Irredentism and the Construction of National Identity: Morocco and the Western Sahara

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Despite being one of the most protracted and ongoing territorial disputes, as a case of irredentism the Western Sahara conflict has only incidentally enjoyed international attention. The opportunity to step into the vacuum of international news coverage and information provision about this disputed territory, however, has recently been seized. The media platform of the state-sponsored 'Council of the Moroccan Community living abroad', as the name suggests, has targeted the Moroccan diaspora with online content about the Western Sahara in recent years. While studies of irredentism have focused on the importance of nationalism in arousing support for irredentism among the nation, the role of irredentism in the construction of national identity has received little attention. Through the empirical analysis of media content, this paper unravels the argumentation behind the Moroccan state's irredentist claims in its communication to the diaspora and demonstrates that they are rooted in a state-informed national identity construct, a construct to which the Western Sahara as irredentist project in turn plays a contributing role. On the basis of this construct I point out that, in addition to being of interest as potential support base for advancing the Moroccan state's irredentist cause in the Western Sahara, it is likely that the Moroccan diaspora is also reached out to in this regard for the purpose of bolstering the idea of a monarch(y)-centred national identity.

Keywords: irredentism – national identity construct – diaspora – Morocco – Western Sahara – legitimacy – kin-state politics

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Introduction

Diasporas, communities of nationals living outside of state boundaries, have been central objects of inquiry to studies of irredentism, that is, the state policy of annexing a territory considered to have formerly belonged to it. For a good reason, since their (attributed) status as 'cross-border (ethnic) kin' has constituted an important source of legitimacy for states' irredentist projects. This is because considerations of legitimacy tend to generate support or sympathy for the irredentist endeavour among those not directly involved in the matter when the cross-border kin appears to be supportive of the so-called 'kin-state' (Horowitz and Redd 2018, 79-85). The Moroccan state, however, is faced with at least two major problems in this regard when it comes to its irredentist project in the Western Sahara. First of all, a movement by the name of Frente Polisario[1], more commonly known in English as the Polisario Front, disputes Morocco's claims to the Western Sahara. Importantly, the Polisario Front is recognised to be the representative of 'the people of the Western Sahara' (hereafter referred to as Ṣaḥrāwīyīn or 'desert dwellers') through UN resolution 34/37 of the 21st of November 1979 (34/37. Question of Western Sahara, 203-4). Secondly, it is not apparent at all that the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn living under Moroccan authority since 1975 would endorse Morocco's irredentist claims and freely accept living under Moroccan authority, whether with some degree of autonomy or not. Multiple attempts from the United Nations at organising a referendum among the inhabitants of the Western Sahara with the options of either independence or integration with Morocco have failed to materialise. A prime reason for this has been Morocco's repeated rejection of the proposed voter lists in which the Moroccan settlers in the Western Sahara were not to be included, demonstrating concern about the possibility of a majority vote for independence (Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine 2013, 72-3). As a consequence, what Morocco considers to be its ethnic kin in the Western Sahara does not seem to constitute a viable source of legitimacy. In the absence of a diaspora 'internal' to the irredentist dispute to turn to, then what options are left with regard to legitimacy?

The Council of the Moroccan Community living abroad', a national institution known by its acronym CCME (Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine À l'Étranger), has attempted to reach Morocco's non-resident nationals with information and news updates about what it likes to call the 'Moroccan Sahara'. This despite the fact that, unlike what Morocco considers to be its ethnic kin in the Western Sahara, a direct link between this kin abroad and the Western

[1] From the Spanish 'Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y Río de Oro', which can be translated to 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguía el-Hamra and Río de Oro'

Saharan issue is not apparent. So why bother them with information about this subject surrounded by controversy?

An explanation for this is that the diaspora constitutes potential political capital. "In the context of globalisation, the diaspora model has become a political reference which goes beyond frontiers and enables claims of legitimacy to be made in international public opinion" (Bordes-Benayoun 2010, 47). This is all the more the case for diaspora communities which have the ability to express their political views through their right to vote. One only needs to be reminded of the Turkish constitutional referendum of 2017, in which the participation of foreign nationals, though only constituting a mere 5% of the electorate (Sevi, et al. 2019, 10), made the difference between yes or no to constitutional reform (OSCE/ODIHR 2017, 26). While formerly Moroccan nationals residing abroad were not granted the right to vote for elections, this changed with the revision of the constitution in 2011. Where article 8 of the 1996 constitution stipulated that "every citizen, male or female, has the right to be a voter"[2], in article 30 of the 2011 constitution to this stipulation has been added that "foreign nationals enjoy the same fundamental rights accredited to Moroccan female and male citizens, in accordance with the law".[3] Over the years, the voting process for foreign nationals has been facilitated by allowing third parties to assist in the registration process of voters and to enable voters to register online (Wang 2015, 65). Recent estimates put the total number of Moroccan nationals at about 37 million (UN 2019, 25), of which approximately 5 million are nationals living abroad (Mahieu 2020, 232), therefore amounting to roughly 15% of the total national population. Thus, the overseas diaspora is of political interest to the Moroccan state.

What binds the Moroccan diaspora and the Moroccan state together beyond nationality is national identity. It is this national identity upon which effective diaspora engagement, and therefore the capacity to tap into this potential source of political capital, is likely to depend (Gamlen 2006, 6). For this reason, nationalism, the appeal to national identity for state purposes, is important in studying this state-diaspora relationship.

[2] For an original copy of the 1996 constitution in Arabic, consult: http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/arabic/Moroccan_Laws/Moroccan_Constitution1996.pdf
[3] For an original copy of the 2011 constitution in Arabic or French, consult: http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/1/lois/constitution_2011_Ar.pdf http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/0/constitution/constitution_2011_Fr.pdf

The scholarly literature on nationalism and irredentism has tended to focus on the role of nationalism in the materialisation of irredentism ((Dixon 2014); (Hout 2019, 661)), considering their relationship in one particular direction. The reverse relationship, that is, the role of irredentism in the construction of national identity, has not received similar attention. In the absence of a direct, apparent link between a diaspora 'external' to the irredentist issue on the one hand and the irredentist issue itself on the other, the construction of national identity, in particular the territorial component to it, is of significance in establishing or strengthening a connection between the two. As an attempt at diaspora engagement, the way in which a state legitimises its irredentist conduct in communication to its diaspora specifically may inform us about the role of irredentism in the construction of this national identity. This therefore leads to the formulation of the following research question:

> How does the Moroccan state legitimise its irredentist endeavour in the Western Sahara in its communication to the Moroccan diaspora?

In this paper, I argue that the Moroccan state attempts to do so through the construction of a nationalist narrative in which the Western Sahara is related to what have become other central features to the makeup of Moroccan national identity over time. While this research paper does postulate the instrumental nature of nationalism within the context of irredentism, it finds that this relationship is to be considered in the reverse direction as well. Not only does nationalism have the potential of serving an irredentist cause, the irredentist cause also has the potential of informing what seems to be a contrived construct of national identity.

I conduct this research on the basis of a textual analysis of CCME media content dealing with the topic of the Western Sahara in which I examine the arguments and claims put forward. These arguments and claims are considered within the historical context of Morocco's endeavour in the Western Sahara, informing us about the (historic) role of nationalism or national identity to this endeavour. This context enables us to understand where (part of) the claims and arguments emanate from and helps to identify the instances in which the Moroccan state relies on or makes appeal to what I demonstrate to be a state-informed national identity construct.

How a state actor frames its arguments and claims in order to generate legitimacy for its irredentist endeavour is relevant to investigate for a number of reasons. First of all, the actual

acquisition of the territories to which the irredentist claims pertain only constitutes part of the process of full integration into 'the homeland'. Without the essential international recognition of those territorial acquisitions as being part of the irredentist state, the latter is likely to remain faced with diplomatic constraints. Therefore, the legitimisation process, as is the case with Morocco, has the potential to continue after the act of irredentism has occurred. Secondly, as this research will demonstrate by use of the case study involving Morocco and the Western Sahara, the premises underlying irredentist claims do not merely provide us with information about what argumentation theory dubs the 'reference repertoire' (i.e. the set of ideas and assumptions providing the resources for justification) but also inform us about the makeup of the broader nationalist narrative as propagated by the irredentist state in question. Thirdly, if those actors engaging in irredentism go to great lengths in order to justify their endeavour both to themselves and to others, which they tend to do, then the deconstruction of the underlying ideas and assumptions to those claims should allow for the disruption of the justification and as such help to pave a way to dispute settlement (Kornprobst 2007, 463).

This paper starts off with a chapter discussing the conceptual basis of this research and the literature which it engages with, most importantly exploring the phenomena of irredentism and national identity. The second chapter is dedicated to the structure of the research, outlining its theoretical basis traversing the fields of irredentism, nationalism and kin-state politics. This second chapter also further introduces the case under scrutiny in this research and the actors of interest to this study. The third chapter concerns itself with the provision of a historical context of Morocco's conduct in and with regard to the Western Sahara. This chapter demonstrates the utility which nationalism has had for the monarchy-dominated state domestically and with regard to the Western Sahara, explicating its construction with a focus on its main components. The fourth chapter encompasses the analysis of primary sources in the form of digital media content. The final chapter discusses the implications of the findings of this case study for the current academic debate, concluding that the study of cases of irredentism may contribute to our understanding of how national identity constructs are built.

1. Literature Review

This literature review commences by defining the key concepts of relevance to this study: those of irredentism, diaspora, national identity, and nationalism. Subsequently, it discusses what information the current literature provides about the way in which irredentist projects tend to be legitimised. Thereafter, it explores what we already know about the nexus between irredentism and the construction of national identity. I make the observation that there is a focus in the literature on the role of nationalism with regard to irredentism, but that the relationship tends not to be considered in the opposite direction, that is, examining the role of irredentism with regard to the construction of national identity. I argue that it is worthwhile to consider this aspect to the relationship between nationalism and irredentism for the reason that it has relevance for domestic politics and the generation of legitimacy for an irredentist cause both domestically and internationally.

Key concepts

While interpretations with regard to the term 'irredentism' may differ to some extent, the meanings attributed to it tend to converge on a number of aspects. First of all, irredentism tends to be regarded as a form of ethnic conflict ((Gokcek 2011, 276); (Boal 2015, 91); (Siroky and Hale 2016, 117)). The ethnic aspect is to be found in the shared ethnic identity between 1) the (majority of) inhabitants of the kin-state, i.e. the state with irredentist aspirations where the majority of 'the nation' resides, and 2) the inhabitants of the land to which the irredentist aspirations pertain (M. A. Waterbury 2020, 1-2). Secondly, irredentism is the act of not just 'conquering' a territory or 'liberating' its inhabitants, but of *redeeming* part of 'the nation' on the basis of some type of connection between the irredentist state and the aspired territory. This connection may constitute a former inclusion of that territory into the state in question, or even into a former state or empire of which (the territories of) the state in question used to be part, a shared ethnic identity with the inhabitants of the territory to be redeemed, or both at the same time. Both aspects seem to be applicable to the case of Morocco and the Western Sahara. The Moroccan state considers the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn of the Western Sahara to be its ethnic kin and has displayed eagerness to grant them Moroccan citizenship and as such include them into the Moroccan nation. It considers the Western Sahara to be a historical part of Morocco (informally known as 'Greater Morocco') because of some form of prior sovereignty held over the territory, and from that perspective, aspires to 'redeem' rather than to 'conquer' the territory in question. Lastly, the term is inseparable from

the state, as it concerns a state actor's endeavour to alter state boundaries. The term 'irredentism' is therefore conceptualised as follows: 'the state policy of annexing territory, possibly inhabited by ethnic kin, considered to have formerly belonged to it'.

The term 'diaspora' within this study is interlinked with the idea of the nation-state on a political level, as it concerns itself with the attempt of a nation-state to reach its nationals abroad with politically-charged information. It therefore pertains to individuals with the Moroccan nationality. This without discrimination, as the media platforms studied are designed to reach the diaspora in the broadest sense and to be generally accessible (by, amongst others, providing most of its content in both Arabic, French and English). It is therefore conceptualised as 'the total of extraterritorially residing Moroccan citizens'.

While nationality connects the nation to the state, national identity also connects the nation to the homeland. One of the primary aspects to national identity is the concept of a national homeland. As demonstrated by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the various national conflicts that have arisen between the different nation-states that were previously unified into one bloc, borders and national homelands have a tremendous impact on the way in which population groups perceive of themselves and others (Williams 1997, 225-6). While these homelands are constructs in the same way that national identities themselves (or for that matter, any other social facts) are, they nevertheless tend to be treated as static entities in practice and are therefore perhaps less malleable than other possible aspects to a national identity (Shelef 2021, 3). Serving as the object of this collectivist form of identity, the nation is indispensable to the idea of a national identity. National identity is therefore defined as 'the collective identity associated with a particular nation, typically tying that nation to a territory considered to constitute its homeland'.

In spite of the wide array of extant nationalisms and even wider array of explanations thereof, the common denominator of all nationalisms remains its object: the nation (Smith 1973, 16). Hobsbawm argued that a nation is a phenomenon which is 'constructed essentially from above': "Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around" (Hobsbawm 1992, 10). Therefore, there is no purpose in discussing matters of nation and nationality without relation to the state (Ibid.). Following the most widespread practice of exploring nationalism 'top-down', that is, as ideology devised by those in power (Kasianenko 2020, 2), this study concerns itself with the employment of nationalism as a means to an end.

Nationalism rather than any other ideological tool is of interest here because the national identity of the 'Moroccan subjects' abroad is what glues them to the Moroccan nation-state on a political level. The term 'nationalism' is therefore understood to mean 'an instrument to garner support among the nation for the nation-state and its conduct through an appeal to national identity'.

Legitimising irredentism

Irredentism is most directly associated with the execution of irredentist claims, or the *act* of irredentism. The annexation of the relevant territory and as such actualisation of the territorial claim constitutes a straightforward and by all means essential part to a successful irredentist project. Another perhaps equally important and essential part concerns the justification of the irredentist endeavour. The path to justification of the irredentist cause can be divided into two. The first half precedes the actualisation of the territorial claim and is covered by 'vision', which is the presented manner by which to attain the stated irredentist goal, in terms of territory ((Kornprobst 2007, 463); (Kornprobst 2008, 229)). This part is most important in selling the irredentist project domestically. The other half is covered by legitimacy, which pertains to the ability to justify the irredentist claim (and execution of the irredentist project) to the outside world (Ibid.).

Traditional irredentist claims are typically based on a narrative of historical continuity, tying the territory to which the irredentist claims pertain to the nation-state in question ((Saideman and Ayres 2008, 60); (Vogli 2011, 19)). This continuity may pertain to the prior existence of a state or empire that is associated with the majority nation of the irredentist state (M. A. Waterbury 2020, 1-2). Irredentist claims may also focus on the (re-)unification of 'the nation', which translates into attempts to derive legitimacy from the supposed status, treatment, living conditions, or will of cross-border ethnic kin. This typically includes their asserted status as second class citizens, suppression or mistreatment at the hands of their host state, inability of the host state to provide for their needs, and/or call for outside intervention by the kin-majority state, possibly accompanied by the wish of the cross-border ethnic kin to secede from their host state and integrate with the kin-majority state ((Davis and Moore 1997, 173-4, 178-81); (Saideman and Ayres 2008, 44-5); (Ambrosio 2016, 468, 473); (Siroky and Hale 2016); (Stein 2017, 2024); (Knott 2018, 997)). Concrete examples are the annexation of Sudetenland by Nazi-Germany under the pretext of protecting co-ethnics and the Russian

annexation of the Crimea, which was justified most directly through the holding of a referendum among the peninsula's inhabitants ((Ambrosio 2016, 468, 473); (Siroky and Hale 2016, 124)). In all these modes of justification, the inhabitants of the territories to which the irredentist claims pertain constitute the prime referent of legitimacy for the posited claims.

What makes the legitimisation of irredentist endeavours particularly challenging is the tendency of those not directly involved in such a territorial dispute to look more favourably upon efforts in pursuit of independence than efforts in pursuit of territorial expansion, so to speak (Horowitz and Redd 2018, 79-85). What's more, since the goal of self-determination of the kin abroad is likely to be viewed as the primary source of legitimacy for the irredentist endeavour of the kin-state, the questionability of their support for the kin-state's irredentist project constitutes a problem for the latter (69). That is why state actors attempt to ensure support both internally and externally, the latter of which is discussed below.

The construction of national identity

According to Waterbury, a number of interests may drive what she calls 'homeland state elites' (i.e. those in control of the kin majority state) to construct policies with the aim of engaging the diaspora, among which is the generation of both domestic and international political legitimacy (M. Waterbury 2009, 2). The diaspora may lend legitimacy to a state actor's conduct directly through political participation but also indirectly through lobbying or advocacy campaigns in their countries of residence ((Berkowitz and Mügge 2014, 77-85); (Ho and McConnell 2019, 249-50)). The engagement between state and diaspora itself tends to be seen as legitimate when there is some kind of evidence for cultural or linguistic ties between the two, even in the absence of formal nationality (M. Waterbury 2009, 2-8). Indeed, nation-states and their nations, including members both internal and external to that state, tend to be unified by one common denominator: a shared national identity. Any outward engagement initiated by the nation-state is likely to be conditioned by this (imagined) connection, as the capacity of the nation-state to implement effective policies of diaspora engagement depends on it (Gamlen 2006, 6). This condition of a (as far as possible, universally appealing) shared national identity, however, is not self-evidently present. 'The' diaspora, in particular when pertaining to the collective of communities from a range of different countries, is no homogeneous entity in terms of identity but rather involves multiple,

diffuse identities – arguably requiring a carefully contrived construction of national identity to enable all who make up the collective to identify themselves with (Ibid.).

If effective diaspora engagement depends upon this connection of identity, then the way in which national identity is constructed is essential. Various theories are in existence about how national identities are constructed. One such theory, relevant to this study's object of analysis, regards national identities as primarily 'discursively constructed' (Wodak, et al. 2009, 3-4). The focus in this theory lies on the verbal or written expression of national identity, whether it concerns the expression of the individual, group, or institution (3). These discursive constructs are premised upon national uniqueness, uniformity, and homogeneity with a deliberate neglect for intra-national differences but in clear opposition to other nations with the tendency to highlight the slightest differences (4). After all, the identification of the self inevitably involves the differentiation from the other (2). While recognising what studies dealing with the construction of national identity tend to emphasise (e.g. (Rusciano 2003); (Wodak, et al. 2009); (Bieber 2015)), namely that multiple actors, ranging from individuals to state actors and even non-nationals, engage in the construction of (perhaps various simultaneously existing forms of) national identity, this study is concerned with national identity as it is projected to the diaspora by the nation-state. While the production of texts by a state-affiliated body may be influenced by considerations of those things that appeal to nationals abroad, such texts essentially remain representative of an institutional construct of national identity.

Since nationalism has been shown to constitute a potential motivating force or trigger for diasporic (kin) support for and/or engagement in shifting state boundaries (Siroky and Hale 2016, 7), it is a highly relevant phenomenon to study within the context of irredentism. In fact, the scholarly field of nationalism studies has tended to treat the phenomenon of irredentism as a manifestation of (radical) nationalist political ideology ((Dixon 2014); (Hout 2019, 661)). It is true that nationalisms may give rise to irredentist projects ((Reinares 2005, 124); (Heiskanen 2019, 318)) or, as has appeared throughout this literature review, may play a role in their legitimisation. The reverse relationship between irredentism and nationalism, that is, the role or utility of irredentism with regard to nationalism – or even more specific, the construction of national identity – is however also of relevance. Shelef notes that considering a territory as part of the 'homeland' of a nation is a 'nationalist form of territoriality', denoting that the value thereby attributed to the land in relation to the nation exists independent from that territory's material properties (Shelef 2021, 2). It adds another

dimension to the land in question since the homeland in turn "[…] plays a role in constituting the nation itself" (Ibid.). Quite interestingly, applying this logic to an irredentist claim on a cross-border territory, this then endows that claimed land with the (partial) role of constituting the nation and as such lending meaning to national identity.

Since diasporas are of interest to state actors on a political level both domestically (when constituting part of the electorate) and internationally (constituting a referent of legitimacy or a potential support base for lobbying and/or advocacy), it is relevant to further investigate the way in which irredentism may inform national identity constructs which are employed for the purpose of communicating effectively with the diaspora in this regard.

2. Design & Methods

In this chapter I discuss why Morocco is an interesting case to look at in order to fill the identified gap in the literature (pertaining to the relevance of irredentism with regard to national identity), how I operationalise my key concepts with a view to this investigation, by use of what data I conduct this investigation, and finally how I intend to answer the research question and engage my central argument through the (empirical) analysis of the data.

Case selection: Morocco and the Western Sahara

The Moroccan state has attempted to reach its diaspora with information about the Western Sahara in recent years through a state-affiliated digital media platform, administered by 'the Council of the Moroccan Community living abroad', also known by its acronym CCME (Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine À l'Étranger). This council presents itself as a 'national consultative institution' whose responsibilities include monitoring and evaluating Morocco's public policies towards nationals abroad, defending the interests of Moroccan nationals abroad, strengthening the latter's social and economic contribution to Morocco, and reinforcing diplomatic ties between the Moroccan state and their countries of residence (CCME 2022b). This national institution, falling under the authority of the monarch (CCME 2021c) and therefore directly linked to the Moroccan state, was created by royal decree in 2007 and has a royal advisor as its general secretary. What's more, the CCME makes no secret of its objective of 'promoting the kingdom's influence abroad' through links to its diaspora communities (CCME 2021a).

While Morocco may already have exploited its reserves of hard power for the most part, therewith largely fulfilling the material side to its irredentist endeavour, it is still struggling to obtain international recognition of its territorial acquisitions in the Western Sahara. It therefore remains faced with what is perhaps the most challenging obstacle on the road to absolute territorial incorporation, namely that of legitimacy. This makes it an interesting case for the purpose of studying how a state actor may attempt to justify its irredentist endeavour more generally. What makes the case of Morocco particularly interesting with regard to my central argument, which is that irredentism may play a part in the construction of national identity, is its focus on the diaspora in its legitimisation efforts.

As can be inferred from the literature, attempts at diaspora engagement are likely to be carried out by means of an appeal to national identity. This is not only because national identity fundamentally connects nation-state and nation and forms the basis for effective communication between the two. Most important within the context of irredentism, the connection of the nation with the national homeland tends to be a constant, defining factor of national identity. The irredentist ideal of bringing the boundaries of the imagined national homeland and the nation-state in congruence therefore essentially rests upon the way in which (the territorial aspect to) this national identity is constructed, or alternatively, requires the modification of the national identity construct.

Theoretical Framework: irredentist kin-state policy

As this study is primarily concerned with Morocco as state actor on the one hand and the phenomenon of irredentism on the other, it serves the purpose to briefly turn towards the literature on kin-state politics. Kin-state politics deals with the behaviour of 'kin' majority states, i.e. states representing a majority nation, with regard to trans-border communities sharing this 'kin identity'. The kin-state politics literature has oscillated between irredentism on the one hand and diaspora politics on the other (M. A. Waterbury 2020, 2). Well into the 1990s irredentism was the major framework through which to analyse the behaviour of kin-states towards kin minorities abroad, with the main argument that the interest of mobilised minority groups to appeal to kin-states for support and/or intervention led to the revival or strengthening of state-capturing projects ((D. Horowitz 1991); (M. A. Waterbury 2020, 2-3)). Studies concerned with the phenomenon of irredentism have tended to focus on the 'triad' of 1) the kin-state and its inhabitants, 2) the territory laid claim to (and possibly its inhabitants), and 3) the state (or authority) holding, or previously holding, the territory laid claim to[4]. Around the turn of the century the position of irredentism as dominant framework began to falter because of the observation that many states did not seem interested in armed struggles for swathes of territory as the most costly way to engage cross-border kin, but rather sought to do so through diplomacy, the granting of (a form of) citizenship and the establishment of cross-border networks in areas ranging from politics to culture (M. A. Waterbury 2020, 3). The main focus therefore shifted towards the policies of the kin-state targeted at their kin living abroad (Ibid.).

[4] See f.e. ((Siroky and Hale 2016); (Horowitz and Redd 2018); (Shelef 2021))

To the case of Morocco and the Western Sahara, both the frameworks of irredentism and kin-state policy are of interest. This is because external diaspora engagement is sought through kin-state policy, however, within the context of (legitimising) irredentism. While largely adhering to the triad of relevant actors as proposed by the kin-state politics literature, I explain their relational configuration on the basis of the insights offered by the literature on irredentism, legitimacy, and nationalism (the latter of which, as explained before, I consider to be an appeal to national identity for state purposes) as discussed in the previous chapter. The kin-state policy in this regard pertains to the attempt to reach the external diaspora in relation to the irredentist endeavour through the dissemination of textual and verbal content, elaborated upon below.

I propose a framework that revolves around three 'subjects' occupying a central place in the process went through by a kin-state policy – initiation, (de-)legitimisation, and result. In line with the 'traditional' triangular configuration characteristic of the study of kin-state politics, I present the pathway of a kin-state policy as comprising three major junctions (see Fig. 1.1). This starts with the kin-state, where the policy is devised. As soon as the policy is initiated, it takes off pursuing its intended objective, namely the kin-state's external kin. The external kin then 'consumes' the policy emanating from its kin-state. Having the potential to deliver a response to or act upon the policy in question, the external kin then may deliver a response or undertake action which affirms or rejects the policy – or, alternatively, not respond at all. In the former case, the path continues toward the unredeemed territory which the kin-state policy is all about, granting legitimacy to the 'unredeemed' label attached to the territory by the kin-state, or the contrary, de-legitimising it. Finally, I maintain that the (de-)legitimisation of the idea of 'redemption' of the territory in question leads to gains or losses in the political and/or economic domain for the kin-state, be it advancement or regression of its irredentist cause abroad or the application or lifting of economic sanctions.

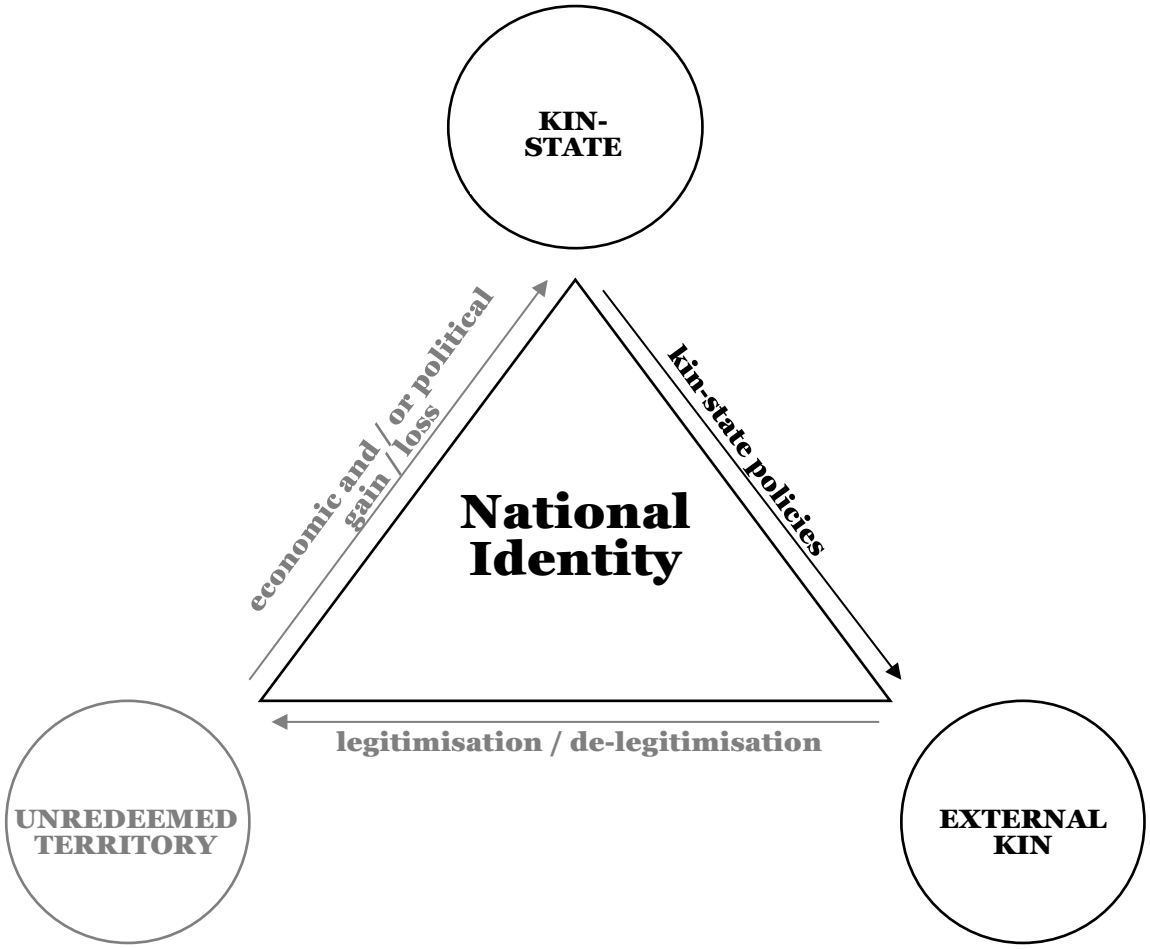

Fig. 1.1

Importantly, the triangle forming the basis of this whole process is constituted by that which connects, or is used to connect, the individual subjects: national identity. Based on the insights provided by the literature on irredentism, legitimacy, nationalism and diaspora engagement, I argue that it is this construct on which the efficacy of the kin-state policy, and therefore its impacts or consequences (legitimisation or de-legitimisation, economic and/or political gain or loss), depend. It are also these impacts or consequences that make the study of the initial part to the triangulation relevant to investigate.

Situated within the academic debate on kin-state politics as outlined above, this case-study research nevertheless deviates from the conventional notion of the diaspora as part of the triad of actors traditionally focused at in studies of irredentism. This to incorporate a diaspora which is not directly involved in the irredentist dispute, i.e. whose members do not inhabit the territory aspired to be 'redeemed' by the national homeland or kin-state. Applying the

framework outlined above to the case of Morocco and the Western Sahara, the triad of subjects can be delineated as follows:

1) The Moroccan state, fulfilling the role of the kin-state. As kin-state, Morocco directs itself toward its kin beyond state borders. In this case, this pertains to individuals holding the Moroccan nationality, the totality of which this study defines as the Moroccan diaspora. The Moroccan state is of interest here as agent, shaping the kin-state policies which it aims at its external kin. The content of these policies concern the (justification and/or propagation of the) Moroccan state's endeavours in the Western Sahara and, as will be elaborated upon below, materialise in the form of digital media content.

2)The Moroccan diaspora, endowed with the role of 'external kin'. Acknowledging the importance of the agency of Moroccan diaspora members, examining this is something that is beyond this study. This study restricts itself to the first part or downward slope of the triangular configuration as depicted in Fig. 1.1 and Fig. 1.2, considering diaspora members as (targeted) consumers of kin-state policies, however, not yet focusing on their consumption of it and their potential reactions to it and actions upon it (as represented along the horizontal slope of Fig. 1.1 and Fig. 1.2) as this study's interest pertains to the content of the kin-state policy.

3) The unredeemed territory, being the Western Sahara. While 'unredeemed' may seem contrary to reality at first instance, the fact that Morocco holds authority over some 85% of Western Saharan territory (Simon 2014, 256) says little about its status in the international community. Since 1963, the Western Sahara has been on the list of non-self-governing territories of the United Nations. This status, as non-self-governing territory, did not change with the termination of Spanish presence there as of February 1976, but remained following the invasion of Moroccan forces and the establishment of Moroccan authority thereafter, to this day (Non-Self-Governing Territories 2022). The territory may therefore be largely redeemed in the physical, territorial sense, but the process of redeeming nevertheless continues on the no less important aspect of legitimacy.

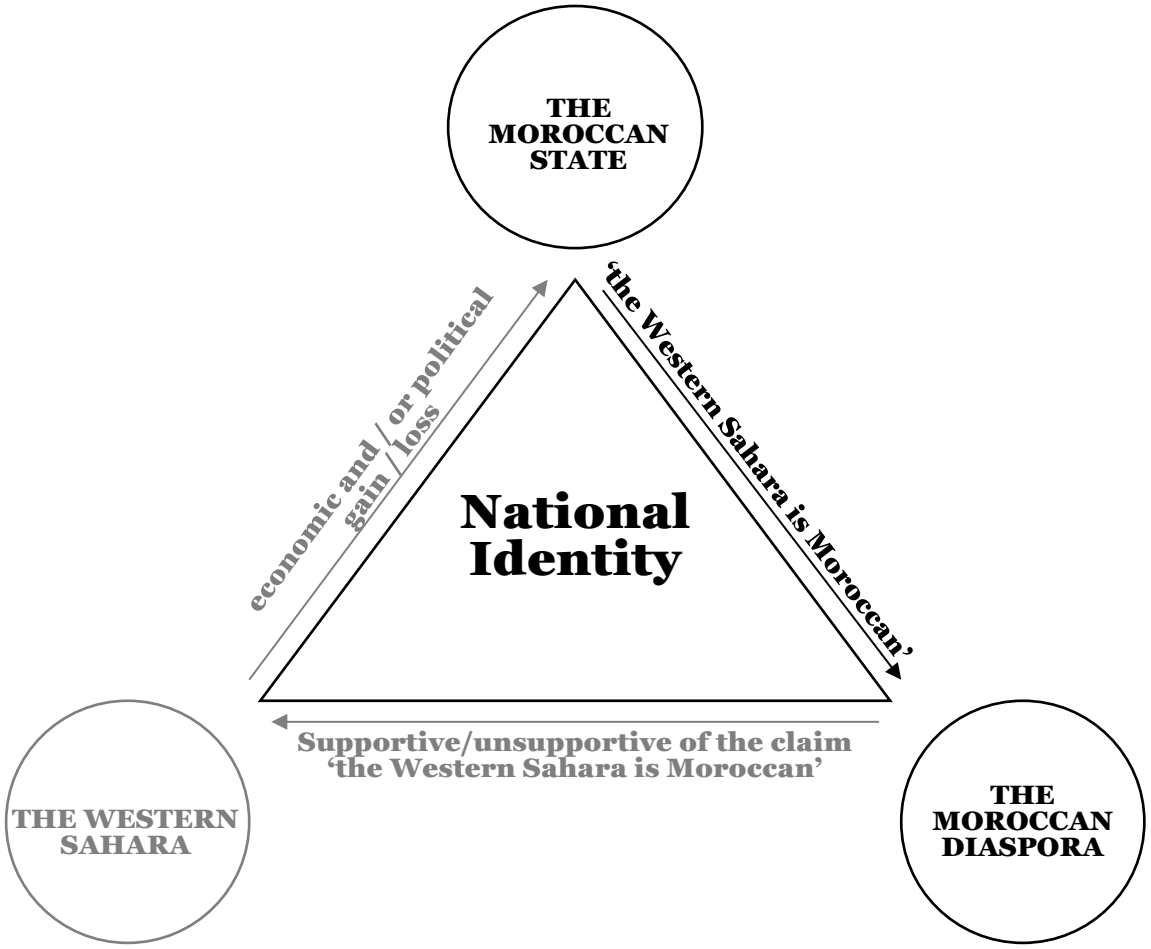

Fig. 1.2

Design

The case of Morocco and the Western Sahara poses as an unusual case in the domain of kin-state politics because of the particular triangular configuration between kin-state, kin, and territory which deviates from the usual cases of irredentism. What's more, prior research gives reason to believe that a within-case analysis is preferable over a (comparative) multiple case-study in the field of kin-state politics research. Exploring two cases of states as dissimilar as Turkey and the Dominican Republic (respectively a heterogeneous vs. homogeneous population, strong vs. weak state, diversified vs. dependent economy, imperial past vs. former colony), Burgess nevertheless points out that they are both cases of strong ties between kin-state and diaspora and showcase high levels of foreign voter turnouts and therefore political participation (Burgess 2020, 91). This suggests that population makeup, strength and development of state and economy, and national history cannot as such be identified as necessarily essential factors in determining the kin-state-diaspora relationship (at least in the

political domain), and therefore that the latter should be analysed on a case by case basis. This justifies a within-case analysis.

Data

As our interest lies with the initial part of the triangulation (see Fig. 1.2), our attention is directed toward the means by which the Moroccan state transmits its political message that the Western Sahara is Moroccan, which is done through the CCME. Involved with the Moroccan diaspora in ways that range from financial support for cultural projects to delivering news connected to Moroccans living abroad, its main medium of communication is its official website ccme.org.ma. The CCME website is divided into different sections, of which the 'news' section and the 'activities' section are of primary interest with regard to the topic of the Western Sahara. They respectively include news articles and updates about the activities of the CCME (participation in dialogues, councils, signing of cooperation agreements etc.). Subsidiary to the CCME is Awacertv.com, an online broadcasting agency with a focus on Moroccan culture (CCME 2021b). Interestingly, the website has a history section which includes a video series on the history of the 'Moroccan Sahara' with a number of episodes delving into its geography. Within the limits of this research project, I shall work with the publicly available media content on the topic of the Western Sahara of these two government-administered media platforms.

As previously indicated, irredentist actors make efforts in trying to justify their irredentist endeavour not only to themselves (i.e. domestically) but also to the outside world. Domestically, in particular after the passing of decades, the overall governmental and societal positions (in particular when congruent) may have become self-evident, therefore not requiring the explanation which those further removed from the dispute may need. This makes the content published by the CCME, specifically targeting Moroccan nationals abroad but also with a much wider potential reach to the outside world, additionally interesting to look at. What's more, a digital medium accessible to the masses is a tool par excellence to disseminate constructed narratives of such abstractions as national identity. Wodak et al. argue that "[…] the various discursive constructs of national identity are given different shapes according to the context and to the public in which they emerge, all of which can be identified with reference to content, strategies and argumentation patterns, as well as according to how they are expressed in language […]." The focus on irredentist claims and

arguments as they appear in written and verbal content, their analysis against the background of a historical context, and the consideration of the 'constructor's' link to the specific target audience, are therefore in order.

Analysis

Since it is the written and spoken media content of media platforms ccme.org.ma and Awacertv.com which are under scrutiny in this study, textual analysis is the most suitable approach. As the analysis in this case is applied to a body of 49 texts (that is, after their selection for relevance, discussed below), a thematic textual analysis constitutes an appropriate qualitative method for the reason that it is particularly useful to summarise key features in large data sets (Nowell, et al. 2017). The body of texts studied most importantly comprises the entirety of texts (in the form of written content) dealing with or touching upon the Western Sahara in one way or another to be found on ccme.org.ma. While the website is available in three languages (Arabic, English and French), the written content shall be scrutinised in the language most directly accessible to me, which is English. The written texts studied have been selected through a search for the keyword 'Sahara' on the website ccme.org.ma (Hooghwinkel 2022, 3-8). Subsequently, they have been filtered for relevance to focus on those texts mentioning (or more elaborately, discussing) issues related to the Western Sahara specifically (9-10). In addition, textual analysis will be applied to the texts (in the form of transcribed verbal content) of what is presented as a 'documentary series' on Awacertv.com dealing with the ostensible history of the 'Moroccan Sahara' titled 'Le Sahara: une histoire Marocaine' (The Sahara: a Moroccan story/history), content which is offered exclusively in French.

The individual texts have been inductively analysed in order to bring out the selection of perspectives which are provided a platform with the aim of grasping the overall image consequently created of the Western Sahara issue, including its suggested links and meaning to the Moroccan diaspora. These perspectives are discussed thematically, sorted according to the nature and/or referent of the claims and arguments posited (e.g. 'legality and territoriality', discussing claims and arguments with a legal or territorial basis, with the (international) law and the territorial aspect of the Western Sahara as referents). This allows for the provision of an answer to the research question, as these themes exhibit that which the producer of the texts relies on or appeals to in order to make its claims and arguments – which I demonstrate

to be rooted in a state-informed national identity construct based on the historical construction of national identity as discussed in the following chapter. The perspectives most apt for generalisation have been inductively coded under general statements or descriptions which either coincide with or are representative of the general tenor of those perspectives, such as 'Morocco's endeavour in the Western Sahara is an issue of territorial integrity' or 'the inhabitants of the Western Sahara are part of the Moroccan nation', as visible in Table 1 and Table 3 of the online appendix (Hooghwinkel 2022, 3-5, 9-10). Since inductive analysis constitutes "[…] a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytical preconceptions", it may help to prevent a selective reading of the texts (Braun and Clarke 2006, 83). My argument being that irredentism may contribute to the construction of national identity, the perspectives are analysed against the background of the identified main components of Moroccan national identity as constructed by the state. The purpose of this will be to assess whether the question of the Western Sahara is not 'merely' legitimised through nationalist rhetoric, but is equally employed to reinforce or expand the national identity construct itself by lending new meaning to it or bolstering its established components through the Western Sahara and/or its inhabitants. As such, evidence in favour of the argument would be constituted by identified connections made between the Western Sahara(n people) and 'the Moroccan (national) identity' in which it is the former that (is argued to) add(s) value to the latter.

It should be noted that the texts analysed include amongst others transcribed (and translated) speeches of king Mohammed VI to the Moroccan nation on occasion of the annual celebration of the Green March. While these speeches are not directed specifically towards Moroccans living abroad, the fact that they have been transcribed, translated and published on the online medium of the CCME with the Moroccan diaspora as target audience makes them valuable to take into account nevertheless. After all, they contribute to the overall image of the Western Sahara dispute presented to the CCME's audience as much as the other texts on its medium.

An important critique of textual analysis of media accounts is that several factors which are important in establishing the 'meaning' of the text are all too often left out of the equation. This pertains most importantly to the context of production (with what intentions was the text produced) and the reception of the text by its audience (how does the audience perceive of the (content of) the text and what meaning does it retrieve from it) (Philo 2007). While this critique would be fully applicable if this study aimed to examine the triangular configuration

as outlined above in its totality, the scope of this study is limited to the production of the text and therefore the content of the text as intended by its producer. While acknowledging the limitations of not being able to pinpoint the context of production of each text individually, I maintain that the medium of issuance at hand, being controlled by an institution with direct links to the government, justifies making the assumption that the meaning of the texts studied should be interpreted in a manner that is in alignment with the overall position of the Moroccan government on issues concerning the Western Sahara.

3. Case description: the Western Sahara and the formation of the Moroccan nation

In order to understand Morocco's present-day posture towards the Western Sahara and its policies concerning it, having somewhat of an understanding of the history of the Western Sahara in relation to the Moroccan state is a prerequisite. In the introduction to his work on North African politics, Willis summarised the status of the Western Saharan conflict in international politics and the public debate:

"The dispute remains unsolved after three and a half decades and now occupies one of the longest serving United Nations peacekeeping operations in the world. Yet few outside the region and the corridors of the UN know anything about the conflict, its causes and its stakes" (Willis 2014, 2).

In the meantime, we can actually speak of four and a half decades of 'dispute' and a UN peacekeeping operation which has been in place for more than three decades. So how did it come to this and what is it about the Western Sahara that makes it of such great interest to Morocco?

Morocco's interests in the Western Sahara

Morocco's practical irredentist activity in the Western Sahara dates back to the year 1975, when it invaded the territory after signing the Madrid Accords with Spain and Mauritania. These accords stipulated that, with the termination of Spanish presence in the Western Sahara, the administration of the territory would be transferred to Morocco and Mauritania – pending a referendum in which the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn would have a say in the fate of their homeland. Both countries proceeded to take control over their allotted share of the region, with Mauritania relinquishing its newly acquired territorial possessions a mere four years later. These were subsequently added to the Moroccan-controlled portion of the Western Sahara.

The Polisario Front, a liberation movement made up of Ṣaḥrāwīyīn, has opposed Morocco's presence in the Western Sahara from the start. Having been formally constituted in 1973 for the purpose of driving out the Spanish from the Sahara, the movement subsequently directed its efforts at the expulsion of the two novel occupying forces. It did so with success in the case of Mauritania, which not only withdrew its troops from the Western Sahara in 1979 but relinquished its claims to the territory altogether. The Polisario's resistance against the

Moroccan presence in the Western Sahara has proven to be much more difficult, enduring to this day. Constituting a rather small-scale movement which pales into insignificance when compared to the Moroccan army, the Polisario Front has owed much of its capacity to continue its decades-long resistance against Morocco to Algeria's unwavering support which it has enjoyed ever since the execution of Morocco's irredentist project. Algeria, which seemed to have reached a settlement to its own border dispute with Morocco in the early 1970s, became frustrated by Morocco's failure to formally ratify an agreement in which it would give up on its irredentist claims to a number of Algerian territories (Willis 2014, 273-4). Together with a number of other (geo-)political motives, this moved Algeria to actively oppose Morocco's irredentist endeavour in the Western Sahara by harbouring the Polisario Front's headquarters on its territory, providing the movement with arms, and countering Moroccan irredentist claims through international organisations and institutions such as the African Union and the international court of justice ((Zunes 1995, 27); (Willis 2014, 277, 331)). This only really started with the execution of the irredentist project, since not long before Algeria had turned a cold shoulder to the Polisario's requests for assistance and even seemed to acquiesce to a joint Moroccan-Mauritanian takeover of the territory within the context of its agreement with Morocco (Zunes 1995, 27). While Algeria has therefore been a major contributor to the frustration of Moroccan regional interests, the depiction of the Polisario Front as an Algerian proxy, a tactic which has been employed by Morocco as part of its advocacy campaign (Ibid.), is difficult to reconcile with reality.

While the majority of Morocco's irredentist claims have come to be settled or retracted over the years, the ones pertaining to the Western Sahara have remained. This is not because the claim to the Western Sahara came at a low cost, since, most notably in terms of human lives and diplomatic relations, it did not. Then why, over the ensuing decades, did the Moroccan regime continue to pursue this costly irredentist endeavour? Part of the explanation is the abundance of natural resources in the Western Sahara, entailing significant economic gain. By the year 1962 it had become clear that the Western Sahara comprised rich phosphate deposits, which further fuelled the determination to establish authority over the area (Miller 2013, 181). What would have made it rather difficult to cease the demand for full Saharan integration into Morocco after having committed so determinately to this cause, however, is the strong involvement of the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces in military operations and deployments in the Western Sahara, having been created in 1956 under the supreme command of the royal house with deliberate overt links to it (Willis 2014, 83). This has been rendered difficult first

of all because of the heavy losses in Moroccan military personnel incurred over the years for the sake of this particular cause, secondly because of the additional pressure which the demobilisation of troops would put on an already overly saturated job market, and thirdly because of the blemish this would entail for both the armed forces and the monarchy (114).

Cognisant of these various material and political motives, the royal house's resort to nationalism within the context of the Western Sahara, something which will be elaborated upon below, appears to have constituted a tool of pragmatism or justification rather than an idealist goal in itself. To substantiate this proposition, one can draw upon the period preceding the so-called Green March of 1975, a government-coordinated mass demonstration by Moroccan citizens (accompanied by armed forces) who marched into the Western Sahara to claim it for Morocco. Over the course of the decade preceding this nationalist campaign led by the royal house, the latter had become more and more politically isolated as a result of its suppression of the increasingly anti-royalist opposition parties and its suspension of parliament from 1965 to 1970, resulting into the coup attempts of 1971 and 1972 against the monarch (Willis 2014, 125-6). The revival of the Western Saharan issue offered a way out of political isolation by rallying the political parties and the population at large around a common national cause, and induced the king to take the lead in the endeavour to 'reclaim Morocco's southernmost province' (126). While calls for integration of the Western Sahara into Morocco were not new at this point, since the 1950s they had been led by the nationalist Istiqlāl party rather than the royalist political parties or the royal house itself (Ibid.). Posing a serious political threat to the monarchy which was already the target of criticism for its close ties to the Spanish dictatorship (Hodges 1983, 109-12), the royal house could not stay behind and started to endorse these claims as well (86). The latter therefore only began to show a profound interest in the issue within this context of political opportunism (Baers 2019, 295), as such exploiting the nationalist cause of 'redeeming' part of the envisioned national homeland to arouse support for the Moroccan monarchy. It is therefore the immediate post-independence political climate which can be identified as the prime reason for why the royal house first became interested in the Western Sahara as a political project, and a combination of material and political interests which can account for the continuation of its irredentist endeavour.

While there are more plausible explanations than nationalist sentiments to explain the Moroccan state's engagement in irredentism, such sentiments may still help to explain the

necessary support of individual citizens for Morocco's acts of territorial aggression. This leads us to the question how exactly, or on what grounds, these claims were justified. In an attempt to elucidate the origin of these claims and therefore the idea that the Western Sahara somehow 'belongs' to (or together with) Morocco, I delve into the notion of 'Greater Morocco' below.

'Greater Morocco'

If a Moroccan nationalist was to designate the first territorial entity to be tied to the notion of Moroccan statehood, the Idrisid dynasty (788-91 A.D.) would certainly be a, if not the most, prominent candidate. First of all, this has to do with the Idrisid dynasty being the first sovereign Muslim entity to be established in the region of present-day Morocco (Rivet 2012, 58). Closely related to this, the second reason is that its founder, Idrīs bin ʿAbdallāh, was (and still is) widely accepted to have been a *sharīf*, meaning that his descent can be traced back to the prophet of Islam (Abun-Nasr 1999, 50-1). This religiopolitical identity aspect turned out to be a unifying factor in the wake of the declining political appeal of tribal identity because of the expansion of cities with large and diverse settled communities (206). As a consequence, ensuing dynasties have propagated their (supposed) Sharifian descent as a legitimising factor to their rule with some reaching back in veneration to the first Sharifian ruler himself ((Abun-Nasr 1999, 208-9, 212, 236); (Rivet 2012, 208)). This includes the current Moroccan monarchy which occupies a place in the line of the so-called Alaoui (ʿAlawī) dynasty (1666-present), rendering the king sacred and inviolable by the constitution and granting him the title of 'amīru l-muʾminīn' (commander of the faithful), thereby bestowing upon him the status of leader of the Moroccan ummah (collective of Muslims) (Daadaoui 2011, 52). With success, since the Islamic religion has remained a socio-political matter connecting the monarchy through its religious basis to all kinds of religious institutions, practices, celebrations, and affairs in general with societal importance (52-3).

Of all the ensuing dynasties in the area since that of the Idrisids, the Almohads (1121-1269) achieved the greatest state of territorial expansion. Although the confines of 'Greater Morocco' may be interpreted varyingly depending on the period one reaches back to, the Moroccan state does not seem to aim to revert to Almohad times in terms of territorial size but rather sticks to its dynasty proper (see Fig. 2.1). Aside from the fact that the former would entail impracticable and diplomatically (even more) problematic claims as the Almohad

caliphate comprised much of present-day Algeria, Tunisia and Spain, the attempt to ‘restore’ a former territorial state of the still ongoing dynasty is also easier to legitimise than turning toward one that has long vanished. In addition, this ties the notion of Moroccan statehood or nationalism directly to the incumbent royal house.

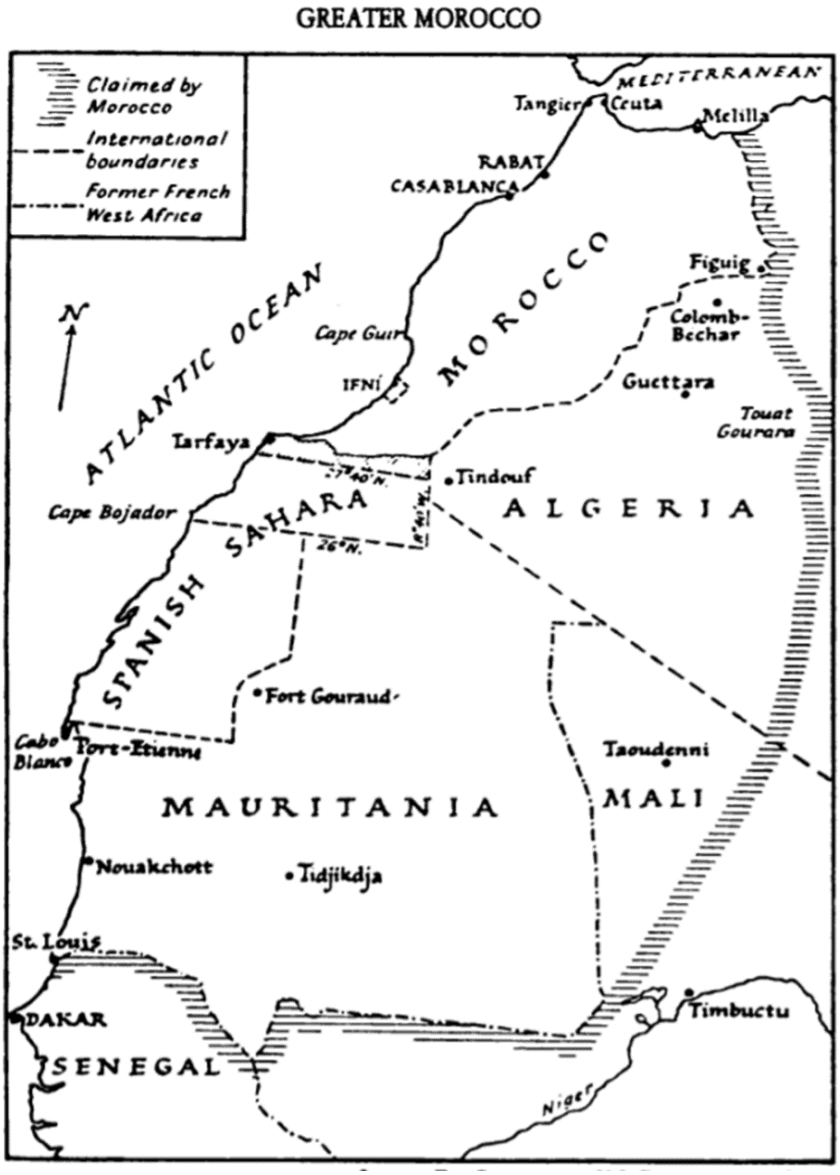

Fig. 3.1 (Hodges 1983, 87)

Looking at Morocco’s dynastic past, religious identity appears to play an important part in undergirding the notion of Greater Morocco to which Morocco’s latest rulers ascribe. Add to that a sense of national identity or nationalism, constructed in service of the anti-colonial

endeavour against France. When it comes to legitimising rule, the importance of these two identity aspects is crystal clear to the royal house. But how to render yourself as indispensable to the recently formed Morocco nation-state as the shared experiences that bind its nation together?

'The holy trinity'

When the Spanish made known their intent to give up on the Western Sahara in 1975 on the eve of Franco's death, king Hassan II himself contrived what would become known as 'the Green March' in the greatest secrecy (Miller 2013, 181). On November the sixth, about 350.000 Moroccans, equipped with Qur'ans, red and green banners, and pictures of the king, marched into the Western Sahara to claim it for Morocco (Ibid.). Being orchestrated by (portrayed to the populace as *led* by) the monarch, this prompted a wave of Moroccan patriotism and helped to push earlier doubts about the position of the monarchy in Morocco to the background (Ibid.). This trend carried through when a couple of months later the combination of the state of national emergency, declared upon the eruption of armed conflict in the Western Sahara with the Polisario Front, and the indirect affirmation of the monarchy by alluding to the glory of prior 'Moroccan' dynasties respectively worked to enhance the royal house's position of power and to legitimise it ((Hodges 1983, 298-9); (Miller 2013, 184)). The ambiguous status of the Western Sahara as territorial entity was therefore effectively exploited in order to solidify the king's position of power.

What demands our attention here is the way in which the monarch, representing the institution of the monarchy, was put on equal footing with what can be identified as two central pillars of the then almost 20 years old Moroccan nation-state: Islam and self-determination. With a virtually homogeneous Sunni Muslim population and a shared colonial experience and anti-colonial struggle, these two pillars really are inseparable from anything close to a shared Moroccan identity. The monarchical initiative of standing up to a former colonial power and 'freeing' supposed fellow Moroccans from the yoke of colonisation therefore was a narrative that fit well in line with the latter and could easily be related and rendered appealing to the former with king Hassan II's role as commander of the faithful. Interestingly, this role as religious leader had been codified in the constitution by the monarch himself somewhat more than a decade earlier (Sheline 2019, 5).

The tactics employed during the Green March should not be considered in isolation. Several other attempts at ingraining the image of the king as part of the essence of modern, post-colonial Moroccan society into the public imagination can be identified. The first one in the most literal sense, namely the presence of images in the form of photographs of the king in not only public places such as governmental buildings but also privately owned shops throughout all of Morocco (East and Thomas 2003, 362). This phenomenon, well-known to tourists, already hints at the reverence for the king present among at least a part of the Moroccan population which will be elaborated upon below.

Secondly, through annual Islamic bayʿah (pledge of allegiance) ceremonies, quite interestingly revived in 1974 in the context of the popular success of king Hassan's patriotic Sahara policy (Hodges 1983, 182), Moroccans occupying positions as officials, notables, or leaders of various kinds offer their allegiance to the king. These ceremonies do not only help to reinforce and legitimise the king's reign by having representatives from all layers of society recognise the king's authority and promising him their obedience (Aslan 2015, 104). Perhaps equally important, they are the continuation of what has long become a state tradition of which culturally symbolic traditional garments, resonating with the public at large among which it is not at all uncommon to wear such clothing on a day-to-day basis, play a prominent part (Ibid.). Not only are these garments of cultural significance. They emerged as symbols of Moroccan nationalism in the colonial struggle against France (104-5). Ever since, Morocco's monarchs have eagerly made use of typically Moroccan traditional apparel during public appearances, lending the wear post-colonial political relevance (105).

Thirdly, as head of the Supreme Religious Council Mohammed VI's name is connected to the majority of religious endeavours in Morocco, including such events as award ceremonies for the promotion of religious devotion among the Moroccan youth (Bouasria 2013, 40).

Fourthly, the Moroccan national anthem, called 'an-našīd aš-šarīf' or 'the Sharifian anthem', by its name celebrates the prophetic descent upon which the legitimisation of the monarchy's position of power rests. Its lyrics end with Morocco's official motto, a slogan which (literally) remains omnipresent throughout the country and could jestingly be described as the country's holy trinity: 'Allāh, al-waṭan, al-malik' or 'God, the homeland, the king' (Fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2 (Amari 2009)

The citizen in perspective

Even to this day Morocco remains unique among its North-African neighbours with similar colonial experiences and demographic compositions in that it has largely preserved a form of traditional governance centred around the figure of the monarch (Salamova 2021, 1). In addition, it is the only country with a head of state who claims authority on the basis of both religion and tradition (Sheline 2019, 14).[5] A survey commissioned by the Baker Institute for Public Policy in 2017 inquired Moroccan citizens about their views on a range of (supposed) Moroccan and non-Moroccan 'religious leaders', including king Mohammed VI (Sheline 2019). Its findings include widespread approval of the king and trust in him as religious leader – much more so than any other public figure, especially when limiting the scope to the national level (12). At the same time, respondents expressed general frustration with the government (Ibid.). Since it seems rather unlikely that Moroccans at large are completely unaware of the political power which the king possesses and his ability to influence government practices, it appears that they largely detach the king's role as political actor from his role as religious leader (Ibid.).

[5] For example compared to the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, whose royal house claims descent from the prophet just like its Moroccan counterpart, but whose king does not lay claim to any religious authority and does not lead prayers (Sheline 2019, 14). Or alternatively to the house of Saud, which claims religious authority as custodian of Mecca and Medina, but has no claim to prophetic descent (Ibid.).

Retaining a healthy dose of scepticism, one may point out that perhaps Moroccans responded overwhelmingly positively about their king out of fear to speak their true mind in view of the legal consequences and societal pressure to which they are accustomed. There is reason to believe, however, that the aforementioned reverence is sincere. As long as 50 years after their ʿăliyyah[6], the members of Moroccan-Jewish communities in Israel kept paying tribute to the Moroccan king and treated him as a ṣaddīq[7] by putting up his images in their shrines and cemeteries (Levy 1997, 34-5). Despite not being Moroccan residents anymore and therefore not being subject to a similar societal pressure nor the constraints of censorship in place in Morocco, the centrality of the monarch to their communal practices has not faltered (34-5). The Moroccan royal house itself makes sure to contribute to the perpetuation of this 'patron-client relationship' by sending its representatives to confer blessings upon the Moroccan-Jewish community on important religious occasions (35). This demonstrates awareness in monarchical spheres about the place of the monarchy among those communities with ties to the country.

Legal measures

While attempts at the glorification of the king seem to have been rather successful, the royal house has simultaneously made sure not to let its position depend on the favour of the people. Article 7 and 19 of the Moroccan constitution of 1996 respectively stipulated the following:

> '… the motto of the kingdom is: God, the homeland, the king.'

> 'The king is the commander of the faithful and the supreme representative of the nation and symbol of its unity and guarantor of the perpetuation of the state and its continuity, and he is the protector of the faith … The king is the guarantor of the independence of the country and the territorial integrity of the kingdom within its rightful boundaries …'

Again, this underlines the centrality and supposed indispensability of the king to Morocco's national identity through emphasis on his religious position. What's more, including this in

[6] Immigration to the (promised) land of Israel, literally: 'ascension'.
[7] Lit. a 'righteous one', an epithet usually applied to exemplary religious Jews.

the constitution effectively renders drawing this into question or critiquing it counter-constitutional. Article 4, 41 and 42 of the 2011 constitution again highlight the king's centrality and religious leadership position and ty the pillar of self-determination to the monarch:

> '… the motto of the kingdom is: God, the homeland, the king.'
>
> 'The king is the commander of the faithful and protector of the religious community and the faith (Islam)[8], and the guarantor of the freedom to practice religious affairs …'
>
> 'The king is the head of state, its supreme representative, symbol of the unity of the nation, guarantor of the perpetuation and continuity of the state ... The king is the guarantor of the independence of the country and the territorial integrity of the kingdom within its rightful boundaries …'

Article 7 of the 2011 constitution stipulates that political parties may not be founded on a religious basis. While this article may in the first place appear to be an attempt at the secularisation of Moroccan politics (as which it is presented), it effectively reserves the religious sphere for the monarch who possesses more political power than any other actor (Maddy-Weitzman and Zisenwine 2013, 40-1). In this way, the possibility of directly deriving legitimacy from religion remains largely exclusive to the king (Ibid.). In an attempt to retain a strong grip on the way in which Islam manifests itself, which ought to be moderate and 'apolitical' (read: benign to the regime), the Moroccan state has furthermore reorganised mosques, jailed supposed Islamists, and increasingly promoted a Sufi form of Islam over the past two decades under the pretext of protecting Morocco against extremist and terrorist influences ((Daadaoui 2013, 28); (Sheline 2019, 6, 13)). Again, this shows how key the religious position but also dominant interpretation(s) of Islam are to the survival of the royal house. The ostensible secularisation of politics in Morocco effectively works to disconnect the king, at least to some degree, from messy Moroccan politics.

[8] Whereas the Arabic constitution speaks implicitly of 'the faith', the French constitution explicitly mentions Islam.

Conclusion

The discussion of the Moroccan state's engagement with its national, resident population, both within the context of the Western Sahara and more generally, has allowed for a number of observations. The first one pertains to the two-component glue holding the newly formed Moroccan nation together, consisting of the Islamic religion and the collective memory around the struggle for national self-determination. Showing well-awareness of this matter and not willing to risk being the third wheel, the Moroccan state got in quickly to add the monarchy to the composition. What this has entailed in practice, we see back in public policy: the construction of connections between these three 'foundations' of Moroccan national identity, their implicit and explicit public display (rendering them 'self-evident' in the long run), and finally the derivation of legitimacy from them.

Concretely, we see the attempt to conflate the notions of Moroccan statehood and nationalism with monarchism through appeals to late dynastic history, the reservation and preservation of the king's exclusive religious position in society – the questioning of which is a taboo on as it pertains to the sphere of religion – and the normalisation of the position of the king in the midst of society by granting the figure of the monarch not only historical and religious but also cultural significance, creating a culture of which the king constitutes the centrepiece.

It seems that a parallel can be drawn with regard to the Western Sahara. Initially, the Moroccan state with the monarchy at its helm got involved in the Western Sahara as national territorial question with the most prominent goal of political survival. The issue of national territoriality therefore became a useful 'tool' to secure a place for the monarchy within post-colonial Moroccan national consciousness, suggesting the accuracy of an instrumentalist interpretation of nationalism when it comes to the Moroccan state. While the natural resources of the Western Sahara entail economic benefit for the Moroccan state and therefore constitute an important long-term interest and factor of motivation, another use to the territory seems apparent: a source of legitimacy for the status of the monarch(y) as unifier and protector of the national homeland.

4. Analysis: the online display of 'the first national cause' in the Sahara

With the historical context to Morocco's Western Sahara endeavour and the state-informed national identity construct as explored in the previous chapter in mind, this chapter involves itself with the analysis of texts in the form of digital media content about the Western Sahara, published by the state-affiliated CCME and its subsidiary AwacerTV. Their discussion below provides an overview of the overarching themes which I have identified as recurring throughout the texts, representative of the nature or referent of the claims and arguments made. The selection of perspectives coming to the fore provide us with an overall (constructed) image of the Western Sahara issue, including its suggested links and meaning to the Moroccan diaspora.

The CCME and its stated objectives

While the Secretary General of the CCME Mr. Abdellah Boussouf is recorded as saying that the council is an advisory body which is in no way subject to political pressure (CCME 2014a), the CCME demonstrates itself to have occupied a clear standpoint in alignment with that of the Moroccan state in what can be interpreted as its indirect encouragement for diasporic engagement in advocating or supporting the Moroccan state's endeavour in the Western Sahara. In one of the texts, the objective of the CCME is formulated as follows: to provide "[…] precise and structured scientific knowledge for the Moroccans of the world, and through them to the whole world, on the issue of the Moroccan Sahara in order to […] learn about the efforts that Morocco is making to achieve peace and development […]" (CCME 2021d). Furthermore stated is the need to 'reject disinformation and misinformation' about Morocco's sovereignty over the Western Sahara, again with the use of 'scientific and historical knowledge' (CCME 2020b). The reader is provided with the information that the CCME provides trainings or programs about the Western Sahara to the Moroccan youth living abroad to expand their knowledge on the subject matter ((CCME 2016b); (CCME 2017d)) and to ensure (effective) advocacy on the issue of the Western Sahara ((CCME 2020a); (CCME 2020b); (CCME 2021d)). On two occasions members of the Moroccan diaspora are praised for their commitment to 'the national cause' for publishing written content about the Green March – mentioned explicitly: with aid from the CCME towards this effort – and for 'showing concern' for the sovereignty of their country of origin through their participation in CCME-organised conventions about this topic ((CCME 2017d); (CCME 2018b)). Young Moroccans in particular are encouraged to plead for 'their national cause' (Ibid.). In the

quoted words of king Mohammed VI, these members of the diaspora constitute 'immaterial capital' to the Moroccan endeavour (CCME 2017d). Also the call for mobilisation of the Moroccan diaspora, in this case specifically those in Andalusia (Spain), is spoken of (CCME 2014d). The words used by the CCME to describe the goal of this call for mobilisation are "[…] to defend the national cause and to counter propagandist speeches of the kingdom's enemies" (Ibid.). Add to this his statement that "Moroccan journalists living abroad should be part of public policies" (CCME 2016d), and a different interpretation than an attempt to mobilise extraterritorial nationals for state purposes is rendered increasingly implausible. How this national cause in the Western Sahara and its broader context are explained to the CCME's targeted audience is discussed in detail below.

The Moroccan nation, nationalism, and national identity

Considering only the way in which the Western Sahara is referred to, it already becomes apparent which side to the territorial dispute is strongly represented throughout the texts analysed. A word search reveals that not even once the internationally accepted name for the region, the 'Western Sahara', has been used (Hooghwinkel 2022, 3-5). Instead, we consistently encounter the word combination 'Moroccan Sahara', suggesting a natural relationship between this part of the Sahara and Morocco. In contrast, when reference is made to the dispute concerning the region specifically, perhaps for entailing negative connotations because of the human and economic costs incurred over the years by the population as a result of it (Zunes and Mundy 2022, xxiii, 23, 46, 288), the word 'Moroccan' is much less common (Hooghwinkel 2022, 3-5).

Similar to the Western Saharan territories, its inhabitants are recurrently spoken of not as separate from but as belonging together with their Northern neighbours. More often than not the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn have been mentioned as part of the Moroccan nation (e.g. 'our brothers and sisters' (CCME 2017c) and 'our fellow citizens' (CCME 2015b)) (Hooghwinkel 2022, 3-5). References to them as simply 'Saharans' or 'the Saharan population' appeared in texts where they were equally considered to be part of the Moroccan nation, suggesting alternation in word use for mere textual purposes (Hooghwinkel 2022, 3-5). Indeed, the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn – though acknowledging the existence of a distinct 'local' cultural heritage ((CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017c)) – are considered to be Moroccans above all. They are said to have 'Moroccan roots' (CCME 2022a) and to add a 'Sahrawi personality aspect' to the Moroccan

identity (CCME 2018a), constituting a component of what is explained as a pluralist but unified national identity (CCME 2017c). Accordingly, Ṣaḥrāwī culture is considered to be national cultural heritage (Ibid.).

From this premise, the statement that the Western Sahara is not just the issue of the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn but rather a cause for the Moroccan nation in its totality does not come across as irrational (CCME 2014b). All this corresponds with the presentation of the Western Sahara endeavour as a question of national unity, another description we encounter in multiple texts (Hooghwinkel 2022, 9-10). On one occasion, the Western Sahara issue is even called 'the first national cause' (CCME 2014d). As the targeted readers of this content, Moroccans residing abroad are lauded for their alleged consciousness of the importance of this cause to the nation and are praised for their 'unique commitment' to the defense of Morocco's territorial integrity and international influence through their contribution to the development of the country, possibly referring to their role as senders of remittances (CCME 2021d). Interesting in this regard is the remark that the presence of a large Moroccan community in Spain could serve as a diplomatic tool to counter those who contest Morocco's territorial integrity (CCME 2014d). In addition to the above, the message is conveyed that '(true) patriotism' means commitment to the aforementioned 'authentic' Moroccan identity, but also to the territorial unity of the nation ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2017c)). In published speeches of king Mohammed VI we read that 'true Ṣaḥrāwīyīn' are 'genuine patriots' with commitment to the nation's territorial integrity, and that one is 'either a patriot or a traitor' ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b)). He goes on to state that acting against or resisting the Moroccan endeavour in the Western Sahara is 'conspiring against the homeland' (CCME 2014b). Referring to those who question the 'Moroccanness' of the Western Sahara, he states that 'conspiring with the enemy' is to be considered treason by both national and international law (Ibid.). Fitting with this strong nationalist rhetoric we encounter the term 'martyr' a number of times in relation to those Moroccans who have died defending the unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of the nation and the motherland ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2016c); (CCME 2017c); (CCME 2018c)).

Finally, the monarch is mentioned as being of central importance in this national endeavour. King Hassan II, the predecessor of king Mohammed VI, is repeatedly mentioned as 'revered architect of the Green march' ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2016c); (CCME 2017c); (CCME 2018c)), among the participants of which the members of the Moroccan

diaspora are also especially highlighted (Awacer Tv 2019f). The current monarch is quoted, referring to himself as "[…] the guarantor of the country's independence and territorial integrity […]" (CCME 2014b). Additionally interesting to note is that the Moroccan people, again explicitly including those living in the diaspora, are said to have a strong attachment and close bond to their king ((CCME 2014d); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2016a)), fostering the image of a king who enjoys wide support from all ranks of the nation.

Algeria and the Polisario Front

Of all the published written texts analysed, just two contain the term 'Polisario Front'. In one of them Morocco's neighbour Algeria is mentioned for its role in supporting and financing the Polisario Front, impeding the development of 'the kingdom's southern regions' (CCME 2021d). Interestingly, the name Polisario Front is mentioned in-between brackets here, resonating with another indirect reference made to the movement as 'the fictional entity' (CCME 2017b). Illustrative of the illegitimacy of the movement as seen through the eyes of the Moroccan state, the other text explicitly mentioning the Polisario Front talks about it as being a terrorist organisation (CCME 2020b).

Rather than (directly) presenting this latter standpoint as that of the CCME or Moroccan state itself, the text discusses the contributions of a Spanish 'expert in issues of terrorism and international security' and a Spanish 'international terrorism and security lawyer' to a CCME organised broadcast about the 'security and terrorist threats of the Polisario Front' (CCME 2020b). The standpoints taken by these two individuals, as presented in the text (Ibid.), are in alignment with the position of the Moroccan state, also as presented in the texts of the CCME (Hooghwinkel 2022, 9-10), highlighting Morocco's contribution to the Western Sahara's regional development and considering Morocco's endeavour in the Western Sahara to be in defense of its national sovereignty and to be aimed at peace. The Polisario Front on the other hand is depicted as an organisation spreading unrest and hatred, perpetuating violence, and contributing to an instable situation in which terrorism can thrive (CCME 2020b). The Ṣaḥrāwīyīn are detached from the Polisario Front, dubbing any connection made between the former and the latter (a 'terrorist armed group') as 'confusion' (Ibid.). The apparent need to combat this confusion, prevalent in Spain, through 'proper media and propaganda' and to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara are mentioned as acts of truth and justice (Ibid.).

While the choice of title of the broadcast or panel discussion already subtly lets the position taken by the CCME with regard to the Polisario Front as organisation shimmer through, apparently the necessity was felt to appeal to the expertise and credentials of non-nationals on what remains a controversial issue in the international domain. Considering the fact that the non-national interlocutors were Spanish, interesting to note is that Morocco and Spain went through a multitude of diplomatic quarrels over the years in which the Western Sahara got involved (Arieff 2010, 20-1). In this light, the text can be interpreted as an attempt to discredit the counter-positions taken by major host states of the Moroccan diaspora such as Spain and to legitimise the Moroccan position by argument from (scientific) authority. Equally an appeal is made to political authority, mentioning the United States' recognition of Moroccan authority over the Western as lending credibility to the 'legitimate position' taken by the Moroccan king (CCME 2020b).

The focus, however, is on Algeria as main culprit of this 'fabricated regional dispute' (CCME 2016c). In the video lecture series on the history of the 'Moroccan Sahara', the Polisario Front is introduced as an Algerian creation with the purpose of exploitation for its own border disputes with Morocco (Awacer Tv 2019d). In both written and spoken content the finger is pointed towards Algeria, blaming the state for the existence of the Western Sahara dispute and the appalling situation of the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn in the territories under the authority of the Polisario Front. Concretely, Algeria is accused of neglecting the well-being of the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn taking refuge in Tindouf – the city where the Polisario Front's headquarters are based and where the largest refugee camp of Ṣaḥrāwīyīn is located – of preventing them from returning to 'their motherland Morocco', and of exploiting their humanitarian situation, utilising it as a means to exert political pressure ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b); (Awacer Tv 2019e); (CCME 2021d)). The country is furthermore accused of waging a 'military and diplomatic war' against Morocco by spending large amounts of money on weaponry and propaganda for 'the separatists' (referring to the members of the Polisario Front) instead of using it to build houses for the refugees and to improve their living conditions (CCME 2015b). In contrast, under Moroccan authority the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn are said to be able to lead a 'free and dignified' life as 'full-fledged citizens' ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017c); (CCME 2018c)).

Legality and territoriality

Also, notions of legality and illegality are employed to explain the conduct of Morocco as compared to the conduct of its adversaries in the context of the Western Sahara dispute. Morocco's business in the Western Sahara is presented as the implementation of the (rule of) law and judicial authority ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2017a)). This opposed to the purported 'lawlessness' which the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn are (or would be) subjected to under the authority of the Polisario Front (CCME 2014b). Also mentioned is that 'disunity' and 'separatism' are forbidden under the kingdom's constitution (Ibid.). The assumption underlying these statements which we can therefore identify is that the Western Sahara and its inhabitants fall within the legal parameters of Moroccan national law. Building upon this assumption, the Polisario Front is referred to as a 'separatist movement' ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b)) and the idea or advocacy of a Western Sahara independent from Morocco is described as 'separatism' ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017c)). This of course only makes sense when regarding the Western Sahara as an integral part of Morocco.

Moving the scope from the national to the international level, we furthermore encounter the proposition that Morocco acts in accordance with international law (CCME 2020b). We are presented with the explanation of the Madrid Agreement as recognising 'Morocco's rights' as regards the Western Sahara (Awacer Tv 2019d). Consequently, counteractions to the Moroccan endeavour in the Western Sahara such as economic boycotts are explained to be violations of international law (CCME 2015b). Again, this presupposes de jure sovereignty of the Moroccan state over the Western Sahara, while in reality we can only speak of de facto sovereignty when taking into account the official status of the Western Sahara as determined by the UN General Assembly. Since 1963, the Western Sahara is considered to be a non-self-governing territory under chapter XI of the Charter of the United Nations. Although Morocco has established de facto sovereignty over the Western Sahara, it is not recognised as 'administering power' over the area:

> "The Madrid Agreement did not transfer sovereignty over the Territory, nor did it confer upon any of the signatories the status of an administering Power, a status which Spain alone could not have unilaterally transferred. The transfer of administrative authority over the Territory to Morocco and Mauritania in 1975 did not affect the international status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory" (Corell 2002, 2).

In fact, as explained by Simon, from a legal point of view Morocco is to be considered an occupying power without legitimate legal claim to the Western Sahara, which has engaged in the illegal annexation of a territory whose inhabitants have a right to self-determination (Simon 2014, 260-2). So too the UN General Assembly considered Morocco's deployment of military personnel in the Western Sahara – who remain stationed there to this day – occupation (35/19. Question of Western Sahara 11 November 1980). Without further engaging in a legal discussion which is beyond the scope of this analysis, it is therefore safe to state that Morocco's claim to the Western Sahara remains rather contentious from a legal point of view – an issue which is highly oversimplified in its portrayal on the CCME's media platform.

This brings us to the so-called question of territorial integrity. In various texts discussing the Western Sahara, the question concerning it is explained as an 'issue of territorial integrity' (Hooghwinkel 2022, 9-10). Often the wordings 'defending' or 'completing' Morocco's territorial integrity are used to explain Morocco's endeavours regarding the Western Sahara ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015a); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017c); (CCME 2018c); (CCME 2021d)), suggesting defensive rather than offensive conduct. Indeed, what can be considered as Morocco's invasion and occupation of the Western Sahara is explained as 'liberation' of the land and of its people ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017c); (Awacer Tv 2019e)), the 'recovery' of the Sahara or southern provinces ((CCME 2014b); (CCME 2017c); (Awacer Tv 2019d); (Awacer Tv 2019f); (Awacer Tv 2019m)), and the 'reunification' of the territory with the homeland (CCME 2014b). Where in some texts we encounter these explicitly irredentist terms, reminiscent of the concept of redemption, in the same spirit the Western Sahara endeavour is explained as a question of (the preservation or safe guarding of) national unity in other texts (Hooghwinkel 2022, 9-10), once again presupposing it being a part of Morocco. At the same time, Morocco's asserted role in supporting anti-colonial liberation movements across Africa is mentioned ((CCME 2016a); (CCME 2017b); (CCME 2018c)), bolstering the idea that Morocco's endeavour in the Western Sahara is one of colonial liberation. So too in the video content the emphasis is put on Spain as coloniser and Morocco as liberator of the Western Saharan territories ((Awacer Tv 2019a); (Awacer Tv 2019c); (Awacer Tv 2019e); (Awacer Tv 2019f)).

Historic legitimacy and religious authority

In the texts analysed, twice the term 'historic legitimacy' is brought up ((CCME 2017c); (CCME 2020b)). What is meant by this becomes particularly clear in the Awacer TV video lecture series. Various signs or remnants of prior sovereignty held over the territories by the Sultans of Moroccan dynasties are used to legitimise the establishment of authority over the Western Sahara by the current Moroccan state. Reference is made to unspecified historical documents, the collection of taxes and minting of coins in the region in the name of the Sultan, and perhaps most important of all, the tribute paid and allegiance sworn by the Ṣaḥrāwī nomadic tribal leaders to the Sultan, also known by its Arabic term Bayʿah (Awacer Tv 2019a).

The Bayʿah is explained to constitute a religious, political and legal contract (Awacer Tv 2019g). It is argued that the oaths of allegiance historically made by the Ṣaḥrāwī tribal leaders are still 'intact' today, referring to royal decrees which had been drawn up by the predecessors of the current monarch ((CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017c); (Awacer Tv 2019a)). As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, today the Bayʿah continues[9] to constitute a traditional ceremony with both religious and political connotations, taking place annually in Morocco. Important to note is that the term Bayʿah emanates from Islam, where it derives its religious significance from. It was first performed by the prophet Mohammed himself, whom the Moroccan monarch is widely considered to be a descendent of – something which is emphasised in his speeches on the occasion of the anniversary of the Green March, referring to him as 'my ancestor' ((CCME 2016a); (CCME 2018c)). Like the legal or political authority, the religious authority of the monarch in the Western Sahara is said to continue to this day as demonstrated by the continued tradition of calling for the Sultan's blessings during Friday sermons performed by the people of the region (Awacer Tv 2019a).

As a presentation of historical evidence an enumeration is made of Saharan tribal Sheikhs – in addition to the representatives of the inhabitants of Tindouf, the current base of operations of the Polisario Front – who used to perform Bayʿah to the Sultan of Morocco, rendering them representatives of Moroccan authority in those areas at the time 'with the same status as representatives in Marrakech, Meknès and Tafitalet', cities which fall within the internationally recognised borders of present-day Morocco ((Awacer Tv 2019g); (Awacer Tv

[9] As also mentioned in the previous chapter, revived in 1974 by the current monarch's predecessor (Hodges 1983, 182)

2019k)). So too the inference is made that, since Spain's governing of Northern Morocco but also the Western Sahara happened in name of the Moroccan king, Morocco in effect retained sovereignty over both these regions after the Spanish decolonisation (Awacer Tv 2019b). Furthermore, the confirmation of the Court of Justice in the Hague of historic legal ties and allegiances between Moroccan Sultans and Ṣaḥrāwī tribal leaders is presented as a recognition of Morocco's 'right to the Sahara' (Awacer Tv 2019e).

Appeals to competence and virtue

In addition to the historic and religious ties between Morocco and the Western Sahara, noticeable are the appeals made to competence and virtue. Generally speaking, Morocco is said to be known as "[…] an influential state in ensuring security and stability in the region […]" (CCME 2014b). In the same vein Morocco is depicted as safe guarder or preserver of stability and security in the Western Sahara specifically (Hooghwinkel 2022, 9-10). Furthermore, the Moroccan endeavour there is described as guaranteeing, ensuring, bringing, offering, and enabling freedom to or for the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn (Ibid.), something which is compatible with the idea of 'liberation' discussed earlier. Also mentioned is the capability to 'deal with human rights issues', something which is said to be acknowledged by the international community (CCME 2014b), and to protect these human rights from the 'schemes' of the nation's enemies (CCME 2015b).

Continuing on the theme of human welfare, the humanitarian aid or assistance provided by Morocco in the Western Sahara as well as the efforts and successes of economic development of the 'southern provinces' since their inclusion into the kingdom are discussed in detail ((CCME 2015b); (Awacer Tv 2019m); (Awacer Tv 2019o); (CCME 2021d)). In contrast, the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn subjected to the authority of Algeria and the Polisario Front are said to be deprived of their human rights and to be suffering from poverty and overall appalling conditions (CCME 2015b). As such, Moroccan authority over the Western Sahara, or rather its population, is presented as being in the best interest of the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn from a humanitarian perspective, granting moral legitimacy to the Moroccan presence in the Western Sahara.

The idea of legitimate authority is further corroborated by appealing to the 'voluntary' political participation of Ṣaḥrāwīyīn in the Moroccan-imposed political system (CCME 2016c). By reference to this, the argument is made that the inhabitants of the 'southern

provinces' have conferred legitimacy upon the Moroccan officials as 'their true representatives' (CCME 2015b). Not only does this fail to mention that some 300.000 Moroccans have settled in the Western Sahara since the establishment of Moroccan authority there, heavily influencing the makeup of its population to include a majority population of Moroccan settlers (Mundy 2012, 95). This also disregards Morocco's unwillingness to allow for the implementation of the UN-established MINURSO[10] mandate, proposing a referendum for the (original) inhabitants of the Western Sahara to express their preference for independence or integration with Morocco (Bellal 2015, 114).

Further attention is given to the disqualification of those drawing into question Morocco's 'legitimate right' to the Western Sahara. The Polisario Front's stated goal of liberating the Western Sahara is dismissed as a 'myth' which Morocco's enemies try to sell, and the overall dispute regarding the territory as 'artificial' ((CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017b)). On another occasion we read about it as a 'fabricated regional dispute' (CCME 2016c), and there is talk of 'fabricated technical reports' regarding the situation, emanating from unidentified others (CCME 2014b). The necessity is mentioned to 'correct fallacies' which are said to be disseminated by opponents of Morocco's territorial integrity (CCME 2016c). Above all, the statement is made, no legitimacy should be given to 'the lawlessness' which prevails under the Polisario Front (CCME 2014b).

Finally, the Moroccan state is presented as a peacemaker, pointing repeatedly towards the autonomy plan[11] advocated by the state as the only credible solution to resolving the conflict ((CCME 2014c); (CCME 2014d); (CCME 2015b); (CCME 2017b); (CCME 2017c); (CCME 2020b); (CCME 2021d)). Even towards the main culprit of the trouble in the Sahara, Morocco is willing to extend an olive branch. Right next to the accusations of instigating conflict and waging a diplomatic war, we encounter references such as 'our Algerian brothers' and 'our sister nation' – even 'deep respect' for the Algerian leadership ((CCME 2016a); (CCME 2018c)). In contrast to Algeria's portrayed hostile stance towards Morocco, the latter is said to have always supported the former, most importantly in the endeavour for colonial liberation ((CCME 2016a); (CCME 2018c); (CCME 2021d)). With regard to this, the strong ties between the Moroccan monarchy and the Algerian colonial resistance are mentioned (CCME 2018c).

[10] 'Mission des Nations Unies pour l'organisation d'un référendum au Sahara Occidental' or United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara

[11] Proposing a special status for the Western Sahara within the Moroccan nation-state, granting the region a degree of administrative autonomy

Once again it is made clear which party is to be held responsible for the poor bilateral relations existent between the two neighbours since Morocco's imposition of authority in the Western Sahara.

Results

Throughout the content published by the CCME and its subsidiary Awacer TV we perceive the simplified illustration of the Western Sahara dispute as a dichotomy between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, legality and illegality, peace and terrorism, security and insecurity, legitimacy and illegitimacy. Unsurprisingly, it is the Moroccan state or kingdom whose actions embody the former parts of these antitheses. The latter parts are in turn represented by the actions on part of those who challenge the Moroccan state's narrative on the Western Sahara, most importantly pertaining to Algeria and the Polisario Front. We furthermore observe a constant depiction of the Western Sahara as an inherently national question, justifying the Moroccan endeavour to integrate the region into 'its motherland' and disqualifying the meddling of external actors in what are to be considered Morocco's national affairs. While the counter-narrative to the purported untruths and misconceptions in circulation about the 'Saharan issue' receives constant attention, alternative perspectives or critical voices of the Moroccan endeavour in the Western Sahara appear to be non-existent in the textual content. This reaffirms the overt political function of the CCME, whose explicitly stated goals with regard to the Moroccan efforts in the Western Sahara include the advocacy thereof among the Moroccan diaspora. Next to the lack of attention for other perspectives there is the structural omission of information, further demarcating the possible interpretations of the territorial dispute and the actors involved.

All in all, the main function of the content as shown by the analysis is the legitimisation of Morocco's overall policy regarding the Western Sahara, rendering the idea of redemption or re-unification self-evident, and the delegitimisation of anything or anyone standing in opposition to it. Most indicative of the kin-state policy's objective is the employment of nationalist and irredentist rhetoric together with the explicit encouragement of the diaspora to mobilise behind the national cause in the Western Sahara (under the leadership of the king). Reading in-between the lines, an additional objective can be identified. Throughout the texts, the audience is subtly reminded of the importance or centrality of the monarch(y) to not only the Western Sahara endeavour but also the Moroccan nation. In line with the observations

made in the third chapter about Morocco's domestic Western Sahara policy, connections are made between the king, the nation, and religion. This includes direct references to religious authority, the presentation of the king as leader of the nation and the national cause, and the attribution of widespread reverence and support for him from among the different communities part of the Moroccan nation. In the context of the Western Sahara, it is the figure of the monarch which unites the Sahara and the Saharans with Morocco and the Moroccans through the religious status he is said to enjoy among both communities, through the same historic political-legal relationship he has had with both communities, and finally through *his* enterprise of reuniting the nation in both territorial and human terms with the Green March as starting point.

5. Discussion

This study has concerned itself with the question how the Moroccan state legitimises its irredentist endeavour in the Western Sahara in its communication to the Moroccan diaspora. As suggested by the literature on irredentism and legitimacy, the legitimisation efforts with regard to the irredentist cause display a strategy which depends upon a narrative of historical continuity, the idea of a unification of the nation, and the inhabitants of the territory to be redeemed as referent of legitimacy. As is typical for cases of irredentism, legitimacy is derived from the supposed mistreatment which these inhabitants (would) endure under the alternative (illegitimate) authority in the area (in this case pertaining to the Polisario Front).

The results of the textual analysis reveal that the claims and arguments brought forward in the media content rely to a great extent on a nationalist narrative which can be made sense of with reference to the main building blocks in the formation of Moroccan national identity. Direct appeals are made recurringly to the national identity of the intended Moroccan reader, an identity to which the monarchy is central, which is rooted in a struggle for national liberation (which is portrayed as ongoing with regard to the Western Sahara) and which has a religious component in the form of Islam (which expresses itself amongst others in the historical religious authority enjoyed by the monarch over both present-day Morocco and the Western Sahara).

While nationalism is employed in the argumentation aimed at justifying Morocco's claims to and presence in the Western Sahara, Morocco's irredentist cause in the Western Sahara is in turn employed to bolster the centrality of the monarch(y) to Moroccan national identity. Links between both the territory of the Western Sahara and the people that inhabit it on the one hand, and the Moroccan nation on the other hand, are made through the personality of the monarch, as if them constituting one nation is contingent upon their unification under the monarch(y). Indeed, this is argued to be the case from a historical (territorial) perspective, and the commonalities between the Moroccans and the Ṣaḥrāwīyīn in the domains of religion and politics are also presented with reference to the monarch. The monarchical component to Moroccan national identity therefore appears to constitute both a means and an end; it serves as referent for the claims and arguments made with regard to the Western Sahara, claims and arguments which simultaneously work to reinforce the image of the monarch as central to Moroccan national identity.

Two other instances in particular demonstrate the role of the irredentist project in constructing national identity beyond the royal component. The first one has to do with the fact that Morocco's claims of legitimacy with regard to the inhabitants of the Western Sahara are rendered difficult as they are directly challenged by those who appear to have more ground to stand on to represent these inhabitants from both a legal and historical perspective. It seems in order to cope with this imbalance of legitimacy, the texts analysed resort to a strategy which is aimed at the delegitimisation of those in (direct) opposition to its claims, most importantly concerning but not limited to actors equally involved in the irredentist dispute. The nationalist rhetoric employed, including such terms as 'traitor' or 'enemy', differentiate the (patriotic) Moroccan nation form those that are not considered to be a part of it, using the (irredentist claims to the) Western Sahara to create a common national enemy – and as such define the self by reference to the other party to the territorial dispute.

The second and most telling instance has to do with the internal makeup of the nation. Where the literature suggests that the construction of national identity tends to go hand in hand with a neglect for internal differences, the case of Morocco shows that this is not necessarily the case. While the studied content does emphasise commonality, at the same time internal cultural differences are not evaded but presented as constituting an inherent component to 'the Moroccan identity'. As such, we observe a tactic which embraces heterogeneity itself, presenting it as a shared value among the nation in its totality. What's more, the inhabitants of the Western Sahara are said to contribute a separate 'personality aspect' to Moroccan national identity, especially highlighting their added value to it. This lends legitimacy to the image of the Western Sahara endeavour as being aimed at the unification of what constitutes a single nation with a single national identity, in spite of differing cultural identities.

While these findings are affirmative of the argument that irredentism may inform the construction of national identity, a limitation to this study should be noted. With a view to the purpose of this study it has been convenient to analyse claims and arguments as they appear in content produced by the communication outlet of the CCME with its outward focus. Still, the production of this content remains a unidirectional mode of communication and therefore leaves more room for interpretation than an interactional setting in which more elaborate explanations of the posited claims and arguments may be expected. Also, the CCME remains one specific state-affiliated communication outlet, limiting the scope to its particular way of portraying the Western Sahara issue. Nevertheless, this study does offer a contribution to the

literature. By demonstrating the nexus between irredentism and nationalism to be a relationship of reciprocity, it contributes to our understanding of how national identity constructs are built. In addition, its results draw attention to tactics of delegitimisation within the context of legitimising irredentism, something not primarily considered by the literature.

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