



Western Sahara: Brief History



NORTH
ATLANTIC
OCEAN

MEDITERRANEAN

TUNISIA

MOROCCO

ALGERIA

LIBYA

WESTERN
SAHARA

MAURITANIA

MALI

NIGER

CHAD

SENEGAL

GUINEA

BURKINA FASO

NIGERIA

SIERRA
LEONE

COTE
D'IVOIRE

GUINEA

SENEGAL

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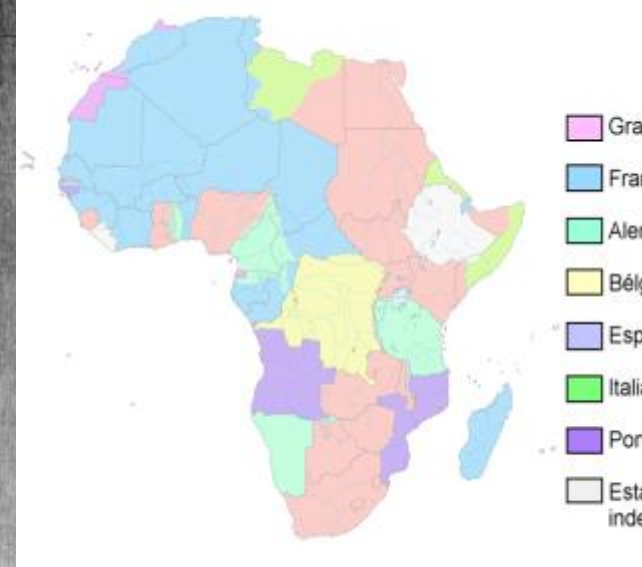
SENEGAL

SENEGAL

Learning outcomes

- To know “the bones” of a political history of Western Sahara and its continued conflict with Morocco

1884 Berlin Conference: Europe carves up Africa



The process of colonisation

- Before colonisation there were the nomadic, tribal 'children of the clouds' in WS
- A supra-tribal council, the Council of 40, brought Saharawi tribes together against external threats
- In 1905, a Saharawi tribal leader, Malainin, temporarily swore allegiance to the Moroccan sultanate in a war against French colonialists
- The Spanish colonisation was delayed and gradual, and was economically and commercially-focused.

The emergence of the Saharawi pro-independence movement

- Saharawis second-class citizens in their own country
- Waves of anti-colonial revolution across Africa inspired Saharawis
- UN decolonisation committee was pressuring all the European powers to decolonise



Mohammed Bassiri

- Saharawi Journalist
- Began the movement 'Liberation Front' (*Harakat Tahrir*) in late 60s
- They wanted a **peaceful** route to independence, cordially negotiated with the Spanish
- This is the last picture of him (taken in prison) before he disappeared

The Zemla “Massacre”

- 17 June 1970, pro-independence demonstration in Zemla Square, El Aaiún city
- 5000 Saharawis demanding gradual independence, by peaceful means
- Spanish Legion opens fire
- Several killed, tortured, imprisoned and forcibly disappeared
- Bassiri forcibly disappeared

Formation of POLISARIO

- *Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro*
- Constituted 10 May 1973
- Tawfa Saleh, “the militants of the POLISARIO used to wear a turban with frayed edges, which is how they could recognise who was with POLISARIO and who wasn’t. At that time, the women who had infiltrated the POLISARIO didn’t use make up, and they didn’t put henna on. They used to put one bracelet on, in POLISARIO colours. That was a way of understanding, because even among the Saharawi people, you may find some Spanish agents working for Spain, and you had to be careful.” (10 December, Auserd camp, Algeria).

The resistance movement grows

- POLISARIO makes economic targets. Takes control of large swathes of the pasturelands
- Other activists stole supplies for soldiers, organised protests, graffitied, petitioned their employers, teachers, colonial governors...

UN Visiting Mission, May 1975

- “...the Mission was able, despite the shortness of its stay in the Territory, to visit virtually all the main population centers and to ascertain the views of the overwhelming majority of their inhabitants. At every place visited, the Mission was met by mass political demonstrations and had numerous private meetings with representatives of every section of the Saharan community. From all these, it became evident to the Mission that there was an overwhelming consensus among Saharans within the Territory in favour of independence and opposing integration with any neighbouring country”

(United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), ““Report of the United Nations Visiting Mission to Spanish Sahara, 1975” in The Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” 1975, 59.)

Madrid Accords

- Secret and illegal agreement signed between Spain, Mauritania and Morocco in Madrid, 14 November 1975
- Spain would get 35% of shares from the phosphate mines, rights over fisheries, and compensation for repatriated Spaniards
- Moroccan and Mauritania would get control of northern and southern Western Sahara between them.

International Court of Justice

- 16 October 1975
- Morocco sought an ICJ opinion in order to give legitimacy to its invasion
- Court concluded in favour of Western Sahara's decolonisation, and for the self-determination of the Saharawis
- Available here: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=323&p1=3&p2=4&case=61&p3=5>

Invasion and exodus



State-in-exile formed

- 26 February 1976 Spain officially leaves WS
- 27 February 1976 POLISARIO declares the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Tifariti, POLISARIO-controlled WS



War: 1975-1991

- <https://news.vice.com/video/the-saharas-forgotten-war-full-length> (from 12:43)
- POLISARIO uses guerrilla tactics
- Defeat Mauritania in 1979
- Saudi, French and US-funded wall stops them
- Ceasefire 1999

PIC OF WALL

UN-led negotiations, 1991-present

- Morocco blocks referendum
- 2001 Baker Plan I
- 2003 Baker Plan II
- 2006 Autonomy Plan
- Diplomatic stalemate
- Now the Occupied Territories are the new (nonviolent) frontline...