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Walking Through the Sahrawi Refugee Camps with Judith Butler

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Abstract: This article considers the role that irredentist nationalist Moroccan and Sahrawi discourses have played in the current stalemate in the negotiations in the Western Sahara conflict. Despite this, Morocco has seen a series of revolutionary and reformist movements prior to and in the wake of the 2010 Arab Spring. Although these movements have often been outmaneuvered by the Moroccan monarchy, they have managed to force a realignment of forces as exemplified by the Moroccan 2011 Constitution. I draw on Judith Butler's critique of identitarian discourses to suggest that women's rights may be a productive platform for Sahrawi women to establish equally efficient coalitions with other women in Morocco, and work to break the current stalemate.

Since 1976, a large number of Sahrawi men, women and children have been living in refugee camps located near the South Western border of Algeria with Morocco and Mauritania. These camps consist of row after row of mud-brick huts and canvas tents surrounded by the Sahara desert. The Sahrawis living in there depend on the subsidies provided by the international community, as there are practically no opportunities for gainful employment in the camps or the arid lands surrounding them. As the first generation of Sahrawis born and raised in the camps begins to reach adulthood, the lack of expectations and absence of a clear agenda for the resolution of the conflict continue to make life there all but unbearable. This article considers the role that Moroccan and Sahrawi irredentist nationalist discourses have had in the current stalemate. I draw on Judith Butler's critique of identitarian narratives and praise for coalitional alliances to review the different reformist movements that have taken center stage in Morocco in the last years. I contend that women rights should be one of the platforms on which Moroccan and Sahrawi activists articulate productive coalitions to promote democracy in the region.

The stalemated conflict has reached its fortieth year and, despite minor numerous efforts to redefine the positions of the two parties, little or no progress seems to have been made. As Stephen Zunes explains,

The Polisario appears to have recognized that by having signed a cease-fire and then having had Morocco reject the diplomatic solution expected in return, it has essentially

played all its cards. So there has been a growing recognition that the only real hope for independence has to come from within the occupied territory in combination with solidarity efforts from global civil society. (2013, 8)

These efforts from within the occupied territory are an attempt to turn its dynamics around by bringing the conflict to the area occupied by Morocco, rather than making the refugee camps the only focus of attention.

These efforts from within the occupied territory have translated in a series of clashes between Sahrawi peaceful demonstrators and the Moroccan police. In October 2010, a large number of Sahrawis congregated around the Gdeim Izik tent camp erected a few miles away from El ‘Ayoum to complain against what they perceived as economic discrimination by the Moroccan government. During the days prior to the forceful dismantlement of the camp, Nayem Elgarhi, a fourteen year old traveling in a vehicle that was trying to enter the camp was shot and killed by the Moroccan security forces. Large numbers of demonstrators were arrested when the police finally took down the camp. The number of casualties during the confrontations that ensued is still disputed: Moroccan authorities contend that there were eleven fatalities and one hundred and fifty-nine wounded among the security forces in addition to two casualties among the demonstrators (“Aujourd’hui Le Maroc” n.p.). The Polisario Front, on the other hand, stated that there were thirty-six casualties, seven hundred and twenty-three wounded, and one hundred and sixty-three arrested among the demonstrators alone (“Polisario demands...” n.p.). In the trials that followed the dismantlement of the camp, twenty-two of the demonstrators received sentences ranging between twenty years and life in prison. Independently of the veracity of the claims made by the Moroccan government and the Polisario Front, the violence unleashed during the Gdeim Izik confrontations was condemned in strong terms by the African Union, the United Nations and the European Union.

The Gdeim Izik confrontations were also the culmination of ongoing changes in the dynamics of the conflict within and outside the Sahrawi refugee camps. As Alice Wilson explains, the violence that erupted after the dismantlement of the Gdeim Izik camp put an end to the myth of the peaceful cohabitation between the Moroccan settlers and the Sahrawis living in the occupied territory. As some experts have indicated, it also signaled a growing impatience among the Sahrawi youth with the diplomatic approach to the resolution of the conflict that the leadership of the Polisario Front had promoted since the 1991 ceasefire (Wilson 133-35). Sahrawis critical with the Polisario Front inside and outside the refugee camps present two main alternatives to the official discourse promoted by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). On the one hand, the youth

connected to movements like the Gdeim Izik camp have advocated for “the displacement of the nonconformist actions from the political to the socio-economic sphere,” a displacement that has coincided but not converged with the February 20 movement¹ within Morocco (Gómez Martín 75-76). On the other hand, groups like the Khat al-Shahid have been calling for a return to armed struggle (Wilson 134).² Both movements understand themselves as a form of dissidence within the Polisario Front, a push for reform not a break with their leadership. Gómez Martín and Omet have referred to these movements as forms of “non-dissident dissidence” that are contributing to a re-articulation of the Sahrawi emancipation movement (218-20).

The gradual radicalization of the conflict and the possibility of a return to violence after twenty-four years of non-violent engagement on the part of the Polisario Front come at a particularly difficult time for the region. The uncertainty about the health of Algeria’s president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the instability in Mali, and the fear that the refugee camps may fall under the influence of radicalized jihadists from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),³ have contributed in recent years to shift conversations towards the need of securing stability in the area, even at the cost of ignoring the plight of Sahrawis.

This emphasis on the need of geopolitical stability tends to minimize the role of the Polisario Front and present the conflict as a proxy war for regional and international interests. Political scientist John P. Entelis has argued that the conflict over Western Sahara should not be understood as a clash between Moroccan and Sahrawi interests, but as a confrontation between Morocco and Algeria. As Entelis explains, “[f]rom Algeria’s intensely nationalistic perspective, Morocco’s annexation of the Western Sahara territory constitutes a direct challenge to Algiers’ claim as the dominant hegemon in the region and beyond” (10). The dispute over Western Sahara and Algeria’s support of the Polisario Front would have, according to this argument, contributed to create a buffer zone to contain Morocco’s ambitious plans to expand its frontiers after 1956, when the country reached independence. This view of the conflict has been criticized by Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy, who argue that this narrative exaggerates Algerian support in order to downplay Sahrawi nationalism. They explain that Sahrawi nationalism predates Algerian support of the Polisario Front, that weaker nationalist movements like Eritrea and East Timor have succeeded without the support of neighboring nations, and that Sahrawi nationalism would not necessarily be doomed to fail in the absence of backing from Algiers (31).

It is important to understand that Zunes’s and Mundy’s criticism of the emphasis on Algerian interventionism does not intend to deny the role played by Algeria in the conflict, but to avoid the

exaggerated emphasis on Algeria's role that has characterized Moroccan accounts of the events in Western Sahara. According to their account, although economic factors (i.e., the phosphate mines and possible oil reserves in Western Sahara) have contributed to the stalemate between Rabat and Algiers, the real reason behind their positions is that the national identity of both countries has been predicated on the resolution (or irresolution) of the conflict. In the case of Morocco, Western Sahara provided strong arguments for a "postcolonial national identity based on irredentism and the regime's need to consolidate itself, especially the monarchy" (Zunes and Mundy 35-36). Faced with the questionable loyalty of its army, the Moroccan monarchy found in Western Sahara the perfect long-term project to keep the military engaged. "Greater Morocco," Zunes and Mundy explain, "did not originate with the monarchy, but with Moroccan nationalist leader 'Allal al-Fassi'" (36). By supporting the aspirations of the nationalists and entrusting the military with the completion of this project, the Moroccan monarchy succeeded in controlling the two political forces that could pose a threat to its survival. On the other hand, "Polisario," Zunes and Mundy admit, "remains a part of Algiers' greater interests, not to mention a reflection of Algeria's self-image" (249). The success of the Green March in 1975 was perceived by the then president of Algeria, Houari Boumédiène, as a conspiracy on the part of Western powers to help redraw the map of Africa without consulting Algiers. Algeria's anti-colonialist nationalism could not easily withdraw its support for the Sahrawis without being perceived by its citizens as giving up on its foundational principles.

The frames of the Sahrawi conflict, however, go beyond the mere local (Moroccan/Sahrawi) or regional (Moroccan/Algerian) cleavages. The alignment of the United States with France has prevented the United Nations Security Council from effectively challenging Morocco's *de facto* occupation of Western Sahara. Furthermore, the interests held by Western powers in both countries, reinforce rather than erode the present stalemate. As Entelis acknowledges,

It seems very unlikely that a recommendation of regime change in both those countries that would usher in genuinely representative and democratic governments to power, ones more willing to resolve regional differences cooperatively and in a more transparent manner, would find any support in Washington today. (11)

The arguments presented by Entelis, Zunes, and Mundy suggest that the geopolitical interests of the different states that articulate the regional and international frames of war of the Western Sahara conflict may be better served by the irresolution of the conflict than by a negotiated end to it. The possibility that Morocco may strengthen its position in the region in the event that the Sahrawi agreed to become part of a Moroccan autonomous region is unacceptable for Algiers, as its

opposition to the first Baker plan in 2000 indicated. On the other hand, the possibility of an independent Sahrawi Republic as a result of a referendum as contemplated in the second Baker plan is unacceptable for Rabat. Similarly, neither France nor the United States are willing to pressure Morocco into a negotiation that may compromise their interests in the country, as evidenced by the request by several members of the United Nations Security Council and posterior veto by France for a human rights mandate to the MINURSO (United Nations Resolution 2218/2015).

The stalemate in which the Western Sahara conflict finds itself at present is particularly tragic, because the articulation of Sahrawi nationalism and its deployment as a tool to secure the wellbeing of the communities living in the refugee camps aimed to invoke the same international order whose geopolitical interests that, as I have been arguing, prevents its institutions from effectively protecting those communities. The birth of Sahrawi nationalism predates the abandonment of the territory by Spain, but its rapid and successful articulation in the period preceding the 1975 Green March and the rushed abandonment of its colony by Spain were certainly informed by the need of these communities to argue their case in terms that could be accepted by the international community. As I have argued elsewhere, the International community demanded that any claim for sovereignty be substantiated by the existence of a clearly delimited Sahrawi national identity (Campoy-Cubillo 151-84). Despite the appeals to the international community, Morocco and the Polisario Front ended up engaging in war. The war went on for more than fifteen years without ever reaching a clear tipping point that could indicate a possible victory for one of the sides. Morocco and the Polisario Front reached the conclusion that the stalemated war could not provide a resolution to the conflict and this was the main reason why they agreed to put an end to the armed conflict and engage in diplomatic negotiations. As Zunes and Mundy explain,

The only reason Polisario and Morocco entered into the UN peace process was the offer of a winner-take-all solution: a referendum on independence or full integration. Victory by arms had become impossible for Morocco and Polisario, yet the UN proposed victory by other means. The two sides' acquiescence to the 1991 peace process could rightly be described as a case of de-escalation. (26)

After twenty-four years of negotiations, the viability of a negotiated solution to the conflict remains elusive as the positions of the two parties involved continue to be irreconcilable and the international community continues to be unable or unwilling to force each party to agree on the conditions that could foster such agreement.

As my historical overview of the conflict suggests, one of the major obstacles to the end of this conflict is that the identity of each one of the parties involved (Sahrawi nationalism, as predicated by the Polisario Front, as well as Moroccan and Algerian nationalism, but certainly American, French and Spanish national discourses) are unable to articulate positions that favor conflict resolution without seemingly eroding the very identitarian foundations on which they stand. Western Sahara is, like many other border disputes, an identitarian stalemate in which the terms on which the conflict has been predicated secures the irresolution of the conflict. In what follows, I will draw on Judith Butler's analysis of the identitarian roots of conflict and her advocacy for coalitional identities as a possible way out of the current impasse in Western Sahara. My goal is not so much to propose specific actions, but to examine the benefits of reconsidering the identitarian axis along which the present conflict has been articulated. The irredentism of Sahrawi, Moroccan, and Algerian positions, I would contend, entails that none of the parties involved can substantiate its claims to national identity without directly questioning those of the other parties involved. It would be naive to expect Morocco, Algeria, or the Polisario Front to give up on their geostrategic claims to the territory, but an emphasis on coalitional positions that obviates, rather than emphasize, their traditional nationalist discourses may provide some much needed room to maneuver.

In *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* (2009), Judith Butler argues that "the fact that no subject can emerge without being differentiated has several consequences" (141). The first one, according to her argument, is that a subject can only appear inasmuch as it excludes other subject formations. The second one is that the subject needs to abject those aspects of oneself that fail to conform to the norm. The result of this process of compliance is that "the normative framework mandates a certain ignorance about the 'subjects' at issue, and even rationalizes this ignorance as necessary to the possibility of making strong normative judgments" (143). In other words, the clear-cut identity required for the self to be perceived as stable is predicated on the willingness to ignore the fact that the process of subject formation is constantly asking us to turn a blind eye to those daily experiences that contradict the stability of the subject at hand. Butler's argument is deeply informed by psychoanalytic interpretations of the mechanics of self-formation in individuals, but her main purpose in *Frames of War* is to argue for the relevance of psychoanalytic insights to conflict resolution among multicultural communities and in the international arena.

Butler uses the conflictive relation between Muslims and homosexuality as an example that, although these two identities seem to be equally exclusive, the exclusion of the other is constantly contradicted by the multiple situations where the common interests of both groups overrides the

supposedly irreconcilable differences between them. Most importantly, the experiences of the different individuals in each community often exceed the clear-cut boundaries by which they are identified. “What,” Butler asks, “if the very features that are ‘recognizable’ prove to rely on a failure of recognition?” (141). When we invoke the generic term (i.e., Muslims or homosexuals) we are invoking the normative framework against which these individuals are to be recognized, but failing to acknowledge the complexity of their existence. As Butler explains, “To say that there are rules against homosexuality within Islam is not yet to say how people live in relation to such rules or taboos, or how such rules and taboos vary in their intensity or centrality, depending on the specific religious contexts and practices at issue” (*Frames* 143). The norm should make the individual recognizable, but more often than not, it acts to obscure the true reality of the individuals that invoke it.

Individuals, like nations, are constantly struggling to give an account of themselves, to paraphrase the title of an earlier book by Butler, but such narratives always begin *in medias res*, as she explains: “I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know” (*Giving an Account* 39). Algerians, Moroccans, or Sahrawis are not alone in experiencing the frailties and contradictions of national self-formation, as practically all nations in the West and beyond are constantly engaged in exercises of national self-fabulation. If the frailty of national identity becomes more apparent in the case of Western Sahara, this is not because frailty is the exception to the norm, but rather because the trauma of colonization and the equally traumatic rushed decolonization undergone by Western Sahara have made the limitations of such processes much more apparent. In this sense, narratives that emphasize the fictional nature of Sahrawi nationalism by pointing at Algerian geopolitical interests or the relatively brief history of its existence betray a willingness to forget the fictional nature of the nationalist discourses that inform them.

By emphasizing the frailty of national narratives, I do not mean, in any way, to advocate for a postnational era. At risk of stating the obvious, it is evident that national identities play a very important role in how individuals and groups of individuals seek to defend their right to a dignified existence. Advocating for postnational positions in this context would certainly not be productive. Recognition and, consequently, emancipation, are the most crucial demands that an individual and the group to which one belongs can make to a state or to the international community. I contend, however, that the process of recognition that claims of citizenship entail is not static but dynamic. Since the necessary fabulation of the self is an ongoing process, recognition and claims of citizenship should also be understood as constantly evolving processes. As sociologist Tariq Moddod explains,

“To be a citizen, no less than to have just become a citizen, is to have a right to not just be recognized but to debate the terms of recognition” (qtd. in Butler 139). To the extent that recognition can be as alienating as it can be empowering, to debate the terms of recognition requires us to constantly redraw the lines of who the subject that is being recognized is. Butler mentions as an example of this re-articulation of the terms of recognition the coalitional Muslim gays and lesbians, such as the Kreuzberg bar SO36 in Berlin (Frames 146). When such coalitions occur, she argues, “they are bound together less by matters of ‘identity’ or commonly accepted terms of recognition than by forms of political opposition to certain state and other regulatory policies that effect exclusions, abjections, partially or fully suspended citizenship, subordination, debasement, and the like” (Frames 147). The example used by Butler, a Berlin bar where Turkish gay youth refuses to choose between the normative heterosexual identity dictated by their ethnic heritage and a supposedly more tolerant German culture may seem anecdotal. However, it speaks to the fact that coalitions are not only a matter of choice but are, rather, generated by multiple types of oppression. For the Turkish youth gathered at SO36, German liberalism towards their sexual orientation is the counterpoint of a deep-seated intolerance towards their ethnic heritage. As *Der Spiegel* reported on occasion of the assassination of eight Turkish immigrants and one Greek immigrant between 2000 and 2007 known as the “doner killings,”

The phrase “doner killing” is a sad indication of the degree of latent racism permeating German society. By calling the murder spree “doner killings,” the victims are condescendingly dehumanized, as if they had no names or occupations. Imagine if it had been a series of murders involving primarily Italian victims. Would we have then called them the “spaghetti murders”? (Kuzmany n.p.)

In this environment, gay and lesbian Turkish immigrants are a clear example of intersectionality: these immigrants are victims of homophobia and xenophobia. The coalition of gay and Muslim communities that the SO36 exemplifies is also a reminder of the need to relativize identity claims, or rather to embrace seemingly opposite positions simultaneously, in an effort to overcome oppression. I think it is important to emphasize here that the men and women in the SO36 are neither acculturating to German gay culture nor embracing their Turkish heritages at the cost of silencing their gay and lesbian identities. Embracing their sexual identity in a Germany that prides itself of tolerance towards gays and lesbians helps expand the notion of German citizenship that has often excluded Turkish minorities. Similarly, by embracing their sexual identity without abandoning their

Turkish heritage (an identity that, in any case, they are not at liberty of abandoning as the infamous “doner killings” made clear), they are also helping to expand Turkish identity.

Butler’s example of the SO36 bar may sound frivolous in view of the decades of suffering that the Sahrawi in the refugee camps and the occupied territories have had to endure. I would argue, however, that the coalitional position that she advocates can and has already been proved to promote reform in Morocco. In what follows, I will describe the different coalitional identities that have appeared in the Moroccan political field and consider the benefits that such positions may have to facilitate progress in the Western Sahara conflict.

Morocco has been the stage of one of the most interesting struggles for the emancipation of women in North Africa in the last two decades. The proposal of the National Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Development (NPA) presented by Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi in March 1999 triggered an intense debate between the secularist and Islamist sectors of Moroccan society. The NPA advocated for reform in education, health, economic development, as well as the political status of women in the country. The drive for the NPA originated in 1997 in a meeting between non-governmental organizations and representatives of the World Bank to discuss how to implement the Beijing platform for the equality of women. The World Bank advised the drafting of a plan of action for the integration of women that the Moroccan secretary of state for charities took upon himself to organize (Howe 165). This proposal was strongly opposed by Islamist sectors that considered that it disregarded the principles of Sharia law. In an article for the Islamists newspaper *Al-Tajdid* titled “I have been integrated into development for fourteen centuries,” Al-Fatemi argued “I refuse to let the World Bank manage the most intimate aspects of my life. I am a woman, not a bank account, and refuse to give the International Monetary Fund the right to interfere in my family life” (qtd. in Salime 83). Islamist opposition to the NPA focused for the most part on resisting what they perceived as foreign hostility to Islam, but some Lamine Reggala, president of the Islamist group al-Badil al-hadari, also critiqued the plan as a smokescreen to distract attention from the general reform of education also advocated by the World Bank that “undermine[d] public education in a country where illiteracy hits more than 60 per cent of the population” (qtd. in Salime 83). The struggle between secularists and Islamists around the issue of women’s rights led the latter to articulate its own feminist discourse. As Salime comments, these groups have competed with secularist feminist groups focusing on culture, rather than the legal system, understanding that the field of struggle was the control of public opinion without which any legal reform would be compromised (xvi). Islamist groups denounced the alignment of secularist

feminist groups with foreign institutions like the World Bank, whose policies had often been criticized by these feminist groups, but their efforts to coopt the secularist drive behind the NPA led them to articulate positions on women's rights that would have been unthinkable before.

In 2003, the Moroccan Parliament approved a new family code that, according to King Mohamed VI, respected both Islamic law and the international declaration of human rights. The willingness of the Moroccan monarchy to consolidate the image of Morocco as a modern country by reconciling Islamist and secularist agendas has also signaled the opportunity to expand the range of reforms initially undertaken. Although established feminist leaders were absent from the February 20 movement, the demands for increased freedom that characterized the February 20 movement that began in 2011 certainly benefitted from the struggle for women's rights that preceded it. The struggle between secularist and Islamist feminists, and the multiple coalitional platforms that resulted from it led the February 20 movement to seek alliances with the Islamists. Similarly, the issue of gender parity before the law that had been one of the central points of discussion during the debates about the family code, as *Zalime* explains, had now become an accepted platform for both secularists and Islamists within the February 20 movement ("Signs of a new Feminism?" n.p.). If Moroccan secularist feminist sought a coalition with institutions like the World Bank to move their agenda forward, the February 20 movement also looked for coalitions to reinforce their demands.

The movement that began in 2011 made many of the demands of the secular feminist their own. It also broadened its demands for a more democratic Morocco by including cultural rights in its original platform. The viral video that helped launch the February 20 series of demonstrations from 2011 on featured a series of young individuals stating "I am Moroccan and I will take part in the demonstration on February 20" in Arabic and Tamazight. The video was a powerful reminder that the demands for improvement from the Moroccan youth could not be separated from the demands for cultural rights from the larger Amazigh community. In her lucid analysis of the resurgence of Amazigh nationalism, Fatima Sadiqi reflects on how it destabilizes both Islamist and secular feminist positions. Berber heritage, a term that Sadiqi prefers to Amazigh, provides a referent to a pre-Islamic tradition while at the same time reminding us that women's agency in preserving and transmitting Berber traditions has been crucial in resisting other forms of oppression:

The prevalent assumption that the need to understand Islam is fundamental in understanding contemporary Moroccan life fails to address non-religious historical occurrences that have assisted in/been a primary motivating force in the shaping of the current state of affairs. The inclusion of the Berber dimension provides the

Moroccan feminist discourses with an authenticity which is not defined by anyone else but the people (women) who have been carrying it, an authenticity that is not necessarily rooted in the West or legal Islam. (240)

Sadiqi's call for a coalition of Berber and feminists positions reminds us that in the struggle for democratization that has characterized Morocco's recent history, coalitional positions "bound together less by matters of 'identity' or commonly accepted terms of recognition than by forms of political opposition to certain state and other regulatory policies," to quote Butler once more, have often been much more effective than irredentist positions (*Frames* 147).

The 2011 Constitution approved by King Mohamed VI included Tamazight as one of the official languages of Morocco together with Arabic. Despite its official status, Tamazight is still lacking a clear language policy, but the expansion of cultural rights in Morocco has contributed to consolidate Amazigh nationalism as one of the main interlocutors in the ongoing efforts to reform the country's political infrastructures.

I do not assume that a coalition between the Polisario and members of the February 20 could easily take place. As Gómez Martín indicates, the seemingly irreconcilable discourses of the Moroccan February 20 movement and the Sahrawi nationalist movement do not suggest that this may happen any time soon. Furthermore, the future of the February 20 movement is uncertain. Early reports that "the monarchy [was] prevailing in its battle with the 20 February Movement" have now, almost five years later, become common place (Fernández Molina 441). As Nicolas Pelham indicated recently, Morocco has managed to "dodge the Arab Spring" managing to outmaneuver the challenges posed by both the 20 February movement and the Islamists (n.p.).

The efforts of the diverse coalitions that resulted from the Moroccan women rights movement as well as the 20 February movement that followed it, however, were not futile. The political reform and the expansion of cultural and gender rights that the 2011 Constitution represent may have been designed to co-opt the revolutionary impetus of these movements, but have also resulted in a reconfiguration of the King's power.⁴ A Sahrawi feminist movement, however, one that is not focused on demonstrating the political correctness of Sahrawi nationalism but on working on specific issues shared by women in Morocco and Western Sahara, may offer much-needed room for maneuvering. Such coalitions, as Butler reminds us, concentrate on overcoming shared oppression in whatever form it reveals itself. I am not suggesting that a Moroccan/Sahrawi women's movement could single-handedly put an end to the conflict in Western Sahara, but this could be one of many coalitions to come if we are to imagine a future beyond the current stalemate.

Notes

¹ The Moroccan February 20 movement was started in 2011 by a group that called themselves Democracy and Freedom Now. In the wake of the Arab Spring demonstrations, the group launched a viral video in Arabic and Amazigh calling their fellow Moroccans to demonstrate to demand freedom, better education, labor and minority rights among other things. Although the Moroccan Minister of Youth initially reacted to the protests arguing that “this march is today manipulated by the Polisario,” King Mohamed VI ended up announcing “sweeping reforms” (qtd. in Lalami n.p.).

² The Polisario Front, echoed the call for a return to an armed confrontation after the 2007 congress held in Tifariti as indicated in the Security Council Report S/2008/251. As recently as 2014, Mohamed Abdelaziz, Secretary General of the Polisario Front, indicated in an interview with the Spanish daily *El País* that “[e]l pueblo saharai nos presiona y nos pide que tomemos el camino de la lucha armada inmediatamente” (the saharawi people pressures us and asks us to take the path of armed confrontation immediately) (Blanco n.p.).

³ A threat that Morocco has emphasized in an effort to erode present support to the Polisario Front, but the United Nations have echoed. In a In an April 2013 report to the 15-nation Security Council, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted “serious concern over the risk that the fighting in Mali could spill over into the neighboring countries and contribute to radicalizing the Western Saharan refugee camps.”

⁴ In the 2011 Constitution, Mohamed VI gave up his claim to divine rights and became the leader of the faithful.

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