theirs is a story of determination, persistence, and [I] hope that one day they will enjoy the basic rights all humans deserve – the right to life and to self-determination'.<sup>71</sup> In 2016, while providing Congressional testimony, US Representative John Conyers, who along with Rep. Joseph Pitts co-chairs the Western Sahara Caucus, claimed that 'the Kingdom of Morocco has occupied the Western Sahara in violation of both international law and Morocco's commitments to the United Nations'.<sup>72</sup> The legal backing for self-determination provides the Polisario Front with a substantial amount of symbolic capital. While more powerful countries such as the United States, France, and Spain have not made official statements in support of the insurgent group, the right to self-determination as determined by the ICJ has helped the Polisario amass significant amounts of tacit support.

### *If it looks like a state and acts like a state...*

Recent history is filled with examples of non-state armed actors assuming the role of a state. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), for example, created institutions within its organization that addressed humanitarian and social services.<sup>73</sup> The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), developed state-like institutions during the conflict with Sudan, and offered opportunities for under-represented groups in its control to participate in local decision-making.<sup>74</sup> At its inception, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) acted as an organizing structure for Colombian peasants in the rural areas. The group adjudicated local disputes, policed areas it controlled, and investigated criminal activity and weapons possession. The Colombian insurgent group also assisted in creating cooperatives that provided political education to locals.<sup>75</sup> Yet few groups appear to come as close to the level of state-like institutions, symbols, and behaviours as the Polisario Front. As discussed in the preceding pages, building both the formal and informal institutions of a state was a conscious choice on the part of the Polisario's founders.<sup>76</sup> A democratic-looking entity reduced the likelihood of factionalism within the organization. The strategy may also have been an effect of the environment in which the Sahrawi live. As one man remarked, in such a harsh environment you need the support of as many people as you can.<sup>77</sup>

The Polisario Front's state-like behaviour is demonstrated in the organizations that run the camps in Algeria. Neither the UN nor any other

humanitarian agency administers the refugee camps. Instead, the Polisario has taken on this job. Under the SADR, the Polisario organizes its people into five camps or *wilayas*: Aousserd, Boujdour, Dakhla, Laâyoune, and Smara. The SADR bases its administrative offices in the town of Rabouni, which sits just outside the camps. For administrative purposes, each *wilaya* is divided into 29 districts or *dairas* as well as 116 neighbourhoods or *barrios*. The people of each district and each neighbourhood within the camp elect officials to oversee these units. In turn, each *wilaya* is led by a governor who is nominated by the president of the SADR and must be elected by local delegates at the Congress of the Polisario Front.<sup>78</sup>

As further evidence of its 'state-ness', the Polisario has introduced Sahrawi coins. Produced in limited numbers, the coins are recognized less for their nominal value than they are for their commemoration of key events in Sahrawi history. 'They are not used in everyday exchanges, but kept as symbolic reminders of the will to have a "proper" Saharawi currency'.<sup>79</sup> The SADR also issued its first postage stamp in 1990.<sup>80</sup> Small acts like these create a sense of legitimacy for the SADR and the Polisario Front.<sup>81</sup>

The Polisario's strategy at the international level is the pursuit of diplomatic relations with other states. At one point over 80 states recognized the SADR as the legitimate government of Western Sahara. It is difficult to determine how many nations recognize the sovereignty of the SADR at present because several states have withdrawn or frozen their acknowledgement. These cancellations and suspensions are often the result of diplomatic pressure from Moroccan-allied states, economic incentives from Morocco, or a shift in a country's ideological leanings.<sup>82</sup> Some of the most outspoken support on the continent has come from the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. Former president Nelson Mandela and his successor Thabo Mbeki voiced support for the SADR, and the former visited the refugee camps and the Polisario-occupied territory of Western Sahara.<sup>83</sup> The Polisario gets additional capital in its status as a founding and active member of the African Union, and as a contributing member to peacekeeping efforts.<sup>84</sup>

### **Cultural capital**

While the Polisario Front's symbolic capital is a key part of its longevity, its cultural capital is equally important. Bourdieu describes cultural capital as a reflection of the contribution that education makes to the reproduction of social structures. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, is found in three 'states' or forms: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state.

The embodied state refers to capital achieved through work on oneself, necessitating the investment of time, a 'labour of inculcation and assimilation, costs of time, time which must be invested personally by the investor'.<sup>85</sup> Such capital comes in the form of formal education, which



requires the investment of personal time; it is acquired through the betterment of oneself and cannot be completed by anyone other than the individual. Thus, early investment in education is likely to draw more cultural capital. The Polisario acquires cultural capital through the formal educational institutions developed in the camps as well as the opportunities it affords minority populations.

Formal education for the Sahrawi people is important for the Polisario. The SADR's constitution mandates primary school for all Sahrawi children.<sup>86</sup> The SADR's Ministry of Education is in charge of 32,000 students and 2850 teachers. Each camp has various educational facilities and an educational committee.<sup>87</sup> The Sahrawi are distinct among international aid organizations for their high literacy rates, which is reportedly at 90 %. It has been widely reported by scholars and international aid groups that the Sahrawi in the camps have a level of education (measured by literacy rate and schooling) that is higher than most countries in the Maghreb.<sup>88</sup> The Polisario also supports a summer abroad program for students so that they may experience life outside of the refugee camps. Each summer, a select group of students between the ages of eight and 12 spend a summer with a host family in Europe.<sup>89</sup> The program, called *Vacaciones en Paz*, has been in operation for over 10 years and connects European families in a very personal way to the Sahrawi cause. Some of the host families visit the refugee camps to visit 'their children'.<sup>90</sup>

A further demonstration of the importance of education and inclusion for the Polisario is demonstrated in the schools for individuals with special needs. In 2002, the Polisario, under the auspices of the SADR, established such a school and today each of the five camps has a similar facility. These schools are one of the first such institutions to exist in refugee camps.<sup>91</sup>

The objectified state of cultural capital includes material objects such as writings and monuments. Such objects can be found throughout the refugee camps, such as the various monuments erected on the roads between the camps, in the Polisario's War Museum, and the Sahrawi History Museum. Cultural capital in its institutionalized state reflects institutional or legal recognition. This may include capital in the form of academic qualifications, such as a higher degree. The Polisario has been supportive over the years of acquiring graduate degrees when possible. Among the Sahrawi are engineers, veterinarians, and medical professionals. Many of the Sahrawi attend post-graduate institutions in Cuba. Sometimes these individuals return to the camps, as in the engineer who developed a hydroponic garden, or the animal doctor on staff at the chicken farm.

### *Sahrawi women*

One of the strongest features of the Polisario Front's cultural capital is found in the role of women in Sahrawi society. Women made up a small portion of

the insurgency during active fighting prior to 1991. Yet one of their greatest roles has been the construction of the refugee camps.<sup>92</sup>

According to scholars, the place Sahrawi women hold in society comes from the traditional construction of gender roles in Western Sahara. Recent research has shown the central part women play in nomadic societies where women retain a key role in socio-economic activities and the management of community and household resources.<sup>93</sup> Though the men are often the ones who own and manage livestock in nomadic communities, women are not necessarily excluded from this process. If they possess the economic means to do so, women among North African nomadic groups can purchase or inherit livestock and some manage local and political decision-making as they relate to the economy.<sup>94</sup>

Sahrawi women have noted increased levels of participation that they have acquired over the years from both their role in fighting for independence and by building the camps. In the beginning, the camps were almost exclusively female because men were doing most of the fighting. Women constructed schools and hospital tents, as well as tents that housed offices for civil society organizations.<sup>95</sup>

They were the ones who developed the organs of civil society and the camps' first political institutions. It was this unique position in a newly developing society which enabled the women to shift the Sahrawi community towards greater gender equality through moderate interpretations of Islam and the freedom enjoyed through their nomadic roots. This process gradually led to the partial erasure of traditional gender roles by way of a homegrown variety of Sahrawi modernity.<sup>96</sup>

In 1979, with the support of the Polisario, women in the camps founded the National Union of Sahrawi Women (NUSW). The NUSW mobilizes women and encourages economic empowerment by organizing micro-credit ventures. A micro-credit loan helped fund the first women's taxi cooperative, for example. Economic empowerment helps women gain independence and gives them a sense of societal contribution.<sup>97</sup> The NUSW receives funding from several international organizations including the UNHCR, the Federation of African Women, and the governments of Algeria, Botswana, Cuba, France, Italy, Mexico, Namibia, Slovenia, and South Africa. During the NUSW's national conference, there is a large contingent of Spaniards who stay with Sahrawi refugee families. Among those attending or funding the event in the past has been Spain's National, Basque, and Canary Islands *Institutos de La Mujer* (Women's Institutes); representatives from Spain's national socialist, conservative, and left-wing political parties and trade unions; major regional development organizations; municipal councils; national-level NGOs; local and regional groups of Friends of the Sahrawi People; Spanish women's organizations; and both the Spanish Support Network and the Basque Support Network for the NUSW.<sup>98</sup>

Sahrawi women hold constitutionally guaranteed rights equal to men and can run for any government position. Women also populate the Polisario leadership. The majority of decision-making at the *barrio* level are made by women, and at the level of *dairas* the ratio of women to men is approximately equal. Two out of five governors of *wilayas* are women, and females occupy about 30% of mid-level government positions.<sup>99</sup> In 2003, women demanded the creation of a secretary of state for women and social issues. In response, the Polisario developed the Secretary of State for Women's Promotion and Social Care.<sup>100</sup>

The Polisario Front's view of women and their roles have been noted by international organizations such as the UN, the World Food Program (WFP), and Oxfam.<sup>101</sup> The UNHCR's Refugee Women and Gender Equality Unit has stated that the case of Sahrawi refugee women's empowerment is an example of 'good practice on gender mainstreaming'.<sup>102</sup> Here we see how Western assumptions on gender and society are identified by international organizations and thus produce cultural capital for the rebel organization. This is not meant to imply that the Polisario's treatment and recognition of women is done merely to acquire the support of the international community. Nevertheless, the alignment of norms creates linkages between the two entities, which certainly works in the Polisario Front's favour.

The group also works to keep the Sahrawi youth in the camps engaged, hosting Sahrawi youth organizations and conferences. According to some, part of this is done to give the youth something to do once they are out of school. While this shows portions of civil society that their voices are valued, and while it contributes to the unity of the Sahrawi, it may reflect a concern that many of the camps' younger generation are getting restless and want to return to war.<sup>103</sup>

### ***Economic capital***

The last of Bourdieu's forms of capital is economic. For Bourdieu, one can acquire economic capital with anything that can be directly converted to financial resources.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, this represents the Polisario Front's weakest form of capital in the sense that independently it is only able to raise a small amount, while foreign organizations and governments provide the remaining resources.

The Polisario Front raises a small portion of economic capital on its own through fundraising efforts.<sup>105</sup> As described in the preceding pages, the Sahara Marathon is such a tool. Sahrawi in the camps also raise and sell chickens in local markets as well as vegetables that come from hydroponic gardens.<sup>106</sup> There is also a developing tourist industry in the camps:

The influx of visitors to the camps has contributed decisively to the development of a cash economy and petty commerce in two main ways. Firstly, by generating income for the refugee families in the form of 'presents'. It is estimated that each Spanish visitor gives to the host family an average of 200 Euros (the same amount

approximately that each child brings back to the camps after the summer stay in Spain). Secondly, it has facilitated the emergence of a small craft industry oriented to this 'humanitarian market'. In some respects, the refugee camps are a flourishing 'tourist' destination. In fact, the camps receive a much larger number of visitors than the Western Sahara under Moroccan control.<sup>107</sup>

Yet, the Sahrawi refugees remain dependent on humanitarian assistance. Food and medical supplies, for example, come from outside sources.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps the largest contributor of assistance in terms of resources is Algeria. Working alongside UN humanitarian agencies, Algeria helps in the development of road infrastructure, the provision of electrical power, health and education facilities, and bilateral assistance to refugee authorities.<sup>109</sup> Spain also provides large amounts of aid to the camps. According to a recent report, working through the WFP, Spain gave Sahrawi refugees nearly 10 million euros in 2014 and 2015.<sup>110</sup> In 2017, the European Union gave nine million euros of humanitarian funding, of which five million consisted of food aid that was distributed through the WFP.<sup>111</sup>

The WFP took over food support of the camps from Algeria in 1986. The organization contributes 125,000 food rations per month through 16 distribution centres throughout the five camps and targets malnutrition, anaemia, and stunting among residents of the camps.<sup>112</sup> The WFP reports that funding for the Algeria-based Sahrawi programs is decreasing.<sup>113</sup> Responding to such challenges, the WFP hosts donor missions, which include representatives from UN organizations and officials from other governments.<sup>114</sup> In the past, the United States has been a large donor to the WFP, and provided an emergency supply of one million dollars in 2017 to address the financial shortage.<sup>115</sup>

The Polisario's military armaments were drawn initially from captured Moroccan weapons, as can be seen in the Polisario's War Museum. Eventually, Algeria and Libya supplied a variety of Soviet-era weaponry.<sup>116</sup> While neither Algeria nor Libya provided figures as to the military support it gave to the Polisario, as Zunes and Mundy noted, it would not have been financially constraining to do so for the two oil-rich countries.<sup>117</sup> It is difficult to find the amounts of military aid the Polisario receives and from where it comes. With Algeria as its base, though, it is difficult to see any other country as its primary source of support. The modern land rovers and trucks that Polisario officials and soldiers travel in come from somewhere, and as scholars have noted, '...Polisario's political and military health was virtually guaranteed by Algeria'.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusion

As Bultmann describes in the introduction to this special issue, capital is dynamic; how capital manifests itself and is distributed reflects the social

world's make-up at any given moment.<sup>119</sup> The Polisario Front survives on several forms of capital and does so by adapting to its audiences and current international norms and politics. During its early years, the group recognized the need for a wider base of support. It invited journalists and foreign delegations and raised the attention of human rights organizations. Today, the Polisario's presentation as a non-aligned organization gives it the ability to attract social capital as we see in the support it receives from individuals and organizations on both the political left and right. Its ability to use modern and generation-specific technology such as social media allows it to reach a wider audience around the world, demonstrating an adept approach to capital accumulation.

The Polisario's symbolic capital comes from several elements, the most important of which is the ICJ's 1975 legal opinion on self-determination. And, while this ruling has not been so influential as to warrant outright support from such countries as the United States or France, it has justified the SADR's official recognition from numerous countries. This provides the Polisario with an active seat at many tables in the international arena, specifically the African continent. Likewise, by setting up the formal institutions of a state in the camps near Tindouf, the Sahrawis voluntarily remain in the camps and support the work of the Polisario Front. The social capital this brings the group helps it maintain unity.

Cultural capital comes from the emphasis the Polisario Front places on the opportunities for youth, women, and other vulnerable populations. The immense focus on acquiring an education – and in many circumstances a higher education – speaks to the group's desire to have a well-informed and skilled populace when it finally achieves its goal of independence. These elements also strengthen the Sahrawian identity, which aids in its support from local Sahrawi. Social services provide impressive points of discussion to outside entities who spread awareness of the state-like services the Polisario provides through the SADR.

Economic capital is the weakest point in the Polisario's resource portfolio. Libya and Algeria were early supporters, providing weapons, vehicles, land, and food aid. Over time large humanitarian organizations – with the financial backing of several states – took over the needs of the camps' population. Yet funds for humanitarian assistance decreases, and the question remains whether such a crisis will force the Polisario to return to active war with Morocco.

One could argue that the constraints of the sparse environment and limited notoriety during the group's inception determined later success in acquiring capital.<sup>120</sup> Capital is a reflection of politics, norms, and the interconnectivity of the international realm. The Polisario Front demonstrates its ability to remain flexible in its methods of accumulating capital and in the various types of communications in which the group engages.

A reliance on the Sahrawi population and the need to keep the group from factionalizing under tribal structures taught it to be careful not to align itself with any specific ideology or country. Its only stated objective was independence. As the war with Morocco continued and eventually came to a ceasefire, the group began making connections with various international organizations and high-profile individuals and devised unique ways to raise awareness. It also appropriated international trends and events such as the marathon and the film festival, and expanded its communication venue to social media. The resilience to internal and external upheaval is a continuous process of adaptation and risk. The Polisario Front weathered such upheaval as the Cold War, the 'war on terror', and the politics surrounding Moroccan allies. It has also responded to the needs of its people, providing women with a significant space in society and government, and supporting educational programs.

This brings me to several questions that further research may be able to answer. It is not clear whether distinct forms of capital are more important in insurgent survival (or survival of any armed group) than others. If the Polisario had twice the amount of economic support it does now, would it still survive if it did not have cultural or symbolic support? Does the focus on a specific type of capital point to weaknesses in armed groups? What capital is more influential to which audiences? And finally, further research needs to be done on how adding to or taking away from certain types of capital does or does not contribute to the intractability of conflicts.

## Notes

1. Farah, 'Western Sahara and Palestine', 20; Smith, 'The Struggle for Western Sahara', 545; Darbouche and Zoubir, 'Conflicting International Policies', 91; Human Rights House, 'Western Sahara'; San Martin, *Western Sahara*, 3; Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, xii, 256; NOVA, 'Group NOVA', 15, 23; Spencer, 'Western Sahara'; Gopalan, 'Frozen in the Desert'.
2. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 'Social Space'.
3. Hamilton-Hart, 'War and Other Insecurities'.
4. See Collier, 'Economic Causes'; Collier and Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance'; Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence*; Humphreys, 'Natural Resources'.
5. Jensen, *Western Sahara*.
6. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*.
7. Ibid, 93.
8. Ibid.
9. See note number 7, 99.
10. Reyner, 'Morocco's International Boundaries', 324.
11. Damis, *Conflict in Northwest Africa*, 10.
12. Thompson and Adloff, *The Western Saharans*, 17. Western Sahara is among the top three places on earth with commercially recoverable reserves (in addition

to China and the United States) and represents over 70% of the global supply. See Shaw, 'Top Phosphate Production'.

13. Gretton, *Western Sahara*, 21–22.
14. See note number 6.
15. Joffé, 'Sovereignty and the Western Sahara', 375. Observers have noted that over the previous two years, King Hassan of Morocco had been manipulating the kingdom's enduring claim to the region to strengthen domestic support for the monarchy. See Joffé, 'Sovereignty and the Western Sahara'.
16. International Court of Justice, 'Western Sahara Advisory Opinion', 100.
17. See note number 6.
18. *Jeune Afrique* no. 801; Thompson and Adloff, *The Western Saharans*, 139.
19. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 115.
20. Bhatia, 'Western Sahara under Polisario'.
21. Polisario's 3<sup>rd</sup> General Congress quoted in Barbier, *le Conflit Du Sahara*, 205.
22. Thompson and Adloff, *The Western Saharans*, 251. Cracks in this non-tribal unity may exist, as suggested by Zunes and Mundy who note that the Polisario officials' reluctance to let researchers investigate the power relationships among those of different backgrounds. This, they argue, suggests that tribalism continues to be a sensitive issue among Sahrawi nationalists. See Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 118.
23. See note number 6.
24. Thompson and Adloff, *The Western Saharans*, 249.
25. Ibid.
26. Mouloud Said, Interview with author, 6 December 2017.
27. Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'.
28. See note number 7., 24.
29. Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'.
30. Thompson and Adloff, *The Western Saharans*.
31. Fatima el Mehdi, Interview with author, 9 December 2017.
32. Ibid.
33. Mouloud Said, Interview with author, 7 July 2016.
34. Polisario Soldiers, Interview with author, 10 December 2017.
35. See note 26.
36. See note number 6.
37. Today, the length of the berm stands at 2700 km or 1,700 miles long. CIA, 'Western Sahara'. Accompanied by the Polisario Front, I visited a point along the berm. One can go only so far before reaching mined area.
38. The current envoy is Horst Köhler, former President of the Federal Republic of Germany.
39. See note number 6.
40. Ibid; Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'; Amnesty International, 'Morocco/ Western Sahara 2015/2016'.
41. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 121–22.
42. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', *The Fields of Cultural Production*, 165–81.
43. Thompson and Adloff, *The Western Saharans*, 250.
44. Anheier et al, 'Forms of Capital', 862.
45. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 243.
46. See note number 30.
47. See note number 7, 251.
48. Ibid.

49. Urruela, 'El Parlamento'; Le Marec, 'La Question Sahraouie'.
50. Benabdallah, 'The Position', 423.
51. Liebling, Charles, Interview with author, 16 June 2016.
52. Scholte, Suzanne, Interview with author, 3 September 2017.
53. Embassy of Algeria, 'U.S. Congressional Delegation'.
54. Castellanos, 'Javier Bardem'.
55. Sahara Marathon.
56. See note number 35, 25.
57. See note number 55.
58. Shafi, 'A Global Village'.
59. RFK Human Rights, 'Kerry Kennedy'; RFK Human Rights, 'Western Sahara'.
60. Payne, 'Getting to "Yes"', 3.
61. Inhofe, 'Getting to "Yes"', 13.
62. Keene, 'Our Friends'.
63. See note number 27.
64. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital'.
65. Morocco's narrative concerning its claim to Western Sahara is based on three elements: the historical ties of sovereignty between Saharan tribes and Moroccan sultans; colonial records and historical treaties that acknowledge Moroccan control over Saharan provinces; and Morocco's efforts to liberate several provinces from Spanish rule after 1956. See Maghraoui, 'Ambiguities of Sovereignty', 117. Morocco argued that in the nomadic context, tribal and religious connections dominated. See Knop, *Diversity and Self-Determination*, 134–35. In the government's view, control over Western Sahara would reconstitute an empire it lost at the time of Spanish colonization. See Dore et al, 'Self-Determination', 441.
66. Franck, 'The Stealing', 711–12.
67. Omar, 'The Right to Self-Determination'.
68. Hanauer, 'The Irrelevance of Self-Determination'.
69. Shaw, 'Top Phosphate Production'.
70. Secretary General of the United Nations, 'Report S/2014/258'.
71. See note number 61, 9.
72. Conyers, Jr., 'Tom Lantos Commission'.
73. Bruderlein, 'The Role of Non-State'.
74. Metelits, *Inside Insurgency*, 56.
75. See note number 7, 95.
76. Polisario Member, Interview with author, 7 December 2017; See note 34.
77. See note number 35, 81.
78. Oxfam, '40 Years of Exile'; Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'; See note 25.
79. San Martin, 'Western Sahara', 573.
80. Lippert, 'Sahrawi Women', 13.
81. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 123.
82. Ibid.
83. It has yet to be seen if the February 2018 regime change in South Africa will affect this backing.
84. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 124–25.
85. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 244.
86. Rivero Casado, 'Vida y Educacion'.
87. Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality', 20.



88. Pothoven, 'Helping and Hindering'; Mundy, 'Performing the Nation'; Herz, 'Humanity Journal'; Shafi, 'A Global Village'; Oxfam, '40 Years of Exile'; Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'. Though girls reported to drop out at a high rate as they get older to help at home or because female hygiene materials are not available. See Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Gender, Islam', 'Ideal Refugee Women', 'Protracted Sahrawi Displacement'.
89. Oxfam, '40 Years of Exile'.
90. See note number 79, 589.
91. See note number 87, 19.
92. Firebrace, 'The Sahrawi Refugees', 181; Caratini, 'Système de parenté', 443; Higgs and Ryan, 'Leaders in the Desert'; See also Harrell-Bond, cited in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Gender, Islam and the Sahrawi', 67.
93. Belloso and Azkue, 'Local Human Development'; Nunn 'The Importance of History'; Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'.
94. Lippert, 'Sahrawi Women'; Nunn, 'The Importance of History'.
95. Zunes and Mundy, 'Western Sahara'; Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'; See note 30.
96. See note number 87, 17.
97. See note number 35, 30.
98. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Gender, Islam and the Sahrawi', 70.
99. Mehdi, cited in Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'.
100. See note number 35, 30.
101. Mowles, 'Desk Officer's Report'; World Food Programme, 'Protracted Relief', 6234.00; World Food Programme; 'Protracted Relief', 10,172.02004; World Food Programme, 'Protracted Relief', 10,172.1; United Nations Executive Committee, 'Refugee Women and Mainstreaming'.
102. UNHCR, 'A Practical Guide'.
103. See note number 35, 81.
104. See note number 64.
105. See note number 35, 32.
106. World Food Programme, 'Assistance to Refugees'.
107. San Martin, 'Nationalism, Identity and Citizenship', 589–90.
108. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*; Dreven et al, 'The Everyday Reality'.
109. See note number 106.
110. Ibid.
111. European Commission, 'Algeria/Western Sahara'.
112. World Food Programme, 'WFP Algeria'.
113. See note number 106.
114. See note number 112.
115. World Food Programme, 'US Helps WFP'.
116. Bhatia, 'The Western Sahara'.
117. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 16.
118. Zunes and Mundy, *Western Sahara*, 9.
119. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', 242.
120. Ibid.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank those who assisted her in her travels. She also wants to extend many thanks to Aryn Keyel for her research assistance.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This project was funded by American University and the School of International Service Dean's Summer Research Award 2016.

## Reference

- Amnesty International. "Morocco/Western Sahara 2015/2016." Amnesty International, 2016. Accessed November 23, 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/morocco/report-morocco/>.
- Anheier, H. K., J. Gerhards, and F. P. Romo. "Forms of Capital and Social Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography." *American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 4 (1995): 859–903. doi:10.1086/230603.
- Barbier, M. *Le Conflit Du Sahara Occidental l'Harmattan*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982.
- Belloso, M. L., and I. M. Azkue. "Local Human Development in Contexts of Permanent Crisis: Women's Experiences in the Western Sahara." *JAMBA: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 2, no. 3 (2009): 159–176.
- Benabdallah, K. "The Position of the European Union on the Western Sahara Conflict." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17, no. 3 (2009): 417–435. doi:10.1080/14782800903339362.
- Bhatia, M. "The Western Sahara under Polisario Control". *Review of African Political Economy*, 28, no. 88 (2001): 291–298. doi: 10.1080/03056240108704536.
- Bourdieu, P. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Edited by J. Richardson, 241–258. New York: Greenwood, 1986.
- Bourdieu, P. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological*, 7 no. 1 (Spring, 1989) 14–25. doi: 10.2307/202060.
- Bourdieu, P. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Bruderlein, C. "The Role of Non-State Actors in Building Human Security." *The Case of Armed Groups in Intrastate Wars. Human Security Network Geneva*. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2000.
- Bultmann, D. "Analyzing the Cambodian Insurgency as a Social Field." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 2 (2014): 457–478. doi:10.1080/09592318.2014.904031.
- Caratini, S. "Système De Parenté Sahraoui: L'impact De La Révolution." *l'Homme* (2000): 431–456.
- Castellanos, M. "Javier Bardem Movies 2013: Actor Supports the Saharawi Film Festival." *Latinpost.com*, 2013. Accessed November 19, 2016. <http://www.latinpost.com>.

- [post.com/articles/2448/20130925/javier-bardem-movies-2013-actor-supports-saharawi-film-festival.htm](https://post.com/articles/2448/20130925/javier-bardem-movies-2013-actor-supports-saharawi-film-festival.htm).
- CIA. "Western Sahara." Report. *World Factbook*, 2017. Accessed January 2, 2018. [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_wi.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_wi.html).
- Clark, R. S. "The 'Decolonization' of East Timor and the United Nations Norms on Self-Determination and Aggression." *Yale Journal World Pub Ord* 7 (1980): 2.
- Collier, P. *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy*. Washington, DC: World Bank Development Research Group, 2000.
- Collier, P., and A. Hoeffler. *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001.
- Conyers, J., and L. John. *Commission on Human Rights: The Status of Western Sahara, & Human Rights Threatened, Self-Determination Deferred: The Status of Western Sahara*. US Congress: Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, 2016.
- Damis, J. J. *Conflict in Northwest Africa: The Western Sahara Dispute*. Vol. 278. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1983.
- Darbouche, H., and Y. H. Zoubir. "Conflicting International Policies and the Western Sahara Stalemate." *The International Spectator* 43, no. 1 (2008): 91–105. doi:10.1080/03932720701880049.
- Dore, I., R. R. Jerome Elkind, L. H. Lohia, and T. K. Smith. "Self-Determination: The Cases of Fiji, New Caledonia, Namibia, and the Western Sahara." In *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)*. 429–444. The American Society of International Law, 1988.
- Dreven, S., C. Poprask, and R. Rok. *The Everyday Reality of Sahrawi People: Living in the Exile*. Slovenia: Alliance of Liberal Democracy for Europe in the European Parliament, 2016.
- Embassy of Algeria. *U.S. Congressional Delegation to Visit Sahrawi Refugee Camps Next Sunday*. Washington D.C: Embassy of Algeria to the United States, 2017.
- European Commission. "Algeria/Western Sahara." *European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations*. Brussels, Belgium: European Union, 2018.
- Farah, R. "Western Sahara and Palestine: Shared Refugee Experiences." *Forced Migration Review* 16 (2003): 20–23.
- Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, E. "Gender, Islam and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival." Doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2009.
- Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, E. "'Ideal' Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the Sahrawi Refugee Camps: 'Good Practice' for Whom?" *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2010): 64–84. doi:10.1093/rsq/hdq023.
- Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, E. *Protracted Sahrawi Displacement*. Forced Migration Policy Briefing. Oxford: Oxford University, 2011.
- Firebrace, J. "The Sahrawi Refugees: Lessons and Prospects." In *War and Refugees: The Western Sahara Conflict*, edited by R. Lawless and L. Monahan. London: Pinter Publishers, 1987.
- Franck, T. M. "The Stealing of the Sahara." *American Journal of International Law* 70, no. 4 (1976): 694–721. doi:10.2307/2200382
- Gopalan, J. "Frozen in the Desert: Western Sahara and the Forgotten Conflict." *Harvard Political Review*, (2017). <http://harvardpolitics.com/world/frozen-western-sahara/>
- Gretton, J. *Western Sahara: The Fight for Self-Determination*. Vol. 1. London: Anti-Slavery Society and the Committee for Indigenous People, 1976.
- Hamilton-Hart, N. "War and Other Insecurities in East Asia." *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 1 (2009): 49–71. doi:10.1080/09512740802651102

- Hanauer, L. S. "The Irrelevance of Self-Determination Law to Ethno-National Conflict: A New Look at the Western Sahara Case." *Emory Int'l L Reviews* 9 (1995): 133.
- Herz, M. "Humanity Journal." Report. *Refugee Camps of Western Sahara*, 2011. <http://humanityjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/4.3-Refugee-Camps-of-the-Western-Sahara.pdf>.
- Human Rights House. "Western Sahara: Forgotten Conflict with Suffering People." Human Rights House Foundation, 2010. Accessed February 5, 2018. <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/14669.html>.
- <http://www.scribd.com/doc/24077787/RP-NDC-Criminalite-Sahel-novembre09>.
- Humphreys, M. "Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 508–537. doi:10.1177/0022002705277545.
- Inhofe, J. *Getting to 'Yes': Resolving the 30-Year Conflict over the Status of Western Sahara*. Pub. L. No. 109–104, US House of Representatives, US Congress, Washington DC: Committee on International Relations, 2005.
- Inhofe, J., E. M. Kennedy, and S. Brown. Letter *Letter to Condoleezza Rice*. Letter August 5 2008. US Congress, Washington DC.
- International Court of Justice. *Western Sahara Advisory Opinion*. 1975.
- Jensen, E. *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005.
- Joffé, G. "Sovereignty and the Western Sahara." *The Journal of North African Studies* 15, no. 3 (2010): 375–384. doi:10.1080/13629387.2010.520237.
- Johanna, H., and C. Ryan. "Leaders in the Desert: The Sahrawi Women of Western Sahara". *International Journal for Intersectional Feminist Studies. The Journal of Project Monma Research Centre* 1 (September 2015).
- Keen, D. *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Keene, D. "Our Friends in the Desert." *The Hill*, 2010. Accessed November 21, 2016. <http://thehill.com/opinion/columnists/david-keene/132259-our-friends-in-the-desert>.
- Knop, K. *Diversity and Self-Determination in International Law*. Vol. 20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Le Marec, J. P. *La Question Sahraouie Au Niveau Européen*. 2006. <http://www.arso.org/LemarecPE2006.pdf>
- Liljas, P. "There's a New Terrorist Threat Emerging in Western Sahara, and the World Isn't Paying Attention." *Time*, 2014. Accessed May 5, 2017. <http://time.com/3085464/theres-a-new-terror-threat-emerging-in-western-sahara-and-the-world-isnt-paying-attention/>.
- Lippert, A. "Sahrawi Women in the Liberation Struggle of the Sahrawi People." *Signs* 17, no. 3 (1992): 636–651. doi:10.1086/494752.
- Maghraoui, A. "Ambiguities of Sovereignty: Morocco, the Hague and the Western Sahara." *Mediterranean Politics* 8, no. 1 (2003): 113–126. doi:10.1080/13629390308010005.
- Metelits, C. *Inside Insurgency*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Mowles, C. "Desk Officer's Report on Trip to the Sahrawi Refugee Camp near Tindouf, Southern Algeria." Oxfam, 1986.
- Mundy, J. "Performing the Nation, Pre-Figuring the State: The Western Saharan Refugees, Thirty Years Later." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 2 (2007): 275–297. doi:10.1017/S0022278X07002546
- NOVA. "Group NOVA in Western Sahara." *A Pearl in the Desert: The Group NOVA in Western Sahara Project: Project Evaluation Report*, 2016. Accessed January 17, 2018. <http://novaws.org/en/index.php/2017/04/04/354/>

- Nunn, N. "The Importance of History for Economic Development." Harvard University, 2009. Accessed January 24, 2018. [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/nunn\\_are\\_2009.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/nunn_are_2009.pdf)
- Omar, S. M. "The Right to Self-Determination and the Indigenous People of Western Sahara." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21, no. 1 (2008): 41–57. doi:10.1080/09557570701828584
- Oxfam. "40 Years of Exile." Briefing Paper. Oxfam, 2015. Accessed May 10, 2018. [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/bp-40-years-exile-western-sahrawi-refugees-280415-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-40-years-exile-western-sahrawi-refugees-280415-en.pdf)
- Payne, D. M. *Getting to "Yes": Resolving the 30-Year Conflict over the Status of Western Sahara*. Pub. L. No. Serial No. 109–104, S. Chicago, IL: Committee on International Relations, 2005.
- Pothoven, C. M. "Helping and Hindering: The Role of the United States and United Nations in the Western Sahara Conflict." *Journal of Public and International Affairs-Princeton* 13 (2002): 145–163.
- Reyner, A. S. "Morocco's International Boundaries: A Factual Background." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1963): 313–326. doi:10.1017/S0022278X00001725.
- RFK Human Rights. "Kerry Kennedy Testifies before Lantos Commission on Western Sahara." *RFK Human Rights*, 2016. Accessed November 19, 2016. <http://rfkhumanrights.org/news/news/kerry-kennedy-testifies-lantos-commission-western-sahara/>
- RFK Human Rights *Western Sahara: Human Rights Violations Reported between January 1, 2015 and June 30, 2015*. Washington, DC: Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, 2015.
- Rivero Casado, I. "Vida Y Educacion En Los Campamentos De Los Refugiados Saharauis," 2012. <https://uvadoc.uva.es/bitstream/10324/4785/1/TFG-L%20291.pdf>.
- Sahara Marathon "Sahara Marathon," 2018. Accessed February 12, 2018. <http://www.saharamarathon.org>.
- San Martin, P. "Nationalism, Identity and Citizenship in the Western Sahara." *The Journal of North African Studies* 10, no. 3–4 (2005): 565–592. doi:10.1080/13629380500336870
- San Martin, P. *Western Sahara: The Refugee Nation*. Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2010.
- Shafi, S. "A Global Village." Report. *Refugees or Residents*, 2012. <http://aglobalvillage.org/journal/issue2/shafi/>
- Shaw, M. "Top Phosphate Production by Country." *Article Investing News Network* (2017). <https://investingnews.com/daily/resource-investing/agriculture-investing/phosphate-investing/top-phosphate-producing-countries/>
- Smith, L. E. "The Struggle for Western Sahara: What Future for Africa's Last Colony?" *The Journal of North African Studies* 10, no. 3–4 (2005): 545–563. doi:10.1080/13629380500336854
- Spencer, C. "Western Sahara: The Forgotten Conflict at Risk of Re-Escalation." *Newsweek*, 2016. Accessed November 2, 2017. <http://www.newsweek.com/western-sahara-forgotten-conflict-risk-re-escalation-459703>
- Thompson, V., and R. Adloff. *The Western Saharans*. London: Croom Helm, 1980.
- UNHCR. *A Practical Guide to Empowerment: UNHCR Good Practices on Gender Equality Mainstreaming*. Geneva: UNHCR, 2001.
- United Nations Executive Committee for the High Commissioner's Programme, Standing Committee. *Refugee Women and Mainstreaming a Gender Equality Perspective*. Geneva: UNHCR, 2001.

- Urruela, Á. "El Parlamento Europeo Frente Al Conflicto Del Sáhara Occidental." *Papers: Revista De Sociologia* 46 (1995): 107–120.
- Volman, D. "Foreign Arms Sales and the Military Balance in the Maghreb." In *North Africa in Transition: State, Society, and Economic Transformation in the 1900's*, Edited by Y. H. Zoubir, 220–221. Gainesville (FL): University Press of Florida, 1999.
- World Food Programme. "Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations - Algeria 6234.00. Assistance to Western Saharan Refugees," 2000.
- World Food Programme. "Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations - Algeria 10172.0. Assistance to Western Saharan Refugees," 2002. doi: [10.1044/1059-0889\(2002/er01\)](https://doi.org/10.1044/1059-0889(2002/er01))
- World Food Programme. "Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations - Algeria 10172.1. Assistance to Western Saharan Refugees," World Food Programme, 2004.
- World Food Programme. "US Helps WFP Provide Food Assistance to Refugees from Western Sahara in Algeria." News report. Brussels, Belgium: World Food Programme, 2017. Accessed February 28, 2018. <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/us-helps-wfp-provide-food-assistance-refugees-western-sahara-algeria>
- World Food Programme. "Assistance to Refugees from Western Sahara." Standard Project Report. World Food Programme, 2016. Accessed February 26, 2018. [https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/21685f5edfd94e62b17310834627d99d/download/?\\_ga=2.42511904.460072672.1519821598-1360243919.1518614257](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/21685f5edfd94e62b17310834627d99d/download/?_ga=2.42511904.460072672.1519821598-1360243919.1518614257)
- World Food Programme. "Spain Continues Food Assistance to Western Sahara." World Food Programme, 2017. Accessed February 26, 2018. <http://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/spain-continues-food-assistance-western-sahara-refugees-algeria>
- World Food Programme. "WFP Algeria Country Brief." Country Brief. Brussels, Belgium: World Food Programme, 2018. Accessed February 28, 2018. [http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp270710.pdf?\\_ga=2.11921841.460072672.1519821598-1360243919.1518614257](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp270710.pdf?_ga=2.11921841.460072672.1519821598-1360243919.1518614257)
- Zunes, S., and J. Mundy. *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010.