

# **Domestic and transnational advocacy networks in the Western Sahara pursuit of self-determination: the activism of Polisario Komitee and EUCOCO**

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## **Introduction**

The triggering point for this research lies in my growing interest in non-state actors and human rights. In the present work, this interest materializes in the challenge that non-state actors pose for the international order in a context of human rights violations, resistance, and social movements. Starting from that, I am interested in how these actors, in their multiple forms (varying both on the level of formality and dimension), influence international politics, mainly through their role on implementing human rights norms. My study case is the Western Sahara and the pursuit of their self-determination through advocacy networks – in its domestic and transnational dimensions. The existence of advocacy networks is part of the Sahrawi social organization, but the focus of this research will be the initiatives dispersed in spaces outside Western Sahara and Algeria (where most of the Sahrawi people are living).

Some of these reflections about non-state actors arise from a long-standing debate in International Relations about their growing role in international politics, with highlights to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Keck and Sikkink (1998), and Khagram, Riker and Sikkink (2002). This growing emergence is complemented by notions such as those problematized by Rajagopal (2003), who argues in favor of a ‘politics from below’, acknowledging policy-making as arising from other actors besides States.

Considering that, a basic assumption for this research is the illegality of the Moroccan occupation in the territory of Western Sahara. This is rooted both in the International Court of Justice statement from October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1975, in which no legal ties of sovereignty were recognized between Morocco and the Western Sahara, and on how the Moroccan invasion and occupation goes against the international efforts on eradicating colonization, headed by the United Nations mainly through the Declaration

on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, adopted by General Assembly in December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1960<sup>1</sup>.

Another basic assumption is the recognition that States are not the only actors playing a role in the Western Sahara case. Appreciating the agency of non-state actors, this work is embedded in a debate that emphasizes their role in international politics. For that, recognizing the agency and ownership of non-state actors is a basic assumption. Centered on the suggestion provided by Khagram et al. (2002), this research will consider that advocacy groups play a decisive role in initiating processes of political change, as these groups restructure world politics by changing norm structure of governance in a global level. On the other hand, and at the same time, it is mandatory to be conscious regarding their limitations, and to what extent these limitations poses challenges to their effectiveness.

When it comes to my study case, multiple actors have agency on addressing the illegality of Moroccan politics, advocating for the recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), providing basic needs, raising awareness, giving visibility to the Sahrawi right to self-determination, and so on. These actors are based inside and outside Western Sahara and Algeria. These initiatives are shaped by dynamics that emerge from international solidarity initiatives and advocacy networks. The networks provided by such initiatives materialize an intertwined and juxtaposed scenario in which non-state actors interact to pursue compliance with the international norms spread by the human rights regime.

Diminishing the gap between norms and practice is one among other goals of advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). As these networks act towards influencing and aiming to facilitate human rights norms implementation, norms, in this context, are to be seen as both the channel that created human rights as well as the way to ensure, pursue and achieve them. In this context, activism and advocacy (in its many forms, ranging from political altruism and international solidarity to transnational social movements) become indispensable in the process of norm implementation, mainly due to their ability on raising awareness and holding actors responsible for their positioning.

Because NGOs and social movements are primary actors of collective action (Khagram et al., 2002), in order to understand the role that non-state actors play in

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the International Court of Justice, it is a legal entity derived from the development of international law mechanisms, in the twentieth century. It operates under the United Nations system, being its main judicial organ to solve disputes among States and provide advisory opinions.

supporting the Sahrawi's right to self-determination, this research was designed to cover both the domestic and the transnational dimension of the pro-Sahrawi advocacy network. Most specifically, due to the fieldwork opportunities of being based in Leiden and The Hague, The Netherlands was chosen as the space to investigate the domestic dimension. When it comes to the transnational dimension, the EUCOCO (European Coordinating Conference of Support to the Sahrawi People) will be explored.

In this sense, the first chapter will address the conditions in which the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination emerged and the subsequent rise of the international solidarity movement supporting their cause. This chapter will aim to contextualize norms, the right to self-determination (its origin and context), the exile condition of the Sahrawi people, and the origin of the overseas support network. For that, secondary sources will be complemented with primary ones. The interviews conducted with Chej Ramdan, the Front POLISARIO representative to The Netherlands<sup>2</sup>, will provide information to help understand the conditions of the self-determination pursuit, and the relationship between Western Sahara, Spain, and Morocco.

The second chapter will contemplate the domestic dimension of advocacy, based on a committee founded in The Netherlands in 1976. The Polisario Komitee, as an initiative emerged from Dutch civil society, will be explored in its origin and agenda, that led it to be part of a broader advocacy network committed to the Sahrawi right to self-determination on a European level. This chapter will be structured through the conceptual contribution from Giugni and Passy (2001), Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly (1999), Keck and Sikkink (1998), Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Tarrow (1998), and Zald and McCarthy (1979). Their arguments are invoked in order to connect the social movements literature with the role of non-state actors in international politics through advocacy networks. Besides that, two types of primary sources were used to contribute to the narrative aimed in the chapter. In order to address the efforts played by Polisario Komitee on supporting the Sahrawi right to self-determination from overseas, the research benefited from interviews with Fennie Stavast and Niko Tetteroo, former members of the Polisario Komitee (since its early years until the very end), and access to the Polisario Komitee archives, inventoried by the International Institute of Social History in

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<sup>2</sup> Front POLISARIO is an acronym and stands for *Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro* and is the political movement for the liberation of Western Sahara.

Amsterdam<sup>3</sup>. These sources allowed for a broader understanding of the Polisario Komitee's agenda. Besides that, it enabled organizing and systematizing its efforts in three main categories: raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and pressuring the government.

The third chapter will address the transnational dimension of advocacy for the Western Sahara right to self-determination. Consequently, this chapter will deal with actors emerging from other spaces beyond The Netherlands. It will be guided by the literature on information, leverage and accountability politics, by Keck and Sikkink (1998), representing the forms in which transnational advocacy networks act. The forms of transnational collective action, based on the contribution of Khagram et al. (2002), will present the EUCOCO (European Coordinating Conference of Support to the Sahrawi People) as a transnational initiative, fulfilling concepts and tasks that differ from and complement the domestic dimension presented previously. Its activities will be linked to the impact of the transnational experience, concerning its role in influencing towards norm implementation through lobby, campaigns, and contact with parliamentarians. Regarding the information about EUCOCO origin and activities, primary sources were used (minutes and documents issued by the organization) as well as information gathered through interviews with Boris Fronteddu (Secretary of the Belgian Solidarity Committee with Western Sahara – *Comité Belge de Soutien au Peuple Sahraoui*) and Pierre Galand (President of the Belgian Solidarity Committee with Western Sahara – *Comité Belge de Soutien au Peuple Sahraoui* – and President of EUCOCO).

In this sense, the fieldwork has been conducted through archive analysis and interviews, in order to get the most original and precise information/data. Aiming to demonstrate the influence that non-state actors pose to the international order when it comes to advocating for human rights implementation (which is the case of the right to self-determination), having spoken with people who were part of these initiatives definitely shed some light on why and how they did it. Besides that, it also shows how Polisario Komitee and EUCOCO initiatives intertwine within themselves and with the literature concerning the forms of collective action and the ways this kind of activism influences. This influence is expressed through a broad spectrum. It goes from issue

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<sup>3</sup> In 2015, the International Institute of Social History completed the inventory of the Polisario Komitee archives. The inventory is composed by minutes, statutes, correspondences, financial documents, press releases, newspapers, as well as visual and sound materials.

creations and agenda setting; influence on discursive positions of States and international organizations; influence on institutional procedures; influence on policy change in ‘target actors’ which may be States, IOs, or private actors, until the influence on State behavior (Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 2002; Zald, Mayer and McCarthy, 1979; Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

As colonization is the framework in which the Moroccan foreign policy is addressed to Western Sahara, my commitment with this research is also to raise awareness about the ongoing process of colonization that Western Sahara is undergoing. The injustice that the Sahrawis are facing. The betrayal from international law mechanisms first aimed to work on behalf of individuals worldwide but apparently aiming to work on behalf of powerful States. In this context, it is important to reinforce the opportunities in which individuals can join the cause. The activism of the civil society, in its domestic and transnational scopes, has been indispensable in this fight. For that, I would like to reinforce that this work would have not been possible if this activism didn’t exist. This research would not have been possible without the support, availability, and passion from the people I interviewed.

## **1. The ongoing process of colonization in Western Sahara: Moroccan violations, the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination and the emergence of international solidarity**

The nature of the right to self-determination, since its origin, served multiple purposes. When it comes to a European context, it was invoked to address internal disputes. On the other hand, when addressed to the Global South, it was tied to the decolonization process faced by the recently formed States – in this context, it was a by-product of the United Nations (UN) initiatives to operationalize its agenda.

It is 2018 and the Western Sahara continues to pursue its right to self-determination. Facing an illegal occupation of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of its territory by Morocco, the continuous violations of rights is a basic assumption regarding the kind of policy that has been addressed to the region. These violations enjoy a worldwide support, both on maintaining the Moroccan impunity as well as embodying initiatives that support the Sahrawi right to self-determination. It is the exile and refugee condition of the Sahrawi people that boost the development of a support network – at the same time, on the other hand, this condition is responsible for undermining their living conditions.

This section will provide a brief overview of the origin of the Western Sahara pursuit of self-determination. Contrary to other regions, the ‘decade of decolonization’ didn’t contribute to the independence of Western Sahara. Actually, it was the ‘decade of decolonization’ that triggered the Moroccan invasion in the region due to Spain’s withdrawal and the resulting vacuum of power. The events that followed put Western Sahara people and its political status in a delicate condition, by which the international regimes and institutions place under the expressions of ‘occupied territory’ or ‘non-self-governing territory’, categorizing it but not providing the inalienable rights of the Sahrawi population.

The rise of support networks, in this sense, comes to address issues that States and formal institutions have been failing to address. Non-state actors committed to social change and enjoying a political vocation emerge in multiple spaces and shapes, aiming to implement the Sahrawi right to self-determination.

*The right to self-determination: a brief essay on its origin and complexity*

The management of international politics through international organizations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century demanded and gave rise to a process of universalization and positivation of principles, norms, and regimes. This process was mainly driven by Western powers and was followed by a development in international law mechanisms and concepts. As a consequence, it privileged a global order that meets the expectations, values, and interests of Western hegemonies. In this context, principles are to be understood as “beliefs of fact, causation and rectitude” (Kratowil, 1989, p. 59); norms represent “standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations” (ibid); and regimes are “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations” (Kratowil, 1989, p. 57).

This framework gave rise the emergence of fundamental rights, in which the right to self-determination is placed. While having a high instrumental value, the notion of self-determination also enjoys being multifaceted and ambiguous (Cassese, 1995). Its development and usage under the framework of the UN have to do with an international commitment to drive the political agenda and operationalize politics on the international level. Even though it can operate as a fluid notion, the right to self-determination definitely demonstrates levels of complexity when operationalized as a human right.

Firstly, because it is a personal/individual capacity (Fisch, 2015), that becomes collective when tied to a territorial notion. Secondly, because the territorial aspect evokes other notions such as sovereignty and legitimacy, which are among the most controversial concepts due to their association with imposing limits on the scope of the activities carried out by States.

Not by chance, the notion of self-determination has gone a long way towards normalization until becoming a right itself, especially because it was only mentioned, but not fully developed, in the UN Charter. Regarding its roots, it dates back to the eighteenth century, inspired by the Enlightenment values of liberty, progress, tolerance and the relation between society and the State. Later, in the nineteenth century, the principle became indispensable in the context of State-building processes in Europe, as a consequence of the conflicts that changed the *status quo* on the continent. This means that, until that point, the development of the right to self-determination was a reality that served and belonged to the West, mainly because the right to self-determination was a key concept on the context of the World War I, the World War II and the Cold War, serving to articulate those changes (Cassese, 1995).

In this sense, the right to self-determination was expanded to the Global South only as a part of the decolonization process, modeled on a moral discourse of right and wrong and as an indispensable right to claim independence from the colonial system.

As the development of international law has been conducted and shaped by the Western world, the first formal use of the right to self-determination is said to have been in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of the labor movement, being associated with the right to self-determination of peoples (Fisch, 2015). Then, in the World War I context, it was part of Woodrow Wilson speech (Kirgis, 1994). Later, in the UN Charter, signed at the San Francisco Conference in 1945, it appears as one of the main principles of the institution, as a value in which the relations among nations are based, both in Chapter I, Article 1 and Chapter IX, Article 55<sup>4</sup>. But, it was only during the decolonization moment that it was formally recognized as a right, through the UN

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter I, Article 1 states that: “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace” and Chapter IX, Article 55 states that: “With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: a) higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; b) solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and c) universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People, adopted by General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) in December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

The decolonization context, then, was the background in which, for the first time, the right to self-determination was addressed to the Global South. Also, it was for the first time recognized as a right and not only a principle<sup>5</sup>. In order to “expand the concept beyond anticolonialism” (Kirgis, 1994, p. 305), the UN adopted the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, in 1970. This declaration aimed to elucidate, regulate and standardize the scenario that followed the ‘decade of decolonization’, in which it was foreseen that the right to self-determination could lead to dissidences and dismemberment of States.

The operative power of norms and principles placed the right to self-determination as a fundamental pillar on defining the human rights regime. Not only political events but also the evolution of the human rights regime led to a closer relationship between the right to self-determination and human rights<sup>6</sup>. This is the notion that remains until nowadays, and despite being associated with independence and freedom, it still shares the fear of encouraging dismemberment and secessionism<sup>7</sup>. It demonstrates the distinct levels of complexity that the right to self-determination reaches on both theoretical and conceptual terms. In the case of Western Sahara, despite this complexity, it is argued that other factors contribute to the successful implementation of the right to self-determination. According to Cassese (1995, p. 218),

political and territorial claims, economic considerations (on account of the rich deposits of phosphates existing in Western Sahara), as well as the transfer of large numbers of Moroccans into Sahara, have been a major stumbling-block to the application of international law and a consequent speedy implementation of the right to self-determination.

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<sup>5</sup> The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 1960, states that: “All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

<sup>6</sup> The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action elucidates it on stating that “the World Conference on Human Rights considers the denial of the right of self-determination as a violation of human rights and underlines the importance of the effective realization of this right”.

<sup>7</sup> The Vienna Declaration states, under Article 2, that “In accordance with the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation Among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, this shall not be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and thus possessed of a Government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction of any kind.”



This statement confirms that the complexity of the right to self-determination, for the Western Sahara case, is complemented with a long history of the Sahrawi rights being violated, *vis-à-vis* the Moroccan policies towards the region.

*The Moroccan Occupation of Western Sahara: an international politics of violations*

Western Sahara remains considered ‘Africa’s last colony’. Due to the Spanish colonization of the region, it used to be called “Spanish Sahara”, and for a long time, Spain and the Sahrawi’s dealt with the Moroccan claims over Western Sahara territory together. The claims date back to Moroccan independence in 1956, when Moroccan government claimed Western Sahara to be part of Moroccan pre-colonial territory – the “Greater Morocco”<sup>8</sup>. During the colonization, Spain used to act on behalf of its colony, establishing military forces on the border to avoid the Moroccan invasion – a situation that changed with the decolonization.

When the ‘decade of decolonization’ began in the African context, Spain faced international pressure to decolonize Western Sahara. This was when Morocco and Mauritania claimed, most intensively, sovereignty over the territory, due to the vacuum of power resulting from Spain withdrawal. In this context, both governments asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an Advisory Opinion. As an answer, the ICJ stated, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1975, that:

neither the internal nor the international acts relied upon by Morocco indicate the existence at the relevant period of either the existence or the international recognition of legal ties of territorial sovereignty between Western Sahara and the Moroccan State. Even taking account of the specific structure of that State, they do not show that Morocco displayed any effective and exclusive State activity in Western Sahara (ICJ, 1975).

Right after this ICJ advisory opinion, Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania signed one agreement that came to be the source of rupture, distrust, and discontent between the Sahrawis and Spain, as their former colonial power: the Madrid Accords, signed on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1975, would decide the future of Western Sahara without the

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<sup>8</sup> According to Pablo San Martin, “Rabat’s interests in the lands south of the Bled es Siba date back to 1956, when the leader of the Istiqlal Party, Al-al El Fassi, formulated the idea of Greater Morocco (...). Greater Morocco extended from the Strait of Gibraltar to the River Senegal and comprised the Western Sahara, most of Mauritania, part of Mali and the eastern part of the Algerian desert, stretching from Tindouf to Bechar” (2010, p. 66). San Martin also affirms that El Fassi’s ‘Greater Morocco’ project was officially accepted by King Hassan II in a speech given on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1961.

participation of Sahrawis themselves. The immorality of this treaty relies not only on how this decision was made, meaning the non-involvement of Western Sahara in a topic that concerns their very own interest and future but also what this decision stated, meaning the division of power between Spain (temporarily), Morocco and Mauritania over Western Sahara's territory.

The Madrid Accords, in this sense, mark a disruption in the relations between the Sahrawis and Spain. According to Chej Ramdan, the Front POLISARIO representative to The Netherlands and a witness himself of the mentioned period, "the Sahrawis and Spanish people used to live in harmony until the signing of the Madrid Agreement, in which the Spanish government betrayed not only the Sahrawi people but many Spanish citizens that sympathize with the Sahrawi cause"<sup>9</sup>.

The months of October and November 1975 were crucial for the political development of the Sahrawi current condition. Not only the signature of the Madrid Accords marks Spain's withdrawal, but the 'Green March' comes to address the Moroccan presence on the Western Sahara territory. In November 1975, King Hassan II called Moroccan citizens to march through Western Sahara, as a demonstration of power and ownership. The 'Green March' was carried out by civilians, which prevented any violent reaction from Spain or the Sahrawis. The Sahrawi's existence and resistance highlight the Moroccan attitude and policy towards Western Sahara, that ends up being known to violate basic principles of international regimes, starting by the fact that the Sahrawi's right to self-determination is, in theory, a non-negotiable right protected by international law. Following the Green March, then:

on 26 February 1976, Spain informed the Secretary-General that as of that date it had terminated its presence in the Territory of the Sahara and deemed it necessary to place on record that Spain considered itself thenceforth exempt from any responsibility of any international nature in connection with the administration of the Territory, in view of the cessation of its participation in the temporary administration established for the Territory<sup>10</sup> (UN, 2017).

As a consequence, the very next day, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1976, the Sahrawis proclaimed Front POLISARIO as their political representation and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as the maximum demonstration of their wish for

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<sup>9</sup> Information obtained through an interview with Chej Ramdam, Polisario Representative to The Netherlands, on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Later on, in 1990, the General Assembly reaffirmed that "the question of Western Sahara was a question of decolonization which remained to be completed by the people of Western Sahara". Curiously, this statement from 1990 still seems to be actual.

independence. The Sahrawi's current life and government in exile coincide with both Front POLISARIO and the SADR pursuit of political recognition and the right to self-determination.

By maintaining the Western Sahara occupation until today, Morocco goes against international law and transnational efforts of eradicating colonization. It also violates universal and fundamental human principles, norms, and rights<sup>11</sup>. This ongoing process of colonization reflects the Moroccan advantages of maintaining the *status quo* of the region in its favor, through the occupation. It also allows Morocco to enjoy the economic advantages from the natural resources exploitation in the region<sup>12</sup>.

On the other hand, despite the Moroccan impunity regarding the occupation, there is a global condemnation of Morocco's violations of international law and human rights<sup>13</sup>. It can be seen through political retaliations and formal statements questioning the occupation, as seen through the current debates regarding the illegality of the resource exploitation between Morocco and the European Union, concerning the fishing industry, phosphate extraction, and agriculture<sup>14</sup>. Also, critical perspectives in academic production, international organizations reports, and non-governmental organizations' claims demonstrate a structured resistance against the occupation and a source of support defending the Sahrawis right to self-determination<sup>15</sup>.

The diffuse and widespread condemnation of the Moroccan foreign policies regarding Western Sahara demonstrates that the Moroccan occupation has been and

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<sup>11</sup> Moroccan occupation policy goes against the UN charter, that recognizes the self-determination as a principle. It also violates the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, that stated that "all peoples enjoy the right of self-determination" (1960, UN General Assembly). Moreover, by occupying Western Sahara territory, Morocco violates the Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1949) that states that "the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies".

<sup>12</sup> The phosphate mines and the fishing industry are known to drive Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara territory.

<sup>13</sup> Many governments, through their diplomacy and forums under the United Nations, as well as organizations, have been condemning and criticizing Moroccan initiatives in Western Sahara. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, World Organization Against Torture, Reporters Without Borders, International Committee of the Red Cross, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Defend International, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information are just some examples.

<sup>14</sup> For more information, see the recent decisions issued from the Council of the European Union regarding the fisheries agreement between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco.

<sup>15</sup> Many organizations have been condemning and criticizing Moroccan initiatives in Western Sahara, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, World Organization Against Torture, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, International Committee of the Red Cross, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Defend International, Society for Threatened Peoples, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information.

continues to be intensely questioned. Morocco's reaction has been to maintain its position at any cost. This condition requires the Moroccan government to look for reaffirming its legitimacy. In this sense, their actions come in many forms, including illegal ones, such as bribery<sup>16</sup>. These initiatives take place on local and regional levels, but mostly on international ones, aiming to exert influence through many channels, such as the development of a one-sided story-telling in the media and academia<sup>17</sup>; chasing political support in international politics and diplomacy<sup>18</sup>; and influencing international organizations<sup>19</sup>. Besides that, Morocco also works through violence and repression. It can be seen through the military control of the armed zone in the artificial sand wall built by Morocco (that serves as a border between the occupied territory – estimated to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Western Sahara territory – and the Front POLISARIO controlled area), as well as through the human rights violations towards the Sahrawis that are still living in the occupied territory.

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<sup>16</sup> The main source of this assumption is embodied in a very contemporary subject, that characterizes cyberwarfare: in the late 2014 a Twitter account, entitled “Chris Coleman”, made public numerous statements concerning documents and e-mails, mainly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Direction Générale des Études et de la Documentation (General Directorate for Studies and Documentation, the Moroccan intelligence and counter-espionage agency, created by General Ahmed Dlimi in 1973), revealing existent evidences of lobby, secret negotiations and bribery carried out by Morocco in multiple channels and agendas. Believed to be a pseudonym, the account (@chris\_coleman24) was suspended after releasing the confidential documents. Then, another account was activated (this time as @chris\_coleman27), but then suspended again. The revelations, popularly named “Wikileaks du Makhzen” (Wikileaks, as referring to the international non-profit organization responsible for publishing secret information, and Makhzen as a reference to “Dar-al-Makhzen”, the name of the official residence of the king of Morocco, situated in Rabat) were quickly spread on the internet and became news on tabloids. Some websites were suspended (as well as “Chris Coleman” account on Twitter) but some still contain online information regarding these Moroccan actions.

<sup>17</sup> Concerning academia, the Wikileaks du Makhzen made public Moroccan negotiations with journalists and think-tanks, mainly from USA and France (other nationalities, such as British, also appear on the list), in order to guarantee that the content of their publications would rebuild Moroccan reputation on negotiating the role of human rights in MINURSO or discrediting Front POLISARIO. Besides that, chronic, articles and public opinion statements in favor of Moroccan government and its King were ordered, with a previously negotiated content. The amount paid varies from money (Euro or United States Dollars) to luxury trips, including free access to Morocco. Through journalists, think-tank reports, and publications Morocco aims to build its reputation as acceptable and legitimate, as well as making its political positions adequate in order to maintain its own claims and defending its very own national interest in the region.

<sup>18</sup> Regarding diplomacy, it is recognizable that the Moroccan Foreign Policy is mostly driven by the claim over Western Sahara territory. The documents exposed by Wikileaks du Makhzen show Moroccan diplomats negotiating and discussing the role of human rights on Moroccan foreign policies with American diplomats.

<sup>19</sup> Towards international organizations, the “Wikileaks du Makhzen” published correspondence reveals intercepted communications, donations with ulterior motives, and lobby activities, related to the UN Mission in the region. MINURSO is one of the only UN Missions left without a human rights mandate. This fact serves as inspiration for academic production and NGO's campaigns, both claiming for a revision of the mandate and the inclusion of a human rights approach, in order to control Moroccan repression towards people that don't share a pro-Moroccan position on the occupied territory. The leaked documents reveal Morocco lobbying in favor of keeping the Mission without a human rights mandate, in order to protect its own interest.

Furthermore, Morocco has not joined the International Criminal Court, meaning its absence from international mechanisms that serve the purpose of guaranteeing the protection of civilians and the operationalization of norms and principles of the human rights regime, such as the right to self-determination<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, Morocco has recently joined the African Union (AU), which has been seen by academia and the media as a movement to gain regional influence and legitimacy, in order to address the Western Sahara dispute through the regional level instead of the international one.

All these conditions confirm the ongoing colonization process faced by Western Sahara, in a political scenario that privileges Morocco in the maintenance of the *status quo* of the region, posing many challenges for the Sahrawis' operationalization of their right to self-determination. These challenges become apparent when the claiming part operates from exile – and this is the case of the Sahrawis.

### *The Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination: Front POLISARIO and the government-in-exile*

Among all the consequences of the Moroccan invasion and occupation, the fleeing of the Sahrawi people to Algeria in 1975 had a major impact on transforming their social and political structure. When referred as a “refugee nation” one may keep in mind that this is the living condition of the Sahrawi population over the past forty-three years. This means dealing with the impacts that this condition has on their social organization, political, and economic development – not only due to the consequences of a territorial absence, in which infra-structure highly impacts it but also because the right to self-determination remains a claim.

The political birth of the Front POLISARIO came to address resistance on a struggle for independence and freedom, rooted in anticolonial motivations and followed by a refugee and exile context. The environment ruling the region in the aftermath of the

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<sup>20</sup> According to ‘Claiming Human Rights, a Guide to International Procedures Available in Cases of Human Rights Violations in Africa’, “the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a permanent independent court which judges persons accused of the most severe crimes of concern to the international community, namely genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The ICC was founded by virtue of a treaty signed by 105 States. The ICC is a court of last instance. It does not intervene if and as long as a case is the object of an inquiry or prosecution within a national judicial system with the exception that the procedures are not seriously conducted, for example if they are officially conducted to deprive a person of his penal responsibility. Furthermore, the ICC does only judge persons who are accused of having committed a severe crime as mentioned above. Jurisdiction and functioning of the ICC are regulated by the Rome Statute. The Court is competent for severe crimes committed on the territory or by nationals of a State Party.”

Spanish withdrawal, with the Moroccan and Mauritanian claims over Sahrawi territory, the ICJ statement, the Green March, and the Moroccan occupation, led to two of the most important political events concerning the political history of the Sahrawi people: the foundation of Front POLISARIO, as the political representation of the Sahrawi people, and the proclamation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The Guelta Declaration formalized the rupture with Spain, leading the Sahrawi people to focus their efforts into the political development of Front POLISARIO.

The exile condition intensifies the challenges faced by the Sahrawi people. When it comes to their pursuit of self-determination, as a consequence of the Moroccan occupation of their territory, it has passed through different stages. Started with a disbelief that the situation would last this long. This logic was reinforced by the ICJ statement, by the development of international movements supporting the Sahrawi cause, and also by the progressive recognition of the SADR, which were positive indicators of success on the pursuit of self-determination.

Dealing with an (at first sight) unexpected lasting of the refugee condition impacted negatively on the political organization of both the Sahrawis as a society and Front POLISARIO as a political movement. The exile condition adds extra challenges, in which besides fighting for their right to self-determination, managing the refugee population conditions becomes a mandatory duty. Providing for food, health services, education, and social needs turns out to be a responsibility that takes place in an unstructured context, lacking both infrastructure and an economic background, that normally would serve as a national source of incomes to invest in the population<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, being in exile boosts the perception of the urgency to act. In the case of Western Sahara, the international invisibility of their situation and the predominant Moroccan narrative influence negatively on their pursuit. From the Sahrawi perspective, when it comes to international relations and foreign affairs, Western Sahara used to be addressed as a “reserved subject”, in which the level, amount and veracity of information to be turned public was not only filtered but also controlled by Morocco and

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<sup>21</sup> As the Moroccan national and geostrategic interest are behind its occupation of Western Sahara territory, natural resources, such as phosphate, as well as the fishing industry and agriculture, are nowadays part of the economic structure of Morocco, becoming indispensable in its export agenda. The legality of these resource exploitations is a matter of broad discussions in international politics.

Spain<sup>22</sup>. This contributes to a situation in which actions to counterbalance the silence were required, and in this case, the exile condition played a trigger on urging to act.

This is why, for Front POLISARIO, developing a Minister of Foreign Affairs and a Minister of Cooperation became indispensable. Among other ministries in charge of a multiple agenda to address the needs and challenges faced by the Sahrawi society, these two ministries were essential in the crucial task of looking for visibility and support, two intertwined notions on the effort to raise awareness about their situation and condition. The support they were in search of was both material and political and, in this sense, the exile condition reinforces the need for assistance, because it portrays an extreme condition on pursuing self-determination.

In this sense, the exile and the refugee condition boosts the need for support, by portraying the urgency of acting, which was firstly fulfilled by Algeria. The Algerian role emerges as a consequence of two of its defining characteristics: Algeria's acknowledgment on being historically supportive of independence movements, rooted in its anticolonial commitment with the African continent, reinforced in its role in the Pan-African movement, as well as the Algerian commitment to contain the Moroccan expansion on the Maghreb region<sup>23</sup>.

The exile context, then, raised the voice of international solidarity movements, which summed up with non-governmental organizations to provide political and material support on denouncing the human rights violations carried out by Morocco and defending the Sahrawi's right to self-determination. This political support came through inserting the Western Sahara on the international agenda. The material support came through resource mobilization, in order to provide essential goods for the population, mainly in the early years as refugees.

Both initiatives evolved to the development of activism networks, firstly as overseas solidarity manifestations that later developed into more structured solidarity movements, committees, foundations and non-governmental organizations. In sum, being in exile truly increased the challenges and difficulties faced by the Sahrawi population, and intensified their demands. At the same time, it reinforced and emphasized the need

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<sup>22</sup> Information obtained through an interview with Chej Ramdam, Front POLISARIO Representative to The Netherlands, on February 15th, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Information obtained through interview with Pedro Pinto Leite, Secretary of the International Platform of Jurists for East Timor, member of the Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara and Western Sahara Resource Watch, on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

for visibility and support, a commitment that found an echo in advocacy mechanisms in which shared values tend to see no borders.

*International solidarity, activism, and network: the self-determination pursuit echoes beyond the sea*

When it comes to operationalizing the pursuit of self-determination, or as the pursuit of any other fundamental right, numerous conditions are required in order to gain visibility and promote change in the *status quo*. After fleeing to Algeria, looking for visibility was an indispensable step in the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination. The ICJ statement and the Moroccan invasion seemed not to be enough to raise international attention and, for that reason, Front POLISARIO engaged in developing support networks and committees, aiming to raise awareness about their cause, making their situation public, and making the world know about their condition<sup>24</sup>.

Finding support and establishing contact with other States and institutions was and still is crucial and central to their cause. Not only Front POLISARIO was dedicated to that, but previous initiatives such as the *Organización Avanzada para la Liberación del Sahara* (Advanced Organization for Saharan Liberation)<sup>25</sup>, were committed to look for support and establish contacts with neighbor countries (Justo, 2013). The exile context and condition demanded the development of networks looking for political and material support. The proclamation of the SADR, the foundation of Front POLISARIO, and the early years of pursuing self-determination, all in the late 1970's, happened in a context in which, concomitantly, non-state actors were emerging as players in international politics, meaning that the support would not necessarily come shaped as the traditional politics played by States and its institutions.

Non-state actors interactions are structured in terms of networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). These networks differ essentially in their dimensions, nature, and goals. Activism networks, for example, aim at changing the *status quo*. Their relationship with social movements has to do with how crucial social movements are in the process of

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<sup>24</sup> Information obtained through an interview with Chej Ramdam, the Front Polisario Representative to The Netherlands, on February 15th, 2018, who highlighted the efforts played by Front POLISARIO in developing their ministries of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, as well as the efforts in chasing external support in order to make itself and the Sahrawi condition known.

<sup>25</sup> Established in 1968, the *Organización Avanzada para la Liberación del Sahara* was a pro-independence political movement, considered to be the seed for the development of the Front POLISARIO.



political change (Giugni et al., 1999). In this sense, it is possible to see a complementarity between the agenda formation of social movements concerned with human rights violations and the development of activism networks sharing the same concerns.

The shared values and principles that recognize human rights violations tend to see no borders, giving rise to a common agenda of advocacy and support. This allows us to think about the transnationality of collective action, not only due to the origin of the claims but also as the strategic value of both domestic and transnational dimensions. For Keck and Sikkink (1998), the new links that emerge from the interdependence of both levels help to multiply channels to access the international system.

Actions that are performed collectively and with a political aim are defined by Giugni and Passy (2001) as political altruism. While theorizing about the solidarity movement, they present the possible levels of intervention, mainly from local/domestic to transnational dimensions. Their argument highlights how borderless is the background of action of our objects of inquiry. This background also enjoys trends and changes, in which principles, norms, and regimes are political mechanisms conceived and addressed through supranational structures to manage international politics – as stated previously.

In this context, the emergence and role of non-state actors are no longer problematized – it is assumed as a reality in which their agency is not denied or overshadowed, but recognized and enhanced. This present work is embedded in a discussion previously addressed by many scholars committed to demonstrating that a state-centric perspective, when it comes to human rights and activism, isn't capable to address the facts, cause, and effects, and challenges that implementing human rights norms poses.

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), on arguing in favor of the centrality of norms and normative issues to understanding politics, make a contribution on theorizing about norm cycles. The authors theorize norm cycle arguing that norms have been central to the study of politics. The norm cycle is represented by three stages: norm emergence, norm cascade and internalization. The phase of norm emergence counts and relies on the work carried out by the norm entrepreneurs, setting the agenda. Then, the norm cascade represents the 'domino effect' in which a norm becomes part of the political agenda of States, being accepted. Internalization, in its turn, occurs in the end of the norm cascade, and relies on the States incorporation and absorption in its policy.

The authors address not only the stages that compose a norm cycle but also the actors involved in the process. For them, the origin of a norm necessarily relies on the

role of what the authors call ‘norm entrepreneurs’ – which comes to be mostly non-state actors acting through organizational platforms. The fact that norms are built by agents and emerge in a highly contested normative space highlights the persuasive character of the involved actors in this stage of norm creation. It also leaves space to reinforce the role that information has, considering its strategic need on framing the agenda.

Convincing States to embrace new norms materialize what advocacy networks are committed to. It also represents what the Polisario Komitee and the EUCOCO are engaged in. This prominent role can be seen in the way the advocacy networks exert influence and promote change. On the following pages, two dimensions of activism supporting the Sahrawi right to self-determination will be explored. Firstly, a domestic dimension of collective action will be analyzed: established in the domestic level, in the national domain of The Netherlands, the Polisario Komitee emerged in 1976 and developed its activities locally. Following that, a transnational dimension of collective action will be explored through EUCOCO, the European Coordinating Conference of Support to the Sahrawi People, whose activities aimed at a broader spectrum of actors and participants. Both initiatives will demonstrate the indispensability of activism in a human rights context due to their political orientation, commitment to social change, and role as norm entrepreneurs.

## **2. The local dimension of collective action: Polisario Komitee and the support for the Sahrawi right to self-determination through raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and pressuring the government**

As it has been argued, norms and principles serve the purpose of operationalizing international politics. It is through them that States and institutions infer an expected behavior on other States and institutions, supported by international law mechanisms and agendas. When it comes to human rights, its norms emerge not only from a “top-down” logic, but it can also be seen as an emerging demand from the civil society. The non-state actors engaged in this process act as ‘norm entrepreneurs’, representing a “bottom-up” perspective on conceiving human rights norms. Their role is mainly indispensable in the phase of norm emergence and agenda setting, in which they influence other players that are part of this agenda.

The domestic dimension is where mobilization and advocacy begins, since “non-governmental organizations and social movements are the primary actors of transnational

collective action” (Khagram et al, 2002, p. 9). The local level is the first and foremost shape in which an advocacy materializes. For that, the international solidarity for supporting the Western Sahara saw in the 1970’s and 1980’s the emergence of multiple local initiatives, spread worldwide, aiming to support the Sahrawi right to self-determination. Among these, there is the Polisario Komitee, in The Netherlands.

This chapter, as well as the following, will shed some light on this specific dynamic of international politics, in which non-state actors, in the form of local level initiatives, play a role and have agency in addressing human rights. Focusing on the activities of this Dutch initiative, the Polisario Komitee, this chapter aims to demonstrate how this player acted on three main fronts: raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and pressuring the government, all related to supporting the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination.

#### *The Polisario Komitee: a Dutch initiative for the Sahrawi’s right to self-determination*

More contemporary academic contributions, committed to reflecting social and political behavior, raise questions about the role of non-state actors in international politics. History, Sociology, International Relations and Political Science scholars engage with the understanding of political processes that involve non-state actors as central players (Khagram et al., 2002). The argument of non-state actors as agents engaged in restructuring world politics (ibid) recognizes their agency as sources of change in the international system. Their ability to bring transformative and mobilizing ideas to the international arena (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) is also invoked and relates to the kind of activity explored in this section.

This academic debate is centered on the recognition of non-government organizations and initiatives, presented at distinct levels (local, international and transnational dimensions) and expressed in distinct ways: social movements (Giugni et al, 1999), political altruism (Giugni and Passy, 2001), advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), challenging groups (Gamson, 1975), collective action and resource mobilization (Zald and McCarthy, 1979).

Despite labels or descriptions, all these initiatives represent indispensable elements contributing to a ‘changing nature’ in international politics, in which the role of non-state actors is an important source of new ideas in the international system (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). As a matter of fact, when it comes to an activist agenda, human rights are

a common frame bringing together distinct elements. The notion that “human rights has been a predominant focus of transnational social change organizations since the 1950’s” (Khagram et al, 2002, p. 31) confirms the particularities of the advocacy agenda highlighted here.

However, the rise of advocacy networks is not only a direct consequence of structural processes related to the management of international politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Political opportunity structures also favors the formation of cause-oriented initiatives committed to social change. Fennie Stavast, a former member of the Polisario Komitee, argued that the context of decolonization in Africa urged for a collective conscience in Europe. Inspired by the Spanish solidarity, it allowed a focus towards Western Saharan self-determination in other European countries, such as The Netherlands<sup>26</sup>.

When Zald and McCarthy affirm that “mobilization is more likely when collective action is more urgent” (1979, p. 27), it resonates with the history of Western Sahara after 1975, considering the sequence of events that took place by that period and the exile and refugee condition of the Sahrawi people. In this sense, despite the dominance of Morocco on sustaining a universal narrative about its presence in Western Sahara, the Sahrawi’s claim and the pursuit of self-determination led to the development of advocacy networks – firstly in Spain and later provoking a domino effect, promoting the emergence of distinct pro-Sahrawi collective initiatives in other European States.

Concerning The Netherlands, it was on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1976, in The Hague, that nineteen people got together in a meeting to formalize their interest to “support the Front POLISARIO fight” (Polisario Komitee, 4 December 1976)<sup>27</sup>. The common desire for change, meaning the recognition of the Western Sahara right to self-determination, as well as the political recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, brought them together in this first meeting, leading to the establishment of a committee, horizontally structured and divided by tasks.

This first meeting led to the establishment of Polisario Komitee’s first immediate goals, which were the need to inform the Dutch population and the rapid transfer of existing information to various points in The Netherlands; the need to organize concrete support and coordinating aid; and the need to provide an informative about the Moroccans

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<sup>26</sup> Fennie Stavast was a member of the Polisario Komitee since its foundation, in December 1976.

<sup>27</sup> The people present in the meeting were from Groningen, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Dordrecht, Nijmegen, The Hague, Leidschendam, 's-Heerenberg, Eemnes, Alkmaar, Utrecht, Zoetermeer. On the attendance list, twelve other people that were not present at the meeting were mentioned and listed as interested on the initiative – the document also shows that they were aware and welcome for the next meeting.

living in The Netherlands. Mobilized by these first goals and considering the future challenges of advocating for the Sahrawi self-determination, the participants proposed a division into task groups, accordingly: organizing national events and festivals; screening films and contacting the press; inventorying the existent material and the demanded material to raise money and awareness (according to the target group); and defining financial, subsidiary, and aid initiatives<sup>28</sup>. The operationalization of Polisario Komitee came to be assured by Novib's commitment to guaranteeing the starting costs of the Polisario Komitee, as stated by the minute of a meeting held on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1977<sup>29</sup>.

It was in the very first meeting that the committee was named, but it was only later that the official foundation and statute were signed<sup>30</sup>. It was, then, time for the Polisario Komitee to become known, as the materialization of mobilizing citizens motivated by solidarity principles to defend the Sahrawi right to self-determination. As a collective actors' primary purpose is to carry on struggles, through a common identity, a shared fate, and in a general commitment to defend a group (Zald and McCarthy, 1979), this was the kind of solidarity that marked the birth of the Polisario Komitee. This notion is complemented by Giugni and Passy (2001), for whom an altruistic behavior must be performed voluntarily and intentionally, benefit other persons, and has to be performed without expecting any reward: all characteristics of the Polisario Komitee<sup>31</sup>.

In this sense, Polisario Komitee emerged in 1976 as a solidarity initiative. During its early months the meetings were held on a bimonthly basis, and during the first year, the attendance varied from two to two hundred fifty people per meeting. This kind of initiative was also taking place in other European countries, at the same time, so Polisario

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<sup>28</sup> The financial task division would include drawing up a budget concerning the specific activities of the Komitee, to be submitted to organizations such as NCO (Nationale Commissie Voorlichting en Bewustwording Ontwikkelingssamenwerking – in literal translation this organization represents the National Commission Information and Awareness Development Cooperation), Novib, and X-Y.

<sup>29</sup> Novib, currently Oxfam Novib, is an NGO established in 1956. According to its vision and purpose its main belief is that everyone can build an independent life without poverty. To reach its goal, Novib works with local organizations in developing countries, organizes fundraising campaigns to make people aware of poverty and injustice in the world, and tries to influence the policies of governments and companies by lobbying, both on national and international levels.

<sup>30</sup> During the first meeting the members agreed with the proposed name (Polisario Komitee) and there was a consensus over the fact that their general goal was to support Front POLISARIO on achieving self-determination. Nevertheless, it was said in the meeting that if Front POLISARIO changes its position, the committee should reconsider its name. The statute of foundation of Polisario Komitee ended up being signed on January 10th, 1977.

<sup>31</sup> Giugni and Passy (2001) complement this notion arguing that “political altruism is a form of behavior based on acts performed by a group or/and on behalf of a group, and not aimed to meet individual interests; it is directed at a political goal of social change or the redefinition of power relations; and individuals involved in this type of social change do not stand to benefit directly from the success deriving from the accomplishment of those goals” (2001, p. 6).

Komitee became one among other international solidarity initiatives for supporting the Sahrawi people in Europe. Its political development allows placing it as part of an advocacy network, affecting and influencing politics in the international and the domestic level.

It was on a cold March afternoon, in the city of Nijmegen, in Fennie Stavast's cozy living room, that me, her and Niko Tetteroo spent quality time and lots of energy on trying to group and categorize the activities carried out by the Polisario Komitee, in an attempt to systematize its initiatives<sup>32</sup>. The conversation, that benefitted from their lifetime experiences, allowed us to group the Polisario Komitee initiatives in three categories of action, that are a byproduct of the committee's agenda: raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and pressuring the government. These three distinct but complementary categories will be explored in the next three sections, in an attempt to map the path followed by Polisario Komitee on developing its support for the Sahrawi fight for self-determination.

#### *Raising awareness: the challenges of social conscience and commitment*

As non-state actors are a source of resistance from below (Khagram et al., 2002), raising awareness and developing a collective conscience demands being informed and conscious. As stated in the foundational letter of Polisario Komitee (December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1976), raising awareness was already one of the organization's first commitments. As a political space of advocacy organized through shared values, giving visibility to the Sahrawi's fight for self-determination was a crucial first step, and that could be achieved in multiple ways. The minutes of the meetings from 1976 to 1989 showed a continuous commitment of Polisario Komitee on informing society and raising awareness about the Western Sahara condition.

Polisario Komitee engaged in raising awareness through diverse initiatives. Having had access to the committee inventoried files in the International Institute of Social History plus enjoying interviews with its former members, it was possible to cluster Polisario Komitee's initiatives in categories, as follows: organized campaigns in form of cultural events, such as movie sessions, photo expositions, and music presentations dedicated to express both the Sahrawi's exile condition as well as their

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<sup>32</sup> Niko Tetteroo and Fennie Stavast were members of the Polisario Komitee since its foundation, in December 1976.

culture of resistance; incentive and publicize books dedicated to the Sahrawi cause, whose content explored the Moroccan politics of violations and the Sahrawi's right to self-determination; development of a newspaper entitled "Polisario Krant", aiming to gather and diffuse all the recent events regarding both the Western Sahara as well as the achievements of Sahrawi's international solidarity network; negotiation for spaces in the media (radio, television and newspapers), in order to reach and penetrate society through information; and protests and manifestations urging the population to join the cause, organized and carried out as a political resource.

Information is at the core of advocacy networks development and operationalization. The concept of "information politics", developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998), has an explanatory power regarding the effects on building a collective conscience as well as contributing to influence State behavior. For the authors, it consists of the ability to generate politically usable information, moving it to where it might have more impact. On interpreting the concept, it is possible to see two complementary aspects: firstly, there is the generation of information, which maintains these initiatives as an alternative source of information on a global scale. This is an intrinsic characteristic of advocacy networks, for whom social change can be achieved through reports, statements, and published works, because they tend to be more representative of the civil society, in comparison to governments, considering their strategic use of information and foreign affairs. The other aspect is how information is used to persuade and stimulate people to act and join the cause. Polisario Komitee acted upon both aspects, as a source of information and using information to gather collaborators.

In this sense, organizing and supporting cultural events and campaigns played a big role in the committee activities. On its very first meeting, in December 1976, the members were divided into task groups, among which there was one responsible for organizing cultural events. In an open letter sent in February 1977, the Polisario Komitee secretariat introduced a movie entitled "*West Sahara, Onafhankelijkheid of Sterven*" (Western Sahara, Independence or Death), a co-production of Jan Kees de Rooy (a Polisario Komitee member) and Octavio Cortés Acevedo, with financial support from IKON and Novib<sup>33</sup>. The Polisario Komitee constantly organized movie screenings, promoted locally, at the city level, in order to reach the local population. Sometimes they were followed by Sahrawi music presentations and photo exhibitions. Besides that,

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<sup>33</sup> IKON stands for Interkerkelijk Omroep Nederland, and was a Dutch public broadcaster.

theater plays and informal meetings with Sahrawi people were made viable by the committee. As an example, there was a visit of a group of Sahrawi women in The Netherlands, aiming to make public the Sahrawi reality, culture, resistance and fight for self-determination, bringing it to the daily lives of the Dutch society<sup>34</sup>.

Complementing the cultural approach, the Polisario Komitee was also committed to raising awareness on the population through encouraging, supporting and getting involved in producing books dedicated to the Sahrawi condition and fight for self-determination. Among some titles, there are “*Onafhankelijkheid of Sterven: De strijd van Polisario voor een vrij West-Sahara*” (Independence or death: Polisario's struggle for a free Western Sahara) written by Albert Stol in 1978, and “*Een kennismaking met het volk van de Westelijke Sahara*” (An introduction to the people of Western Sahara) written by the Polisario Komitee in 1982<sup>35</sup>.

Following the contributions on the written level, the Polisario Komitee also produced a newspaper, entitled “Polisario Krant”, committed to putting together the recent events regarding the Western Sahara as well as the achievements of Sahrawi’s international solidarity network. The newspaper played a decisive role in raising awareness and increasing the level of knowledge about the conditions in which the right to self-determination was being pursued by the Sahrawi people. In February 1977, during one of the regular meetings carried out by the committee, the members mentioned the idea of a bulletin, and it was suggested to get in touch with the Belgian committee, in order to exchange information about ideas regarding the content as well as to share how to operationalize the idea. This movement embodies the concept of political transfer, that represents the “migration of political practices across national borders” (Velde, 2006, p. 205). This communication with other solidarity initiatives/committees aim not only the political transfer regarding the practical knowledge itself: as networks are communicative structures (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), they seek to influence discourse and policies through engaging in larger political communities that share the same goal.

As a product of that, the first edition of the Polisario Krant came to be announced.

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<sup>34</sup> Minutes from January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1977; February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1978; March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1978; April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1979; August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1979; November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1985 and April 26<sup>th</sup> 1985 highlight the discussion on organizing and advertising cultural initiatives to raise awareness.

<sup>35</sup> Information obtained according to a meeting held on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1978. As expected, other committees were also developing similar initiatives. As an example, the Belgian committee for Sahrawi people sent a letter on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1981, sharing the intention on publishing a book concerning the Sahrawi right to self-determination, on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. On the occasion they also asked for financial support and engagement.



Materialized as a hub to focus the news concerning political events about Western Sahara, the newspaper main goal was to raise awareness and to cover an informational gap on the matter. According to Stavast, the local Dutch media was negligent in not publishing anything regarding the Western Sahara. For her, at least if the media published something (even if it was a wrong information), the committee would have the chance to correct or counter-reply. But in the case of an absence of news concerning the topic, mainly because the Dutch media was engaged in covering other conflicts, Polisario Krant emerges both as an alternative to the silence and as a source of information, including classified information – such as human rights matters, as the political prisoners under Moroccan custody. This exercise of bringing news to the public sphere is considered indispensable in the context of a social movement. News coverage is critical and essential, and they can take form through mass media, print, or broadcast news: these are important resources for sustaining social movements (Zald and McCarthy, 1979).

It could be argued that the absence of Dutch press and media on covering the political events regarding the Western Sahara contribute to a weakening of human rights compliance. As it is expected from the media to play a crucial role in making public not only the political events but also the consequences of it, the silence and absence of mass coverage was to be fulfilled with the kind of initiative that Polisario Komitee represents. It materializes the space that non-state actors have been penetrating as interlocutors, not as an alternative, but, in this case, as a source of information. It is in a context of information politics that the non-state actors gain influence because they serve as alternative sources of information (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

In aiming to raise awareness and give visibility to the cause, besides the Polisario Krant newspaper, the Polisario Komitee also acted on negotiating spaces in the media in other two different levels: radio and television. Through minutes of the Polisario Komitee meetings, it is possible to identify multiple attempts at trying to penetrate the media level, engaging in reports, short documentaries, and articles concerning the Western Sahara. The content was not restricted to the political nature of their fight for self-determination but is also covered the consequences of the Sahrawi's life in exile, as well as characteristics about their daily lives. Examples regarding television media were a trip to Algeria organized by VARA, a Dutch broadcast association, to make a documentary about the festivities of the celebration of SADR anniversary<sup>36</sup>. Besides that, there was

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<sup>36</sup> According to Stavast and Tetteroo (2018), politicians also have had engaged in initiatives like that later on.

also a request sent to Embargo, a television programme by VPRO (another Dutch broadcast association), to pay attention to the issue of Western Sahara. Both were discussed in a Polisario Komitee meeting on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1978. Regarding radio initiatives, as an example, there is a negotiation between Polisario Komitee and VARA, on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1979, for broadcasting on the radio a talk about the Polisario struggle.

On the writing media, the publication of an article entitled “*De vrouw in de woestijn*” (The woman in the desert) by VIVA (a weekly fashion magazine from The Netherlands), is presented on a meeting held on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1978. The publication concerned the life of Sahrawi woman, sharing their achievements, characteristics, agency, and challenges, and it serves not only to give visibility but also to develop empathy between the Dutch population and the Sahrawi’s conditions. Besides that, a month later, on a meeting held on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1978, the committee discussed an incoming mail, in which Aly Knol, a Dutch journalist, was willing to write an article about Polisario for the “*Vrije Volk*” (Free People), a Dutch daily newspaper. This kind of partnership serves to open a channel of communication between both parts, representing a positive achievement for the Polisario Komitee by that time.

As part of a solidarity network, Polisario Komitee worked on sharing information and giving visibility, as ways to achieve the desired political and social change towards the self-determination. The power of information, in this sense, relies in multiple forms: their ability to serve as a source of information (either as a reaction to media monopoly or media absence and silence, but always aiming to raise awareness), their ability to engage with other players with a specific or privileged positioning regarding the Moroccan position, and their ability to maintain themselves informed.

When it comes to engaging with other players/actors, the Polisario Komitee had contacts with a group called ‘KMAN’ (Committee of Moroccan Workers in The Netherlands). According to Niko Tetteroo, representing the Polisario Komitee contact person with this group at the time, the idea was to inform Moroccans living in The Netherlands about the situation in Western Sahara. When the first delegation of Front POLISARIO came to The Netherlands, the Polisario Komitee prepared a meeting between KMAN and Front POLISARIO. Spreading the Sahrawi point of view among Moroccans was of great and strategic value, especially because, according to Tetteroo, more than 90% of the Moroccan community in The Netherlands took the Western Sahara

question as a sacred issue<sup>37</sup>. This positioning can be demonstrated by one event that took place in April, 1985, during a Polisario Komitee meeting in Rotterdam. In this occasion, a Moroccan group entitled “Amicales” invaded the meeting in order to demonstrate their opposition to the initiative supporting the Western Sahara cause<sup>38</sup>. This demonstrates that this kind of initiative, despite representing the human rights agenda, faces opposition.

These efforts on influencing and raising awareness take place in a context in which “solidarity movement organizations playing advocacy or educational roles try, above all, to influence citizens or public opinion, as well as governmental policies” (Giugni and Passy, 2001, p. 227). In this sense, besides raising awareness, the Polisario Komitee had to engage in maintaining their members informed, through internal education. In their specific case, information from both the occupied, the free territory, as well as the camps in Algeria, found an echo to be reproduced in this kind of network. Only by reaching these two levels of information (inside and outside the committee) the Polisario Komitee can become able to have information as a powerful tool and resource, serving strategically to pursue the changes they aimed to.

According to Tetteroo and Stavast, the members of Polisario Komitee were constantly educated, and the awareness-building process among the members of solidarity groups was also very well organized. Newsletters played an important role in that. The fact that local key-figures and leaders had access to information about the Western Sahara allowed the Polisario Komitee (and the other solidarities as well) to develop their own means to keep informed. Among the techniques to spread the information among people from the solidarity movement, slides were the most popular ones, as it allows the use of images and it provides a great flexibility, adapting the presentation according to the audience<sup>39</sup>.

In this sense, for the Polisario Komitee to work on informing both its staff and its audience triggers the development of other initiatives. Raising awareness and mobilizing resources aim to sensitize for the cause and mobilize public opinion – meanwhile

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<sup>37</sup> Western Sahara, in this case, turns out to be Moroccan Sahara, as the Moroccan community addresses it.

<sup>38</sup> Information obtained through interview with Niko Tetteroo, former member of the Polisario Komitee, in January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Information obtained through a minute of a meeting held in The Hague in February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1977 and from Fennie Stavast. According to her, there were several groups that were willing to engage with the Sahrawi cause, such as trade-unions, political parties, women groups, etc. As an opportunity to develop their willingness, for people who usually would not attend a Western-Sahara meeting would be informed at their "own place" (church, neighborhood-center, etc). She highlights the flexibility that slides offer, once it was easy to adapt to the public it was referred to. She gives as examples: in women groups the discussion would be more about living in the refugee camps; for political parties, it would be more about international law.

initiatives related to pressuring the government aim to account for compliance and influence State behavior. At the same time, all of them aim to promote political and, consequently, social change. In this sense, despite having individual goals, these categories of action also have shared goals, what makes them mutually constitutive.

One other category to be explored in relation to the efforts on raising awareness played by the Polisario Komitee was the organization and call for mobilization on the streets, in the form of protests. The protest, as a political resource, is used to access policy-making by those who do not have a direct access (Lipsky, 1968). Zald and McCarthy (1979) also elaborate on Lipsky contribution arguing that protest is a political resource that serves to mobilize diverse audiences. Minutes and posters show how the Polisario Komitee engaged in initiatives of this nature. Also, co-organized with political parties and/or institutions, they call upon the population to participate in peaceful gatherings, in which public events (usually cultural performances) took place as well<sup>40</sup>. These manifestations, either marching on the streets with signs or gathering people together in cultural performances, were always triggered by a common goal: to raise awareness and gather support for the Sahrawi fight for self-determination. This support can be expressed in many forms, such as a political positioning against particular measures, decisions, or events. In this case, for example, besides protesting against the Moroccan Occupation, Polisario Komitee also organized manifestations against cartographic representations of Western Sahara as a territory of Morocco in two different atlases, representing a dissatisfaction on the portrayal of the Western Sahara's territorial dimension<sup>41</sup>.

On highlighting the role of political initiatives committed to raising awareness through information and the effects resulted from these initiatives, Tarrow (1998) categorizes three mechanisms in the study of social movements that have an explanatory power on helping to understand how movements make meaning in politics. Most specifically, writing on social movements, collective action, and contentious politics, Tarrow systematizes the process of meaning-making, contributing with three categories of impact, as follows: firstly, movements “frame contentious politics”, in the sense of organizing and connecting the grievances; secondly, movements “define, crystallize, and

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<sup>40</sup> As an example found in one of the advertising posters, some of the political parties and institutions involved on organizing the manifestations were PPR (*Politieke Partij Radikalen* – Political Party of Radicals), PSP (*Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij* – Pacifist Socialist Party), PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid* – Labor Party), CPN (*Communistische Partij van Nederland* – Communist Party of the Netherlands) and Novib.

<sup>41</sup> This discussion can be seen on Polisario Komitee minutes from April 15<sup>th</sup> and September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1978.

construct collective identities”, given the importance of building a collective identity in the early stages of any social initiative; thirdly, he highlights how movements, in which social initiatives like Polisario Komitee are part of, have dealt with emotions to mobilize the society, as emotions act as a common arena to link distinct individualities into a common discourse of human rights, for example.

In this context, as raised by Stavast and Tetteroo, part of the difficulties faced by the committee have to do with the fact that Western Sahara receives little attention when it comes to the agenda of occupied territories and right to self-determination, especially if compared with Israel and Palestine, for example. The case of Palestine enjoys a broader and more general knowledge spread, making it easier to raise awareness because the departure point already assumes some sort of knowledge. For Western Sahara, the departure point remains little-known or a not too much explored topic. This is why the efforts on information politics are indispensable.

Information is a valued resource for non-state actors. It is through them that they allow the promotion of social change, influence politics and expose norm-breaking, all in order to influence in implementing human rights norms<sup>42</sup>. Advocacy groups, such as the Polisario Komitee, challenge the political order and exercise soft power by proposing, questioning, criticizing, and publicizing information (Khagram et al, 2002). These levels are reached not only through raising awareness or other forms of spreading information explored so far, but also through resource mobilization, and pressuring the government, which will be explored as follows.

#### *Resource mobilization: a source to raise awareness*

Besides raising awareness through organizing cultural events, movie screening sessions, music presentations, photo exhibitions, promoting and supporting books, developing a newsletter, negotiating spaces in the media, and organizing protests and manifestations, Polisario Komitee also engaged in resource mobilization initiatives<sup>43</sup>. It was through resource mobilization that the Polisario Komitee engaged both with the

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<sup>42</sup> Khagram et al (2002) problematize this on page 16, through the concept of “mobilization of shame”.

<sup>43</sup> Resource mobilization here is used as a descriptive term, and does not represent the ideas of the resource mobilization theory. Known as an alternative interpretation and approach to social movements theory (Jenkins, 1983), resource mobilization can be a product of social movements theory that attributes, assigns and recognizes resources as the main source of the origin, development and outcome of social movements. This assumption relies in a specific context in which social movements succeed because of an efficient mobilization of resources.

Dutch society and with the Sahrawi population on providing basic needs, not only to meet their necessities but also to raise awareness over their cause.

According to Stavast (2018), resource mobilization is one of the ways in which the Polisario Komitee found to create awareness because to ask for help you need to create a story to make people connect with the cause. Individuals are a target due to their potential to become collaborators, and resource mobilization campaigns are a way to establish a dialogue between the advocacy group and the population in general. Their potential on becoming a transnational audience collaborates with the outcomes expected with the mobilization (Giugni and Passy, 2001). In this sense, resource mobilization goes beyond the material dimension that is expected by the donations raised by the committee: it represents a way to raise awareness regarding the conditions faced by the Sahrawi people in exile. A way to create empathy, materializing both political and material support in one single action.

This resonates with Keck and Sikkink's concept of symbolic politics (1998). For the authors, this kind of politics concern calling upon symbols, or stories, or actions that correlate to a reality that is far away. Accordingly, Giugni and Passy (2001) say that collective actions emerge from grievances and that symbolic, social, material, and human resources are elements provided by solidarity movements. In this sense, these are complementary and coexistent elements in the process of change aimed by the initiatives carried out by the Polisario Komitee.

Mobilizing resources and making resources available absorbed much of the effort displayed by the members of Polisario Komitee during its existence. On the third meeting of the committee, on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1977, a clothing campaign entitled "*Laat de Sahara niet in de kou staan*" (Do not leave the Sahara out in the cold) was debated. This campaign was responsible for collecting six hundred and fifty kilograms of clothes, that were shipped through Rotterdam on the week between 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of January. The shipment was paid by Algeria, and one week later, another shipment was sent, this time with a thousand and five hundred kilograms.

Less than a month later, on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1977, the members reunited in The Hague and reported that the clothing campaign was a success. Such a positive result was the product of local efforts in which the Polisario Komitee members, spread in multiple cities in The Netherlands, headed the donations. The shipment to the Sahrawi camps in Algeria was always negotiated in order to have the best deal – this includes free-cost shipments that were paid either by Algeria or by the Red Crescent, for example.

Besides clothes, the Polisario Komitee also engaged in donation campaigns of medicines, food, and shoes. Some campaigns ran in parallel, mainly due to their local level dynamics<sup>44</sup>. These campaigns enjoyed and benefited efficiency: the cycle between collecting the donations and shipping sometimes took less than a month, according to minutes of meetings held on February 26<sup>th</sup> and March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1977.

The Polisario Komitee also served as a bridge, connecting Sahrawi people's needs, transmitted through Front POLISARIO, with the suppliers and donors, managing content, quantity, quality, and logistics, as it is possible to see through the minutes. In May, the same year, the numbers were increasing exponentially, reaching the marks of ten tons of clothes and two tons of medicines. So, in order to make sure on keeping a good path on these campaigns – raising awareness over the Sahrawi's needs, engaging the Dutch society on their reality, and providing Sahrawi's with material support – a general letter was sent to all members on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1977, asking them to keep the initiatives of the committee locally – meaning keeping the initiatives on the city level. As the members were spread in The Netherlands, this allowed the initiatives to keep spread and perform with a higher audience on the local level. This same letter also addresses other topics such as the extension of the clothing donation campaign, a food campaign of rice, wheat and sugar (pointed as the main needs), and the involvement of Nutricia in a food campaign for children<sup>45</sup>.

In 1977 the committee reached its peak in collecting donations, having collected sixty-one tons of clothes. In the following years, they kept on collecting clothes, medicines, shoes, and food<sup>46</sup>. Adding to that, the committee engaged in toys campaigns and hospital equipment, such as incubators for babies, as we can see from the minute of the meeting held on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1978. The positive acknowledgment of these initiatives and its achievements was a common and mutual recognition. On following up the campaigns, a meeting held on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1980, highlights how positive the campaigns have been.

The involvement of other institutions was a common feature, especially because

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<sup>44</sup> As we can see through the minutes of July 3<sup>rd</sup> and September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1977, for example, clothing and food campaigns were happening simultaneously.

<sup>45</sup> Nutricia was a Dutch food company, that started as a dairy factory in 1896. Later, it specialized in artificial feeding for babies. In 2007 it was bought by the French group Danone, that holds, nowadays, a brand segment entitled Nutricia, specialized in baby food and medical nutrition.

<sup>46</sup> Regarding clothes, it is possible to see informations on the minute of meeting held on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1978 and the letter from the Red Crescent Movement/Croissant Rouge Saharaoui confirming the receipt of the donations on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1982, for example. Concerning shoes, information can be found on the minutes of May 20<sup>th</sup> and July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1978.

of their specific know-how. In some cases, advocacy groups acted as donors to NGOs in order to promote specific projects<sup>47</sup>, and in other cases, donations were directed to the advocacy groups<sup>48</sup>. These initiatives and projects were committed to basic needs such as food and health. But, incoming and outgoing correspondences of Polisario Komitee show that education was also on their agenda, and school supplies and funding for educational needs for Sahrawi children were also part of their initiatives<sup>49</sup>.

Besides contacting other players or serving as a bridge among the actors involved, Polisario Komitee also received requests for supporting initiatives carried out by other actors. As one example, the *Rencontre & Développement*, an Algerian non-governmental association, kept constant contact with the Polisario Komitee to maintain a partnership on developing social projects related to the Sahrawi people. Those projects included an annual aid program (*Programme d'Assistance aux Réfugiés Sahraouis* – Assistance Program to the Sahrawi Refugees) and occasional projects, related to craftwork and donations, as it was possible to see in incoming correspondences addressed to the committee.

Firstly, resource mobilization campaigns concerned meeting the needs of the Sahrawi people, considering the challenges and the needs of the Sahrawi life in the exile. But, as the campaigns were organized, Polisario Komitee realized that resource mobilization had a double capacity, serving to meet not only material needs but also political ones. Asking for donations was an opportunity to denounce the conditions of the Sahrawi people. This kind of initiative also showed the ability of solidarity and advocacy networks to connect different players. The density in which these non-state actors are involved and the impact they have in international politics infer the argument raised by Khagram et al (2002) that these actors are engaged in restructuring world politics. But, despite their increasing prominence in global affairs, human rights compliance itself still relies on the hand of States. This is why one required part of solidarity movements activities is dealing with governments, and it wasn't different with Polisario Komitee.

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<sup>47</sup> As an example, the Swiss committee engaged on donating school supplies and funding for school projects. The donations were forwarded to local centers in Algeria or NGOs, such as the Croissant Rouge and OXFAM, as it was possible to see in a letter sent by the Swiss committee, in January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1981.

<sup>48</sup> Some initiatives included significant donations from other non-state actors, such as NGOs like Oxfam, that in September 1978 donated four tons of meat, as stated on the minutes of the meetings held on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1978. Another minute from April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1979, shows food donation, showing the constancy of these initiatives. Student house associations also got involved in contributing.

<sup>49</sup> As it was possible to see in a letter sent by Polisario Komitee in September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1988, to the Crescent Movement/Croissant Rouge Sahraoui. The document urges the development of a small report on the utilization of a material provided by a Dutch institution for literacy campaigns.



### *Pressuring the Governments: lobbying and petitioning*

Keck and Sikkink (1998) affirm that governments are both the primary ‘guarantors’ of rights at the same time that they are their primary violators. In the context of human rights, this gets even more complex when it comes to guaranteeing the compliance of norms. A basic assumption of this work is the agency of non-state actors in international politics, most specifically, their role in facilitating the implementation of human rights norms – this specific case deals with the right to self-determination. So, as the States remain an important power holder when it comes to complying with human rights norms, the actions carried out by advocacy networks must dialogue with them.

The refugee condition faced by the Sahrawis after the Moroccan invasion led to the development and establishment of international solidarity initiatives overseas, committed to supporting the Sahrawi cause. When it comes to human rights, international solidarities, social movements, advocacy networks, and challenging groups tend to be borderless, not tied with national notions. Their collective actions are to be performed on behalf of other people (Giugni and Passy, 2001), which means that it doesn’t serve, necessarily, to a national interest. It contributes to a particular scheme in which the relationship between these initiatives and the State are based in claims that do not concern the national population.

The systematization provided by Keck and Sikkink (1998) on the types and stages that networks provoke influence goes from issue creation and agenda setting to influence State behavior, as stated before. Even though talking about success and failure is a tricky terrain, the effectiveness of advocacy networks, such as the Polisario Komitee, is usually measured through its impact on norm implementation. This is directly tied to its influence on State behavior, as this is where the political and social change pursued by these initiatives rely on. Activists are concerned with producing a normative change in their area of concern (ibid), so the ability to deal and negotiate with governments is a required skill to promote change.

The concepts of “leverage politics” and “accountability politics” resonates with this category of action. Keck and Sikkink (1998) define leverage politics as “the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence” (p. 21). Meanwhile, accountability politics, for them, mean “the effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles” (p. 22). These notions demonstrate the interdependence between the non-state actor and the

State – namely, here, between Polisario Komitee and the Dutch government.

The agency of non-state networks is demonstrated not only by the recognition of an existent record of States that changed behavior due to pressure campaigns and lobby carried out by advocacy networks, but also by the fact that human rights policies developed and implemented by States emerged as a consequence of international pressure arising from the enlargement of the human rights regime. According to Giugni and Passy (2001), solidarity movements act as an extra-parliamentary political actor in many European countries. Dealing with States as a part of these non-state actors efforts are a crucial path towards aiming norm implementation. For Polisario Komitee, the initiatives that were not targeted to the Dutch society had as a target parliamentarians and political parties, corroborating these assumptions.

This aspect of international politics also leads to thinking about the conditions in which these non-state actors operate within a State. Giugni and Passy (2001) argue that aspects of the political opportunity structure are responsible for making some States more likely to give origin to solidarity initiatives. High levels of mobilization, according to the authors, happen in Germany and Switzerland, but the highest overall belongs to The Netherlands. As the Dutch environment is pointed by some authors to be more favorable to the emergence of solidarity movements, there were expectations to be met, such as the impact of institutional facilitation. As highlighted by the authors, these countries enjoy most developed strategies to be applied to this relationship between the authorities and the social movements, leading to facilitating their mobilization<sup>50</sup>.

Keck and Sikkink (1998) affirm that in European States, the influence of networks is centered on Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation. The Polisario Komitee acted accordingly: according to Stavast and Tetteroo, the committee had constant attempts at trying to schedule meetings between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Front POLISARIO and trying to schedule meetings between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Polisario Komitee. Both Stavast and Tetteroo recognize that these attempts were a constant failure, and the point of contact they were able to reach was with civil employees of the government, such as specialists, but never the government itself.

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<sup>50</sup> Also, on complementing this notion, Keck and Sikkink (1998) state that “In some countries the overlap between individuals in government and NGOs is significant. For example, in 1995 both the queen and the foreign minister of the Netherlands were members of Amnesty International. Indeed, Dutch policy makers claim difficulty in remembering which hat they are wearing at a particular meeting – academic, member of a leading human rights NCO, member of the NCO governmental advisory board, or government delegate to an intergovernmental organization”.

These attempts had as the main goal, as highlighted by both the interviewed, the recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Besides, according to the concept of leverage politics, political effectiveness matters the most, so having the support of a State contributes to a starting point to encourage at least a debate and, at best, other States following the recognition as well.

In order to pursue that, the Polisario Komitee acted through petitions claiming for the recognition of the SADR. One important support came in 1977, when PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid* – Labor Party), demonstrated a willingness to talk and recognize Front POLISARIO, according to the minutes of a meeting held on October 1<sup>st</sup>. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1979, another minute exposed Polisario Komitee pressuring parliamentarians on recognizing SADR. The minute stated that Polisario Komitee motivated parliamentarians to take a stand, asking why The Netherlands always absolves on decisions taken on the United Nations level. It was also said that parliamentarians were asked to vote in directions that favored the recognition of the SADR. But, by that time, there was no previous record of Western European countries have recognized the SADR, which implies no previous favorable behavior, demonstrating that it was not even a debate held nor in a local nor in a continental level. Pragmatically, it means that talking about the Sahrawi's right to self-determination was not on the agenda of these States. In this sense, the non-recognition by any State nullifies the chance of any possible domino effect, in which one State behavior would influence the other and so on.

Later on, on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1979, another campaign organized between the Polisario Komitee and Dutch political parties is mentioned. Most importantly, this meeting discussed the recognition by the Dutch parliament of the right to self-determination, but not the SADR. Stavast and Tetteroo consider that, based on the historic of abstention attitudes held by The Netherlands, the recognition of the right to self-determination was already an achievement. At the same time, they do recognize that it is not as meaningful as it could be if they had recognized the SADR or Front POLISARIO as legitimates.

On pressuring the government, Polisario Komitee acted through petitions and lobbying towards the recognition of the SADR. It also acted along with political parties, not only lobbying and pressuring but also organizing campaigns and cultural events, as mentioned before, with some political parties engaged in raising awareness on the Western Sahara situation. Tetteroo mentions a meeting with Michiel van den Kasteelen, from the political party PPR, on articulating a common campaign including other political

parties, such as PvdA, PSP, PPR, and D66<sup>51</sup>.

Among the parties that Polisario Komitee kept a contact, there was an interest on traveling to the camps in Tindouf, Algeria, where most of the Sahrawi population has been established. This happened mainly on the occasion of the celebrations of the SADR anniversaries. The parties CPN, PSP, and PPR have had recognized the SADR by that time, and according to Stavast they, indeed, went to Algeria in some celebration events regarding the SADR anniversary. The Polisario Komitee not only supported these trips but also had high expectations and hopes that the political parties developed any kind of publicity on their domestic environment, in order to promote a positive influence – but that expectations and hope were not always fulfilled.

Besides lobbying in favor of the recognition of the SADR, other agendas were constant due to the political reality of Western Sahara. Human rights issues, political events concerning the Western Sahara region, political economy quarrels, and the natural resources exploitation are a few examples. Needless to say, the current *status quo* of the region, marked by the Moroccan occupation, already attests multiple violations of the Sahrawi rights, in many forms and levels.

Making States accountable for their actions means exposing the gap between discourse and practice, as the concept of accountability politics defines. Once a government commits to a principle, it encourages other States to do so. But, it can also undermine its possibility to change behavior, since there will be international pressure for compliance. In this sense, the Dutch government wasn't willing to commit itself to recognizing the SADR, but it does not mean its parliamentarians weren't willing to pay attention to other issues on the Western Sahara agenda, such as showed by the minute of a meeting held on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1981. In this occasion, the Polisario Komitee discusses a petition to be sent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Christoph Albert van der Klaauw, about the situation of the Sahrawi people in the occupied territories, the political prisoners, and the subsequent human rights violation towards that population<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> The political parties that Polisario Komitee either contacted or kept a regular communication were: PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid* – Labor Party), PSP (*Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij* – Pacifist Socialist Party), SP (*Socialistische Partij* – Socialist Party), CDA (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl* – Christian Democratic Appeal), VVD (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* – People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), PPR (*Politieke Partij Radikalen* – Political Party of Radicals), D66 (*Democraten 66* – Democrats 66), CPN (*Communistische Partij van Nederland* – Communist Party of the Netherlands), EVP (*Evangelische Volkspartij* – Evangelical People's Party), JOVD (*Jongerenorganisatie Vrijheid en Democratie* – Youth Organization Freedom and Democracy).

<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, other manifestations from the Dutch government made clear their pragmatic position towards the Western Sahara, such as the refusal on allowing a Front POLISARIO member to come to The Netherlands, in 1977, as discussed on a meeting on September 4<sup>th</sup>, same year.

On the economic level, the presence of Dutch companies in the Western Sahara opens a dialogue between Polisario Komitee and the government. The natural resource exploitation in the occupied territory of Western Sahara is led by Morocco and enjoys the presence of multinational companies from all the continents of the world, including European and, most specifically, Dutch ones. By the time of Polisario Komitee activities, Boskalis was the Dutch company that was prospecting economic activities on the territory<sup>53</sup>. The company held a project to build a port in Laayoune, the main city of the Western Sahara.

Aiming to expose the gap between norm and practice and claiming for the illegality of the occupation and the natural resource exploitation, Polisario Komitee engaged on pressuring the company to give up the project. As shared by Tetteroo (by that time he was the representative of the Polisario Komitee regarding this specific topic), despite the economic activity and the engagement of a Dutch company going against the international law, Dutch politicians were still afraid to discuss the recognition of SADR, even facing a political economic impasse, that involved more stakeholders than usual. Fortunately, in August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1980, it was reported by the Polisario Komitee that Boskalis withdrew from the project, which came to be considered a political victory for both the Sahrawis cause and for the Polisario Komitee.

In this sense, the agenda between the Polisario Komitee and the Dutch government was centered on aiming the recognition of the SADR and the Front POLISARIO. For that, the committee worked on trying to stablish a dialogue between the two parts, unsuccessfully. After all, the Dutch government kept its position of declared neutrality, despite Polisario Komitee efforts<sup>54</sup>. On the other hand, it must be stressed that the Polisario Komitee was able to influence political parties, that engaged in giving visibility to the Sahrawi cause, bringing it to the agenda and political scenario of Dutch politics.

### *The beginning of the end: an attempt to present the end of Polisario Komitee*

A “challenge period” is written on the literature of social movements to address

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<sup>53</sup> Namely, Royal Boskalis Westminster N.V., is a Dutch dredging company that provides services relating to the construction and maintenance of maritime infrastructure internationally.

<sup>54</sup> According to the Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland (Netherlands Enterprise Agency), “The Netherlands and the EU are neutral in the conflict between Morocco and Front POLISARIO and do not recognize the mutual claims in the area. The Netherlands supports the UN in its efforts to arrive at a political and sustainable solution that provides for self-determination for the original Sahrawi population of the area”.

the inactivity of determined initiatives. Gamson (1975) exposes three conditions in which a “challenge period” is over: firstly, when the challenging group ceases to exist as a formal entity (officially or unofficially), either dissolved or merged in another group; secondly, when the group ceases mobilization and influence activities, to what the author attributes the ‘period of dormancy’; thirdly, when the group is accepted as a valid and legitimate spokesperson<sup>55</sup>.

Among the archives of the Polisario Komitee, from 1976 to 1990, it is hard to trace a timeline with milestones and main events to attribute the reasons for the end of the committee, as there were no explicit statements communicating the end of its activities. In an effort with Stavast, Tetteroo, and the consulted primary sources on the archives, some events can be traced as collaborating to the weakening of the committee activities, starting by the occurrence of an incident in 1981 involving both Dutch parliamentarians and the Front POLISARIO.

Previous to the incident, the Polisario Komitee was engaged in taking Dutch parliamentarians to visit Western Sahara. When the visit occurred, after a long process of negotiation (in which Tetteroo was playing a part), the car with the Dutch delegation and the members of the Polisario Komitee was shot at by Moroccan forces on crossing the border of the occupied territory, leading to both deaths and injuries. This information, both from Tetteroo’s memories and from a minute of a meeting held on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1981, can be considered to contribute to an increasing sense of untrusty that, most likely, led to the end of the committee a decade later.

It is said to be the beginning of the end for two main reasons. Firstly, it threatened the credibility of the committee among the Dutch society and government. Secondly, it compromised the financial support and subsidies that financed the initiative, mainly coming from NCO<sup>56</sup>. Tetteroo describes the period after the incident as a moment in which “the atmosphere was negative: it was a bad moment for Polisario Komitee” (2018). The members feared that mainly in function of the possible negative publicity over Front POLISARIO because of the accident, it would echo on Polisario Komitee, due to a free association of their names. According to Tetteroo, they were also fearing the risk of a statement from the Dutch government asserting that Front POLISARIO isn’t, perhaps,

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<sup>55</sup> According to Gamson (1975), five years of non-activity is a period considered sufficient to determine the end of an entity.

<sup>56</sup> NCO stands for Nationale Commissie Voorlichting en Bewustwording Ontwikkelingssamenwerking – in literal translation this organization represent the National Commission Information and Awareness Development Cooperation.

the only representative of the Sahrawi people.

Moreover, internal issues took too much time, effort, and energy from the members of the committee. Through the minutes it was possible to see that task division of the members was something constantly discussed and redefined. Despite the fact that it can be seen as a positive move, aiming self-improvement in the organization, adjustment to changes, and adaptation according to priority demands, it can also show signs of weakness, instability, and incapacity to find the ideal formula to operate the human resources of the committee<sup>57</sup>.

These constant changes on Polisario Komitee's task division are likely to be related to the decrease in the attendance on the meetings of the committee and a decrease in the members participating in the planned activities. A minute from April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1983, shows only two people attending, followed by a meeting on May 31<sup>st</sup>, in the same year, with no minimum attendance achieved. In this very same year, 1983, the members of the committee also had to deal with the end of the subsidy from NCO, which impacted heavily on their ability to carry out most of its initiatives<sup>58</sup>. In 1987, basically, only three members were constantly attending the meetings. This is why, in the following year, 1988, the members decided to start a new life for the committee, moving from Rotterdam to Nijmegen. But, on the very next year, they moved back to Rotterdam, showing a moment of inflection.

Although they denote instability, these internal events did not paralyze the activities of the committee. Indeed, it is possible to see that many of the initiatives previously mentioned took place as parallel to these internal issues. In 1990 there were still letters, incoming and outgoing correspondences, between Polisario Komitee and other solidarity initiatives and NGO's. But, as highlighted by Stavast (2018), "no new people were coming, and old people moved on with their lives".

In this sense, the existence of the Polisario Komitee definitely allowed a reflection on the impact and the limits that a domestic experience can have on being a solidarity initiative advocating for human rights. Raising awareness through cultural events, supporting and financing books dedicated to the Sahrawi cause, the development of the

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<sup>57</sup> For example, in April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1980, the task division changed as follows, to address all the activities in which the committee was engaged: archives/information/educational material; financial; propaganda material; contact with foreign supporters; internal education; the newspaper Polisario Krant; press & publicity; lobby; info stands; spokesperson; administration; new groups. But, four months later, on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1980, a new task division was presented, and it changed again.

<sup>58</sup> The suspension of the subsidy by NCO was found in a minute from a meeting held on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1983.

newspaper Polisario Krant, negotiation for spaces in the media (radio, television, and newspapers), protests, campaigns, for resource mobilization, and pressuring the government were among the activities carried out by Polisario Komitee.

The local dimension plays a role in defining the dynamic in which the committee operates. As seen in the archives, literature, and interviews, the structure enjoyed by Polisario Komitee favored the development of activities related to raising awareness. As stated by Tetteroo and Stavast, the strength of the committee was on raising awareness, through the development of activities and campaigns at the local level. Other initiatives, such as those related to pressuring the government, were seen to be more limited, suggesting that it was not as effective as raising awareness or resource mobilization.

As Polisario Komitee definitely enjoyed a period of ‘dormancy’, according to the definition provided by Gamson (1975), some decades later former members of the committee saw the possibility to make a new start. Based on the same motivations as before, in 2002, the *Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara* (Foundation for the Self-determination of Western Sahara) was established. Its activities and initiatives can be categorized as the same as the Polisario Komitee. Its strengths and weaknesses remain: *Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara* plays a good role on raising awareness on the population, at least on the early years of its existence, but wasn’t (and still isn’t) effective on political pressure among the government. Distinctly from the Polisario Komitee, though, its later version hasn’t pursued to raise awareness through resource mobilization.

Despite this chapter’s focus on the local dimension of collective action, the time and space in which the Polisario Komitee existed allow recognizing the coexistence of both domestic/local and transnational initiatives concerning the solidarity movement around the Western Sahara pursuit of self-determination. These two dimensions coexist, complement themselves, and are intertwined and juxtaposed, collaborating for advocating in favor of human rights norm implementation. This transnational dimension will be the focus of the next chapter, in which its proper dynamic will be explored.

### **3. The transnational dimension of collective action: EUCOCO and the support for the Sahrawi right to self-determination through information, leverage and accountability politics**

The international solidarity movement for Western Sahara in Europe provides material and political support, that comes as a result of the existence of its domestic and



transnational dimensions. The intersection of both distinct levels of advocacy depicts fluidity and complementarity, and this unification contributes to a stronger voice supporting the Sahrawi right to self-determination. As the local dimension has been explored through the initiatives of the Polisario Komitee, an example of transnational collective action will be explored here: the European Coordinating Conference of Support to the Sahrawi People (EUCOCO).

Networks are defined by Keck and Sikkink (1998) as organizations that are characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange. Due to its political vocation, it fulfills a space in multiple agendas of international politics as well as identifies with an advocacy role in promoting and defending causes. A transnational advocacy network, in this sense, is represented by relevant actors working on a specific issue at an international level. These actors share values, goals, and information (*ibid.*).

Even though advocacy networks and non-State actors seem to be a byproduct of the development and the evolution of the human rights regime, their essence and roots point to the campaigns for the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth-century (*ibid.*). Through the decades, though, their dynamics, size, and complexity have changed, mainly due to shifts in international politics as well as changes in communication patterns. What didn't change is the fact that transnational advocacy networks exist as political spaces in which it is possible to address demands emerging from civil society, such as claiming for human rights implementation.

Indeed, Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that the establishment of advocacy networks is more common when it is addressed to issues that are characterized by two main features: having high-value content and informational uncertainty. This is, not by chance, the case in which the human rights agenda is embedded.

In this sense, the next sections of this chapter will explore the advocacy played by the transnational dimension of the solidarity movement for the Western Sahara. In an attempt to recognize its main contributions, the concepts of politics of information, leverage, and accountability (by Keck and Sikkink, 1998) will structure and permeate the sections. Assuming that information is power in order to promote the desired social change, the strategical use of information requires it to be shared and processed. Besides that, the political spaces in which EUCOCO operates through leverage and accountability politics will be addressed, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of having multiple actors performing this kind of advocacy.

*The EUCOCO advocacy: the politics of information on pursuing compliance with human rights*

The formation of a transnational dimension of the European solidarity for Western Sahara was made possible due to the fact that non-State actors that claim for human rights compliance share a common agenda. This allowed the local level to give rise to a transnational dimension to approach their demands. The players on the local level aimed to develop an initiative that allowed addressing the same fight for the Sahrawi right to self-determination but through a different channel. As a result, in parallel to the existence of domestic initiatives, the European Coordinating Conference of Support to the Sahrawi People (EUCOCO) was created.

Arising from the international solidarity initiatives in Europe, in 1976, most specifically from the debates provided by a meeting held in Rotterdam (The Netherlands), EUCOCO emerges as the coordinating body of the Sahrawi international solidarity<sup>59</sup>. This initiative is presented here as a transnational advocacy network. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), besides being a set of actors working in a shared agenda, a transnational advocacy network is glued by information exchange, which gives the ability for them to mobilize information in a strategic way in order to promote social change<sup>60</sup>. For them, setting an agenda, generating information, changing policy, and influencing State-behavior are among the main activities carried out by this kind of actor – and, as we will see, are among the activities carried out by EUCOCO.

According to Pierre Galand, EUCOCO emerged in the context of decolonization and anti-fascist fights. The logic of fighting against the colonial system and the occupied territories found an echo in Europe, in which the civil society, NGOs, and universities engaged in defending the emancipation of oppressed people. Their immediate commitment was to mobilize public opinion and raise awareness about the situation in the so-called ‘Global South’ (as exposed on the case of the Polisario Komitee). In fact, the development of local initiatives happened in parallel with the development of the

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<sup>59</sup> Information obtained through an interview with Pierre Galand, President of EUCOCO and President of the Belgian Committee for the Sahrawi People, on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018. According to him, it was in a meeting in Rotterdam that the EUCOCO was born in its concept and execution. Still according to him, twelve people were present at the meeting, being them from Dutch, Belgian, and French nationalities.

<sup>60</sup> The transnational advocacy network concept exists among other forms in which it is possible for collective action and advocacy take place, manifest, and articulate. Other examples are international non-governmental organizations (or transnational nongovernmental organizations), transnational coalitions, and transnational social movements (Khagram et al., 2002).

EUCOCO itself, as a part of the solidarity, serving as a common hub to channel information and define action plans on a transnational level.

Shared values were a triggering point for the development of EUCOCO in the context of the European solidarity movement supporting the Western Sahara. The idea of a coordinating body that could assimilate the multiplicity of solidarities towards Western Sahara in the European level gave rise to its development. It means that the local level initiatives saw on EUCOCO the possibility of a mechanism that would promote activism through, firstly, coordinating the dialogue among the plurality of active actors, and, secondly, serving as an ideal channel to address their demands, exerting pressure on governments, States and institutions.

Besides having a shared agenda, advocacy networks share information. The dense level of exchanging information and services characterizes their ability to generate and use information in their favor. For Keck and Sikkink (1998), information is the most important asset that this kind of network can have. The authors argue that, essentially, transnational advocacy networks are not powerful in themselves, so they must rely on their information and use it strategically in order to achieve their goals.

The strategic use of information is invoked in order for them to set the agenda, generate information, and promote discursive changes. These are actions that require a level of awareness that the annual meetings provide. The development of a common discourse, as a byproduct of the meetings, is materialized through the final resolutions that come as a result of the annual conferences. According to Pierre Galand and Boris Fronteddu, the EUCOCO meetings take place on a yearly basis, and the exchange of information that will lead to the action plans and the final resolution occur through workshops, divided by themes<sup>61</sup>. Namely, the workshops are divided into topics regarding Human Rights, The Construction of the Sahrawi State, Politics, and Natural Resources.

During the workgroup sessions, information exchange and information processing happen, allowing the players to come up with a conclusion, a follow-up and an action plan, regarding the priorities defined by the main group and the monitoring group. As transnational advocacy networks rely on information, its strategic use is an ultimate goal and achievement. Actually, when it comes to information politics, non-state actors are commonly recognized as a source of generating, processing and spreading information.

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<sup>61</sup> Pierre Galand is the President of EUCOCO and President of the Belgian Committee for the Sahrawi People. Boris Fronteddu is a Project Manager at the North-South Forum and member of the Belgian Committee for the Sahrawi People.

Information, then, becomes both a means and an end in itself. Interpreting facts, testimonies and data allows advocacy networks to enjoy power not only as alternate sources of information but also as a persuasive tool (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

As the conference puts together different actors, ranging from international solidarity committees, Front POLISARIO, parliamentarians, Sahrawi people, NGOs, political parties, lawyers, trade unions, and youth and women's groups, the flux of information is dense and complex, regarding the competences and positionalities of all these stakeholders. They play an active role in setting the agenda and their power is exercised by producing, exchanging and making strategic use of information. Just by following up on each other's projects, contributions, and challenges, the different stakeholders in the network boost the development of efficient action plans. Besides that, sharing their achievements and initiatives allows the political transfer of good practices and ideas.

Possessing information can serve many purposes. Information is assimilated as a source of power because it allows the participants of the conference to have a high level of awareness regarding the whole picture concerning the Western Sahara current situation. It is only by having precise information that it is possible to establish an agenda, with topics and priorities. With that, the final resolution of each meeting allows deciding how the action plan will be structured and subsequently executed.

The different backgrounds of each actor involved in the conference allow for the emergence of different topics. Having the Sahrawi people and Front POLISARIO representatives included and present at the conferences definitely helps on getting to know their ultimate needs, being it political or material: a letter addressed to the Polisario Komitee, under the auspices of the 15<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, held in Hamburg in 1989, informed about the urgent demands regarding the food needs of Sahrawi population attests. Complementing that, the 38<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, held in Rome in 2013, addressed as a priority the immediate liberation of all Sahrawi political prisoners.

Discussing the status of political prisoners and making it a priority is something made possible only by having information regarding the existence of political prisoners, their names, who is missing, since when they are missing – the exact kind of information that is usually held and controlled by Morocco. This kind of data is provided by having at the meeting multiple actors emerging from different layers, places, and contexts, in which their shared values on supporting the right to self-determination finds a common space that encourages dialogue, exchange, and actions.

Political condemnations, made explicit in the final resolutions, were made possible only due to the existence of a space of dialogue provided by the format of the conference. Expressing worries regarding the infringement of human rights in occupied territories and the condemnations applied for activists<sup>62</sup>, or defining as an action plan to give greater visibility to the expulsion of international observers from the occupied territories<sup>63</sup>, are all products of information access provided by the existence of EUCOCO as a established transnational advocacy network.

The need to raise awareness about the situation in Western Sahara was also part of the informational agenda. The 8<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, held in Paris in 1982, decided for an action plan to inform the European population about the Moroccan aggressions towards the Sahrawi people and to inform about the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination. The following conferences, held in Brussels in 1983 and in Bologna in 1984, both committed to adopting an action plan to intensify the information flux in order to inform the public opinion in Europe. Following that, during the 12<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, in Madrid in 1986, the final resolution stated a collective effort on working to build public information among European citizens and EU parliamentarians regarding the situation in Western Sahara. Engaging in raising awareness, just as how it took place on the local committees, was also a commitment of this transnational level of advocacy<sup>64</sup>.

Possessing information plays an important role in all the steps in which an advocacy network acts upon. It allows to higher the levels of awareness on the situation and provides advantages on influencing, negotiating and lobbying. Looking for influencing the policies and the behavior of other actors is one among other goals aimed by solidarity movements in the context of transnational advocacy networks. For that, their attempts on pursuing change on State behavior and aiming to influence in promoting norm implementation will be exposed under the logic of politics of leverage and accountability in the next section.

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<sup>62</sup> Information obtained through the final resolution of the 42<sup>nd</sup> EUCOCO, in 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Information obtained through the Synthesis of the broaden Task Force recommendations, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Another example comes from 1987, in a letter sent by Pierre Galand to the international solidarity addressing a topic discussed on the previous year, at the 12<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, regarding the organization of a second edition of a conference entitled “Paix pour le Peuple Sahraoui” (Peace for the Sahrawi People). The goal of this event was to enlarge public opinion on informing the situation in Western Sahara, create a mobilization effect among the press, and raise the debate of the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination.

A transnational advocacy network is one among other multiple types of collective action that have been theorized in the academy. Khagram et al. (2002, p. 7) define transnational coalitions as “sets of actors linked across country boundaries who coordinate shared strategies or sets of tactics to publicly influence social change”. Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that networks are communicative structures, and in order to reach their goals – influence politics and State behavior – they engage in broader communities. EUCOCO is an example of a broader community that pulls together distinct actors united by shared values in a coordinating body– in this case, the shared value is the Sahrawi right to self-determination. International solidarity initiatives aim to influence in promoting human rights norms implementation, and according to the previously mentioned authors, they do that by pressuring target actors and monitoring compliance with human rights norms.

Besides information politics, the other channels in which these non-state actors can change the *status-quo* are defined by Keck and Sikkink (1998) as leverage and accountability politics. These concepts are usually invoked in a scenario in which a non-state actor deals with a State or an institution – as previously stated by the case of the Polisario Komitee and the Dutch government.

Said to be an ‘overused word of the century’ (Friman, 2015), leverage has been used to describe an advantage or resource. Despite its usage in multiple contexts, the author believes that leverage politics are central to the politics of naming and shaming<sup>65</sup>. This is the kind of ability that lies in the hands of non-state actors committed to influence in human rights implementation – which are the kind of actor that has been central to my discussion.

Calling upon powerful actors was a strategy used by EUCOCO. In its early years, in a meeting held in Santpoort, The Netherlands, in 1981, the participants of the 7<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO agreed on engaging on this process of leveraging and aiming to acknowledge responsibility through accountability politics. For that, they decided on addressing three letters. The three letters were sent on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1981, and were addressed to the

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<sup>65</sup> Friman (2015) explores the politics of naming and shaming as a framework. He paraphrases Gary Martin, who traces the origins of the phrase “name and shame” in the popular lexicon to the late 1800s and defines it as “the publication of the identity of a person or group that is culpable in some anti-social act in order to shame them into remorse.” For the author, generating remorse on the part of the offender was not the only intent. Public humiliation was also intended to serve a deterrent role.

president of the Organization of African Unity (OAU); to the UN General Secretary; and to King Hassan II<sup>66</sup>.

The first letter, addressed to Mr. Arap Moi, president of the OAU at the time, provided a follow up on EUCOCO meetings and communicated the decision emerged from the 7<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO to organize a referendum for the Sahrawi self-determination. This was the seed for the origin of MINURSO<sup>67</sup>, showing the EUCOCO ability to address solutions that came to be recognized on the international level later. The letter asked for attention regarding the Moroccan troops in the occupied territory, stressing how it undermines the Sahrawi rights to self-determination and freedom of expression. For the participants of EUCOCO, the only way to reach progress in the peace process is through a negotiation between Morocco and Front POLISARIO, and, considering that, the conference urges the OAU to play a role in making this dialogue possible – especially due to the Moroccan refusal on speaking with Front POLISARIO.

The second letter, addressed to Mr. Kurt Waldheim, the UN General Secretary at the time, also exposes the plan for a referendum, justifying it as the only way to a peaceful solution. It urges the UN to play an active and meaningful role in this process, not only due to the Moroccan refusal to speak with Front POLISARIO but mainly because of the UN intrinsic responsibilities regarding its commitment with decolonization on a global scale.

The third letter, addressed to King Hassan II also informs about the referendum plan, pointing out Moroccan colonial role in Western Sahara, mentioning its refusal to dialogue with Front POLISARIO and asking Morocco to play a role that reflects political courage, wisdom, fraternity, solidarity and good neighboring in order to contribute to the prosperity of the region. Through this letter, the King is informed that Sahrawi people want peace but at the price of its freedom and independence, and then it asks for Morocco to remove its troops and to allow the UN and the OAU to apply the peace process referendum developed in Nairobi. It once again, it urges Morocco to negotiate with Front

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<sup>66</sup> The OAU, besides a mechanism of regional integration, must be seen as a pan-African initiative organization for fighting colonialism, aiming also to strengthen and intensify cooperation in multiple agendas among African States.

<sup>67</sup> MINURSO stands for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara and is the acronym for the French *Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Organisation d'un Référendum au Sahara Occidental* and the Spanish *Misión de las Naciones Unidas para la Organización de un Referéndum en el Sáhara Occidental*. Established in 1991, it paved the way to the current cease-fire between Morocco and the Front POLISARIO. Its main goal, nevertheless, is the organization of a referendum in which the Sahrawi people would choose between independence or integrating with Morocco. However, since 1991 it has been unable to reach its goal, remaining discredited and operational.

POLISARIO to reach a fair, peaceful, and durable solution for this conflict that is bringing instability, damaging the peace and the security of the region, as well as violating the human rights of the Sahrawi people.

These initiatives of a formally portrayed dissatisfaction, urging for political action, represent the ultimate attempt of the conference to inform the main players (in this case, the OAU, the UN, and the Moroccan government) about urgent issues, claiming them to act on behalf of the Sahrawi right to self-determination<sup>68</sup>. According to the Prime Minister of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Mohamad Elouali Akeik, these efforts, typical of solidarity movements and non-state actors, are indispensable on interpreting the right to self-determination<sup>69</sup>.

A politics of leverage resonates with how non-state actors combine instruments aiming the politics of shaming. The ‘mobilization of shame’ is a logic shared by both Friman (2015) and Keck and Sikkink (1998). It serves as a moral and social sanction, to embarrass and discursively coerce the non-compliant actor, leading to a loss of legitimacy, damaging the reputation, and causing political and economic isolation. Especially on the early years of the Moroccan occupation, the development of an alternative narrative was indispensable. The need to counterbalance Moroccan claims over the Western Sahara territory unequivocally made explicit the Moroccan human rights violations and obstructions to the Sahrawi right to self-determination.

The 10<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, held in Bologna in 1984, also had in its final resolution the agreement on sending letters to important players on the Western Sahara situation. Namely, they were the UN General Secretary, the Spanish Prime Minister, the presidents of the European Parliament, as well as the presidents of the United States of America and France. The goal was, once again, get attention, be heard and reach a negotiation by exposing the lack of responsibility that emanates from each of them.

The letter addressed to the UN General Secretary, Mr. Javier Perrez de Cuellar, made clear the existence of Moroccan aggressions towards the Sahrawi people, reinforcing the violation of human rights and how it undermines the achievement of the

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<sup>68</sup> The OAU was constantly contacted in order to act on behalf of some initiatives carried out by EUCOCO. It was also frequently demanded to be acknowledged of its political moves that could show its positioning regarding the Western Sahara. The 8<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, held in Paris in October 1982, deeply congratulated the OAU acceptance of the SADR as its 51<sup>st</sup> member State, event that happened on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, that same year. The following year, in Brussels, the 9<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO congratulated the positive political implications of the SADR’s recognition.

<sup>69</sup> Information obtained through an interview with Mohamad Elouali Akeik, Prime Minister of the Sahrawi Democratic Arab Republic, on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.



right to self-determination. The conference urged the UN to recognize the SADR, and to denounce the Moroccan attitude that inhibits Sahrawi rights and sovereignty. The general secretary is then asked to raise awareness about the content of this letter among the other member States of the institution. The echoes of these kinds of initiative were limited. There was a long path for the letter to become public or to echo on the General Assembly. Besides, it was aggravated by the fact that the scenario enjoyed patterns of communication less far-reaching than nowadays.

The letter addressed to the President of the Spanish Government, Felipe González, clearly shows the resentment that has been a mark on the relations between Spain and the Sahrawi people<sup>70</sup>. It starts reinforcing previous attempts of dialogue regarding the Spanish positioning towards the Sahrawi people, reminding the roots of the betrayal – a feeling that dates back to the Madrid Accord. The Spanish condition of providing guns to Morocco is highlighted as a negative movement on collaborating and reinforcing violence and war. EUCOCO urges the Spanish government to act with concrete attitudes in light of the previous commitment of Felipe González's party, the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party, with the history of the Sahrawi people. This letter serves as a good example of exercising politics of accountability, as it aims to hold powerful actor to previously principles (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). It also dialogues with Friman's contribution on naming and shaming, in which there are a public exposure and condemnation of government attitudes. This was indispensable for making public the Moroccan positionality and its politics of violations, even though Morocco (since then and until nowadays) enjoys a status of impunity.

The letter sent to the European Parliament president also denounces the Moroccan violations and aggressions, not only related to the Sahrawi people but also to non-compliance to international law. EUCOCO urges the European Parliament to re-examine the European positioning towards Moroccan military occupation of the Sahrawi territory, raising a debate shaped by a moral conscience and pressuring the institution to commit with international law principles and the human rights regime, commonly part of its foreign policies addressed to other regions.

In a more recent example, on the 39<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO held in Madrid in 2014, the final resolution called on the United Nations Security Council to both impose sanctions against

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<sup>70</sup> Felipe González was the General Secretary of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE – Partido Socialista Obrero Español) from 1974 until 1997. By that time, he showed support to the Sahrawi cause, a reality that changed when he became the President of the Spanish Government, from 1982 to 1996.

the violations played by Morocco and to recognize SADR as a full member in the UN. For Friman (2015), leverage politics networks use public exposure as a resource, making them able to mobilize public opinion. The author states that changing the behavior of targeted actors through the public exposing of violations of norms has a long history in international politics, and goes under the naming and shaming framework. The focus of these approaches on exposing governments abuses when it comes to human rights (Friman, 2015) has a great explanatory power in acknowledging the efforts carried out by EUCOCO. In this sense, advocacy networks engage as actors that play a decisive role in exposing non-compliance with human rights in order to promote changes in State behavior. Complementing that, alongside with information politics and leverage politics, representing the ways that advocacy networks act, lies the concept of accountability politics. Aiming to hold actors accountable, this kind of role that advocacy networks play has to do with their commitment to exposing the gap between discourse and practice.

The position of Spain and the United Nations regarding the Western Sahara and the Moroccan violations sum up most of the efforts played by EUCOCO on trying to hold actors accountable. Right on its early years, on the 7<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, the SADR Minister of Health, Salek Babbyh, had already addressed that the Western Sahara is a matter of decolonization, that fits under the jurisdiction and competence of the United Nations. On a yearly basis, the conference has to remind the UN of its role in acknowledging Moroccan violations, that remain unpunished. The expectation on compelling the UN to cooperate has to do with the role of the institution on promoting human rights on a universal level, urging States on a global scale to commit and engage in practices that are aligned with their norms and principles and that operate according to its mechanisms.

Besides the UN, the recurrent references to the Spanish government have to do with its historical responsibility as the former colonial power in Western Sahara. Since the early years of the conference, the Sahrawis' voices are summed up with the international solidarity initiatives, NGOs, political parties, trade unions, lawyers, youth and women's groups, and parliamentarians involved on addressing the Western Sahara right to self-determination. One of the main reasons pointed as having allowed and triggered the current situation in Western Sahara was the Madrid Accord, in which Spain's withdrawal was negotiated with the Moroccan and Mauritanian sovereign role in the region – despite the International Court of Justice advisory opinion of October 1975.

Being accountable, in the case of Spain, is something constantly reminded by the solidarity movement in its both dimensions – local and transnational. One central figure

is the target: Felipe González. On the one-year anniversary of the Madrid Accord, in November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1976, Felipe González (by that time the General Secretary of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party) proclaimed a speech in a Sahrawi refugee camp<sup>71</sup>. The speech denounced the Madrid Accord, as of his statements were committed to the Sahrawi cause. A decade later, Felipe González became the President of the Spanish government, fulfilling the Sahrawi people – as well as the international community – of hope on addressing the exile situation of the Sahrawi citizens, the Moroccan refusal to dialogue and its illegal occupation of the Western Sahara territory. His words didn't turn into actions, in the sense that Spain kept its same positioning regarding the Western Sahara, even during his mandate. For that, not only once, but multiple times, EUCOCO kept on urging the Spanish government to assume its historical commitment – due to its colonial relationship – and to make Felipe González's words practical actions.

Some of the examples from the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> EUCOCO, held in Brussels in 1983, Bologna in 1984 and Madrid in 1986, respectively, show the political pressure in the final resolution. The Spanish government is urged to honor the commitments made by its party, denouncing the Madrid Accord, and engaging in finding a solution for the Moroccan invasion. This initiative is an example of accountability politics, in which the advocacy network takes action on exposing incoherences between discourse and practice of important players and, through that exposure, try to promote norm implementation due to the existence of a previous commitment with the cause.

It is always hard to trace and measure failure and success when it comes to social movements or advocacy initiatives (Giugni et al., 1999). The challenge lies in attributing the political changes as direct or indirect outcomes of the political pressure employed by the non-state actors. Nevertheless, it allows us to see the limitations of this kind of

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<sup>71</sup> The speech, translated to English (for the original Spanish version, please see the Annex): “We have come here today, on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1976, to show through our presence, our rejection, and condemnation of the Madrid Accord of 1975. The Sahrawi people will win their fight. They will win, not just because the law is on their side, but also because they have the will to fight for their freedom. I want you to know that most of the Spanish people, the best and most noble part of the Spanish people are in your side. For us this has not only to do with the right of self-determination anymore, but moreover accompanying you in your struggle until the final victory. As part of the Spanish people we are ashamed that our government not only has done a bad colonization, but even a worse decolonization, handing you over to reactionary governments such as Morocco and Mauritania. But you must know that our people also fight against this same regime, that delivered the Sahrawi people into the hands of reactionary governments. The closer our people are approaching their own liberty, the more efficient will be our support for your struggle. The Polisario Front is the guide that will enable the final victory of the Sahrawi people and we are convinced that your independent and democratic republic will succeed, so that you will be able to return home. We know that your experience is to have received many promises never fulfilled. I will not promise you anything but commit myself to history. Our party will support you until your final victory”.

politics. Naming, shaming, leverage and accountability politics play a role on an agenda that relates to the diplomatic and political level, in an agenda of reputation building and recognition. This contributes to the narrative-building of the right to self-determination, highlighting how inalienable this right is and reinforcing the past in favor of the present. Other agendas, such as the economic one, are indirectly invoked by these actors<sup>72</sup>.

Information, leverage, and accountability politics allows EUCOCO to act on three distinct levels, according to Pierre Galand. Namely, they are: the UN level, in which the main focus is the MINURSO and the advocacy is done through lobbying inside the UN, members of the security council, and NGOs based in New York; the Geneva level, in which it aims to take advantage of the location due to the establishment of the UN (mainly the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – OHCHR), and many other diverse international organizations and NGOs, allowing the committees to protest on Human Rights sessions, be part of events and spaces of discussion, and contact embassies, aiming to guarantee that the Western Sahara issue will be addressed on their agendas<sup>73</sup>. The third level is the support to the Sahrawi struggle inside the occupied territory, in which EUCOCO keeps contact with Sahrawi people living on the occupied portion and follows up on information regarding torture and political prisoners.

The letters, statements, reports, petitions, and informations made public through EUCOCO, as a transnational advocacy network, contribute to raising awareness and hold actors accountable regarding the Sahrawi right to self-determination. EUCOCO sets a political and a social agenda focused on advocating for the recognition of the right to self-determination – and it does so by many forms, as we have seen. According to the Prime Minister of the SADR, Mohamad Elouali Akeik, these initiatives, carried out by the solidarity movement, definitely helped and still help on shaping the interpretation regarding the Sahrawi right to self-determination.

On helping to shape the interpretation regarding the right to self-determination, as a reaction to the political pressure instigated by EUCOCO, there is the penetration of the

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<sup>72</sup> In this context is important to stress the role that advocacy networks such as the Western Sahara Resource Watch play on the economic and natural resources agenda. Raising awareness, collecting, processing and reporting information regarding the natural resources exploitation in the occupied territory is the commitment of this organization. They inserted the Western Sahara on the global political-economic agenda, through raising the violations towards the economic exploitation of the occupied territory.

<sup>73</sup> For EUCOCO, besides acting on the Geneva level, it is important to highlight its decisive role in Brussels. The process of pressuring the governments happens through lobbying in the institutional level, such as the European Union and the United Nations. This is made viable by EUCOCO's leadership being established in Brussels, 'the capital of the European Union'.

Western Sahara agenda in both European and National Parliaments. Boris Fronteddu (2018) emphasizes how the number of questions raised in both legal entities arises from the solidarity movement. He also caught attention for the fact that the acceptance of these initiatives strongly varies according to the level of sensibility of the parliamentarians. The organization of an inter-parliamentarian conference, entitled “The EU and Western Sahara: after the ECJ rulings”, come as a consequence of this growing insertion of the topic in the parliamentary agenda. The conference took place in the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, at the European Parliament, and it was composed by four panels and keynote speakers from the European Parliament, civil society, NGO’s, activist groups, government entities (both Europe and Africa), the Sahrawi Parliament, and the Front POLISARIO.

It is in the nature of a transnational advocacy network to be plural in its goals, structure, and form of advocacy. Assuming the argument of Khagram et al. (2002) in which non-state actors interact with international norms and restructure world politics, after exposing advocacy for human rights in its domestic and transnational dimension, it has come to the knowledge that the multiplicity of actors can contribute to enhancing the ability of networks to reach their goals. At the same time, one must keep in mind that this plurality, if mismanaged, can be a source of tension, hampering the desired efforts. The next section will explore the effects of this plurality on the interactions and forms of relations, arguing that each dimension holds particular conditions to exercise advantages.

*Domestic and transnational advocacy and politics: coordinating action through a network of multiple actors*

As a coordinating body of the Sahrawi international solidarity, the EUCOCO congregates initiatives coming from different countries and continents as well as distinct types of actors. The participants of the conference, for the past more than forty years, are representatives of the solidarity movements, emerging from domestic/national dimensions, sharing space with members of the Front POLISARIO, political parties, lawyers, trade unions, youth and women’s group, members of the European Parliament, national and regional parliaments, working groups, NGOs and INGOs.

The ongoing dialogue and current condition over the Western Sahara are enriched by the plurality of the backgrounds of its players. As “domestic actors are important in gathering information on human rights and raising awareness of their human rights grievances to a world overwhelmed by worthy causes” (Friman, 2015, p. 60), NGOs or

INGOs are endowed with different abilities that allow them to enjoy an international reputation in naming, shaming, rising, and spreading information. Friman (2015, p. 50) states that “perhaps the most widely recognized actors in human rights naming and shaming are human rights non-governmental organizations (HRNGOs)”. The Western Sahara cause, fortunately, enjoys the participation of both levels through the solidarity movement.

The intergroup in the European Parliament, that works on inserting the demands related to the Western Sahara in the political agenda of the European Union, is considered to be a great victory for the Sahrawi cause. The Intergroup Western Sahara consists of more than a hundred parliamentarians committed to a purpose, and they are the only official intergroup on a thematic that concerns liberation movements that still exists since 1985<sup>74</sup>. This intergroup is essential for the activities carried out by the advocacy networks, as it enjoys the advantages of being part of an established political body that guarantees the operationalization of foreign policies in a space where that their voices will be heard.

Khagram et al. (2002) argue that location matters, because being close to international organizations makes it easy to access information and monitor negotiations, as well as lobbying governments and member of important secretariats. For them, “it is not surprising that we found some of the largest concentrations of social change INGOs near major IGO headquarters in Brussels and Geneva” (Khagram et al, 2002, p. 36). EUCOCO enjoys this due to its engaged participants spread in different places and its presidency in Brussels. Besides that, in the past decade, the conference participants spread to other continents such as Latin America, Africa and, Asia, allowing a broader range concerning the audience and the governments to be influenced.

The coordinating role played by EUCOCO allows a multifaceted framework in which an advocacy network acts, creating awareness, combining changing international norms, collecting information, changing institutional procedures, targeting the stakeholders, lobbying, and pressuring governments and institutions (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). These activities bring a plural and dynamic operationalization of goals and combine different levels of structure in which the distinct actors engage. Transnational coalitions, networks, and movements engage in different levels when it comes to information exchange, coordinated tactics and joint mobilization (Khagram et al., 2002).

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<sup>74</sup> Information obtained through an interview with Pierre Galand, President of EUCOCO and President of the Belgian Committee for the Sahrawi People, on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Acting at the political level inserted EUCOCO on a pattern of interaction that is the product of a growing participation of non-state actors in international politics, mainly regarding the interactions between those actors and the human rights norms<sup>75</sup>. One hypothesis emerging from Wiseman (2010) holds that a State's responsiveness to transnational civil society actors vary according to the phase in which it is aiming to influence. Despite the difficulties on evaluating the effectiveness on influencing the decision-making, the author argues that the advocacy networks influences on the negotiating process (such as the issue framing and the agenda setting) are clearer to be seen. Following his assumption, the EUCOCO political pressure on addressing letters to the main stakeholders, aiming to hold them accountable, as well as its role on addressing the Sahrawi demands through the Intergroup Western Sahara at the European Parliament remain good signs of its contribution to the cause.

Wiseman (2010) also argues in favor of analyzing the role that advocacy networks play on a daily basis, through micro-practices, besides only focusing in decision-making processes. It is worth a focus due to EUCOCO's role as a source of information and a hub that channels information arising from the domestic level of the solidarity movement and aiming to reach other players. In this sense, EUCOCO's actions point to an advocacy on the political level that aims to penetrate the governmental and the institutional arena. Its network, geographically spread in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America allows the input and the output of information, providing both internationalization and internalization of the cause, reaching different spaces and audiences.

The transnational dimension of collective action, embodied in the EUCOCO initiative, contributed to raising awareness as well as pressuring and lobbying governments and institutions. The plurality of actors is indispensable on helping to build a narrative that represents the Sahrawi people, building a collective interpretation of the Sahrawi right to self-determination. The more plural the actors involved more equipped with information they will be, and the more channels to exert pressure they will enjoy. At the same time, this plurality implies and requires a high level of interest management, due to its inherent complexity.

EUCOCO's commitment to take the Sahrawi's rights to the international agenda and promote changes on State behavior (influencing them to recognize the SADR,

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<sup>75</sup> According to Pierre Galand, in an interview held on April 20th, 2018, EUCOCO's political support is complemented by the material support carried out by NGOs such as Oxfam and the International Committee of the Red Cross, for example.

acknowledge the human rights violations, holding actors accountable for their previous commitment regarding the Western Sahara, among others) represents its main contribution, serving as an example of an “international law from below”. Indeed, it represents a transnational advocacy network due to the nature of its interaction, its structure, its goals, its shared values, and its common agenda. It is at the core of activism initiatives and reinforces the role that non-state actors play in influencing and facilitating the implementation of human rights norms.

## **CONCLUSION**

The rise of advocacy networks comes to address issues that States and formal institutions have been failing to address. The human rights represent the main agenda among this. In her latest book, Kathryn Sikkink (2017) suggests six policy tools that should be used to address human rights violations. Firstly, she points out to diminish war and seek non-violent solutions; secondly, she argues in favor of democracy and on enhancing the quality of existing democracies; thirdly, she advocates for the guarding against dehumanizing and exclusionary practices and ideologies, regardless of their basis (whether gender, race, class, religion); fourthly, there is the need to encourage States to ratify human rights treaties, and to enforce human rights law and norms; fifthly, there is the need to end impunity regarding accountability; and sixthly, the need for supporting, expanding and protecting domestic and transnational mobilization when it comes to human rights.

The role of non-state actors in providing and processing information, building the agenda, and influencing behavior, allowed that campaigns shifted from raising awareness to negotiating treaties with States. As advocacy networks are one of the most important sources of new norms, ideas, and identities in international politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), the policy-making to implement human rights norms acknowledges the strategic partnership between non-state actors themselves and other players in international politics. This could be seen both by the Polisario Komitee and its relationship with the Dutch society and other players as well as EUCOCO’s structure and dynamic, plural by essence.

The emergence of the international solidarity towards the Sahrawi right to self-determination dates back to the early days of the Moroccan occupation, the foundation of Front POLISARIO, and the proclamation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. In



The Netherlands, the establishment of the Polisario Komitee resulted from the influence of academic spaces complemented with the engagement of the civil society – both spheres that enjoyed a socio-political vocation. The development of their activities led them to be part of a broader network, sharing space with other similar solidarity initiatives. It was the engagement of these analogous actors, playing a role on the same cause but located in different spaces, that gave rise to the transnational dimension of this solidarity. The origins of both dimensions are intertwined and, through the research carried out here, it was possible to point out how they complemented each other – even in its limitations and effectiveness.

The Polisario Komitee acted on a political and a social agenda within a local spectrum, aiming to pursue the Sahrawi right to self-determination through multiple forms. It had the ability to penetrate the Dutch population raising awareness – through manifestations, cultural events, spreading news (either printed, broadcasted or radio), and it also acted upon resource mobilization campaigns. Among all that was heard and read, the emphasis goes to its ability to mobilize awareness on the individual/societal level, which contributes to setting an agenda locally. I would attribute less emphasis on the committee ability to penetrate and influence the government – which implies its limitations on influencing State behavior. For that, I argue in favor of stressing the Polisario Komitee role as a norm entrepreneur and on exercising information politics, to the detriment of its role on developing and playing leverage or accountability politics.

The EUCOCO, on the other hand, benefitted from its shape, that enjoyed a direct channel with political actors such as the European Parliament and Commission, the United Nations, the African Union, presidents, and prime-ministers of States related to the Sahrawi cause. Speaking on behalf of multiple solidarity initiatives, EUCOCO's conference shape allowed the communication and exchange among these initiatives. Also, having its secretariat based in Brussels facilitated in terms of geographical issues, influencing positively on attending events and meetings in organizations based in Brussels – such as the European Parliament and many NGOs. EUCOCO, in this sense, was committed to the ideas held by the concepts of information, leverage and accountability politics. This allows me to argue in favor of its abilities at the political level, mostly escalating the agenda to most powerful actors and holding actors accountable with its previous positions regarding the Western Sahara, with less emphasis in the individual/societal level.

My interest in studying the role of non-state actors in contributing to transforming international politics has shown that the policy-making, when it comes to human rights, fits the logic of an ‘international law from below’ (Rajagopal, 2003). It means not only enjoying the participation of a plurality of actors from the international system but mainly acknowledging policy-making as emerging from other actors besides States. In this sense, these non-state actors, shaped as advocacy networks, are stakeholders in facilitating human rights norms implementation.

The research allowed noticing that the Polisario Komitee and EUCOCO’s prominence take place on the stages that preceded the implementation. Their role refers to what is expected from ‘norm entrepreneurs’, as the implementation itself relies on the hands of the States. In this context, their effectiveness can be placed on raising awareness, setting the agenda, holding actors accountable, and, to a lesser extent, influencing State behavior. In this sense, the research points out that the contribution raised by the Polisario Komitee and EUCOCO relies on the realm of collaborating to shape a collective narrative of the Sahrawi right to self-determination.

The advocacy played by both initiatives contribute and aims to the maintenance and development of a broadly accepted interpretation of the Sahrawi right to self-determination, bringing the discussion to the level of international politics. When asked about the role of non-State actors on the Sahrawi pursuit of self-determination, Mohamad Elouali Akeik, the Prime Minister of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, recognized that the portrayal of the Sahrawis as holders of the right to self-determination owes a lot to the role played by the international solidarity and the advocacy networks, both on the domestic and on the transnational level. But, this is just half of the battle, as the implementation of the right to self-determination lies ahead. The Prime Minister stresses the need to overcome the phase of discussing interpretations and building a collective narrative, in order to move forward to the implementation of the right to self-determination.

For that, the efforts should be placed on the application of this right. It requires to move from an agenda of political pressure to an agenda of political implementation, for the application of the Sahrawi right to self-determination. In practice, this kind of power seems to depend more on the States particular interpretations rather than on the general principles, norms, and values sustained by the human rights regime and the international law mechanisms. This directly limits the performance and effectiveness of non-State actors.

Considering that, as a reaction of recognizing its own structural limitations and foreseeing the need to reshape and combine other forms of political pressure, the international solidarity has been constantly working close to parliamentarians. The development of an established channel of communication between the solidarity and the parliamentarians happens in order to influence State behavior, as parliamentarians represent the main channel between a non-state actor and the State itself. Influencing State behavior seems to be the missing gap for implementing the Sahrawi right to self-determination, and as mentioned previously, advocacy networks indeed do have a history of advocating along with parliamentarians.

This logic has been just reinforced in a particularly recent initiative. The Sahrawi cause will enjoy a new level of dialogue: the city of Paris hosted, a week ago, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the first meeting of the International Network of Parliamentarians for the Self-Determination of Western Sahara. This initiative, initiated by Jean-Paul Lecoq, a French politician with a long-standing tradition on defending the Sahrawi cause, has been conceived last year on the 42<sup>nd</sup> EUCOCO, held in Vitry-sur-Seine. According to the media, around two hundred and forty members of parliaments from all over the world gathered together to address an agenda aiming for the establishment of a referendum to implement the Sahrawi right to self-determination – MINURSO’s main goal and failure.

This initiative shows that the efforts of advocacy networks and the international solidarity movement are in constant improvement. Now, enjoying a network of parliamentarians from different continents generates expectations not only towards more awareness and mobilization for the Sahrawi cause but, finally, the materialization of a step closer to the implementation of the right to self-determination, once the agenda will be discussed among individuals that represent States, who hold in their hands the power of implementing human rights.

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## **ANNEX:**

### **Felipe González’s original speech. Tindouf, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1976:**

*“Hemos querido estar aquí hoy, 14 de noviembre de 1976, para demostrar con nuestra presencia, nuestra repulsa y nuestra reprobación por el acuerdo de Madrid de 1975. El Pueblo Saharaui va a vencer en su lucha. Va a vencer, no sólo porque tiene la razón, sino porque tiene la voluntad de luchar por su libertad. Quiero que sepáis que la mayor parte del pueblo español, lo más noble del pueblo español, es solidario con vuestra lucha. Para nosotros no se trata ya del derecho de autodeterminación, sino de acompañaros en vuestra lucha hasta la victoria final. Como parte del pueblo español, sentimos vergüenza de que el Gobierno no haya sólo hecho una mala colonización sino una peor descolonización, entregándoos en manos de gobiernos reaccionarios como los de Marruecos y Mauritania. Pero debéis saber que nuestro pueblo también lucha con ese gobierno que dejó en manos, al pueblo saharauí, de gobiernos reaccionarios. A medida que nuestro pueblo se acerca a la libertad, será mayor y más eficaz el apoyo que podamos prestar a vuestra lucha. El partido está convencido de que el Frente Polisario es el guía recto hacia la Victoria Final del pueblo saharauí y está convencido también de que vuestra república independiente y democrática se consolidará sobre vuestro pueblo y podréis volver a vuestros hogares. Sabemos que vuestra experiencia es la de haber recibido muchas promesas nunca cumplidas. Yo quiero, por consiguiente, no prometeros algo, sino comprometerme con la Historia. Nuestro partido estará con vosotros hasta la victoria final.”*