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WSC Newsletter January 2021



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A word from our Chair:

Another year of struggle for justice for the Saharawi people. But a year like no other.

However in spite of our lives being dominated by Covid-19 there have been some major changes in the dynamics of Western Sahara.

The Saharawi people have had enough of the UN's failure to implement its own mandate so they blockaded the illegal gap in the sand wall at Guerguerat. Saharawi civil society mobilised to close the breach of international law. This saw Morocco break the ceasefire and MINURSO did nothing. The Saharawi People's Liberation Army acted to defend its people and attacked Moroccan forces based in occupied Western Sahara.

The brutal repression of the human rights of Saharawi by the Moroccan forces continues unchallenged. Particularly worry is the targeting of human rights defenders who advocate for the Saharawi people's inalienable right to self-determination and correctly assert that the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara is illegal under international law.

The UK government has signed a trade agreement with Morocco that will come into force on 1 January that will allow goods from Western Sahara to avoid import duty by being imported as Moroccan produce.

I'm proud that the Western Sahara Campaign has continued to raise these issues and tried to get the UK government to act to defend international law - even through Covid.

I'm also pleased that we are well placed to challenge any illegal acts at domestic or international level.

It has been a difficult year for all of us but I would like to thank you for spending some of that time supporting the Saharawi people's right to self-determination. It is much appreciated.

In solidarity.
Mark Luetchford, Chair of WSC (UK)

Trade, Guerguerat and the UK

The trade agreement with Morocco specifically includes Western Sahara. This has been designed to circumvent the ruling of the EU Court of Justice that products from occupied Western Sahara cannot be part of the EU's trade agreements with Morocco; a ruling that was incorporated into UK law. WSC has been corresponding with HMRC and the FCDO about the agreement. We are now waiting for the Statutory Instrument, detailing how the act will be applied, to be released, before we act.

WSRW has released Above the Law, an extensive report following trading in fish products and showing the efforts that the EU is taking to politically undercut the ruling. (See pages 4-5). Shipments have been tracked to Edinburgh.

The breakdown of the ceasefire in Western Sahara followed military action by Morocco in response to a civil action by Saharawi drawing attention to the increasing exploitation of their resources.

At the time of writing the UN Security Council has not yet met to discuss the breakdown of the UN brokered ceasefire. Nor have we seen evidence of the UK taking action. We need to raise this with MPs and put pressure on our government to act.

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WESTERN SAHARA CAMPAIGN UK
The Western Sahara Campaign works in solidarity with the Saharawi people to generate political support in order to advance their right to self-determination and to promote their human rights. Our role is to lobby the UK Government and the EU. You can help us to ensure the UK does not ignore the voice of the Saharawi people.



Follow the news about EU's illegal fisheries in Western Sahara



The EU pays Morocco to fish in occupied Western Sahara.

Guerguerat

Tired of stalemate, Saharawi support Polisario military action against Morocco.

The absence of a quick resolution to the recent flare-up in Western Sahara risks a wider regional conflict

Saharawi have praised the move by the Polisario Front independence movement to confront the Moroccan army, having had enough of a decades-long stalemate that has kept them from claiming sovereignty over the contested land of Western Sahara.

Tensions in the buffer zone of the North African desert region are still running high a week after Morocco launched a military operation to reopen a key highway at the Guerguerat border crossing between Western Sahara and Mauritania, which it said had been blockaded for weeks by Polisario supporters.

The Importance of Guerguerat

In the summer of 2016, UN operations in Western Sahara were thrown into crisis as Moroccan and Polisario forces engaged in a stand off at the Guerguerat crossing between the very south of the occupied territory and Mauritania. Morocco had entered the demilitarised buffer zone and started to build a tarmac road where there had just been a track across the desert. Polisario eventually withdrew its personnel after a UN assurance of a commission to look into the situation at Guerguerat, where the Saharawi said Moroccan activity constituted a breach of the ceasefire agreement of 1991.

Fast forward to this October. A group of Saharawi civilians from the camps established a permanent protest at the Guerguerat crossing where, again, Morocco was engaged in road-building activity. Traffic ground to a halt, forcing EU cargoes of fish to be shipped from Mauritania to occupied Dakhla for onward transit. On 13 November, Moroccan troops attacked the protestors, sparking a response from Polisario units outside the demilitarised zone. The government of the SADR declared the ceasefire accord to have been broken by Morocco. It withdrew its own signature and Saharawi fighters began attacking Moroccan positions along the 2,700km defensive wall. At the time of writing, those attacks have continued every day for three weeks.

Why is Guerguerat such a big deal? The answer comes in several parts. Let's start with the crossing itself. For some years it was an informal crossing that benefited everyone, enabling some low level trade and smuggling to and from Mauritania and family visits between Saharawi in the occupied territories and those in Mauritania or the refugee camps. But as Morocco has ratcheted up the economic exploitation of the occupied territory the crossing has developed into a significant commercial manifestation of that exploitation with up to 200 trucks crossing each day – hence the project to tarmac it and occupy by stealth the buffer zone. Moroccan and EU trucks use the crossing and, with the increased Gulf Arab (and likely Israeli) interest in the occupied territory, the Saharawi fear a major new campaign of resource stripping and colonisation.

Next. It was four years ago that the UN promised a commission to resolve the Guerguerat issue. Nothing has been done. And for 18 months the post of Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Western Sahara has been left vacant, meaning stuttering talks between the parties have fallen into abeyance and the Minurso peacekeeping force has been without leadership. And Minurso's mandate remains unrevised – the only post-Cold War mission without a human rights mandate. If these indications that the Security Council was according Western Sahara no priority whatsoever were not enough, as the 30th anniversary approached of a ceasefire that was always contingent on a referendum of self-determination, the October 2020 resolution of the Council did not even refer to a referendum. Reports of the Secretary General have reported growing frustration and anger in the camps over lack of progress, but the Security Council ignored its own observations, for members to then throw up their hands in dismay when that anger was channelled to military action.

Guerguerat is also strategically of great importance. Moroccan occupation or de facto control of the buffer zone would put it within 5km of the northern tip of Cape Nouadhibou, a finger of land just a few kilometres wide that shelters Mauritania's port city of Nouadhibou and its vital iron export terminal. The cape is divided north-south between Western Saharan territory on the Atlantic side and Mauritanian territory on the bay side. The Western Saharan tranche has been demilitarised since 1991. Troops stationed in the ruins of the town of Lagouira at the southern tip could reach Nouadhibou in minutes. Even the threat of controlling that piece of land would give Morocco blackmail power over Mauritania. One consequence of that would be that it could dictate Mauritania's policy on the Western Sahara, including trying to prevent Saharawi from traveling to and from the camps and repressing the large Saharawi population in northern Mauritania. In the 1950s and 1960s, Moroccan nationalist party Istiqlal militated for a Greater Morocco that would encompass the Western Sahara, Mauritania, bits of Mali, and chunks of Algeria. The invasion of Western Sahara saw part of that project accomplished by traditional military means. Effective control over Mauritania would see another part achieved by intimidation. And control over a tarmac road at Guerguerat would give Morocco control of a trade route from West Africa to the Mediterranean, a blow against its brother-enemy Algeria.

The timing of Morocco's move is worth a note. It comes while the US is a policy-free zone pending the installation of the next presidency. Another Security Council member – the UK – is anxious to implement a contentious post-Brexit trade deal with Morocco that threatens to give legal cover to UK firms plundering the Western Sahara. France, of course, remains Rabat's uncritical protector-in-chief. Although Moscow is posing as honest broker, its dealings likely have more to do with further enhancing its influence in the Maghreb than securing justice in Western Sahara. Meanwhile, in former colonial power Spain, the PSOE is in power and shows every sign of perpetuating the historic cosiness of the party's leadership to the Moroccan governing elite.

The dangers in the course of action taken by the Saharawi are great. The Moroccan army is large and armed with sophisticated US and European weapons and detection equipment. And the Saharawi population of the occupied territory is hostage to Moroccan government repression and potential arms-length pogroms. But the greater danger is judged to be national demoralisation and fragmentation amid apathy and cynicism in the Security Council.

It remains to be seen whether an untried generation of Polisario fighters can duck and weave around an ostensibly more powerful foe, as their fathers did. It also remains to be seen how quickly the international community realises that the instability generated by lack

of a just resolution in the Western Sahara has wider implications for security and trade in the Maghreb and the Sahel.

Toby Shelley

Human rights monitoring needed more than ever in Western Sahara Amnesty International

According to local organisations monitoring the human rights situation in Western Sahara, the Moroccan military operation in Guerguerat was followed up with a crackdown on Sahrawi activists by Moroccan police, including raids on homes, increased surveillance, and arrests.

Though no civilian casualties have been reported in the clashes, the latest developments are a stark reminder of the urgent need for an independent, impartial and effective human rights monitoring mechanism in the territory, as well as in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria.

For the past decade, the UN Security Council has been ignoring calls by Amnesty International and others to add **a human rights component** to MINURSO, which would allow for monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses, as is done by the vast majority of comparable UN missions around the world.

This is in addition to the fact that in recent years, access to the region has grown increasingly difficult for external monitors as the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate. In 2020, Moroccan authorities prevented at least nine lawyers, activists and politicians from access to Western Sahara. Journalists have also been denied access.

Read: **Human rights monitoring needed more than ever in Western Sahara | Amnesty International**

Above the Law

Extract from the WSRW report

The EU's tacit support for Morocco's exploitation and untenable claim to Western Sahara has been a cause of deep frustration to the people of the territory. Morocco's military response to a recent protest by Saharawis against Morocco's plunder of their land has led to renewed armed conflict, ending a UN-brokered truce of 29 years.

The European Union's highest Court ruled in 2016 that Western Sahara cannot be part of the EU's trade deal with Morocco. Yet the EU continues to import fisheries products from the territory, directly supporting Morocco's illegal claims to Western Sahara. The only adjustment the EU made following the ruling, has been to admit that they are doing what they used to.

Morocco has no sovereignty over Western Sahara territory, nor any mandate to lawfully administer it. Therefore, the EU Court of Justice (CJEU) ruled, EU-Moroccan treaties could not be applied to Western Sahara unless with the express consent of the people of the territory.

The report documents the EU Commission's willingness to accommodate Morocco's untenable claim to Western Sahara, by applying its trade agreement with Morocco to Western Sahara in almost the exact same way as before the CJEU's ruling of 21 December 2016. The only difference is that what had been the de facto inclusion of Western Sahara has now been made explicit.

The EU continues to engage exclusively with Morocco for the trade in products from Western Sahara:

- It accepts erroneous declarations of origin on customs documents and veterinary certificates issued by Moroccan authorities;
- It accepts the inclusion of companies within the list of approved establishments of Morocco;
- It waives customs duties on such goods;
- It actively hinders the gathering of data on the trade flow.

A lucrative part of the trade consists of the import of fishmeal and fish oil. In few other places in Europe is this more visible than a terminal in the port of Bremen: the centre for fishmeal imports to Europe. This report follows the routes of fishmeal from the occupied territories to Germany and shows that half of Morocco's fishmeal exports to Germany in 2019 actually came from Western Sahara.

The CJEU stated in its landmark decision that the Saharawi people have a right to self-determination, and therefore that their consent must be obtained for an agreement to affect the territory. So how did the EU approach this dilemma when negotiating the post-judgement agreement with Morocco? They stated it would be impossible to obtain consent from the Saharawis. Instead, the EU argued that even though - "available data is often fragmentary" - a new agreement would benefit what they refer to as the local economy. The EU did this even though the Court had specifically rejected the relevance of benefits.

Rather than seeking the consent of the actual people of the territory, the EU Commission held an exchange of information with 18 Moroccan operators and politicians who unsurprisingly agreed that a deal with Morocco would be beneficial. Despite manifestly failing to comply with both international and EU case law, a revised trade agreement covering Western Sahara was approved by Council and Parliament, and entered into force in July 2019. Not a single association advocating self-determination had taken part in the process.

The report reveals a document from the Commission showing how it manifestly misled EU institutions about who took part in the consultations on benefits. Literally all Saharawi self-determination groups in Western Sahara and in the diaspora, including their UN recognised representative, Polisario, objected to the EU-Moroccan agreement. However, all Saharawi letters condemning and rejecting the EU-Moroccan process were used by the Commission as proof of a consultation process. Only 16% of the groups and individuals listed as having been consulted had actually taken part.

The need to obtain consent has been completely ignored. The EU ignored its own court.

The EU is claiming its agreement is "without prejudice to the respective positions of the European Union and Morocco with regard to the status of Western Sahara." This is the root

of the problem. All the way from the conceptualisation of a revised trade deal, to the negotiations and their conclusion, and in its current implementation – this has been about the EU and Morocco. Through its trade agreement with Morocco for a land that is not recognised by a single country as Moroccan sovereign territory, the EU is a key supporter of the illegal Moroccan claims to the territory.

The only party that legally ought to have a decisive say in this matter - the actual people of the territory, the Saharawi people, whose right to self-determination is recognised internationally – have never had a say at all.

The conflict over the last colony in Africa is yet to be resolved. The scramble for the territory's resources remains a fundamental reason why the oppressed Saharawi people have been unable to exercise their right to decide their own future.

The continued exploitation has become a tangible obstacle to the peace process. As Morocco is allowed to profit from its illegal presence, it is hard for Saharawis - bearing the brunt of the occupation or living in harsh conditions in desert-based refugee camps - to keep faith in the UN peacemakers. Several UN Special Envoys to the conflict have put the question of the territory's resources on the agenda of peace talks – talks in which Morocco refuses to genuinely engage.

"The said judgment states that an agreement with Morocco covering the territory of Western Sahara must receive the consent of the people of Western Sahara. Consequently, Sweden made clear in the national statement that we understood "the people concerned" to be "the people of Western Sahara," in line with the judgment.[...] In view of the rejections to the consultation process and/or the draft agreement, and particularly the objections of Polisario, the official representative of the people of Western Sahara in the UN process, Sweden is not satisfied that the outcome of the consultation process can be said to constitute the free and informed consent of the people of Western Sahara."
Government of Sweden upon abstaining on vote on EU-Morocco trade agreement, 30 July 2018.

Download the report Above the Law

Address to the Human Rights Council

Dear Delegates and Representatives,

It is an honour to be speaking in front of you all today on behalf of 178 NGOs across the world, supporting the people of Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, in their quest for peace and justice.

We are here to discuss human rights, inequalities and poverty faced by the world population. The people of WS have been living in a total human rights black hole. This territory has been abandoned by Spain and occupied by Morocco for 45 years now. The UN mission (MINURSO) is the only post-cold war mission currently deployed, that is not mandated to monitor, protect and promote human rights. Given the ongoing violations, discriminations, inequalities and general suffering of the people, this is unacceptable. The occupation has allowed the natural resources to be plundered for the benefit of the occupying power and to the detriment of the autochthone people who live in extreme poverty.

The people of Western Sahara eventually suffer twice. From violations and from impunity. What legal bases, can the UN invoke to leave them unaccounted for regarding human rights violations? The world cannot turn a blind eye to this situation. And it is deteriorating.

Following a recent escalation and media campaigns by Moroccan official authorities, there is an imminent danger that many of Western Sahara's most prominent human rights defenders and activists may be arrested and jailed in the coming days or weeks, including Mrs. Aminatou Haidar, 2019 Right Livelihood Award Laureate. We, as support groups, have been following a dangerous smear campaign and open threats against members of the Saharawi Organ Against the Moroccan Occupation (ISACOM).

We are all here today to talk about lessons learned, so here is a question for the HRC: what lessons can we learn from the failure of the international community to protect human rights and ensure justice for the people of WS and how do we remove the obstacles to the realisation of an act of self-determination, which is the key to accessing social and economic justice and development for its people? I think we all know the answers. They just need to be implemented.

Thank you for your attention – Here is to hope this attention will turn into actions.

Meriem Naili, WSC, Geneva 8th October.

Aggression in Western Sahara: The Supreme International Crime

The return to hostilities in Western Sahara last November marked an important moment for the place of Africa's last colony and its people in the international order. Among other matters, international criminal law is brought sharply to prominence. Aggression is particularly revealed in these events.

The crime of aggression had always applied to Western Sahara, from the moment of its illegal invasion in October 1975. That is to say, the elements of the crime were established from the start and continue to this day: a decision to invade and hold a territory without lawful basis, done by use of armed force. Because Western Sahara remained occupied under such elements, or criteria, after the UN-brokered 1991 Settlement Plan, the crime persisted. However, it was only in 2018, after a long road to defining aggression in the treaty, known as the Rome Statute, that established the International Criminal Court (in 1998) that the crime of aggression could be said to apply.

Armed invasion in 1975 without lawful justification was, therefore, a first act of aggression.

Here, we must note the crime applies to individuals and not states. Of course, it is states which carry out aggression, but the underlying decision to use armed force unlawfully against the territory of other is a matter of personal responsibility, in other words, individual liability. This is what the long negotiations until 2018 to define the crime were concerned with. A part of the test of criminal intent is the extent of the use of force, and also the gravity or seriousness of its result. However, 2018 brought another problem. It was that the crime could not be applied retroactively. This seems sensible. It is almost universally

how national criminal law systems operate to prevent unfairness, and is a well-settled principle of war crimes in the modern era, recalling the experience of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Another accepted limit in 2018 was that only the most senior persons of a state or government with direct authority to commit a country to aggression can be subject to an accusation of aggression. In this way, the crime of aggression – unlike the three other international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes – cannot extend to supporting persons.

If not retroactively the acts of 1975, therefore, how does the crime of aggression apply in Western Sahara? A first and stand-alone wrongful act is the continuing use of force in the territory. It may be that hostilities were brought to a standstill in 1991, but the presence of a substantial military force (not to mention the heavily land-mined berm) brings the original wrong continuously to the present day. There is, after all, nothing in the Settlement Plan which accepts or excuses the presence of armed force in Western Sahara.

Two other singular acts of aggression also continue: occupation and annexation. Each imposes individual liability when pursued through the use of armed force, as now. Beyond occupation, which indeed even the Settlement Plan indirectly confirms, annexation has become more brazen in the 20 years since the UN-administered voter registration process was brought to a standstill. The most recent occurred early in 2020, with Morocco bringing into effect its 2017 national law to create an exclusive economic zone specifically on the coast of Western Sahara. (This was thought to be an attempt to claim what Western Sahara Campaign U.K.'s case launched in 2014 in the U.K. High Court and later referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union concluded was not possible, that the territory and coastal ocean area of Western Sahara are not a part of Morocco.)

A more recent example of an act to annex Western Sahara is the operation and expansion of the commercial border crossing in the far south of the occupied part of the territory, at Guerguerat. Securing the annexation is accomplished by such acts of creating an economic and governance "hold" over the territory. Of course, the acts at Guerguerat which caused a return to hostilities – including the apparent use of live ammunition fired at Saharawi civil society protestors would otherwise be wrongful acts, fitting the definition of one or more war crimes.

Much can be seen of the history of aggression in Western Sahara, therefore. However, it is the long arc of that history coupled with another undeniable fact of international law which reveals the aggression for what it is, and what it threatens. It can be explained easily: In addition to the first use of unlawful force – say, invasion – aggression can extend to occupation and annexation. In the circumstances of a colonial territory – more precisely, a non-self-governing people – the crime can extend to the act of denying them the right of self-determination.

This seems odd. It has been unprecedented in the international order, recalling the crime only came to be developed after 1998 when the great business of decolonization was all but complete. What makes the odd the ordinary is that the crime of aggression – again, a decision of senior state officials – was meant to both safeguard territorial integrity and the political independence of a people, equally those having achieved statehood and those entitled to choose a post-colonial statehood or other political status. These are the fundamental norms of the United Nations Charter. The crime of aggression is meant to place liability on individual persons for unlawfully violating the international order. That is more than territorial integrity. The right of a people to freely define themselves in political terms is at least as important.

It is that right – the choice of self-determination – that is most seriously violated in Western Sahara. And it is where the 1991 Settlement Plan meets international criminal law. By the use of armed force, recently (and tragically once again) revealed, the promises of the Settlement Plan (and perhaps the most established of all human rights that is self-determination) has been frustrated, brought to nought. The denial has been increasingly clear since Morocco sidestepped its stated commitment in 1991 to offer only a referendum for the Saharawi people (indeed, all the people now living in what it refers to as its "Southern Provinces") after 2007.

The "problem" of international criminal law in Western Sahara is not so much that it operates with inconvenience to Morocco, or would threaten to upset whatever "balance" arguably remains under the Settlement Plan. Rather, the problem at its greatest is that the law holds consequences and imposes obligations to the entire international community.

Helping Morocco to occupy or annex Western Sahara is much more revealed as ethically wrong and starts to result in liability for individuals (and companies) who support, for example, human rights violations and the removal of natural resources from the territory.

The crime of aggression is yet more a problem for the international community: After all, how can states conduct diplomacy with alleged criminals?

There is a large barrier to pursuing the crime of aggression in Western Sahara, but one that is surmountable all the same. This is the question of jurisdiction. The International Criminal Court (the ICC) is not yet in a position to act. That is because the negotiation of the crime has, for a time yet, limited the ICC's reach to responsible individuals or the territories where the crime takes place of states specifically agreeing to the Court's jurisdiction. To date, only 39 of 123 ICC member states have accepted the crime. This means the Court is unable to apply the crime to most places where aggression currently takes place, for example The Ukraine and Yemen. For Western Sahara, however, Spain as a matter of international law retains the necessary territorial connection for its criminal law system to apply the crime. Spain accepted a just-negotiated crime of aggression in 2014. And the country's courts have concluded criminal law jurisdiction in the territory to have continued without interruption since 1975.

International criminal law is rightly concerned with a protection of civilian people under occupation or otherwise in places of armed conflict. And this law has been shown as necessary in a resumption of hostilities in Western Sahara. It is this reason why aggression is called the supreme international crime: All that is so manifestly offensive in Western Sahara's occupation, annexation and denial of its people's right to self-determination flows from the decisions and acts of a few. The great promise of Guerguerat, if it can be called that, is that those individuals can be brought more readily to justice.

Dr. Jeffrey Smith is a law academic and barrister who teaches in Ottawa. His recently published extensive analysis of the crime of aggression in Western Sahara is available on the **WSC website**.

**'Stories of the Sahara', Sanmao,
translated by Mike Fu, Bloomsbury, 2019**

How to categorise this book? Travelogue, autobiography, anthropology, history, historiography – it's something of all of these but to what degree we cannot fully know because we cannot question the writer directly as she died in 1991. Only now has this book been translated into English.

'Stories in the Sahara' recounts the time spent in Spanish-occupied Western Sahara in the mid-1970s by a Chinese woman whose travels had already taken her to mainland Spain, Germany, the Canary Islands, and Central America. In China and Taiwan she won iconic status and the book is driven by her personality, one that must have been a challenge to confront. Are her demands of her acquaintances - Sahrawi and Spanish, officials and neighbours, friends and come-by-chance encounters - outrageous or naïve, challenging or foolhardy? She wants to cross the Sahara to the Red Sea. She visits wild dog-infested cemeteries at night. She has encounters with bandits. She escapes quicksand.

This is all very entertaining but the interest for me is her account of the lives of Sahrawis (and, indeed, Spaniards) in the last days of Spanish colonial rule. Sanmao marries a Spanish engineer who works at the phosphate mine at Bou Craa but they live among Sahrawis and her days are punctuated by visits from neighbours from whom she learns about the way of life of those who have settled around the few streets that constituted Laayoune then. She says the town reminded her of something from a Western movie.

Much of her interaction with her neighbours is recounted as amusing anecdotes but her exasperated affection does not stop her from addressing darker aspects of life. One chapter – 'The Mute Slave' – makes hard reading.

The Sahrawi uprising against Spanish rule is taking hold in Sanmao's final months in Western Sahara and her accounts emphasise the level of support for independence.

'The guerrillas are back?' I asked Jose quietly.

'They don't need to come back. All the Sahrawi who live here are on their side.'

Anti-colonial slogans appear all over Laayoune. The town is put under curfew but the young men have already disappeared into the desert to join the guerrillas.

And here is the most intriguing part of the book. Sanmao describes the building tension as Morocco musters its forces over the border, as some Spanish troops are determined to fight them, as some wish to turn their guns on the Sahrawis while others hold the Sahrawi in deep affection. She recounts a meeting with Bassiri in the desert. Bassiri organised the Harakat Tahrir, precursor to Polisario but he had disappeared years earlier in 1970 after Spanish troops put down a nationalist protest and there is evidence that he was executed by paratroops in the desert. So, what do we make of Sanmao's account of the meeting and the chilling aftermath? If the names and dates don't add up, her story may hold an uncomfortable nugget of truth about the fate of another guerrilla and his associates in a community, like all communities, riven by cleavages other than the overtly political.

'Stories of the Sahara' is by turns fascinating, charming, sobering. Whether we should take all of it literally is open to question. Sanmao's account both benefits and suffers from her status as an outsider and from her delight in the dramatic. But how do we read it?

Toby Shelley

Four Days in Occupied Western Sahara A Rare Look Inside Africa's Last Colony as Ceasefire Ends

Democracy Now, Nov 27, 2020

This special rebroadcast of a Democracy Now! exclusive documentary, breaks the media blockade and goes to occupied Western Sahara in the northwest of Africa to document the decades-long Saharawi struggle for freedom and Morocco's violent crackdown. Morocco has occupied the territory since 1975 in defiance of the United Nations and the international community.

As Morocco and the Polisario engage on the battlefield, dozens have been arrested in the occupied territory. In late 2016, Democracy Now! managed to get into the Western Saharan city of Laayoune, becoming the first international news team to report from the occupied territory in years. Many of the Sahrawis in this film are currently under police siege or in hiding.

Watch on YouTube.

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