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Sahrawi Self-Determination Within Existing Borders: Adapting the Right to Self Determination to Modern International Norms

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the attitudes towards the Sahrawi people and the POLISARIO Front in Algeria and Morocco, with a more specific focus on how these latter have impacted their endeavour to establish the former's own sovereign state. The paper provides background on the political, social, and economic, atmospheres in both countries, to contextualise the modern state of democratic institutions and voter engagement. With this information in mind, several potential pathways forward are presented for Sahrawi self-determination, weighing the pros and cons of seeking political representation within existing states, or through secession.

BACKGROUND

Western Sahara is a territory over which sovereignty has been greatly debated since the end of the colonial period. Previously a Spanish colony (1884–1975; after 1958, overseas province of Spanish Sahara), the land was primarily occupied by the Sahrawi and Berber people. The Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro, or the POLISARIO Front, was a Sahrawi rebel group formed in 1973 to fight against Spanish occupation and later Moroccan occupation[1]. Shortly after Morocco gained independence from France in 1956, King Hassan II organised a march of Moroccans into Western Sahara to claim it as part of Morocco. At the time, Spain was also formally pulling out of most of its colonies and negotiated the land to Morocco. The Sahrawi people had been seeking to establish their own state within the borders of Western Sahara, and felt the negotiation between Spain and Morocco undermined their right to self–determination and sovereignty[2].

Since the Moroccan occupation of the territory began in 1975, there have been armed conflicts and ongoing debates in the World Court and United Nations in an attempt to reach a mutually beneficial settlement for both groups[3]. Currently, the POLISARIO Front has declared itself a state and runs a semi-socialist democratic government in a refugee settlement across the border in Algeria[4]; the UN considers the area a "non–self–governing territory" administered by Morocco as a administrative but colonial power. Under Baker Plan I (2000), Western Sahara would function as a semi-autonomous region for Sahrawi people; the region could foster no national defense or foreign policy. This plan was proposed and accepted by Morocco; however,

[1] Seddon, 1989
[2] Hodges, 1984
[3] Seddon, 1996
[4] Farah, 2009

it was not formally moved for review by the UN Security Council. Baker Plan II proposed to grant Western Sahara semi-autonomous designation for five years followed by referendum for independence to be voted upon by all Sahrawi citizens. This plan was proposed and endorsed by the UN Security Council in July 2003, and accepted by the Sahrawi but not the Moroccans. Sahrawi people in Morocco as late as 2005 took part in demonstrations and protests[5] demanding statehood, but despite the efforts of the 1991 Settlement Plan, and the 2003 Baker Plan, consensus has yet to be reached. While the Moroccan monarchy outright denies Sahrawi claims to Western Sahara, Algeria has given the POLISARIO Front its ongoing support since 1975[6], a policy that has strained Algerian-Moroccan relations[7].

The struggle for self-determination in increasingly small nation-states is not unique to the Sahrawi people. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the Palestinians and Kurds have engaged in ongoing political and armed conflicts seeking sovereignty; in Spain, Catalonians and Basques seek to secede from the Spanish state; and throughout Eastern Europe, there have been numerous conflicts since the fall of the USSR on 26 December 1991. However, granting Sahrawi people a state in Western Sahara may not be a sustainable political goal because the MENA region is so ethnically diverse that there could ensue endless conflicts over which groups should have sovereign states[8]. Rather, the Sahrawi people may be better served by seeking political representation in either Morocco, Algeria, or both. Both Morocco and Algeria are illiberal democracies where seeking citizenship and representation in parliament may not immediately lead to greater freedoms. In Algeria, the Sahrawi have the benefit of being seen as

[5] Kaye, et al., 2008
[6] The Monroe News-Star, 1976
[7] Williams, 1914
[8] Wellman, 2005

politically legitimate insofar as being members of their own independent state. However they likely would not be welcomed into the Algerian political theatre because in so doing, they would pose a threat to the pan-Arab national identity. For the Sahrawi to gain access to the political theatre in Morocco, they would have to abandon the search for statehood to which the POLISARIO Front still adamantly adheres. In Morocco, the Sahrawi could potentially ride the wave of momentum gained by the Berber movements and gain recognition—if they are not perceived as posing a threat to the Moroccan monarchical hegemony.

MOROCCO - BACKGROUND

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature. Within both houses there is such a high level of representation that power remains highly decentralised, and even parties with a majority share struggle to pass legislation. The Moroccan constitution was not adopted until 1962, and it specifically outlines a multiparty system with checks in place to limit democratic institutions from being established and maintain the primacy of the monarchy. The king is the commander in chief of the military, maintains the power to dissolve parliament, appoints all ambassadors, and is the supreme religious authority in the state. The system is not without its benefits, but it also is illiberal and viewed as undemocratic by much of the Moroccan general populace. The newspaper The Telegraph estimated in 2005 that the monarchy costs Moroccan taxpayers roughly an estimated £144 million a year (US$271M at the then current exchange rate), which—given it is 18 times the budget of Queen Elizabeth II or almost 30 times that of King Juan Carlos II of Spain—is not sustainable in any economic or political model.

In the post-colonial period, King Hassan II was able to gain private control over much the of land previously held by French and Spanish colonial powers and allot it to those he deemed loyal to the royal family. This inner circle was constantly rotating, thereby creating factions

amongst the elite; neither the lower nor upper classes are intended—or indeed, even able—to unify against the monarchy. Evidence shows that the monarchy and political leadership are unable or unwilling to address growing socio-economic issues. Human rights associations, women's solidarity groups, local civil society groups, and moderate Islamist groups, all are trying to provide support for their target demographics. There is particular discontent among the youth, who are growing increasingly discontented with the state's inability to address pressing social and economic issues. The objective of the aid group to elevate their niche demographics appears to be targeted with the express goal of keeping people from more radical ideologies.

Discontent Moroccans do, according to various articles of the Moroccan constitution, have the right to strike (Art. 29), the right to vote and run in elections (Art. 11, 30), as well as freedom of opinion, expression, public gathering, and association (Art 10), and belonging to a union (Art. 8). Strong democratic institutions require participation; however, voluntary participation is dependent on institutions being demonstrably functional. In Morocco under King Hassan II, elections were rigged in order to maintain the status quo. Since the 1990's Morocco has gradually opened itself to greater democratisation, and held elections closer to the realm of "free and fair" expected of a liberal democracy. But the common people of Morocco have yet to experience any positive side effects of the liberalisation. There has been an increase in representation and guaranteed positions for women in politics and religious affairs. But in day to day life, there has been little increase in the state of social and economic inequality. Abstention from elections has become a growing form of protest.

The 2011 election saw the rise of the Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD: 22.8% of the 4.7M votes, 27.1% of the 395 seats); the PJD followed in the footsteps of the 1960's Mouvement Populaire (MPDC). A moderate right–wing Islamist party, the PJD chose to

support the Moroccan monarchy while demanding reform and greater democratic institutions, and economic partnerships with other countries. The popularity of the PJD and other moderate Islamist groups in Morocco is dependent on their ability to deliver on their promises of creating positive social and economic change for the citizens of Morocco. Within the confines of the political system as it exists today, it is very unlikely that they will achieve their goals, and instead they will gradually lose credibility. The Moroccan royal family maintains tight control over all state affairs and makes it nearly impossible for reformist parties to liberalise institutions at a rate fast enough to appease voters. Notwithstanding, in the most recent (2016) elections, PJD improved by 18 points to 27.9% of the vote and 31.6 (125) of the seats. In counter however, a monarchy–backed party (Authenticity and Modernity Party, PAM), increased its representation by 55% to 20.95% of the votes and 25.8% (102) of the seats. This vast increase by a monarchical party will only make reform more difficult.

There are many respected associations working as civil society actors that citizens can look to for support and organisation where the state does not deliver. For instance, women's associations began formally coalescing in the 1980s, though the women's rights movement has a history in Morocco pre-revolution; the associations have made significant headway in achieving their goals. Moroccan family code was written so that women and men were broadly considered equals, and this led to an expansion of personal, private, and economic rights among women.

Morocco, like many North African states, has a significant Berber population: the Moroccan people consider themselves 99% Arab-Berber. Several Berber associations banded together to create the Amazigh Movement. Amazigh is the name of the indigenous cultural group of Morocco, and Imazighen means "free/noble people". This movement sought to bring recognition to the Amazigh Moroccans, and to end repression of Tamazight language and

culture, which is defined in Article 5 of the 2011 constitution as one of the two official languages of Morocco. The Amazigh movement was successful in many ways. Tamazight language study is now required in schools, and the news is broadcast in Tamazight as well as Moroccan Arabic. This was done to co-opt the Amazigh movement and avoid radicalisation of dissatisfied citizens later. However, these gains by the Imazighen have been met with mixed reviews by the many Moroccans who do not identify with Amazigh culture.

One of Morocco's greatest ongoing disputes in the international political arena is the disputed sovereignty over Western Sahara. Western Sahara, as described above, is a former Spanish colony that was claimed by the Moroccan monarchy at the end of the colonial period. The Sahrawi people claim, with significant historical evidence, that Western Sahara is their ancestral homeland and that they should be granted to right to self–determination within its borders. Credible linguistic evidence points to the Saharawi being Saharan Arabs, as Hassaniya is a Bedouin Arabic dialect. Spain failed to involve itself in this regional conflict and turned the land over to Morocco and Algeria, but the Sahrawi still dispute this claim, with backing from the United Nations. Many Sahrawi people now live in Algeria in refugee settlements just beyond the border. This has strained Moroccan-Algerian relations, in addition to strict travel and visa laws between the countries. Morocco also still has contentious relations with Spain regarding disputes over land in Morocco (the territory/cities of Ceuta and Melilla) still being held by the Spanish state.

SAHRAWI PEOPLE IN MOROCCO

Mineral rights and tourism revenue of Western Sahara are potential factors in why Morocco would be hesitant to cede the territory. However, revenues derived from these financial sectors are not so great that they could argue that the economy would be irreparably impacted by the

loss. This potential for capital loss is a key factor in why Morocco seeks to stake a historical claim to the area. In contrast, the Sahrawi claim to the land is based on the contemporary loss of the land on which they had lived. The Sahrawi were a historically nomadic people who primarily lived in Western Sahara but also could claim areas of southern Morocco, Southwestern Algeria, and most of northern Mauritania. The borders of Morocco as drawn up in the Treaty of Fez signed in 1912 pose a dilemma already because the tribal groups in the region were historically nomadic, and to some extent remain so to this day. While the Sahrawi people could claim Western Sahara, there would still be groups with legitimate claims to overlapping areas in other states.

Were the Sahrawi people to agree to being designated an autonomous region within Morocco, they would still forfeit a certain level of governance to Morocco as a result of the parliamentary structure. This could potentially be problematic as the government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is a single party socialist government that is incompatible with a monarchical system and the Moroccan constitution if 2011. Catalonia in Spain is often cited as a reason that autonomous statehood could be a viable option for Western Sahara. However, there is a constant unrest in the region as conflicts continue to arise between the central and autonomous governments.

Representation within Morocco could be a workable option for Sahrawi seeking political determination. The Moroccan monarchy has been gradually liberalising and democratising. Progress is slow, but there have been serious victories made by associations[9] such as the Moroccan Women's Associations. This association was able to effect change to Moroccan family code that allowed unmarried women to be considered adult and gave them greater rights,

[9] Lust, 2011

and the Berber movements in the state have gained greater recognition as a result of their activism. The Sahrawi people could seek self-determination by broadening the rights and recognition of Berber groups in Morocco to include themselves, as the POLISARIO Front has already been engaged in internal political struggles following similar patterns[10].

ALGERIA - BACKGROUND

Algeria is, as of July 2018, a country of approximately 41,657,488 people, 99% of which are Arab-Berber; the *CIA World Factbook* notes that while most Algerians have Berber ancestry, only 15% of Algerians self–identify as Berber. Arabic is the official language of Algeria; however, many of the middle and upper class also speak French. Tamazight, or Berber, is an officially recognised language of Algeria; dialects spoken within Algeria include Kabyle (Taqbaylit), Shawiya (Tacawit), Mzab Berber, and Tuareg Berber (Tamahaq). On paper, Algeria is a majority Arab state wherein the people speak Arabic leading to a pan-Arab national identity.

The reality on the ground is that the majority of the citizens who identify as Arab live in the north of the country, in densely populated cities, while most of those who identify as Berber live across the south. There are social and historical reasons for this development of split identities. The north of Algeria was historically part of the Roman and Ottoman Empires, and in the modern era was developed during the French colonial period because the French could benefit economically from building up urban areas for exporting goods and importing tourists. In the contemporary era, it remains significantly more developed than the south. The southern regions of Algeria remained relatively autonomous until Algeria became an independent state: trying to coalesce a single national identity and representative democracy has continued to be problematic.

[10] Lippert, 1992

Contemporary state formation began in Algeria with the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN, "national liberation front"), and its armed wing, *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN, "army of national liberation"). The FLN was established in 1954 and eventually gained the support and membership of almost all Algerian nationalists. What started as a guerilla resistance to end French occupation of Algerian territory remains a powerful political player in Algeria to this day: in the 2017 legislative elections, they garnered a majority of the vote, 26%, gaining 164 of the available 462 seats (35.5%); despite the numbers, however, this represented a loss of 44 seats relative to the 2012 legislative elections. The FLN were initially tasked with untangling the wreckage left in the aftermath of the French colonial period. France had not extended its educational or healthcare systems to Algeria, not had it developed or industrialised the country beyond what was necessary for extracting goods. This lack of material, economic, and social, infrastructure was not stable ground on which to found a new state. Thus, after the revolution, government policies focused on urbanisation, and growing the small business and education sectors. The methods of urbanisation and development increased the quality of life in fits and spurts but decimated the rural population, as well as leading to high unemployment in urban areas.

Ahmed Ben Bella (1916–2012) was the first president of an independent Algeria (15 September 1963 – 19 June 1965). He centralised power in Algeria, helped found the state's early institutions, and codify the constitution. However, in June of 1965 Colonel Houari Boumédiène (1932–1978) overthrew Ben Bella. While both Ben Bella and Boumédiène were—or at least openly proclaimed—to be socialists, Ben Bella's economic plan had been to gradually industrialise and socialise while still maintaining global trade. Boumédiène in contrast cut Algeria off from the West and immediately nationalised the major industries. He also further

disrupted the existing rural and agrarian societies that had already been impacted by the late Ottoman and French imposition of private land ownership by instigating a land grab purposefully limiting landed property and redistributing land to the lower classes with the intention of forming cooperatives. Islamism became more popular as socioeconomic inequality ran rampant.

Throughout the 1960's and 1970's, Algeria remained by and large politically stable, and the state benefited from the income generated by the nationalisation of the hydrocarbons industry. In 1978 however, the death of Boumédiène left the country going through a series of failed power transitions and coups. As the army fought against political leaders for control of the government, the economy suffered from isolation, liberalisation, fluctuating global markets, and austerity.

In the 1990's, Algeria opened its market to liberalisation and its political system to multi–party elections. What followed is an unstable period known as the "red decade" from 1992-2002, where the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) and political opposition groups were in constant conflict with the military establishment government. The FIS won 54.2% of the votes in the 1990 local elections (to 28.1 for the FLN). However, when the FIS won 180 seats in parliament in the 1992 parliamentary elections, the army pressured then president Chadli Bendjedid (in office 9 February 1979 to 11 January 1992) to cancel the elections. When Bendjedid tried to compromise with the FIS, the army had him removed and replaced him first with an acting president, Abdelmalek Benhabyles (from 11 to 14 January 1992), then with Mohamed Boudiaf, one of the founders of the FLN, who was assassinated on 29 June 1992 by a bodyguard. Although the assassin was said to have acted on Islamist sympathies, many still believe to this day that the real reason behind the assassination lay in Boudiaf's challenge of the army's governmental control. Two more elected officials were removed before the longest running

president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, was elected in 1999 (through 2 April 2019). Bouteflika maintained his office by not challenging military authority, but this accommodation has led to continually weakening institutions and ongoing political unrest. While Algeria is a democracy, with multi–party national elections, it is not a liberal democracy, thus socially devolving into ongoing conflict between the military controlled majority and the minority groups seeking representation. Despite the dissolution and banning of the FIS, political Islam plays an important role in contemporary Algerian civil and civic life. Due to the widespread unpopularity of radical Islamism stemming from violence in the 1980's and 1990's, Islamism in Algeria today call only for a gradual shift to becoming an Islamic state.

Flaws remain in the sociopolitical system. For instance, laws to not protect the status of women; however women continue hold positions in government, universities, and hospitals. While custom dictates general societal modesty, women are not forced to be veiled and in fact, Algeria recently banned women from veiling their face at work with either burqas or niqabs. Algeria does not reserve seats for women in parliament, and even without reserved seating, women hold about one quarter of the seats across both houses.

Despite the standing illiberal government, the Algerian people have formed many unions and coalitions that, while not recognised by the government, have fought for workers' rights and democracy. The government engages in promoting covert operations, harassment, and unlawful arrests, in order to quell this social and political unrest. This balance of civil versus civic plays out on all levels in Algeria. While technically a presidential republic with a bicameral parliament and high representation, the state remains illiberal as ⅓ of the seats in the upper house are appointment by the president with the intention of maintaining the army's control over policy.

THE SAHRAWI IN ALGERIA

At present, Moroccan parliamentary structure would potentially make it impossible for the Sahrawi people to have any political power even if they agreed to become a region of Morocco and take part in the Moroccan state. In contrast, the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria could seek citizenship and representation in Algeria, where the semi-presidential republic would potentially offer them more political freedom.

Like Morocco, Algeria, as described above, could be considered an illiberal democracy. Despite the illiberal government, much like in Morocco, the Algerian people have formed many unions and coalitions that, while not recognised by the government, have fought for workers' rights and democracy[11], and the government engages in covert operations, harassment, and unlawful arrests. Ultimately however, the government is primarily controlled by the army. The Sahrawi would therefore face two hurdles in order to gain representation: first, the Army very much espouses a Nasserist pan-Arab national identity; second, even if allowed to participate in elections, they could never gain a majority in parliament and would struggle to pass any legislation meaningful to their benefit[12]. By forcing a pan-Arab identity, the government seeks to downplay Berber culture and history within its borders; the Sahrawi people in contrast, while having both Berber and Arab ancestry, still consider themselves very much a Berber minority. They would accordingly have to downplay this aspect of their identity in order to be allowed to function within the framework of Algerian politics.

ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS REPLACING LEFTIST REVOLUTION

[11] Lust, 2011
[12] Keenan, 2006

The POLISARIO Front is a leftist revolutionary party as is, in theory, the FLN of Algeria. However, leftist revolutionary parties represent a growing minority in the MENA region as Islamist parties have become increasingly popular and gained majority control in elections. Islamist parties themselves represent a broad spectrum of the political spectrum: from highly conservative to highly liberal[13]. This can put the POLISARIO Front at a disadvantage while looking they seek allies in the region. Monarchies such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia would not want to potentially place their rule in danger by supporting a leftist revolutionary party. Conservative Islamist parties similarly would not want to support the secularist POLISARIO Front. In both Morocco and Algeria, this set of circumstances would hence not be to the benefit of the POLISARIO Front. While the Algerian army publicly espouses secular policy and seeks to promote secular allies, the army's support of pan-Arab ideology would likely make the POLISARIO Front ineligible for support within the Algerian political sphere. The parties that make up the current opposition in the Algerian legislature are the Green Algeria Alliance, a coalition of Islamist parties who as a result also would be unlikely to support the POLISARIO Front in Algerian politics. In Morocco, the reformist Islamist parties and the left leaning parties would be more likely to go into coalition with the POLISARIO Front were they able to gain any seats in parliamentary elections. However, gaining official recognition and being allowed by the King to run in elections is highly unlikely.

SELF-DETERMINATION OR SOVEREIGNTY

Ultimately in an increasingly global world where exchange across borders is on the rise, even in previously homogenous states, voluntary diaspora is a given. It is not sustainable to create increasingly smaller ethno-states in order to appease ethnic conflicts when citizens of those

[13] Berger, 2019

conflicting states will still inevitably come into contact with one another. A two–state solution in cases such as Palestine and Israel would force the 1 in 10 interfaith couples[14] in the resulting apartheid country to choose one faith and one state despite having a claim to both identities. Similarly, forcing borders into an already heavily settled Western Sahara will result in more harm than good.

Prior to World War I, there was little benefit to independent statehood beyond self–determination. The Interwar Period brought Wilsonian self–determination informed by international policy, and there was a sharp increase in the number of states worldwide. This period saw the beginning some of the first international organisations, such as the precursor to the United Nations: the League of Nations, that offered benefits to member states, a reason a group might want to seek independent statehood[15]. The nationalist thesis typical of this period even goes so far as to claim that governance of ethnically homogeneous states is more likely to maintain stability and legitimacy[16]. Ethnic groups in conflict currently are viewed in the international community as a high security dilemma, with the only way to solve the dilemma from a realist perspective being separation[17]; however, apartheid states and forced migration are demonstrably ineffective long–term solutions. We have seen countless examples in the MENA region and around the world that partition, even as a short term solution, leads to destabilisation from which it can be difficult to recover[18].

We can look at the struggle for Saharawi independence as having three likely outcomes based on Kaufman's suggested solutions for ethnic conflicts the constructivist approach of

[14] Maltz, 2014
[15] Fazal & Griffiths, 2014
[16] Wellman, 2005
[17] Kaufman, 1996
[18] Dubnov & Robson, 2019

creating a single overarching identity that overrides the warring micro–identities; reintegration; and/or power–sharing based on including the minority in the democratic process. In the case of Sahrawi self-determination, there is a strong case to be made for statehood. The two moral arguments for statehood are first, that the secession should not economically or socially destroy the mother state; and second, that the people should be demonstrably more successful in the event of secession. Both arguments can be shown to be proven in the case of the Sahrawi people. However, the Moroccan crown is not likely for the time being to completely cede the territory of Western Sahara, and conversely, the POLISARIO Front is not likely to agree to power sharing as a semi-autonomous region. Should the Sahrawi be granted semi-autonomous statehood, it would still likely lead to exploitation due to the fact that parties and interest groups who attempt take actions contrary to the crown find themselves banned from the political sphere. In a similar vein, the region currently occupied by Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria would never be ceded by the FLN, and political opposition to the shadow military leadership of Algeria often has led to the assassination of political leaders in the past.

Even in the event that a state successfully secedes, there can be no guarantee of border safety in the event that a nation secedes from its mother state and seeks self-determination within its own new borders, as illustrated by ongoing ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. If two groups experiences conflict within one state and the international community responds by creating a forced separation of those groups, these latter will not suddenly agree to cross–border friendship. The resentment will remain: however, there now will be even less of an incentive to coexist, as evinced by ongoing violence along the India/Pakistan border. Fostering contemporary identities beyond sectarian conflicts is essential in ending these conflicts. It is not an easy or simple solution, but it is the most viable in the long–term.

Jordan for instance, has maintained political and economic stability in the MENA region. It has done so historically first, by including the existing Bedouin minority into the political system; and second, by integrating migrants. Jordan has subsequently fostered a multi-ethnic Jordanian national identity welcoming to many minority groups. This permissiveness has allowed the state to maintain a social equilibrium with a growing population of refugees from differing national, religious, and ethnic groups. In addition to the foregoing, Jordan has focused on economic development and social safety nets, which result in an ameliorated well–being for the populace. Jordan managed this despite being surrounded by unstable and failed states. As such, Jordan could exemplify a model for mitigating the rise of secessionist movements. Except in extreme cases of violence and oppression, the international community would be better served by strengthening democratic institutions that allow groups to seek self-determination within the existing state.

CONCLUSION

The international community cannot remain focused on the separation of ethnic groups, even if they view it as being for their own protection. The belief that nations of individuals in similar cultural, ethnic, religious, and other factional groups, should form independent states together is well–intentioned but harmful at best, and the result of colonialism and white supremacy at worst. In “Seven Regions Scheme,” Sir Reginald Coupland, the man behind many of the British Empire’s partition plans, stated that ideally, India would have been partitioned into many small historically informed princely states that functioned as one federation still under British dominion. Copeland felt that the states constituting India had not reached the degree of maturity necessary to coexist and instead, that the partition was a temporary status that would eventually

cease to be necessary. His successful example of the reintegration of warring states? Scotland, Ireland, and England. In the 1990's he would find himself disproven.[19]

Rather than focusing on partitions, semi-autonomous regions, or sharing of power, greater efforts must be placed into strengthening democratic institutions such that minorities have access and can make use of them. "The health of a democracy depends not only on support for key political values such as civil rights, but also on the active participation of an informed citizenry."[20] For a democracy to succeed, all citizens must have access to democratic institutions, and more than that: they must actively engage with them. This can be problematic because due to systematic inequality in the formation of all modern states, many disenfranchised groups never have had access to institutions; and, if they do gain access, they are often wary of the state's intentions.

Seeking to be part of the state's definition of a person, to gain access to democratic institutions, and to get what a person or group feels they are due or need from those institutions is time consuming. For many, especially in younger generations, it seems more viable not to expect anything from the state, but instead to organise locally and provide for themselves within their own shared identity groups. With respect to the case of Sahrawi self-determination, it is difficult to see a path forward given the state of democracy in both Algeria and Morocco. In both cases, efforts would need to be made to strengthen the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Political reform in Morocco by moderate and reformist parties, in union with non-governmental entities, provides the most viable opportunity for future inclusion of the POLISARIO Front in politics, and for some level of reintegration and self-determination for the Sahrawi people.

[19] Dubnov & Robson, 2019
[20] Foa & Mounk, 2016

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