The limbs factory: Circuits of fear and hope and the political imagination on the Western Sahara

Kenza Yousfi

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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

The Limbs Factory: Circuits of Fear and Hope and the Political Imagination on the Western Sahara

A Thesis Submitted to
Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women’s Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women’s Studies in Middle East/ North Africa

Kenza Yousfi

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May/2015
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I owe a particular debt to one person who shall remain unnamed for his own safety, who made my access to the Saharawi camps possible, and who showed a concern about my research and safety. Thank you for your support on many fronts.
Abstract

The wall, as a practice and an imagination, involves an engagement with modes of producing fear in the contemporary moment. This research explores the relationships between the walling imagination in the weaponized field of the Moroccan-built wall in the Western Sahara and the political in its making of the present. The question I explore ethnographically is: What are the ways in which the political is perpetually enacted vis-à-vis the walling imagination? From my ethnographic site—the Saharawi refugee camps—I engage with Saharawi everydayness in navigating violent structural confinements: the wall, the camp, the national liberation master plan, and the performances of refugeeness. My argument goes beyond the historical formation of the Saharawi national liberation movement to look at the constituents of the political laboratory concerned with experimenting with the permanent present. In this formulation, the aesthetics of violence in the Western Sahara are of a global logic whereby violence in its walling modality doesn’t exist outside of capital. The making of the present does not become about the past or the future, but rather about experimenting with the different existing structures Saharawis navigate.
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFAPRADESA</td>
<td>The Association of Families of Saharawi Prisoners and Disappeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(La Asociación de Familiares de Presos y Desaparecidos Saharaui)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOAV</td>
<td>Action on Armed Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASAVIM</td>
<td>Association of Saharawi Victims of Mines (Asociación Saharaui de Victimas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>de Minas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBM</td>
<td>Confidence-Building Measurements, UNHCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELPS</td>
<td>Ejército de Liberacion Popular Saharaui (Saharan People’s Liberation Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>), Polisario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAR</td>
<td>Forces armée royales (Royal Armed Forces), Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GICHD</td>
<td>Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice, United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINURSO</td>
<td>Mission des Nations Unies pour l’organisation d’un référendum au Sahara</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occidental (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUSW</td>
<td>National Union of Saharawi Women (Union Nacional de Mujeres Saharauis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organization of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCP</td>
<td>Office Chérifien des Phosphates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polisario Front</td>
<td>Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio de Oro (Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and the Rio de Oro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUNS</td>
<td>Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol (Party of Saharawi National Unity), Spanish Sahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADR</td>
<td>Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Saharawi Red Crescent, Saharawi Camps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UJISARIO</td>
<td>Youth Union of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Union de Jovenes de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio de Oro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMA</td>
<td>Union du Maghreb arabe (Arab Maghreb Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commission for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMAS</td>
<td>United Nations Mine Action Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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My aim in this project is not to make the arguments contained in these pages comprehensible to readers who have no interest in letting their political compass spin. I fully expect this experience to be lost—and lived—in general alterations of disengagements, just as I am convinced that the present conditions of our lives will one day be no more than a story. And that our world will not be reconditioned, but remade. The reminder to all of you, readers: the desire to live is a political decision.
Chapter 1
Experimenting with the Contemporary

The meaning of the political has been a highly contentious terrain. It generated various perspectives for looking not only into possibilities of the political, or for this matter action and change, but also sites from which scholarly contributions take place. For years, what seems dominating this field has been directed towards either melancholic cry for the Left or assumed inability of resistance to regenerate a new utterance of the political. These two perspectives very concretely determine possibilities of engaging with research grounds probably rarely explored. The rapid circulation of experiences, ideas, political contestations, and people has challenged our usual understandings of political and social production and reproduction. In a world configured by mobility, securitization, and transnationality, how are scholars to handle issues of socially reproducing sociopolitical instability, uncertainty, and flux, and eventually its implications for the political?

It is past scholarly accounts that either cry for the lost past which promised a radical social change that went astray, or condemn practices of resistance to failure that pose the problematic of the vantage point to locate the political, that aspires to an understanding of our present conditions and possibilities to new becomings. From representation, micro-politics, to biopower, these discussions have added to the debate of modern conditions of living and power dynamics. However, the question they constantly pose is: Is there a way to look at embodied forms of politicizing the everyday experiences that do not necessarily reiterate identified forms of modern politics: namely state, border, international law, etc.? It is this relation between the multitude and current forms of discipline and control that create a tension in need for discerning. In many ways, this tension is the point of departure for theorists working on modalities of social change and modes in which political action becomes contingent and unpredictable.

The literature of the everyday provides scopes for grappling with political engagements and organization susceptible to conditions of history and spatiality. It is in this sense that this project emerges; an attempt to reflect on the foundations, contexts, and spatialities of the political in relation to modern power facilities. The site this project seeks to engage with is the wall of the Western Sahara, a highly contested zone for the making of state power and simultaneously a semi-war zone. In a situation of permanent waiting for a solution to the nation on hold: Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, there are discourses built around this
wall. In the face of the creation of Tindouf camps, this wall holds a position in the everyday lives of the population in multiple ways. On the one hand, there are those separated from their families still living in Western Sahara. On the other, the SADR deploys this wall to argue for the violence of the Moroccan state towards Saharawis. The materiality of the wall itself raises many questions concerning how populations (both Saharawi and Moroccan) imagine it. After all, it is not the wall itself that hinders mobility and political action, but perhaps the mines surrounding it and the conditions of living in the camps or the Western Sahara. In fact, there are people who have crossed the wall to go both ways.

It appears that a certain imagination is constituted around the wall. This imagination implies not only a narrative that tries to capture a moment of historical political violence but also an altered situation of dealing and transforming this imagination to something else. In relation to it, the political is contested. As the camps turn to be the way of spatial living of Saharawis, there is a sense that their everyday is evacuated from its political meaning; hence, a temporariness to their situation. Temporariness means a hold in time to posit a bounded meaning of life to the current system of social and political ordering. That is to say, living outside marked territoriality and not constituting a consortium of citizen-state disturbs the global ordering of social and political associations; thus, puts hold on time until things go back to the normative.

Yet, rethinking the political and its possibilities refuses this temporariness for it is yet another colonizing project of lives. It is as if the political plates life are sliding into new and unstable alignments. The question I aim to explore is: What are the ways in which the political is perpetually enacted vis-à-vis the walling imagination? Therefore, the project deals with various trajectories of sociopolitical making in the contemporary situation of social instability and possibilities of change. The discussion aims to recognize the arguments made previously on state power, social change, and possibilities of the political and to further reflect on their limitations in an attempt to postulate on current modes of political engagement that require in and of themselves a new language of writing the unuttered. An engagement in a twofold manner: one that destabilizes the comfort of modern political grounds speaking the language of identifiable categories of humans, lands, and socialities, and second, an engagement that not only unravels the differences of local scapes but also points how these are connected to the larger moment all populations are living.

Evoking the state in this research is important to move beyond it and to position those on its margins at the core of something new. The aim of this thesis is thus threefold: critical reformulation, constructive, and imaginative. Lest producing the same projects that neither
explain the moment nor have critical purchase in transformation, critical reformulation undoes the homogenizing of contemporary politics, grand narratives, and theoretical and political projects that are historically and spatially lamented. Having said that, the need is to unpack the construction of analytical frameworks relevant both to grappling with abstraction and practicalities of communities and movements. Asking questions from this vantage point is imaginative in its ability to engender grounds for the politics of the present. As the contemporary moment raises the problematic of the political to the forefront of social debates, possibilities and experiences are built and imagined anew. To imagine is to argue for spaces of transformation that extend beyond the current ones.

On Intellectual and Political Debates

The language of modern politics has been the ground for theoretical formation in many disciplines beyond political science. Sovereignty is the site of all sorts of anxieties that are produced within discourses of states and global power. Shifting the focus from sovereignty as an organizing principle of the global order (Hardt & Negri 2000), the aim is to portray the complexity of this anxiety—which is based on the decline of territorial sovereignty from the thinking frame of political scientists—and the extent to which contemporary sociopolitics is made of a labyrinthian tapestry of power dynamics. In much of the scholarship, questions are asked from the vantage point of vulnerable populations, thus creating imagined spatialities and categories that domesticate understandings of power in what is fundamentally a modern production of politics vocabulary, such as: citizen, refugee, (il)legal migrant, trafficked, smuggled, etc. Influenced by Agamben (1998), articulations of sovereignty, bare life, exceptional zones, and power, dominated possibilities for rethinking spaces that do not fit the modernist ordering of the political. However, Agamben’s theoretical formulations repositioned conceptualizations of sovereignty to claim that spaces such as borderlands and camps constitute a new power dynamic for the nation-state and international agencies that claim sovereignty anew in the name of humanitarianism, security, and developmentalism. While Agamben engages with dominant narratives in claiming modalities of state, in that all states have predefined functions, apparatus, and technologies of power, the manner in which states engage with other structures, practices, and historical transformations is neglected. There are distinct limits to a political imagination that focuses exclusively on the supposed necessities of the state and its apparatus. These limits continue to be sustained by a
conception that the state is the subject of all questions, that it provides answers to the most fundamental of questions about characters and locations of politics and political life. This theoretical perspective dwells on a discourse of repetition, with a ritualized and institutionalized play of affirmations and negations which leave understandings of power negligent.

If sovereignty is about power, the latter navigates through diverse structures and continuously remakes its discursive and material contours. The conversation about the decline of sovereignty—as a result of antagonistic relations between the different layers of globalization as a process of transforming power: its modalities, spatialities, and exceptionalities—is deemed dead. Sovereignty in itself could take on many performative territorial marks, capital productiveness, and social inflictions. It is precisely the conversation around the Westphalian sovereignty that can no longer sustain a terrain from which susceptibility to contemporary forms of power can inform us of the nature of the contemporary moment and its relation to the state. This view on declining sovereignty presumes that sovereignty is a neutral, granted, and pre-defined metaphysical concept. While it is not the aim to redefine what sovereignty means, it is this paradox that the conversation entails: the decline of sovereignty occurs alongside the rise of jurisprudence, citizenship discourses, and attempts to reclaim the nation-state. The critique of state-centric approaches articulated how old questions on the state as an absolute actor no longer have a critical purchase of what power entails. In other words, just by looking on the map one can no longer deduces any sense of the political, nor does state-centric approaches discern the tensions harbored at the crossroad of fusion and partition of the spatial, social, and political.

While the landscape of this vantage point seems complex enough to try to grapple with one aspect of this tension, the need is to revisit articulations and enactments of newly constituted orders within broader hegemonic frames. Put differently, if the contemporary language from which we write cannot let go of sovereignty, state, and transnational actors, the focus should be then to elucidate what is being lived, formulated, and escaped. The stakes here are at the core of remaking the social and the elusiveness of the political. In this, the political and the social are not two separate domains. Rather than suturing the social and the political as two different spheres that conjoin at times, this thesis informs us that the political is the social. From a Rancerean thought, the political is not contingent on the usurpation of the social. The death of the political—which became a political fashion at moments—is nonexistent simply due to the volatility of the social. Sovereignty in all its understandings cannot be totalizing and can be a project in the making and in constant danger of conflictual
claims to its control (Brown, 2010). It is from this perspective that an understanding could lead us to recast sovereignty in relation to spatiality/territoriality to sensitive spaces. They are sensitive in terms of multiple structures of power, modes of life, and dynamics of spatiality. Sensitive spaces are about the contestation of violence and control, and its embodiment in territorial borders. Such spaces are the milieu of overlapping, contradictory, and contested projects imbricated in a production of new unfixed terrains of power, control, and subversiveness.

One site of this contestation is the wall. In the last two decades, the increasing number of walls in different parts of the world has generated numerous questions pertaining to social instabilities and modalities of power. The wall is in many ways a site at which all sorts of claims mingle to produce a perpetual change to life and the meaning of the political. However, what are the attempts to engage with these new social universes, political orders, and subjectivities intricate in gender, race, and laboring forces? Here, I do not aim to engage with the conceptualization of walls within the narratives of state sovereignty, securitization, and techniques of control of neoliberalism. What I rather want to do is, while acknowledging all of the arguments pertaining to the walling imagination and borderland contexts to understand the way in which walls are increasingly becoming the new site of social tensions through a materializing effect, I would like to draw attention to the nuances of these walls in terms of the imaginary that is constructed along and around them. In other words, walls in themselves are blocks that separate spaces and depict them as confinements. However, what are the particularities of experiences and subjectivities in constructing the meaning of walls considering that the narrative of building walls is always in the name of terrorism, trafficking, smuggling, migration, etc.? The point here is to locate the political; that of individuals and groups that come to existence vis-a-vis this walling. In relation to sensitive spaces, walls are part of an imagination that produced security fortifications as exceptional rules whereby events, actions, and time hold different meanings and function in alternative ways. The political is embedded in this de-politicization of such spaces and events as temporary ‘problems’ or ‘disorders’ of the world. Walls historical construction gives meaning to its fortification in contemporary politics given the discourse that walls limit or hinder the rise of the political of those concerned. This political has a specific narrative that is not necessarily at the core of our current categorical imagination. While the state is one reason why walls exist, perhaps people who experience this walling do not necessarily locate the state as their resistance target, political aspiration, and sociopolitical organization. This means that the evacuation of the political the walling imagination aims to create, along with some thinking
categories, is not something that prevails on the ground. Putting the political—as an abstraction that I will define later—on hold urges a requestioning of the meaning of the political.

On this note, examining these narratives in relation to the state walling imagination requires engaging with the political in relation to spaces that populations are governed through. A caveat however is necessary. First, sensitive does not create another hegemonic thinking of spatiality as pertinent to ruly/unruly or abnormal political order. Rather, sensitive in reference to the global mode of administering the social in the contemporary. Second, this analytical lens does not attempt at ignoring past accounts. The position here is to decolonize the academic grand narratives that are embedded in the practice of perpetual screening of individuals in an attempt to capture the constitution of stories that never found place in our categories, understanding, and writing. In this sense, my aim is to pause for another time the necessity for a reinterpretation of voices and stories we aim to decrypt for various reasons. To acknowledge that there are myriad ways of living and becoming requires the reinvigoration of our language, categories, and research politics. Such is my aim to build on the previous literature, but also to challenge some of its foundations.

From this perspective, the need is to direct attention to contexts that in themselves represent a domain of new political emerging and becoming, and also that have been loaded with hegemonic discourses of national liberation, abject camps, and resistance struggles. I would like to explore these entanglements of the Western Sahara wall for the following reasons. First, this particular domain of walling alters understandings and accounts of sovereignty. Besides, even from a “sovereignty” discourse, there are multiple sovereignties that come in to play and engage in the constitution of political performances of powers. The Moroccan state, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), its militarized front Polisario, the Algerian state, and the numerous international and local NGOs negotiate these sovereignties. Second, a mix of seemingly contradictory paradigms characterizes this domain of power contestation: camp, state, and law. The Saharawi camp is a state in a borrowed land from Algeria, yet it remains a camp in material characteristics, international and local recognition, and agitational politics. This means that discursive power is inherently performative in its essence; it creates and forecloses tensions of sociopolitical subjectivities, modes, and becomings. This play of representational landscapes presents a new condition of outside politics, happening outside the terrain of the state: a possibility that embodies contradictions and aspirations at once. In other words, this play of conditional situations of ordering social and political life, being at its core the state or on its margin the camp,
presupposes the ability of fluid identities and subjectivities to transform and negotiate the contemporary through living it while conceiving something novel. Further, what this domain enables is a possibility to locate the imaginative in a lived present which refer to practices and narratives seeking in living a process to constitute new forms of sociopolitics. To say imaginative is to participate in the established order, yet simultaneously conjure up an image of novel constituents of the political. The wall and its sociopolitical meaning, and the situation of living in the state camp engender a discourse of what becoming could mean vis-à-vis the wall, politics, and the global order. These are the sites of exploration.

**Literature Review**

Artifacts of modernity materialize and tarry in an increasingly changing political ordering of the social. One site of this materialization is the fortification of cities and nation-states’ territories with walls, fences, checkpoints and other modalities that base their existence in an often contradictory discourse of blockades and opening. Contradiction in this sense is not something that produces a detached process of multiplying the sites of tensions, rather contradiction authors new forms and relations of sociopolitical organizing, mobilization, and discourse. Exploring the sites of this tension requires a reformulation of the relation between the political and the social. This relation posits the complexity of the problematic which is the one of the state and its connection to releasing and forming social connections to a new direction of exploration. The reasons why this tension represents a new site of exploration revolve around theoretical-philosophical controversies of the eighteenth century that defined the role of social and political categories of the contemporary era. It was the notion of the “State” that prevailed. But we need to ask whether, at the end of a long cycle, the old debate has not been brought to the front again; whether, today, now that the political theory of the modern era is going through radical crisis, this notion of the State is bifurcated by forms of social and political existence. In this sense, tensions are an expungement to the logic of the State; to its modality or reordering the social and the political. Hence, what I previously noted as the complexity of the problematic points to these connections and divergences between theoretical accounts, modes of governance, social inclinations, and unpronounced characteristics of existence in the contemporary world. The aim here is to reflect on the literature on the meaning of fences and walls, their relationship to the larger mode of neoliberal governance, and the possibilities multiple sites of tensions
engender to recraft yet another time a potential project for the social. A project that envisions a new mode of being that is orchestrated in social justice.

Neoliberalism is to a degree an extension that refurbishes discursive and material modalities of economic, social, and political power in which walls are central. The neoliberal mode of governance is directed towards modeling social relations. These relations came to be domesticated in specific categories and sustained through a sociopolitical reproduction. Aihawa Ong uses the notion of “disciplinary neoliberalism” to discern techniques of governance beyond the military and legality narratives that are usually part of characterizing the rise of materialized disciplined sites. Neoliberalism’ logic forces the central unit of modernity—the state—to exercise spatial controls in different ways whereby population is the primary field of intervention and the objective of governmental techniques (Ong, 2006). Walls then function as the site that harbors myriad tensions of representation, discursive power, sorting mechanics, and an increasingly falling apart of social stability.

Engendered tensions between international regulatory machines and the populations exposed to them depict the clash of neoliberal calculations (ibid:92). Ong argues that as a result of this clash, states are forced to be flexible. What then could be formulated within this flexibility, and yet concealed in a narrative of dwelling the same categories of, for instance, stateless, excess, migrant, etc.? This question aims to bring to attention the historical and political contexts that map out the particular. In other words, to understand sites of walling and their imagination is to discern the transformation of social fabric and the techniques of power implicated in everyday life. Walling is further produced in a more complicated tapestry of politics and historical complexes and there is a generation of new categories and processes.

Brown argues (2010:52) that borders and boundaries as imaginaries unfold the external and internal organization of space in a specific narrative pertaining to the logic of nation-states. Borders, and for this matter walls, denote something particular in the appropriation of space by mobile subjects and states. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013:198) argue that borders are at once spatial scenes of control and excess. Walls restrict mobility and create new sites of struggle. Furthermore, borders are social institutions that reproduce conditions for governance and govern mentality (ibid). The relation between these two roles characterizes how borders produce governable mobile subjects from ungovernable flows. Such an approach explores how walling practices aim at disciplining and governing mobility without losing combat over sociopolitical productions of subjectivity. Space is not merely open to the binary internal, external. Rather, the dynamic that exists between the modes of
governmentality supplemented in walls, whether material to technological, and stories of navigating control raise questions pertaining to the technicalities of the interplay of power.

Limbu (2009) calls for an invitation to listen to the excess as it furthers this quest for locating the in-betweenness of existence of subjects. Instead of trying to translate the complexity of the manageriality of the modern state, which Brown (2010) located in the ungovernability of these masses that lie at the edge of state logic, it is perhaps more adequate for this moment to struggle to perceive the means and practices the dwellers of representational landscapes engender and transform. In this, the wall produces a fluctuating relation that the materializing effect, the physical existence of the wall, seems to constrain the possibilities it offers.

For instance, Clarno (2008) contends that the enclosure performed by walls indicates the relation between neoliberal strategies and militarization of urban spheres. She argues that suburban walls and their technological tools constitute one kind of walling practices and the removal of neighborhoods and constructions of others in the urban periphery constitutes another (2008:187). What emerges in this walling practice in South African and Palestinian contexts is a corporatization of needs. This means the creation of a regime that privatized the basic needs of everyday life including access to water, sanitation, roads, and transportation. Walls in this case intensified further issues of limited access; a matter of everyday survival. While Clarno presents a viable argument on the corporatization of needs, the story is simplified into, for example, the eradication of work for Palestinians. The problematic of work presents situations in which having access to life needs is intricate in work; one needs to labor in order to get access to resources. Israel’s wall created a deprivation of access to resources, while enabling work opportunities. Thus, the wall produced tension of opening and blockading. However, the separation that walls aim to maintain is one that concerns the logic itself inasmuch the spatial claim has its own limits and is constantly reconfigured in an assemblage of subjections. The critique here is not one that denies the main point—walls are part of neoliberal governance—but more of the unacknowledgment of the ability of these same sites to produce various things outside the structure. This structure, it being camp, wall, checkpoint, etc, holds a dynamic that destabilizes the normative figure of its subject. Abourahme (2011) recognizes this dynamic at the Qalandia checkpoint whereby individuals in masses and singularities maneuver through altered historical orders and avail spatial fragmentations.

The rhetoric the walling imagination posits is on the vernacular of politics, and not in the language of modern politics: the state. Brown’s (2010) contention that walls are fictions
does not extend to see to what extent this fiction is productive. As she states (2010:56), walls do not work to resolve the problems posed to the nation-state: security, migration, disorder; they are rather implicated in the logic of more capital deployment in technological maintenance, subcontracting, and weaponization of sites. This walling fiction generates new realities, assemblages, and meanings to sustain itself. Although Brown recognizes that walls produce new subjectivities and identities, the point is more about the production of the imaginary, its internalization or not, and its blend with political paradoxes of associational actors that extends beyond the familiar state categorical narrative.

There are distinct limits to a political imagination that focuses too exclusively on the supposed necessities of the state and its apparatus. Sovereignty as echoed in Brown’s (2010) analysis of walls is something fictionist. The debate around the relation of walls and sovereignty remain open, but it loses vibrancy. The constellations of the present engender something that outdoes the ritualized and institutionalized play of affirmations and negations on the current state of being. It is in this sense that new theoretical foundations come into perspective given that the aim, of at least the vantage point of transformation I adopt here, is to decolonize the imagination of the grand narratives and also to regain the intricate resonance of lives, discourses, policies, and relations.

Abourahme (2011) argues that modes of being and living emerge in a way that help us to rethink our questions. Conditions of walls as material constructions make dwellers learn new strategies to invest current circumstances with advantage and subvert the claimed temporariness of their situations into political action (2011:459). Moreover, the interaction between walls and subjects remains one of open change even in its most banal form. Banal actions are part of the mediation of exclusion and injustices by “turning them into sources of profit or subverting their control of movement and negotiat[ing] seemingly endless liminalities” (ibid).

Not only does this affirm that the social at this moment is unrestrained motion of making and unmaking its particularities, that the social is quivering its possibilities, but also allows spaces to recraft the simplifying effect of fronts of mobilization in the contemporary. The differed patterns and cadences of people inhabiting their everydayness raise many questions regarding the theoretical perspectives underlying intellectual and grassroots activism. From the Marxist, to Feminist, Autonomist, and other traditions grappling with the sociopolitical, there are reconfigurations to be made. Nuances of the state, capitalism, and social collision resonate with the everyday more than a narrative that seems an alternative to modernity yet speaks the same vocabulary.
The inability to articulate questions sensitive to these larger dynamics resides in the inability to engage with the tapestry of intricate sociopolitics. The illusion of temporariness of neoliberal sites, i.e walls, ridicules the extraordinary that happens in distinct places and that has the potential for answering our questions on the political. Being and becoming evacuates the hold on time and the political, and pronounce a politics of desire, which fundamentally envisages a world that actors in multiple sites shape and produce.

**Conceptual Framework**

The events of everyday life do not offer grand narratives on possibilities of social change. What they rather provide us with are techniques and nuances of forces of change. Based on the introduction above, I would like to probe the walling imagination from and by those who experienced it, lived along its material and political existence and imagined becoming based on its violence. What are the political nuances of the Western Sahara wall considering its materializing effect on Saharawi population? To what extent has this walling practice furnished new practices, contestations, and desires of being and becoming political, and finding a place within historical narratives? Therefore, concepts that are at the crux of my project are: walls, imagination, the everyday and the political.

Since there is an historical narrative constituted around the wall, it is important to clarify the scope from which this wall is discussed in this project. Border politics are usually the foundation of walled states/communities. It is however important to note that the particular modalities of borders and walls differ in great respect to the extent that they cannot be substituted. Conceptually nonetheless they are part and parcel of the same technique to control dynamics of movement, labor, and politics. Even when borders at the outset demonstrate a sense of territorial markers of states, walls also discern an intrastate control of where the ungovernable space shouldn’t interfere with the dispositif projected in the limits of a territory. It is in this sense that this difference is conceptually minimal, despite its importance on legal grounds to determining the ‘exterior’ practices of the state labeled in the moment abuses of human rights. Perhaps because further borders cannot be made visible inside nation-states, walls emerge as the new substitute in the twentieth century. These walls are embedded in the rise of the security state against non-state transnational actors (Brown, 2010). These actors represent the following: mobility, organizations, and industries, which do not follow a Westphalian logic of surrounding a border with walls as fortresses against other sovereigns. Put differently, it is no longer about other sovereigns posing perpetual threat to
territorial integrity. Walls have become a modality of power that does not solely resonate with older forms of sovereignty that were contingent upon global capital or religious legitimacy (Brown, 2010, Sassken 1996, 2009). Conceptualization of walls as a site for tensions of late modernity reveals many contentious ideas in relation to sovereignty and the role of the state. While most authors reflecting on the meaning of border politics and walling practices contend that the state is still a form of sovereignty, it is not the sole one, and hence a different vantage point to look at walling practices is possible. (Appadurai, 1996; Sassken, 2009; Carens, 2010; Brown, 2010; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). The border that contains the wall could be a space of control and of excess (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013:198) or social institutions involved in the reproduction of sovereignty through means of governance (Panagiotidis & Tsianos, 2007:83). Brown (2010:52) contends that borders and boundaries are imaginaries that illuminate external and internal organizations of space in a specific narrative pertaining to the logic of the nation-state. Walling thus is contingent on context but remains part of a logic that has a particular recent genealogy: the rise of security state in a neoliberal age. It is from this perspective that walling practices become attached to imaginations of securitizing, policing, and controlling the flow of subjects and objects.

Imagination as a concept could mean various things. However, in this project it elucidates a certain understanding of how autonomous actions of individuals as well as abstracted power of state mingle together to create a vision. I do not mean to limit power to the state, but to rather start from the point of how power has been made visible vis-a-vis the state. Autonomous actions of individuals—which are not formed towards an entity named the state—are not outside of this power; they shape, generate, and reconfigure power in different ways. But the question remains: In what ways do they do this? In the present, autonomous actions represent little ruptures of a possible vision. This vision is the imagination. Hence, imagination here is not what Anderson (1982) termed as imagined community, which denotes a quite different understanding of the term. Imagination in this sense serves to critically analyze the ways in which in specific temporal and spatial contexts there is a constant production of subjective interactions whereby the individual relate and dissociate with differently, for walls create heterogeneous narratives and practices around and along it. State discourse on walls is different from one mobile subject to another that try to cross it. Hence, there is a certain imagination that is fluid and elusive that extends to the materiality of walls. A wall could be a fence, a mined field, a cemented block, or a movable wire. Each of these materialities render interactions with walls different and imaginations, practices, and narratives around it diverse.
In relation to the imagination of walling practices that take place in different parts of the world, populations, states, and entities at stake are faced with a fluid structure of interaction. From a larger scope, walls generate actions by various subjects (Clarno 2008, Panagiotidis & Tsianos, 2007). However, hegemonic accounts on walls in relation to sovereignty exhibit walls as if they are abstract elements of modern governance. If the claim concerns interaction with walls, then there are experiences particular to it. The relationship between the walling practice and the state is, as noted previously, on the one hand a governance of populations and excess, and on the other a social reproduction of relations. These relationships are contingent on the everyday life of individuals who actually collide with the power structures walling entails.

The everyday as a concept denotes many things depending on the theoretical perspective. In this thesis, the everyday builds on the work of Lefebvre (1971, 1987) and Papadopoulos et al (2008) in an attempt to show how individuals navigate structures of power in late modernity. Given that this concept has its own genealogy, what is important here is to note that while the concept everyday as Lefebvre (1987) argues is the actual condition of being, the most universal yet individuated, Papadopoulos et al (2008) further our understanding of the everyday by stating that it crosses and diverges into other experiences of everydayness. This is not an essentialist conceptualization of the everyday, but rather one that emerges from life stories that are dilated and mediated at the intersection of sociopolitical and economic realms. This concept draws on the quotidian experience of living in modern conditions. Sandywell (2004) critiqued the concept of everyday life for its inability to answer where does the everyday life lie. The answer she suggests is that we are compelled to reply “everywhere and nowhere” (2004:173). The problem according to Sandywell is the flexibility of the term, that it is not fixed to be defined (ibid). However, as Papadopoulos et al (2008) engage with everyday life and everydayness, the concept in fact captures that which cannot be categorized due to its nature of constant reproduction into same, similar, or different vicissitudes. It is not a disembodied or essentialist abstraction of practices. Rather, everydayness probes questions on the various techniques and nuances of people’s practices contingent on spheres and dynamics of interactions. Everydayness in as much it is the sphere of flowing present, it does not inhibit the category of definitions and remains a conceptual tool grounded on the politics of living through the moment, neither its past shade, nor its future mirror.

Everydayness of living enables further explorations to what the experience of walls is centered around. This perspective poses questions such as: How is the everyday lived in
relation to the imagination of the wall in specific contexts and communities? Does this walling imagination change the everyday and in what ways? Common to these explorations, at the heart of this inquiry is the meaning of the political in latest conditions of modernity. Here the political combines the effect of state politics and social reproduction of action. The political means the embodied politics of action in everyday life in various spheres. Rethinking the political and its articulation offers other readings and spur other questions pertaining to it. In particular, the political signals other meanings of struggles and actions and is posed in relation to temporality. The political is not axiomatically against domination or a reaction to control, or just an outcome of the processes of making the political in modern times. Rather, the political challenges the hegemony of modernity, its instrumental rationality and its chronologically ordered temporality. Challenging the hegemony brings to light the exteriority of modernity in some cases. It is not that certain collectives live in a moment outside of modernity inscriptions; instead they cannot invariably be defined by their opposition to current processes of forming social and political conditions. Particular to this are forms in which collectives bring to light alternatives that do not speak to the state. As I draw in the following chapters on how Saharawis experiment with the present condition of living, the making of the Saharawi project is not restricted to nation-state building even when it is uttered as such by the Polisario leadership. In other words, the ethnographic material my fieldwork has produced draws on the kind of questions Saharawis ask that do not pertain to the state as the ultimate desire. There might or might not be a Saharawi state, but the questions raised are not contingent on the existence of the Saharawi state. These questions will remain even if the Saharawi state emerges. Hence, the political cannot be understood solely in terms of resistance to modernity, or being against conventional forms of doing politics. This also highlights that appropriations of the political do not pertain to the genealogy of the modern forms of representation: political parties, organizations, and state recognized movements. Reiterating further, I push for the conceptualization of the political beyond binary thinking as represented in us vs. enemy (Schmitt, 2007), politics of virtue (Honig, 1993), deliberative political action (Habermas, 1998), or liberal concept of the political (Rawl, 1993).

The political is a terrain of enacting the subjective relations between individuals, institutions, and modes of socioeconomic reproduction. The stress on its detachment from representation in modern spaces propels its fluid constitution and epistemic struggle that emanates from political spaces that engage with formations of possibilities and dynamics of being and becoming. Spectrums of thinking and engaging with meanings of negotiating,
resisting, opposing, and evacuating structures of the state, economic institutions, and social orders constitute the political and its conceptualization here as breaking with chronological temporality—as could be characterized in eventness and embodiment of action in modern systems of representation. This framing of the political does not preclude the possibility of action from outside of modern systems. Thinking the political from outside epistemic territoriality and chronology of the modern order of things invites us to pose further questions on its vernaculars and iterations.

Specific to this project is the Western Sahara wall, the concept of the political questions possibilities of social and political transformations everyday practices of Saharawis entail. Hegemonic narratives on Saharawis portray them as apolitical refugees awaiting independence and international recognition of their nation. However, the subversiveness of the wall that their living conditions is dependent on, culminates in transformations of the meaning of being and becoming that does not speak the language of modern politics of the Saharawi state. In other words, the relationship between everyday trajectories and the political reconstitute the fundamental point at which politics of life, of living, happen. Thus, the political is a site of continuous making and relating to subjects and objects outside modern representational frameworks.

The relationship between these concepts draws on the larger methodological approach of this research: a critical reformulation of the literature, constructive, and imaginative. Through relating the concept of walls, i.e. walling, to imagination I would be able to move from and across narratives that are at once part of state discourse and evacuating its terrain of control. In parallel, from any imagination there is a lived experience that translates into actions and discourse. The two domains of power negotiations—action and discourse—delineate inscriptions and elucidations of the political. Action and discourse are part of the everydayness and their relevance to the political in contested zones such as the wall remain a question of exploration.

Resorting the Colonial Making

Any attempt to engage with a manifestation of life in Western Sahara or Saharawi refugee camps requires an engagement with the history of Front Polisario. In this section I aim to sketch the background of Polisario, the way it has been portrayed by scholars writing on the Saharawi liberation movement, and further draw on some problematic formulations of the grand narrative on Polisario as the liberation struggle engine. I also hope that this section
raises some questions on the silence of Saharawi interlocutors or myself on Polisario as it remains in the shadows of the narratives.

The emergence of Polisario is in itself a formulation of military and political leadership that have made its existence possible. The Front was founded in 1973 under a unified political leadership that coordinated guerrilla warfare against the Spanish military in the Western Sahara. The Polisario Front represented itself as the liberation movement of all the Saharawis and became later the UN-recognized representative of the Saharawi people, vaguely defined. The front’s objective was to liberate the territory, and as the historical moment of the 1950s-1980s across the globe, the project was to establish a nation-state for the Saharawis. Spain as the administrator of the Sahara before the eyes of the UN was responsible for settling the situation in Western Sahara. Forced to decolonize the territory, Spain had few considerations before it initially acted by signing a tripartite agreement with Morocco and Mauritania in November 1975 in Madrid. Spain did not want to lose its shares in the FosBoucraa phosphate company, but as the internal political scene in Spain was troubled by the health situation of Franco, Spain handed over control of Esamara and Laayoune to Moroccan forces by December 1976.

Prior to the creation of Front Polisario, Mohammed Sidi Ibrahim Bassiri organized Harakat Tahrir Saqiyah al-Hamra’ wa Wadi al-Dahab (Liberation Movement of Río de Oro Saguia el Hamra) in 1968. Harakat Tahrir focused on building a national consciousness of the Saharawi population and argued for the elimination of “traditional social structures” (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:103). Bassiri studied journalism in Cairo and Damascus in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His speeches reflected the ideological stance in the Middle East in the 1960s by which he compared liberation struggles in the region. In June 1970, Spanish colonial administration called for the gathering of Saharawi people in Laayoune to delude international community that Saharawis want to remain under Spanish rule. Harakat Tahrir decided to take advantage of the situation and organized a protest in Zamlah neighborhood, which later became known as the Zamlah intifada. Moreover, Harakat Tahrir announced itself on this occasion and was quickly suppressed by Spanish forces who fired at protestors resulting in about twelve dead. Bassiri was arrested on the same day and was never seen again. Up until this moment, Bassiri remains the first disappeared person in the Saharawi memory and few organizations like the Association of the Disappeared (AFAPRADESA) working from the camps had demanded Spanish government to reveal the fate of Bassiri. The Zamlah event for most nationalists in Western Sahara is the first uprising that has shaped the development of the Saharawi nationalist project. Three years later, on May 10, 1973, Front
Polisario was founded and its leaders started familiarizing the Saharawi population with the existence of a new front that would gather them all under one slogan: fight for freedom. The group ten days later launched an attack on a Spanish outpost at al-Kharga in the northeastern region of Saquiyah al-Hamra. The groups of insurgents were few in numbers and were serving in the colonial’s indigenous army named Tropas Nómadas (nomadic troops). The insurgency succeeded by freeing the imprisoned Saharawis and most importantly by telling the Saharawis that their anti-colonial struggle can succeed even when they were militarily disadvantaged.

Polisario is regarded from various approaches: as a liberation political representation, as a militarized political leadership, and as an insurgent group (by Morocco). One of the intriguing descriptions of Polisario is:

Polisario is a coalition of Saharawi nationalist political tendencies, spanning Western notions of a Left-Right, progressive-conservative spectrum. Although several of its founders were young radicals, reflecting the ideals of national self-determination and socialism that swept through Africa, Asia, and the Americas in the late colonial period, Polisario quickly learned that it would have to appeal to a wide variety of backgrounds and interests to unite Western Sahara under one big tent (Zunes & Mundy 2010:115).

The movement founders had studied in Moroccan universities and had participated in events organized by the Moroccan political left (ibid:104). Ideas circulating at that time as some of the Saharawi interlocutors in the camps tell were all about the ongoing struggle of the ‘Third World’ for national self-determination. As this was the particular background of Polisario’s most acclaimed founder, El-Ouali Mustapha Sayed, Polisario ideologically organized itself to seek help and recognition from states that were going through similar struggles such as African National Congress (ANC, South Africa), or those that had similar ideological stances such as Algeria, Libya, and Cuba. In approaching the neighboring states, Polisario maintained an ambiguous claim regarding its final aims over the Western Sahara for its independence or integration with Mauritania or Morocco. Zunes and Mundy point to El-Ouali’s sympathy for the idea of Moroccan takeover of Spanish Sahara or a Moroccan backed insurgency until the Monarchy crackdown on the leftists in the 1970s and violent reactions to anti-Spanish protests in southern Morocco (2010:104). El-Ouali received timid responses from Libya and Mauritania and was rebuffed by Algeria, who will later become the main supporter for Polisario. The following years witnessed insurgencies on Spanish posts and diplomatic activities abroad. The scene in Spanish Sahara, the UN, and the global
political moment resulted in an official UN mission to the Western Sahara. The mission concluded that there was a growing nationalism in Spanish Sahara. In that report which was written by diplomats from Ivory Cost, Cuba, and Iran, the committee drew a comparison between the support Saharawis had for Polisario and for Spain’s PUNS (Partidode la Unión Nacional Saharaui, Party of Saharawi National Unity). PUNS was a party established by Spanish colonial administration in hope of diverting nationalist sentiments to Spain’s favor (Hodges, 1983:113). Prior to the creation of PUNS, Spain mobilized the Jamaa Council which it had created in 1967 as a system of indirect control based on Spanish understanding of an “indigenous model of decision making” (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:95 & Hodges and Pazzanita, 1994:151). The idea was based on the tribal fractions existing among the Saharawi population by which Spain demanded that Saharawis send their representatives to the council, a classical way of producing leaders in colonial way of governance. The role of the Jamaa was to handle life aspects—anything that included cultural components different from those of the colonizer—that did not fall under the colonial apparatus especially outside the major cities. Spain however by the creation of the Jamaa wanted to make sure that the assembly was sympathetic to colonial interests (Hodges and Pazzanita, 1994:153). As a technique of control, the same idea of Jamaa representative will be used in the identification screening process, selecting a group of elderly tribal men, to finalize who is a ‘real Saharawi’ eligible to vote in the referendum.

When Spain handed Spanish Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania, Polisario gathered the Jamaa representatives where they gave up their colonially legitimized power by dissolving the assembly to the then newly constituted power of Polisario. With the beginning of the regional war between Polisario, Morocco, Mauritania and Spain’s departure, Polisario declared the foundation of Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on February 27, 1976. Under the leadership of El-Ouali, Polisario received the diplomatic and military support from Algeria, Cuba, Libya, and Mozambique, states that also experienced liberation struggles and/or had ideological stances against the North Atlantic pole. The Algerian support reached its peak in 1976 when the Algerian military rescued the fleeing refugees under the Moroccan’s army napalm bombing. Humanitarian regimes did not yet run programs for Saharawi refugees and there were a few states quick to react to the situation after the exodus. The older generation in the camps remembers how Algeria, Libya, and Iran were the only countries that sent them fabrics (to build their tents and sew clothes), food, and provided them with medical care. However, the most important friend to the SADR is the Algerian state for various reasons. First, regionally speaking, Algeria is the only country in the North
African region that can pressure Morocco in favor of a new state. For example, in 1975 a month before the Morocco-Mauritanian take over of the Sahara, the Tunisian president Bourguiba while speaking to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, sarcastically replied to the question of the journalist on the controversy back then in 1975 on the future of the Spanish Sahara claimed by Morocco and Mauritania at the same time. He affirmatively said “self-determination for nomads? Let’s not exaggerate. Western Sahara was a little phantom state” best absorbed by either Morocco or Mauritania lest destabilize the region (quoted in Simpson, 2013:239). Therefore, Algeria was the only state that backed Polisario diplomatically and militarily and permitted the creation of a government-in-exile on Algerian territory. As a result, the project of building a Maghreb Arab Union knew tremor up until today even though there were many attempts to build a common ground for the five state members to cooperate on a wide range of topics and activities. In fact, in the conversations I had with youth groups part of either the political or military wings of Polisario such as UJISARIO, Youth Alliance, NOVA, the political downsides of the conflict were always expressed as part and parcel of the stagnation of the Maghreb Arab Union project. The Saharawi youth think that once Western Sahara is independent there will be an effective Maghreb Union whereby economic and political restructuring will take place.

Morocco and Mauritania sought to control the Spanish Sahara in a number of different ways. The Moroccan takeover had two facades: one was diffused in international media as a peaceful march known as the Green March on November 6, 1975 whereby Moroccan civilians marched from different cities to ‘liberate’ their remaining colonized territories, and the other was based on military assaults on the Saharawi population. This event is discussed in chapter 2. However eventual are the narratives on this moment, in terms of the regrouping of the nationalist Saharawi project, this moment clarified the future language Saharawis will speak before the international state community, and their practices that will shape their new material, sociopolitical, and temporal conditions of their lives.

Even though Mauritania entered by military force, the Saharawi population and guerilla groups—soon to become an organized military—did not see them a serious threat. Mohamed Salem, a fighter in the Saharawi army in the late 1970s and 1980s, laughingly told me “What Mauritanian army?! Their president [referring to Mokhtar Ould Daddah] was a joke, and their army was therefore a joke” (personal interview, February 2015). Saharawi insurgent attacks on Mauritanian posts were gaining popularity to the extent that France had to militarily intervene to back the Mauritanian army. In 1979, El-Ouali and a group of insurgents led an attack on the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, where the founder of the Polisario Front died.
as result of the Mauritanian military response. In the same year, Mauritania withdrew from the tripartite agreement, evacuated the territory, and declared its recognition of the SADR in 1984. Polisario however did not hold control over the territory. Morocco expanded its military presence to what is today the internationally recognized borders of the non-self governing territory of Western Sahara. The war continued between Morocco and Polisario until the cease-fire took place in 1991.

**Who is the Saharawi: MINURSO and the Settlement Plan**

In April 1991, the Security Council passed resolution 690 establishing the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The mission came in accordance with the settlement proposals accepted by Morocco and Polisario in 1988, which was seen as a transitional period for the preparation for a referendum. The referendum came as the framework from which the people of the Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco. Activities of MINURSO entail monitoring the cease-fire and the confinement of troops in designated areas, identifying and registering qualified voters, and reducing land mines in the buffer zones. Currently, MINURSO’s main mission is to monitor the cease-fire and carry on diplomatic negotiations between the parties, a matter restored in February 2015, after almost a year of diplomatic stagnation due to Morocco’s claims of integrity against the UN envoy Christopher Ross.

The referendum should have taken place in January 1992 according to the settlement plan. It was however impossible for the mission to proceed with the set timetable due to the processes and contestations of identifying who was and was not a ‘Saharawi.’ The Organization of African Union (OAU) in cooperation with the United Nations secretary-general sought that a mission will lead to the facilitation of the settlement proposals which Polisario and Morocco agreed on in 1988. With the deployment of peacekeepers in the area of the wall, the 1991 settlement plan was fraught with complications. Morocco and Polisario were at odds which led to further negotiations. The most contentious issue was the problematic of identification: who had the right to vote in the final referendum. Agreeing on the larger category of ethnic Saharawis native to Western Sahara was an easy task. Nonetheless, the process of finalizing the card voters depended on the creation of criteria for determining “relations of blood and land” (Zunes & Mundy, 2010: XXX). These relations were to be determined in two ways: first using the Spanish population census of 1974 and second using the sociopolitical structures of tribal leaders to identify the people who
belonged to families living in the Sahara. Polisario wanted to use the census as the only touchstone, whereas Morocco argued the incompleteness of the Spanish census. Morocco based its argument on the Saharan diaspora that had taken refuge in southern cities of ‘internationally recognized Morocco.’ These were arguments based on an understanding of belonging to the category of “Saharawis” who was contested by both parties due to the possibility of guessing the referendum turnout based on who is voting. Saharawis who were born and lived in Western Sahara had fled in great numbers during the Franco-Spanish counterinsurgency operations of 1957-58 inside Moroccan territory. This had meant to the Polisario that they could probably be more inclined to vote for Morocco’s favor.

The Spanish census counted seventy-four thousand Saharawis in the Western Sahara when Morocco presented a list with more than double of the census claimed as Western Saharans in the vote (ibid). The case was clear for both Morocco and Polisario, setting the ground of voters means knowing the result before counting the polls. Polisario claimed that Rabat wanted to double the voters as its only hope to garner some pro-integration votes. Morocco to give some credibility to the ‘unauthentic’ Saharawis started moving large numbers of its southern population into Western Sahara, a point claimed by Polisario to violate the Fourth Geneva Convention that prohibits any country to move its civilian population into a militarily occupied territory. The new Moroccan settlers were the reason for the referendum breakdown in 1996 and the different politics in the Western Sahara by the Moroccan administration. After the cease-fire, Polisario had privately requested the UN that the Western Sahara be placed under trusteeship for the referendum, lest Morocco create “additional facts on the ground by bringing in new settlers” (ibid:184). This however did not happen due to the Franco-American consensus on the priority of Morocco in the conflict.

The process of sorting and unsorting—officially named the screening process—through the tens of thousands of applicants to the referendum began in 1994. Prior to that, while working on finalizing the terms of the settlement plan, Saharawi leaders and shaykhs (elders) met in Geneva to work with the UN to bring the Spanish census up to date. During the same time, Morocco presented its list made up by the Ministry of Interior which complied more than 120,000 additional Western Saharans to be added to the updated Spanish census asking the UN to add the new voters to the list without prejudice (ibid:195). Polisario immediately rejected the demand and argued against their inclusion based on petitions. MINURSO’s problem at the security council was not about getting support from permanent members but rather allocating resources. The mission was created on a very tight budget, and following the new 120,000 Western Saharans applications to the Identification Commission, it meant that
MINURSO will neither conform to its timetable nor to its funds. The addition meant adding months if not years to the mission when MINURSO had budgeted for 10,000 additional petitioners outside of the revised 1974 census (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:1193-95; Jensen, 2005: 74; Zoubir & Pazzanita, 1995: 618-20). The “aura of legal operation” as Veena Das argues (2004:225) is what the MINURSO tried to capture in its management of the Western Saharans. As I will elucidate in chapter four, the contemporary management of the Saharawi narrative practices is not dependent on this bureaucratization of being, but it rather played the foundation of the kind of narrative practices developed in the years following the exodus. Biopolitical administration of populations and regions through methods of identification and documentation are prose of how the state reconstitutes itself based on subjectivities and citizenship options. Mariane Ferme argues that these are “state-effects” that come to blur and reconstitute the boundaries of the modern nation-state (2004:81-115). Those made marginal at the contours of the state are part of the platform for other representations from which MINURSO was trying to sort. The paradox of illegibility of Western Saharans will later develop into sketching categories to confine the imagination of being a Saharawi to a representational question.

To keep both parties committed to the settlement plan, Pérez de Cuéllar, UN secretary-general, proposed in his last report to the security council in December 1991 to add three new identification criteria in addition to the claims of blood. These are: a) individuals “born of a Saharan father born in the territory” restricted to one generation solely; b) individuals who lived in the territory for a period of six consecutive years prior to December 1, 1974 (Spanish census year); c) individuals who resided in the territory sporadically for a total period of twelve years prior to December 1974 (UN doc. S/23299, Annex I, para 23, 29, 30,31). The last two criteria were favorable to Morocco as they will help register Saharawis with claims to the territory but without any apparent ‘blood ties’ to anyone listed in the 1974 census. The security council however only approved the final report without a direct assent to the criteria, deferring it thus to the next generalship, under Boutros-Ghali. In 1993, Boutros-Ghali presented a compromise identification formula in which the initial proposal of Pérez de Cuéllar was accepted but kept the 1974 census as the touchstone (Zunes & Mundy 2010:198). The new identification formula listed five criteria:

1. Persons whose names are included in the revised 1974 census list;
2. Persons who were living in the territory as members of a Saharan tribe at the time of the 1974 census but who could not be counted;
3. Members of the immediate family of the first two groups;
4. Persons born of a Saharan father born in the territory;
5. Persons who are members of a Saharan tribe belonging to the territory and who have resided in the territory for six consecutive years or intermittently for 12 years prior to 1 December 1974.

(UN doc. S/26185, Annex I: para.2)

This new identification list created another problem for Polisario and Morocco. The number of Saharawis—the larger category of dwellers of the Sahara—who could register under a particular ‘tribal subfraction’ which was the foundation of the 1974 census, was huge. Hence, claims to a Western Saharan origin based on living in the Sahara belonging to southern Morocco constituted the problem for Polisario. Furthermore, Morocco claimed that Saharawi culture was an oral one; a matter that was fiercely rejected by Polisario. Morocco’s argument of the oral tradition of the Saharawi culture suggested that the colonial way of registering and keeping track of the Saharawi demography was not complete. Room for few more thousands of Saharawis to be added to the lists was possible following this claim. The colonial situation which has created a system of documenting inhabitants, resulted in Morocco’s argument of including oral testimony in the vetting process, contending that the Saharawi diaspora of Spanish Sahara and specifically their children lack any colonial documents or identification (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:198). Boutros-Ghali accepted Morocco’s request by asking two shaykhs, one nominated by Morocco and another by Polisario, to attend the identification sessions and give their opinion on the testimonies. In essence, this was the “signature of the state” that manifested itself in the creation of a platform for self-determination, not as a new way to ‘free’ the colonized body, but rather as a disguised alternative of population management. For all of these reasons, the Saharawi question has been reduced to a one of representation. Even when the ICJ released its opinion on the insufficient grounds that link the Saharawis to any legitimate political rule exercised by the Moroccan sultan prior to the Franco-Spaniard colonization, the Saharawis were not granted an automatic independence. The colonial categories of blood, tribe, and land emerged as foundations of representational politics in modernity, and the Saharawis could not make the exception; they had to fit themselves into “something” that will grant them legibility to the core of the making of the state. Hence, the Saharawi movement has been consumed with the performative politics that sought to confine the imagination of the political to the representational question whereby there was no other possible way for the hegemonic order to conceive the political without figuring out who are these Saharawis.
After a long round of negotiations on the contested tribes and lists by both parties, Boutros-Ghali had to solve one more problem. The OAU was the partner in the identification process under the Settlement Plan. OAU observers were expected to take part in the identification screenings. However, Morocco refused their presence because the OAU in 1984 admitted the SADR as a member, which resulted in Morocco’s withdrawal from OAU until today. The Tunisian president, Zinedine Ben Ali, and chair of OAU that same year, 1994, suggested to send his personal envoys as observers. Morocco accepted and so the identification screening started (ibid:199). The identification screening however had another problem akin to the rule of the MINURSO. Identification centers had to be operating at the same time, in the sense that “one identification center would operate if and only if the counterpart on the other side of the berm was operating as well” (ibid:201). For instance, if for any particular reason Morocco or Polisario stopped the work of an identification center in their held-territories, the withdrawal or absence of one observer would halt the work of the other observers at the corresponding center.

The process of identifying who is eligible to vote encountered various problems of disagreement among the parties on the criteria, categories, questions, and the vetting procedures. One of the cases that clarified that the mission of the MINURSO was never really about helping the Saharawis to self-determination, was the story of the missing shaykh at the identification center in the Moroccan-held territories of the Western Sahara. The shaykh was seen being yelled at by a Moroccan observer during the committee’s break because ‘he was taking the wrong decisions for the people contesting for a place in the voting list.’ As a former MINURSO wrote on MINURSO’s identification center saga, “The sad case of the missing sheikhs became an almost farcical part of MINURSO folklore” (quoted in Zunes & Mundy 2010:204). Due to further problems and the increasing doubt on the identification process, Polisario withdrew from the process in 1995 and by the end of the year, the secretary-general was considering the abolition of the mission. The secretary-general reported no progress and based on the exhaustion of all possible solutions to make Morocco and Polisario well-timed, the Security-Council in May 1996 agreed to suspend the identification process and reduce the military personnel by 20 percent (UN doc. SC/6226 and S/Res/1056).

Talks were reinitiated in 1997 in Houston, United States, under the framework of the Settlement Plan. UN secretary-general, Kofi Anan, asked former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker to become the new negotiator for Western Sahara. The agreement in the Houston meeting was to work for the organization of the referendum that should have taken
place originally in 1992. The Houston Agreement of 1997 however did not advance the situation on the ground, which lead to a new set of Baker Plans (Baker I and Baker II), formally known as the Peace Plan for Self-Determination of the People of the Western Sahara. The first plan was drafted in 2000 and is claimed to be pitched by a Moroccan sponsored legal committee. Baker I offered Saharawis autonomy whereby both parties will ‘win something’ as opposed to either Morocco or Polisario losing (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:219). In this plan, Saharawis will have autonomy within the Moroccan state except for defense and foreign policy; Polisario and Algeria rejected it immediately. Zunes and Mundy argue that the autonomy approach distracted from the original track of the conflict in which the “UN-speak for a political—as in not necessarily legal—[wanted a]solution outside the framework of self-determination” (2010:219). This is the nexus of power dynamics over the conflict in Western Sahara whereby the legal language is the most important argument Polisario has over Morocco. The following chapter will discuss the hypnotization of the conflict in the vocabulary of ‘self-determination’ and its uncritical purchase in depicting sociopolitical transformations in the Western Sahara. The Baker II plan proposed that the Western Sahara be placed under a Saharawi self-rule for a period of five years, with a referendum to follow. The referendum would call the whole population of the Western Sahara to vote including the Moroccan and Moroccan Saharawi settlers to vote. It was another attempt to finalize a deal to be finally able to deploy a whole host of categories and structures to manage this population. To the surprise of the international community, Polisario and Algeria accepted the plan as the basis of further negotiation, which lead the UN to endorse the plan in 2003. Morocco, under king Mohamed VI rejected Baker II claiming that it no longer accepted independence as one of the options of the referendum. James Baker resigned from his position in protest. By this time, it was clear that all parties have reached a political deadlock. Another attempt to drive Morocco and Polisario to direct talks happened in the form of series of talks called Manhasset negotiations in 2007-2008.

When Morocco and Polisario signed the cease-fire, the later told the Saharawi refugees in Tindouf camps that they would stay there until the MINURSO finalizes a voter list. The Settlement Plan had included the transportation of Saharawis back to their dwellings in the Western Sahara which they were forced to leave in the 1976 exodus due to Morocco-Mauritanian joint military seizure of the territory. In the previous historical overview of what is regarded in the literature on the Western Sahara to be its history, there is merely a chronological telling of the events that were shaped and performed by the institutional political bodies. Dynamics happening outside of the formal political framework remain in the
shadow of narrating history, a one that has formed the current sociopolitical transformations happening on the margins of Polisario, Morocco, and the UN. The history of Saharawi displacement is one of these stories that is concealed for it offers an understanding of the claims that have reconfigured the lives and power modalities of Saharawis in refugee camps and in the Western Sahara. In the course of these events, Polisario understood that a solution will not be reached soon and asked the Saharawis in its June 1991 Congress to establish a free market economy in the camps (Herz, 2013:382). When the riddle of identifying the “who is the Saharawi” hadn’t ceased after all those years, the Polisario decided to approach the situation of Saharawis in the camps differently. The free market economy approach in the camps and the change in the employment opportunities as they were previously provided by the ELPS (Saharan People’s Liberation Army)—which was the result of unifying all guerilla groups into an organized military whose members also held positions in Polisario council as politicians—reconfigured relations of materiality, work, politics, and temporality in the eastern side of the berm. When the political leadership was still speaking the language of the UN, Saharawis constituted their novel forms of lives, impacted by the ecological, military, capital, and political constituents.

**If it is not a representational question...**

If the question of violence in the Western Sahara is not foremost about identity, then what is it about? Das asked the question: “How one would address violence that is seen as a witness against life itself” in the context of sectarian violence in India (2003:300). The modernist concealment of the violence produced a Western Sahara that is about life, rather about how you represent that life. Violence can be understood in multiple forms. It could be the forced performative politics of the colonized, the refugee, and the killed. It could further be the hindrance of the Saharawis from projecting their everyday life contained and not expelled. In this project, it is all of these and a few more. The violence that I locate in this discussion is the one of the present, one that is lived and remade in the everyday life and not expelled. There are implicit aspects to how I can write about violence in this context, specifically because it pertains to dynamics that make the everyday life habitable. Few of these will be discussed now while others will be elucidated in the following chapters.

By violence I do not simply refer to the reality of killing and being killed. Nor do I only concentrate on the images of the horrific, trauma, and loss. All of these are undeniably part of
violence. Rather, the violence I argue here is the mode of producing the Western Sahara in the contemporary; a one that is not the result of tension but rather the prose of a production machine of circulating capital, disposable populations, and discursive subjectivities. Reading violence as the machine of capital value-production shifts the analysis of the context of the war between Morocco and the Western Saharan, the walling imagination, and the camps and refugeeness. Violence has been made oblivion in the Western Sahara to the extent that the everydayness of the population living in the camps is depicted as inhabitable in the aftermath of the cease-fire. When my interlocutors talked about the inexistence of peace-time in the current moment, despite that Morocco and Polisario respect the cease-fire, it was necessary to think about the particularities of how they have come to formulate that which is not characterized as peace. If the battlefield is not the ground from which Saharawis perceive war or violence, then on which grounds is it lived?

Clearly, the violence I write about is much larger than state-violence or one that is legitimated on grounds of “defense,” as some of Polisario military officials argue. Das and Poole (2004) contend that “legitimate” state violence does not bring violence into an end, it merely redistributes it. I further carry on this question of redistribution to ask: How can this redistribution be productive in terms of capital production and extend from impacting populations to including them in its creation of imaginaries and orders? In this question, and what follows in the analysis, I do not perceive capital’s logic as a singular one that is pre-made and fixed. On the contrary, capital is unfixed and incoherent, and formed in the multiplicity of practices, relations, and devices. Under this form, violence becomes networked as a commodity, a technology, and a structure. And since it implies a complicated tapestry of trajectories, it further engenders divergent life projects.

It is specifically this reading of the productiveness of violence in relation to life that I aim to depict as experimental. That is, since the production and consumption of violence involves humans, entities, and structures, and entails different forms of life, those being part of its machinery experiment with its modalities in divergent ways. It hence becomes not so much of a representational question of how the Saharawis are touched by the various facades of violence in the Sahara, rather how the contemporary moment has forged a novel enactment towards technologies and vehicles of violence. In a conversation I had with Fatima Mehdi, the president of the National Union of Saharawi Women (NUSW), she powerfully told me: “We sometimes think that it is better that we still haven’t gotten our independence because we have more time to work on certain issues” (personal interview, January 2015). The master plan of the Saharawi national-liberation movement is two-fold: liberation and state-building.
Mehdi’s argument although implicitly articulated, is that the nation-state building will not simply resolve the questions posed. Rather, what they want to do is to experiment with the contemporary conditions to try and forge a new order, that can be unmade, remade, or abandoned. Mehdi referred to working on “certain issues” among the Saharawis in the camps. These issues did not pertain to the colonial power. As there might be in the future a Saharawi state, or not, the kind of questions that will be raised will not be so different to those already in the political laboratory as I argue in chapter six. Life is thought in this political laboratory within the contemporary conditions of violence.
Chapter 2

Messy Ethnography: Morocanness, Silence, and the Habitations of the Nation-State

This ethnography is not politically linear. It has some of Law’s (2004) messiness, largely because the world is a mess in itself. This project constituted not only an intellectual and political conversation in different fields, but also an important one for an engagement with what many Saharawis saw as a crucial moment in starting a conversation with the “other” Moroccan side. Reconstituting the political project of the Western Sahara revisits meanings and politics of research in the camps. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014) clearly utters problems of self-censorship, ethical, and political dilemmas in writing about the Western Sahara. On the one hand, perceptions of Saharawis on research are highly motivated by expectations that research will be oriented towards either policy-making or creating further solidarity networks (ibid:247). Second, research is politicized by the institutional regime administering the camps as a way to control critiques that might render the cause vulnerable before the eyes of international community. Distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ research manifest the politics embedded in doing fieldwork. The interest that the political leadership in the camps had in my research was a bit more strategic in the dogmatist sense. In an ongoing struggle over this question of the Sahara, it seemed important to gain the ‘sympathy’ of a Moroccan. This is the fieldwork agenda I was met with.

A Moroccan or a Researcher?

The reaction to different ambiguities that emerge from a kind of research that takes into consideration possible impacts on the social field involves not only ethics and power relations, but turns also to reflexivity. Drawing on research primarily based on the Saharawi social field, there has been little engagement with what constitutes a viable research that can be done in the camps. As most authors feel they have a moral stance towards the Saharawis, in that they have to clearly adopt a non-concealing approach to the national liberation movement, self-censorship silenced credible critiques. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014) argues that it is particularly this self-censorship that silences violent practices and neglect of special social groups’ needs in the camps. Research on Western Sahara is not void of politics; it is rather saturated with ideological and institutional politics. As Alcoff contends, whenever we engage with speaking about others or for others, we are making choices that we need to be politically accountable for (1992:14). The stress on political accountability has been greatly
articulated by feminist interventions in the field of ethnography and oral history. Looking at some of these contributions help us—and particularly myself—to sketch the larger implications of fieldwork especially in the contested terrains of politics and knowledge.

Ethnographic authority emerges as a critical theme among feminists and ethnographers in general. The positioning of the ethnographer plays a crucial role in outlaying the unevenness of power embedded in interviewing and doing oral history (Sangster, 1994). Yet, given that this is an inherent structural problem of knowledge in general, and ethnography in particular, the most important contributions to rethink writing of history of Western Sahara are issues revolving around writing in different temporal, political, and social frames. Sangster contends that because the discipline of history is based on this historical time, it helps to distance ourselves as writers from the issue of unequal power and relationship (ibid:12). This might be a delusional case when one is writing about a period that is not witnessed by the writer herself. In witnessing there seems to be a moral, ethical, and political implication to how one frames or forecloses certain questions. The past as a domain of the left behind creates an illusion of detachment, that can be also overcome in the language adopted to discern power. One cannot claim distance from unequal power relations because of temporal frames when the writing practice involved politicized identities—as identities that are not only political in nature but also that take an intensive character highlighting stern tensions. My presence in the Saharawi camps has been informed by Johannes Fabian (2002) argument about how a temporal imposition of a discursive practice becomes also a political praxis. Denying that a detachment from the past of producing the Western Sahara exists, certain questions of constituting the Saharawi national in the postcolonial and the making of the present were forged. Without this ethnographic production that engenders a political engagement with the making of the present, there could not have been another way to grasp how the contemporary is about the making of the present of divergent life projects.

The content of anthropological knowledge is necessarily part of the subjects’ past which formulates a temporal distance linked up with the constitution of research interlocutors. Historical past becomes not a mere foundation of a discipline, rather as Fabian argues, it represents a choice of expression which is embedded in an epistemological positioning (ibid:80-87). It hence cannot be explained by linguistic formulas. It is important to acknowledge that unresolvable dilemmas such as researching ‘the past’ from different temporal, political, and ideological positionings turn into a matter of locutionary—where do I situate myself discursively and politically—stance of discourse toward ‘objects’ of study. Similarly, ongoing hegemonizing political inscriptions in the making of the Western Sahara
history raise questions on how are we to discern complex networks of violence? There are ethnographic considerations about the meaning of this project inasmuch political arguments forged their way through a reformulation of approaches. Choosing the site of fieldwork, and the very possibility of being an ethnographer in the camps raise questions about the kind of perceptions one has about social fields. Complexity of the warscape in Western Sahara compels me to provide furthermore multiplex answers. The beckoning of this project is to reflect on the way in which trajectories of violence are experimental—taking risks, escaping and inhabiting the conditions of violence in different circumstances—and to draw on modes and means of circulation and commodification of violence. Yet, it could have been an easier task if my identity was not already imbued with politics of the social field I went to. I knew from the beginning that I am taking a risk. A risk of life, of being harassed by the Moroccan police once I enter Morocco. I knew that I am risking a whole spectrum of audience who would not read because I have dared to doubt the Moroccan political stance, or that I have left people in bulk unclear about my stance because I simply do not agree with ideals of nation-states, it being a historical category that has exhausted its chance of solving the problems it initially created through its logic. Yet, I do differentiate a larger anti-state political project from survival tactics in a moment of global politics governed by systemic patterns and factors. In other words, the only viable choice for the Saharawis to exist in the eyes of the international community is to have their own state. However, more clearly, my questions are far beyond discourses of state making as the only available order for a population at this contemporary moment.

All of this played a role in granting me access to the camps, which I had spent months negotiating with military and administrative officials of Polisario. I have been asked “What is your position on the Saharawi cause?” And how could I possibly reply whilst my language was different from military officials? I support it. But I don’t agree with you. That would have meant a bullet in the head. Another question was: “Aren’t you afraid? The Moroccan intelligentsia will know about it. You know you are taking a risk.” All of these questions have ascertained that our selections of topics are politically driven. At this point, I am certainly not doing an ethnography about the “others,” but rather locating that missing thread that has rendered the violence since 1975 one about territorial sovereignty and insurgency. I do locate this project within a broader landscape of warscape and violence in North/West Africa and their political economies. If this war has had an impact on me on the personal level, it has clarified how the moment we live in does not differ so much in its fabric from other violent incidents, but only in its aesthetics of managing populations at different levels.
Reading different perspectives of local and regional politics of North Africa offers a lens to grappling with violence as a highly organized practice. It is a practice that intensifies through the interplay of modernist claims of privatizing or communualizing life. It is in this sense that violence is no longer the result of tensions, but the vehicle that looks for tensions to generate. With privatization of public services, social movements in Morocco are struggling not knowing whom to blame: the neoliberal governance model or the monarchy and politico-economic elite. In fact, the problem is not a simple one. The structures of power and political subjectivities arising in the years following independence in 1956 have shaped the contemporary sociopolitical scene. And the character of the postcolonial Moroccan state is what has raised questions about today’s manifestation of capital in the region instead of a war between nation-states. The political economy of the Western Sahara conflict is also about the fragmented performances of the nation and dyad constituents of the Moroccan elite in power. With the lack of critical scholarship on the entanglements about monarchy’s power and political economy of the country, and of the conflict specifically, the choice of the ethnography comes as a political one. In one of the instances of disparately trying to get hold of Polisario representatives, a professor told me to “drop the idea,” that no Algerian official would want to be interviewed by me (since in most scholarship on the Western Sahara conflict looks into the role of the Algerian state).

Different aspects have informed my choice of the camps as the site of ethnography. I have asked myself at various points why did I not choose to engage with the dynamics of violence in the parts of Western Sahara under Moroccan control? I have myself critiqued the fact that in most historical narratives, the families who have remained in areas controlled by Morocco have been expelled from the making of the Western Sahara as objects of knowledge. Or, why didn’t I try to work from Mauritania. This is not a random choice. The camps have stood to me as the locality of greatest tension between different dynamics, or what Nasser Abourahme (2011) calls as collisions: the official discourse, the material conditions of living, and the international humanitarian regimes. The Saharawi camps in their everydayness navigate discursive materialities and narratives about the state-in-exile. National liberation movements are clearly about establishing nation-states, yet what has raised different questions in the Saharawi case is that the camps since 1976 have engulfed a nation-state structure, with not only state institutions and apparatuses functioning as any other state, but also in formulating this binary of the citizen/refugee. Hence, it appeared to me that the Saharawi project is experimental in prevalent instances. Questions that I asked were not in the nature of what do Saharawis want at the end of liberation movement, because it was
clear that the only possible remedy for a forty year conflict is founding a nation-state. That is, experimentality comes through conditions the Saharawis in the camps live as refugees but also as citizens of the camp-run SADR. What remains lacking for the state is to formally enter capital’s machine and be perspicuously one of its fibers. Everydayness enabled this experimentality to depart from hegemonic plans and think through emergent possibilities of the postnational.

My fieldwork lasted for twenty-five days, with an initial last minute permission of only two weeks. Another ten days were negotiated along the stay. Most of researchers who visit the camps for their fieldwork were granted less than two weeks as not only part of a security approach that is imposed by the Algerian military and Polisario, but also of the coordinators’ conceptions of research. This is partially due to a tradition of conducting evidence-based or policy-based research in camps. To get permission to access the camps, I was in touch with a Saharawi female activist from the National Union of Saharawi Women (NUSW), who from her part informally managed to put me in touch with the specific body responsible for foreigners’ visits to the camps. Although there were many people involved in this process, it remained very informal in the sense that there were no specific documents acknowledging my visit—at least nothing was presented to me. This could be either attributed to the fact that my safety was one of the concerns of the people who tried to help me maneuver around the Moroccan intelligence services knowing every step I was taking in Algeria, or because it is specifically the kind of management of researchers pitched by the Polisario. The stay ended up being coordinated by the NSWU as an organization, and not only the women member whom I contacted first as an independent individual. Reasons for this were given in the form that all researchers coming to the camps need to be endorsed by a specific institution or organization. The NUSW as an institution ended up endorsing my research and coordinating all the visits to official sites and people.

For all the twenty-five days period I have stayed at the house of Amina, who is a woman in her middle twenties. She was chosen by the Polisario department of coordinating foreign visitors, where she also worked, to host me as requested by the NUSW. The NUSW assumed that because Amina and I had the same age—except that Amina was already married and with a kid—our communication will be easier. Amina and her family who live in the next house were known in the neighborhood for receiving foreign guests. The period of my fieldwork coincided with an important moment in the progress of the Western Sahara conflict at the UN table. Forthcoming in mid April 2015, the Security Council is expected to decide on the future of the MINURSO. Polisario had previously argued that it is time for the
MINURSO to solve this ongoing conflict by upgrading the working framework from chapter VI to VII of the UN charter. If adopted, the UN would impose a political solution on all concerned parties, and they would be accountable for UN decision implementation. Morocco had accused the UN secretary-general personal envoy for Western Sahara for adopting a biased approach, which led to obstructing negotiations for about a year. This context was considered by the body coordinating my stay as a threat to my personal safety. There was a kidnapping incident in the camps in 2011 whereby two Spaniards and an Italian were kidnapped in the administrative camp Rabouni. Hence, my mobility in the camps was constrained for the first ten days and I gained larger freedom in moving alone as I was increasingly introduced to more people.

Part of Polisario’s protocol for incoming visitors and researchers is to provide them with an attendant who is able to communicate in the language spoken by the visitor, and a driver. The assigned attendant, Samia, was one year older than me and held the position of a deputy member at the Saharawi parliament. She clearly stated to me at the beginning that her role was not only to facilitate my meetings schedule, but also to guard me. Once, I left with Amina’s sister to the local market without telling Samia that we were going out, it made her furious. Amina then argued madly with Samia telling her that she does not have any authority over me once I am at her house or with her family members. After similar incidents, the family labeled Samia the lieutenant. This sort of establishing authority over my movement lasted only for ten days, I could then move freely to a certain degree and manages my own time and kind of meetings I held with interlocutors.

In the first day, I was asked to present a tentative plan of my fieldwork and to include people and institutions I wanted to meet and visit. Given the situation of having always to coordinate with the NUSW, the attendant, and the driver, there was little chance of doing a different kind of ethnography. The tentative plan I proposed surprised my attendant because I did not display any desire to meet officials or political leaders. As the attendant put it “you have come all the way to the desert to walk randomly around tents?!” The NUSW took the organizations and ‘categories’ of people I wanted to have conversations with and added some visits to sites they considered to be important for my research. The first week was primarily about interviewing these officials, who often had things to tell me without the necessity from my part to ask questions. It also included visiting sites such as schools, workshops, Saharawi National Library, and the National Museum of Resistance.

In many instances, I had interlocutors who usually held professional positions ask me about the desired ‘outcomes’ of this research. Not wanting to engage directly with the
formations of the Saharawi state had confused many of the interlocutors. The long tradition of receiving researchers who have done policy-based or evidence-based research formed this confusion. Therefore, it did not appear as a surprise when my attendant asked me if I had gathered enough information for each day. Perceiving my research as gathering information came out as a result of ideas about researchers coming to the field as information gatherers. And many interlocutors called me ‘the journalist’ as they were used to see journalists on daily basis coming and leaving the camps as part of their job which is ‘collecting information’ that interlocutors perceived as my task. The second issue is embedded in the problematic of presenting ‘reality’ to the researcher. Infused with identity politics, my presence was calling for more ‘reality’ to be shown. As I complained about my movement restrictions, the coordinators, and generally people whom I kept discovering had a hand in arranging my fieldwork, told me that I can now move freely because they do not want me to think that “they are hiding reality from me,” but I had to take into consideration safety measures. Included in “not hiding reality” were demands for me to ask for meetings with people who would potentially show discomfort with the current political leadership. However, even when a critique is formulated about the Polisario leadership, it is carefully worded and is not aimed at the structure of Polisario, instead they focused on some decisions taken by Polisario such as the cease-fire or personalities of the leadership. I had asked the whereabouts of Allal Najem, a Saharawi singer in the camps, who had been previously interviewed by a Moroccan online newspaper Hespress, and who is also popular for his songs against forms of corruption and authoritarianism among Polisario leaders. My attendant replied that I would have met him had he resided in the camps. I asked Amina’s mother if she knows him, and she showed a great discomfort, turning her voice into whispering, said that they do not know where he is. “He is against Polisario, isn’t he?,” I asked. “That’s what they say, I don’t understand why he does that. Polisario has done a lot for us,” Safia mumbled.

These were some of the politics that have allowed this project to exist. And although there were interlocutors who were very interested in this project, others remained doubting my ‘objective’ approach to what they have termed “their justice cause.” A young man had started a conversation with me about the way social scientists remain objective when they conduct research in politically contested areas and about highly controversial topics such as the Western Sahara. It was one of those moments that had clarified to me some of the expectations that some Saharawi interlocutors anticipated from this research. Yet, others were hoping that this research does not stop at the academic door. Hoping that it will act more of an ‘activism ethnography,’ many young men and women had asked me about the kind of
writing existing in the academy that also speaks to ordinary people in contexts of activism. I have addressed these issues by exploring possibilities that ethnography can produce. Even when my engagement with the domains that today constitute the conflict on the Western Sahara remains in its first stages, this can still incite some conceptual and political conversations.

**Saharawi Camps: Habitats of a Nation-State**

The Saharawi refugee camps in Tindouf region of southwest Algeria were gradually established after the 1976 exodus of the population. Today there are five camps whereby four are residential camps: Esamara, Laayoune, Dakhla and Bojidor, and Rabouni camps which hosts all administrative bodies and ministries of the SADR. Hosting approximately 160,000 Saharawis, the camps witnessed development in structure, infrastructure, and perception. The family hosting me lived in Bojidor camp; they had moved from Dakhla camp, which is 150 kilometers distant from all other camps, after a severe flood in the Tindouf region. Bojidor camp hosted the headquarters of the women’s school, lodging families of women who went to the school. It had been previously officially named as the 27 February School, inspired by the declaration date of the Saharawi republic. It officially took the name of a camp only in autumn 2014. Furthermore, Bojidor was the only residential camp that had an infrastructure of electricity. All other camps relied on electrical generators purchased by residents. SADR had contracted a company to establish a solid electricity infrastructure for Esamara camp in which monthly bills will be calculated based on kilowatt per hour cost as opposed to the current situation of Bojidor infrastructure that does not allow for such an operation. Bojidor residents pay the same sum for different electricity usage; a matter that had pushed Amina on many instances to express her unease with the fact that she does not have electrical appliances her neighbors enjoy using and still pays the same amount.

Moreover, the Saharawi Ministry of Water and the Environment manage water and garbage. Water is distributed every nine days by a UNHCR water-distribution truck and stored in a tarpaulin water storage tank. The quantity is fixed as 3 tons of water per distribution per family, regardless of how many members constitute a family. Literally, all SADR institutions and organizations, such as NUSW, have neighborhood representatives who take care of local management. Amina’s mother served as Lamsid district representative for the Water and the Environment Ministry for Bojidor camp. Her role was to make sure that all families living in her duty zone were receiving their shares on time and that garbage was
collected properly. She coordinated everything through the phone and I never saw her going to the ministry building. Most Saharawis I talked to expressed how their living conditions in the camps have changed. In every camp, there is a regional hospital, one primary and one secondary school, organizations’ branches, and schools for information technology and language teaching.

The architecture of the camps is planned in a way that gives possibilities for specific spaces within the camps, in which Saharawis themselves use and shape. The architecture of the camps has been designed in the early 1980s by the Polisario leadership. Every camp is composed of between four to seven districts and has a hospital at the center of the camp. For visitors especially those working in the humanitarian industry, the Saharawi camps represented the “ideal” camps in terms of organization. The “well-organized”—a comment initially made by journalists, humanitarian personnel, and few academics and policy makers (c.f. Harell-Bond, 1981; 1986, 1999; Lipert, 1987; San Martin, 2005)—Saharawi camps have been contrasted to the chaotic structures that usually describe camps around the world, partially because it follows conceptions of camps being outside the zone of the ordinary political. The architecture of the Saharawi camps fulfills the quest for control to a certain extent. The placement of administration in a specter of visibility to all other camps and the creation of five camps distanced from each other does not seem a random choice. Saharawis are contained in this encampment zones to serve a political aim. The political need to establish a social order requires a juridical and political difference that fosters the confinement and the preservation of newly established power regimes. In such a regime, there are no rights (Jaji, 2012:229). According to Jaji, what replaces the citizen’s rights is the refugee’s rights which means a de jure apolitical individual. In the Saharawi camps, it seems there are two distinct levels of being political. The refugeeeness as a status requires the depoliticization to produce a discourse of victimization that serves in one way or another in drawing the attention of the global political regime to resolve the national struggle. On the other hand, Saharawis are highly politicized in terms of negotiating life in camps and engaging in local activism (Corbet, 2006). This dialectic between the apolitical and political captures something different that can neither be trivialized nor idealized. In the ways the present inhabits the camps, as amassing bodies become the technique to legitimize a struggle, the counter to political violence is in many cases not to resist, not to confront materially and physically the state-in-exile, but to escape it and to find means of narrating that which one’s live. It is in other words, escaping the colonial past and future; inhabited by the state on both edges, and reviving the community struggle for everydayness. Refugees uncover the mutually
constitutive and fluid relation between them, the city--camp, and the nation, all in the making of their present.

Michel Agier asks a crucial question at this sociopolitical juncture: “how is life reborn in a history of death?” (2012:64). This question sets the representational landscape of this research and revisits what is the aim of capturing something else than the normative usually studied while theorizing camps and similar zones. First, engaging with some of Agier’s points is important in terms of reflecting on meanings of Saharawi life projects. Agier’s “ethnographic present” recognizes that situations, individuals, and modalities are not outside history. Crisis and emergency do not stop the flow of life. In this sense, crisis emerges as part of temporal framework, and not an exception to history. Temporality is what Agier describes as a mode of description (ibid:72). The need to redraw on historicity afflicts past configurations and effects of time on the present. In so doing, what is at stake is not engendering a new reality, but rather trying to capture what already exists in terms of lived life and the making of the present. Using Foucault, Agier asserts that “life kept going ‘under perfusion’” in the camps he visited (ibid:181). This represents the core of envisaging everydayness amid tensions harbored by the inaccessible inside, which in many ways represents the glorious past, and the uncertain outside: the future of what might become or not. By all means, what remains is the present, that which is created in the course of existence. The camp and its relation to the present becomes a political matter. Reductionist accounts of the political to a mere problem of diminishing state protection or a problem of indefinite displacement conceal embedded politics in defining the camp, exile, order, and space. Movement is the very act of asserting a certain sense of space (Janz, 2001). Thus, the very act of naming such movement, residence, or action is a political one that engenders an authority to classify and control and a subversive effect by those categorized to mold the camp as an artifact.

Temporality emerges here as a specific understanding of different contacts with time. It exemplifies the contemporary era in which we all live in, but also the frameworks from which the everyday time is articulated. The making of the present is central to the way I understand the Saharawi experimentality. The present characterizes the readiness for the Saharawis to maneuver around spatial fragmentation displayed in the structural blocks of the camp and the wall, war and peace, the discursive and the practical. The present transgresses the notion of liminalities, it shows how risks are taken in the case of the invisible field of mines. Waiting that has no end forges an understanding of how the present is lived, made, and (un)articulated. When the contemporary situation does not speak the language of the
everyday, and in a consistent suspension of life projects, the political laboratory emerges as
the metaphoric device for much wider utterances. This political laboratory, which I will come
back to in the last chapter, does not function from the reductive binaries of violence versus
resistance. The risk that is taken to live has become the contemporary character of any kind
of living in the present. In so doing, the suspension of the present becomes its own kind of
temporal reality.

The emergence of the camp, and consequently its definition, denotes the distinction of
the political order. An order that needs to sustain itself through a constant reconfiguration of
its participants, and thus polices the borders of the political realm and all other domains
related to it such as urban traffic, border zones, and spatial imaginations. Dwelling first on
the various descriptions of camps in the literature is important considering the aim of this
project: locating nuances of other possibilities of life already taking place. Agier concludes
from his ethnography that the camp is a “liminal space:” that which is caught between the no
place and the border (ibid: 181). The no space is produced by the state through the control of
the physical and material life preserved at minimum. Therefore, the camp existing on the
margin of history—with no sociopolitical occupation—defines itself as the “extraterritorial
temporary residence” (ibid). Suspension of life sets the frame to position camp residents on a
de facto social marginality, it foreclosing the making of the present. In what way is there an
incompatibility with neglecting bodies, the political order and community? And, how do we
imagine a different political and historicization? To answer this question is to uncover
modalities of control and subversion. The birth of camps signified global mechanisms of
control, sites of violence, politics of representation, and practices of selection and expulsion.
With the creation of camps, humanitarianism gained further foundational elements to its
work. As Agier notes, the production of camps is not solely part of national or regional
solutions to the excess of population, but also part of a larger global mechanism that is
embedded in a moment of neoliberalism and capital circulation. This is a crucial point for any
critical formulation on knowledge production on the Western Sahara. For most scholars, the
Western Sahara means the Saharawi camps in Tindouf. The literature further discussed and
engaged with has been the product of fieldwork in the camps, seen as the focal point of the
Western Sahara conflict and its trajectories. Saharawis living under Moroccan administration
do not constitute objects of knowledge on the Saharawi struggle, exactly because as Malikki
(1996) argues, those who leave are the contemporary objects of study instead of those who
stay.
Furthermore, the incompatibility, explained in terms of who is included as an object of knowledge production, rests in premises of negotiating status of vulnerability; an ongoing process of reconfiguring those allowed to be part of the common modern political order. This is enabled through organizations and networks that finance and exceptionalize situations to recraft the order. The process resulted in a crisis of growth (Agier, 2012). On the one hand humanitarianism gets privatized through creating sociopolitical and economic platforms to finance emerging camps, and increasingly multiply the numbers of privatized entities that manage camp residents (Malikki, 1996). From the same perspective, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014) argues that in the specific case of the Saharawis, humanitarianism and solidarity networks are based on certain representations of Saharawi women. This humanitarianism comes in the form of foreign capital through aid and assistance, which is seen necessary to reproduce the minimum everyday life that ensures a social reproduction of the same category: the skeleton of freedom projects and nation--state discourses. Unlike other refugee contexts, the Saharawi camps are run and administered by the SADR/Polisario. Most refugee camps of established on territories of other states are under control mechanisms of the hosting state. In contrast to this, Algeria granted Polisario full control of their camps including administering, managing, allocating, and contracting companies for the development of camps’ infrastructure. This particular setting gave a different context of Saharawi livelihoods in refuge.

On the other hand, there is humanitarianism of the state with its own discursive politics. The discursive modality displays how certain techniques are chosen among others to manage numbers of individuals admitted to territories and on which basis cards are issued. The SADR issues citizenship national identification cards and passports for Saharawi refugees in the camps to enable them free movement to Tindouf city—a securitized military base and restricted area for non-residents—and to Mauritania. Yet having national identification cards is also important for state services such as relocation to camps, food distribution, health services, access to education, etc. Many of these techniques of control are challenged. Saharawis do not always allow SADR apparatus to control their practices and actions, not in the form of resistance, but rather in a subtle way that navigates the everyday. Interlocutors narrated that many Saharawis are moving to Bojdor camp without seeking the necessary administrative approval. When I addressed this point with the governor of Esamara camp, he replied that it was not possible for refugees to move to another camp without informing the authorities. The reason was formulated in terms of security. Despite that tensions between Polisario and the rest of the population are not easily articulated, and very few are inclined to
critique Polisario (as also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014 observes), some regulated aspects of life are not so easily claimed by state control mechanisms. Therefore, vulnerability becomes a negotiable status whereby the political that was on hold is released and gains further instruments and modes of activity. Agier calls these tensions as the “left hand of the Empire” which is the de jure performance of humanitarian apparatus (2012: 200). Performance acquires meanings only when it follows the intervention of military destructions and becomes the “hand that strikes, and a hand that heals” (ibid). Malikki (1996) notes that refugeeeness becomes a military problem that necessitates integration within the legal apparatus; that which Agier calls the humanitarian government (2012). Historical and political contexts map out the particular inasmuch the everyday life is produced in a more intricate tapestry of politics. The camp produces anew categories of individuals who locate themselves in the collective exile in cases whereby the cultural question becomes unproblematised (Malikki, 1996). In the context of exile, culture is produced with no historicity or politics. As it is the case for one of the ‘confidence-building measures’ designed by UNHCR and MINURSO.

One of the measures was to create a program under the name “apolitical seminars” with the objective of gathering Saharawis from the camps and the Western Sahara to discuss topics on Saharawi culture. In chapter three, I argue that in fact the nomenclature ‘apolitical’ for topics that have been the focus of social change in the camps play an important role in forming conceptions of the political outside state frames.

If there is a complexity attached to the fabric of history and sociopolitics, the camp becomes a heterogeneous organism. Agier argues that camps yield new sociospatial forms that residents appropriate to make the space a habitable place. Although in most cases camps have an indefinite duration—at least the description of camps as a temporary life situation contradicts stories of how camps ended up being new habitats or never offered “going back to the normal”—residents build a space that belongs to them even under precarity. The development of camps is not only important to locate in terms of historicity found in the collapse of feudal empires of the world, but also in the modern language of politics.

**Silence: Soliloquies of Everydayness**

Across the narratives I engage with, silence comes as a strategy thread of this thesis. More often than not, silence is one of the core objects of oral history projects. Studying that which is not uttered or does not reach the cochlea, imbues silence with the potential of speaking more than actual words. I have found myself to be silent on occasions that I should have
probably said something. Even while writing, there were moments that I have chosen to be silent about, not to suggest the ineffable, but to depart from the tradition of condemning everything happening around us to its minimalist or dominion narrative. My silence is vigilant to neither fall in the trap of producing yet another master narrative of the people I have encountered, even when the precarious moments of life have led them to resort to a kind of grand narrative themselves, nor to disdain their everydayness which appeared as a drunken farce. It is this hard exercise of finding the zone of experimentality—what is included or removed from the process of experimenting—that neither can be overgeneralized in all contexts, nor claimed inexistent. Besides, for this specific project, my silence gives the reader to tease further possibilities for reflection.

As a continuation of the argument on constituents of knowledge on the Western Sahara, as those who have left became the objects of knowledge production, I did not want to make the Saharawis hostage of the liberal discourse on ‘rights.’ On an unexpected powerful conversation, one of my interviewees who works as a representative of Polisario, took the consent form paper—because it was the only form of document I had with an institutional logo—and noticed the word ethnography written. A discomforted surprise appeared on his face and he did not seem reluctant to express how much he loathes the discipline of Anthropology. Despite explaining to him that this was the genre of writing of this project rather than a strict methodology, also because a three weeks engagement cannot produce a solid ethnography in the fullest methodological sense. It did not resonate. The representative frowned and made sure that his point is clear: “Anthropology is a way to keep colonizing the people.” He clearly knew the history of how the discipline emerged, something I couldn’t agree more on. However, there were debates in the academy that have tried to rectify the uneasy past of the discipline by reflecting on the possibilities that some of anthropological questions and methodologies offer. For me, it was the beginning to explore how ethnography can be also the ground for an engaged writing, a one that does not stop at the outer limits of the academy, but also enlarges the spectrum of readership and politics.

Anthropologist have continued to depict people as primitive, living in different times zones, and have no culture or politics of their own. Even when they [anthropologists] try to escape the past [of the discipline] it still haunts them in the way they write. All those researchers that come to the camps with a sympathy, think of themselves as outsiders, they often tend to forget that we all live in the same world, we might think that we have different problems, but at the end we discover that it all becomes related.
I advise you rather to move to the discipline of postcolonial studies.

(personal interview, January 2015)

The problematic that I identify in studying populations that have articulated their demands vis-à-vis other entities or populations is that it has been always confined in the rights discourse, much in the way I argue in chapter 2. In relation to ethnographic writing, the caveat should be addressed to arguments made against emerging assemblages of different sorts. Much of representation cannot be avoided, and it might seem that this thesis is unabashedly narrative driven. Yet, some of the necessarily contradictory acts, words, and momentums reveal themselves through these narratives. Instead of taking them as momentarily inconsistencies, I rather take them as potential forces of producing the antagonist relations between escaping grounds relating to the vintage of the modern order of the state. In other words, in a liberation movement that has contested an existing order of a nation-state around political representation, resource distribution and recognition, it does not mean that the end is another blind belief in the management of the nation-state. You can abscond from the nation-state, it is already a mega-narrative that survives on expelling those who either do not belong to it in the first hand, or no longer constitute its working machine. And since much of life domains today are organized around the claims of the nation-state, there is little to live that is not contradictory. Running away from superstructures is, I argue, potentially transformative for sociopolitics. The study of movement-like organizing under forms of activism, revolutions, and liberation fronts can often delude the importance of everydayness that articulates imaginations, hopes, fears, and most importantly questions around today’s populations relations and quandaries about order, violence, and capitalism. The nation-state in the imaginary of liberation movements is perhaps no longer the ultimate object of desire, but more of the conditions of the contemporary moment.

It is in this context that I adopt silence as a reflection on efflorescent threads of politics of the everyday. While there are chances that every reflection is an interpretation in its own respect, it perhaps consoles with not already confining hopes and fear into boxes of pronouncements.
Chapter 3

Warscapes and Historicization in the Western Sahara:
Rethinking the Categories

In summoning the past to reach an understanding of the present, it is all too tempting to see history as a chronology of events. The same holds true for the war in the Western Sahara, which in narration is over determined by the critical events of international conflict-solving machineries mobilizing power structures to end the conflict. Conflict over the Western Sahara erupted in a global and regional context. It was the global era of decolonization and the fitting of all social and political orders into nation-states. Decolonization was marked by the rise of nationalist projects and discourses that set the ground for a particular language which is now the foundation of international law, and all organisms governing power dynamics between states, markets, and populations. On the regional level, there was a novel articulation of political projects that did not go beyond the frame of the state, yet had a different vision than those who were in power. Such is the case for Morocco who witnessed debates on the kind of political ordering the population and parties wished to see. Hence, the history of the conflict is not detached from these larger dynamics that shaped the way the conflict is written today and the questions about it.

Accounts of conflict typically explore the rise of Saharawi nationalism and their rights in the new international mechanism of conflict-arbitration of self-determination. More rarely is the conflict treated as the materialization of violence in its social, economic, and armed trajectories. Here, I reflect on the ways in which narratives of war determine possible critical engagements with productions of conflicts and shape perceptions of sociopolitical transformations. If a critical reading of the historical narrations of the Western Sahara conflict is about reconstructing a political project, with particular aims and poetics, how are we to write about violence without starting from territorial assumptions?

Writing about Western Sahara departs more often than not from one’s relationship to the conflict. This thesis is informed by my struggle to convey the point that a conflict cannot be reduced to with/against. Often, political projects that start from nationalist rhetorics and liberation chants without turning a critical eye onto the premise of a national project in constitution—the creation of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic—which is often a replication of all the problems of modern nation-states, renders this question of with/against a ridicule in itself. The imperative here is to re-write a history of political violence without
falling in the trap of with/against? I ask can a reformulation of events of war, violence, and precarity constitute another political project that does not read propagandist, but rather one that is part of a larger historical global moment? Acknowledging that different localities manage differently moments of political violence, one can still claim technologies and dispositifs of power hegemony both in terms of writing history and constructing imaginations of past, present, and future. This chapter is concerned with narratives around the Western Sahara cause for independence from Morocco from 1975 until today as an attempt to engage with politics of narrating violence and subsequent imaginations around material, temporal, and spatial constructions of lives.

**Constructing Narratives of the Conflict**

Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony. The Spanish arrival in the territory was not marked by any confrontational encounter with the local population. Historical accounts tell that Spanish colonels respected the nomadic lifestyle of Saharawis and their political organization into tribes. San Martín (2010), through an interesting review of Hispanophone colonial archives, avers that the Sahara was an object of colonial desire. Spanish colonial voyages in the Sahara prior to military arrival have looked at territories and their respective governing political systems. The archival material historicized the Sahara as a free territory. Free in the sense that it did not belong to the ruling Alawaite Dynasty in Morocco whose rule extended to the banks of the Daraa valley, nor to the Emirates of Mauritania. The tribal organization seems to be ‘too primitive’ for modern colonial Spain; hence, it was depicted as a land that could be colonized without much trouble from the part of Saharawis. This ‘free land’ is the framework from which the United Nations, Morocco and Mauritania later, will mobilize each for its own interests to argue for annexation or self-determination. The legal term for such territories soon became styled in a new concept: non-self governing territories.

The conflict is portrayed by the dominant discourse to have started in 1975 when Morocco, under King Hassan II, decided to lead the Green March—where thousands of Moroccans chosen by municipal quotas marched to the Spanish Sahara—to liberate the territory. Prior to 1975 numerous resistance movements by local Saharawi populations resisted the Spanish military (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:103-09; San Martín 2010:66-82; Hodges 1983:32-33; Solà-Martín (n.d)). These are part of Saharawis’ memory, reconstructed through pamphlets constituting the nascent Saharawi nationalism, songs of liberation and patriotism, and popular recounting of Spanish decolonization. The conflict is generally
perceived to be from 1975 to the present between Morocco and Polisario with active war from 1975-91 until a cease-fire was signed.

One of the well-known scholarly works in the field of Saharawi Studies is *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism, and Conflict Irresolution* by Zunes and Mundy (2010). In the opening chapter they write “The course of the war [...] begins in November 1975, when Polisario aimed its guns at the new occupiers rather than at Spain” (2010:3). This event is depicted at the moment when Mauritania and Morocco transgressed their accorded territorial limits during and after French and Spanish occupation of Moroccan October 31, 1975 in what was called Spanish Sahara (African Research Bulletin, Oct 1975). The authors further detail military incidents, parties’ negotiations and discordances, and point to the moment when Hassan II decided to ignore the International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion on the issue of Western Sahara’s territorial integration into Morocco prior to the Spanish arrival. It is this event that makes Morocco guilty of occupation under international law. Why is the conflict considered to begin on 3 November 1975, not October 31 of the same year, or the time when Hassan II and the Mauritanian president were negotiating a deal to divide Spanish Sahara prior to hearing the ICJ opinion? This question does not aim at shifting the date from November 1975 to another one, but rather to reflect on politics and categories that embody beginnings and ends of conflicts. Put differently, this question reconsider meanings and trajectories of “The Event” that declare beginnings and ends of emergent sociopolitical situations. I argue, based on the projection of this conflict history produced so far, that certain political and academic choices produce hegemonic readings that portray the conflict as a subsequent chronology of events emptied of tensions and collisions, sustained and experienced by peoples’ lives. And, perhaps, most importantly, these readings cannot offer any further critical constructions and readings of alternative sociopolitical projects.

It is useful to locate the larger moment that shaped, on one hand, this conflict and on another, its writing and perspective from which political preferences are projected. In 1950s, world history was witnessing various struggles against colonialism. Euphoric scholarship was theorizing revolutionary movements that summoned independence from global colonial powers, and stories of resistance re-shaped the way history was re-written and categories were produced. In this sense, the Western Sahara conflict finds itself as part of this global moment. However, why is it that the Saharawi struggle for independence is seen to begin only from 1975? Spain as an imperial power colonized Western Sahara when Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria were also under French colonialism. But the initial narrative undermines the continuation of colonialism and begins only with the Mauritanian-Moroccan
invasion of the territory of the Western Sahara. Through the projection of fragmented colonial processes, the history of the conflict gets enmeshed in a specific reading of global politics. By global politics I refer to this particular production of categories, self-determination and non-self governance, that are made to channel the new ordering of polities. This is the main reason for reading the conflict’s history from a perspective of resolutions and diplomatic relations. It further entails the institutionalization of these categories and the production of knowledge from this vantage point.

Western Sahara’s conflict is an invitation to reflect on the complex relation between decolonization and self-determination. In the late 1960s, Saharawis have struggled for independence from Spain and formed the Liberation Movement of the Saqiyah al-Hamra’ and Wadi al-Dahab (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:103). The Saharawi liberation movement was “inspired by contemporary Arab and African liberation movements” (ibid), and the kind of political project the Saharawis were building did not differ much from the nation-state building reverie of the 1940s onwards. Spain was compelled by the new international states system to cease the territory and transmit institutional and governing powers to the local population. However, there was a problem to this logic to which the international system represented in the United Nations forged a new conceptual machinery to operate from. Saharawis did not organize themselves into an intrastate system that sustained modernity proper, explicitly from the 1690s to 1917. When Spain had to leave, it found itself confronting a social imaginary of political ordering that was not conceptually good enough for the international system. Indeed, the Saharawis had to be decolonized, yet, the question remained for the U.N: to become what?

To answer this question is to engage with the constituents of the modern global political order. Self-determination is the concept that has informed the Western Sahara conflict and all the failures of the creation of a Saharawi state. Its formulation comes as a by-product of nationalist doctrines (Danspeckgruber, 2002), a result of WWI and WWII (Buchanan, 1992; McQuorodale, 1994), culminating in a final statement of international celebration as part of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson Fourteen Points (Danspeckgruber,2002). It was incorporated as not only a political, but also a legal, concept in the United Nations Charter under Art. 1, 55, and 73 (UN General Assembly Resolution 1514, 14 December 1960). In the case of the Western Sahara, self-determination became the only framework from which—as I argue—was imagined to solve tensions in the aftermath of decolonization from major colonial powers. As a legal mechanism of arbitration of conflicts in the world of postwar global politics, self-determination erases historical inscriptions of
sociopolitical and economic violence. Informed by this break in the history of old colonialism, the forgiven ‘sin’ by international political system, self-determination as a theoretical framework and conceptual tool from which history of the Saharawi conflict is narrated conceals other dynamics that do not speak the language of resolutions and diplomacy. Furthered by the independence of East Timor from Indonesia under the auspices of UN organized self-determination referendum, an understanding of the Saharawi issue emerged from within the same framework. With the collapse of European colonialism in 1970s, an explosion of human-rights-based approaches in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, continued to focus on self-determination as the most important right from which all other human rights derived. In a meeting of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, Barbara White, spoke of the US historical experience as a model. She notes: “achievement of self-determination must mark renewed efforts to guarantee human rights and the dignity of the individual” (Telegram 4928, US Mission United Nations to State, Oct 1975). Where self-determination is realized, human rights can begin. Notwithstanding the contradictions that have historically formed these political global moments, the United States have kept an ambiguous position on the question of self-determination in the Western Sahara, East Timor, Palestine, and other places where the denial of self-determination are directly connected to human rights abuses. The framework that is still in work reads: rights make law, and law is bounded to rights (Mamadani, 2001).

Since the history of self-determination resulted from debates after WWII, former colonial powers sought to constrain self-determination to its anti-colonial and political sphere. It did not conceptualize it from the realm of cultural and indigenous rights, or economic relations—although this will soon reveal contradictions on legal understandings of political communities with specific cultural practices. Self-determination is a topic that does not stand on its own. It is rather intersected with contemporary debates on decolonization, the nature of sovereignty, and ethnic minority rights (Mamadani, 2001:685; Simpson, 2013:241). They intersect in the way they have been historically forged. That is, the scholarship on this suggests that the Atlantic Charter in 1941, United Nations Charter in 1944 and 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) have significantly ruptured the meaning of self-determination as a human right in colonial and postcolonial worlds. Debates that produced UN charters and frames from which these territorial spaces were to enter modern politics were also inseparable from larger political contests over postcolonial socioeconomic and political organization. These debates intersected with novel forms of deciding on state
sovereignty and the future of ‘informal’ European and U.S. empires, rather than presenting a new scope of human rights. Unanswerable questions were raised: “Was self-determination a human right or a general principle?” (Normand & Zaidi, 2008:212-20). And if so, was the “self” to whom it applied individuals, ethnic communities, or all people living within the boundaries of former colonial territories? Did it include political as well as economic independence? Did it apply to national groups seeking to secede from recognized states?

Samuel Moyn argues that anti-colonial movements used self-determination as the ideological framework for their national liberation movement because the UDHR of 1948 did not include self-determination as a human right. It was not until 1960 when a coalition of African and Asian states in the General Assembly advocated the passage of the Resolution on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. This resolution formally established self-determination as the “legal foundation for the establishment of the sovereign state from the colonial territory” (2010:84-119). It rejected arguments about primitivism as a basis for continued colonial rule made by various countries. The colonial question and self-determination exposed discourses of understandings of novel forms of organizing and ended up being institutionalized in either NGOs or Western governments. It served as a black box to fit populations into the international forum.

The UN General Assembly passed Resolution 2229 in 1966 affirming the right of self-determination for the people of Spanish Sahara. After six years it passed Resolution 2983 that again asserted the “inalienable right of the people of the Sahara to self-determination and independence” (UN 1975, 580). Since then, it has become the framework from which the Saharawis articulate their claim before the UN and other states. It is also the framework from which knowledge is produced on the Western Sahara.

Set to this background, constructing the category of Western Sahara and its people—Saharawis—is critical to mechanisms of governing social, political, and economic relations. This does not draw on simplistic questions of whether or not a population self-identified as Saharawis existed or not as such a category/identity. Rather, the very making of Saharawis and their territorialization into the concept of Western Sahara as a yet-to-become a nation-state probes the question of reinvigorating sociopolitical order through identification of categories. As Tony Hodges argues (1983), sedentarization and modernization gave rise to Saharawi nationalism. Hodges, however, overlooks other processes of becoming modern. The colonial experience pushed for some novel articulations of being. It was the interplay of colonial socioeconomic and political integration, together with growth of indigenous resistance to a colonial presence within territorial boundaries set by the Spanish
administration that defined a popular consciousness. This consciousness came to be expressed through nationalist sentiments.

In discussions of decolonization, it is often forgotten that the colonial confrontation and its experience were often ones of making and remaking the categories of dialogue. Colonial powers have imposed territorial boundaries that may or may not have coincided with regional patterns of political organization. Within these redrawn boundaries social and political changes were reconfigured. This reconfiguration of orders, concepts, and domains involving colonized populations, and in struggling against colonial impositions, I argue, had to come to terms with different philosophical and legal constructs that were innately from the global North. Western Sahara in this sense is constructed along the same hegemonic lines. The conflict over the territory is to a certain degree a conflict imbedded in mobilizing vocabulary. To dialogue with the colonial, a common vocabulary had to be brought into existence and had to involve Western modernist political constructs due to colonialist assumptions of ideological superiority. What followed was a reappropriation of these constructs within nationalist movements to envision the future they wished to create. The process was inevitable, for they would have to manipulate a colonial inheritance—fashioned by the Western political vision—in a post-colonial world. This has meant that independent states in postcolonial times had to come to grips with colonial organization and assumptions particularly those pertaining to the nation-state. The colonial heritage of ruling Africa produced its own categories of governing. Mamdani (2001) argues that these categories had to be race and ethnicity in most cases. The importance of these two categories comes in the form of “the language of rights [that] bounded law” (ibid:654). As the previous discussion on who ought to be the Saharawi outlined the problem had to do with how to identify the ‘originals,’ Mamadani uses historical and analytical threads to locate indignity as the main instrument of colonialism to grant rights. In so doing, “who was indigenous and who was not, at both the central and the local levels” become the basis of the MINURSO’s Identification Committee, the Saharawi shaykhs, Polisario, and the Moroccan authorities (ibid:658). Political identities are shaped in the immediate postcolonial experience as a specific consequence of the history of state formation. For the same reason, the whole process of first establishing, and second enforcing these identities through legal mechanisms shaped the “relationship to the state and to one another through the state” (ibid:663). In this, the Moroccan Saharawi was distinguished from the Western Saharan Saharawi, and from the Mauritanian Saharawi. Saharawiness had to be established as its own post-colonial independent category that has its own historical pedigree.
In Algeria and Morocco, this meant that ethnic diversity had to be concealed into a homogenous mould of Arabo-Islamic origins (Joffé, 1987:23), as well as a single historical moment being cited to ensure national harmony within the postcolonial state. It has been a difficult experience in both states as tensions of 1982 in Kabyle in Algeria, and those of 1958 in Rif in Morocco have shown. These uprisings characterized all contradictions and tensions in the making of the modern Moroccan and Algerian sociopolitical formations. Yet, self-determination for these populations did not resonate among the international system and states. George Joffé (1987:16-30) argues that the creation of national uniqueness is not confined to present or recent pasts but extends beyond colonial experience, for the creation of a sense of national uniqueness also requires the formation of a historical pedigree. Indifferent to temporality, this uniqueness must be constructed within what could be considered as historically demonstrable. From this perspective, nation-building requires the construction of a myth, a national history that cannot be disputed. Morocco argued to the ICJ that it had historical ties with the Sahara and that in precolonial times it had exercised a kind of sovereignty over the Western Sahara. Despite the Court’s acknowledgment of existing legal ties between the Alawaite Sultan and the Western Saharan communities, the Court did not regard those ties sufficient to demonstrate a territorial sovereignty (ICJ, Western Sahara, Opinion: para.68). The concept of sovereignty was after all the only way in which a precolonial situation could be extorted into definitions set by the UN and international law to allow for the application of paragraph six of the UN General Assembly Resolution 1514. Morocco’s claim was based on various treaty relations that demonstrated the ability of the Sultan to appoint local governors in the Sahara region, collect taxes and obtain oath of allegiance (ibid: para 103-107). It further argued, most importantly, that this concept of authority applied even when the Sultan was lacking direct political, rather timely fragmented, authority whereby Saharawis respected his spiritual status (1987:25). This spiritual status provided the foundation for a political authority according to the Moroccan postcolonial monarchy. Yet, for the Saharawis that live in the camps, the concept of the monarchy itself is highly contested, and references to the politics of contemporary Moroccan monarchy reflect a different understanding that will be explored in the subsequent chapters. At any rate, the Court disagreed with these historical readings presenting another interpretation to them. The Court primarily accepted the foundational nature of the precolonial Morocco state; it nonetheless argued that fealty oaths were personal and not indicative of sovereign control since their validity was limited to the person of Sultan (ibid). On the spiritual level, the concept of sovereignty as the Court understands it cannot be constituted upon religious ties.
Objections of the Court were in fact termed in the modern vocabulary that shapes new makings of populations into modern orders. While Morocco relied on historical readings of communal ties, its language pertained to an era that did not satisfy modern legal language. Epistemologically, the precolonial sovereignty was not the foundation of the Court’s logic. Even when the Court rejected the basis of Moroccan precolonial sovereignty, the identification commission of MINURSO opted for blood and land as the premise of defining Saharawis. Again, the argument Mamadani puts together in terms of how the shift from the colonial subject to the modern subject was forged through categories of identities portrays that what seems a contradiction in historical readings of the ICJ and MINURSO are about the malleability of the categories and not so much about their inconsistency. For the same reason, for the UN and all other parties, they had to solve the riddle of who is the Saharawi. This malleability did not articulate the pre-arranged attachment of political identity—belonging to a specific group that distinguishes itself from another—to a territory. The Sahara as a territory represented an ambiguous articulation of the way the land had to be given back to ‘its people’ because of the way the colonial administered it. In the context of the Sahara’s neighboring North African states, the institutions put in place by the colonizer forged the scene for the establishment of postcolonial states. In so doing, there were modern institutions, categories, and rights bounded to law that represented the readiness of the colonized states to perform postcolonial politics. The Western Sahara did not share the same colonial experience, not only because the Spanish colonizer had a different interest in the region, but also because the institutions that Spain had left upon its departure were very nascent in constitution. Although these institutions were the ones that Polisario will use to fetch its own nation-state narrative, in the eyes of the international community, there was no way to easily accept or reject the idea of a Saharawi territory. There are Saharawis, but this category remains a broad one that does not automatically transform into a Saharawi political identity, capable of performing modernist politics. There is also a territory. But to whom it should be given remains a question that is asked from the colonial epistemic vantage point. In the particular frame deployed to figure out who is the Saharawi, the collision happen based on either the suspension of colonial categories of defining Saharawis, or when the territory is presumed to be the premise of belonging. That is to say that the Saharawis as I delineate in chapter one are the ‘originals’ of the Western Sahara—already configured vis-a-vis a territory—or Saharawis that have the cultural identity of the Saharan group—restrained to a depoliticized identity and hence do not form a political identity. In both cases, the tension of modern categories is inevitable. However, if the process of finding out who is the Saharawi
reached an impasse—perhaps because the very existence of Saharawis is dependent on an abstract idea—then why does the UN and the Saharawis hang on to the discursive politics of self-determination? And, what does it mean for them in the first hand?

Events at popular gatherings organized at Esmara, Bojdor, and Laayoune camps in solidarity with families and Saharawis living in the Western Sahara under Moroccan control resonated with the term’s obscurity. When could self-determination be used and for what purpose? There was not a single time when I spoke with individuals not holding state political positions or politicians and did not stumble across the concept of self-determination. It seemed that there was no way to convey a point of refusing a political organization other than reiterating the word self-determination. A Polisario representative told me in an interview that “there is no other way since humanity emerged to know the opinion of the people without a vote. You can’t read the hands of the Saharawis. You can’t take a sample of them. Self-determination implies the vote of the people.” He continued,

The West is not really interested that Morocco gets bigger or that Western Sahara gets independent. They are more interested in what they call peace and stability in the region. And peace and stability in the region could not be achieved unless there is a qualified majority supporting either way. If there is no clear qualified majority that supports that Western Sahara stays Moroccan, or that Western Sahara be independent, the stability will not be achieved. Because tomorrow Polisario and Morocco agreed on signing something, I can say I am not part of that and I fight for what I think. It is my opinion. But in case me and her, and everyone has voted, and the majority approved what it wants, the others will keep quiet and will have to respect the outcome of that referendum. And that’s why United States, France, and UK want self-determination. Because without self-determination the issue will not be over. And this could grant peace and stability in the region, but only through the participation of everyone in the process.

(personal interview, January 2015).

Self-determination does not stand on its own in the sense that it is the larger concept that embodies a set of techniques that follow. One of these is a referendum whereby the ‘concerned’ people would vote for a choice among others: independence, integration, or autonomy, and later comes the question of who should be included as a Saharawi, and hence be allowed to vote. Nonetheless, the problematic that comes from this formulation is the
particular concealment of other readings of Saharawis’ imagination of themselves. The Saharawi national consciousness, which has been the focus of most literature on Western Sahara, brings uneasy questions as to what makes self-determination stand as the mechanism to solve a conflict, when the Saharawi project is not about determining but rather about liberating. Whether given the chance of holding a referendum or not, Saharawis articulate their will of independence. Yet, why is it that they have to speak the language of self-determination, especially if this legal frame did not forge a solution even after forty years of political negotiation but also armed violence?

The extent to which self-determination is adopted as state political discourse among Polisario leaders is the same for the population. The family I was staying with in Bojdor camp invited me to their friend’s wedding. On that day, Amina was helping in the kitchen, and although she sent her cousin to keep me company, I found myself alone having to deal with telling people that I was indeed a Moroccan. Mona, Amina’s cousin, seemed to fear people’s reaction when they asked her who I was. She always replied: “Ask her, she speaks Arabic.” With a smile, I replied, “I am from Morocco.” The eyes went wildly open. “Moroccan!” “Did she say Moroccan?” I repeated: “Yes from Morocco. Not very far from you.” There was a clear unease in the atmosphere. Women started discussing my presence and investigating the family that is hosting me while Mona kept quite all the time. Later, we all gathered around tables to eat. Two women from my table chitchatted about my presence in the camps. One of them looked at me and said: “We [Saharawis] do not have a problem with Moroccans. We just want our self-determination.” The other one followed her saying: “Thank god you did not meet a bad one. She is polite.” While eating, the table in the room’s corner hailed rhythmically on “No, no to autonomy. No alternative to self-determination.” It is precisely these moments that are awkwardly articulated. The unease with uttering a different project, even when it is national in nature, is not only due to an undesirable creation of a sense of rebellion against a ‘legally legitimate’ entity called Morocco, but also because the very idea does not inhabit the modern vocabulary. In other words, this is not only a matter of gaining recognition for a struggle confined in its colonial era, though crucial, it is rather about the possibilities of using a language antecedently defined as nonexistent. When this language reaches an incapacity to register what is being constituted and desired, the making of the present, the everydayness, and the experimental speak the unarticulated.

After most of the invitees left the ceremony, few women gathered around me to ask about my research. I seized the moment and asked one of them what it meant to her to say self-determination. She remained silent for a moment and insisted that determination meant
the right to choose. I asked her if she had already thought about her choice. She affirmatively replied: “Yes, I want to see the Sahara independent. I chose independence.” “You already have a choice. Why do you want the right of choosing if you have made up your mind,” I added. She smiled and sarcastically retorted: “the right of deciding on our land’s fate is not for us. It is for others in the world to believe that they have given us a choice. I don’t care if they give me the chance to vote in a referendum. But we are living in a time of democracy and law, and that’s the only way to make others respect your political choices.”

The statement in all cases is not ‘Saharawis want their independence; hence, they ought to have self-determination.” There is no equation that such independence leads to self-determination for it to be the constituent of a discourse. As it is reiterated among people in the camps, the Saharawi primary school curriculum of history also draws on the same language. In the third chapter of the fifth grade history school textbook, the lesson entitled withdrawal of Spain starts with the date April 1963 noting that “the United Nations affirms the right of Saharawis of self-determination” (document on file, November 2013). At the end of the one-page lesson there is “I conclude” section where the conclusion on circumstances of Spain’s withdrawal from the Western Sahara is divided into international and national axes. These two are ordered into the international as the first axe and includes four points;

International: - United Nations General Assembly: adopts in its decisions the right of Saharawis to self-determination, asking Spain to decolonization the territory.
- United Nations adopts in its decisions Western Sahara as a non-self governing territory and applies to it granting it its independence.
- The African Unity adopts in its decisions inclusion of Western Sahara in the list of territories requiring decolonization.
- The international and regional situations were marked by the rise of liberation wave especially in Africa and Arab nations.
Nationally: the rise of national ideology requesting independence such through the national liberation movement of the Sahara, founding the popular front and the beginning of armed struggle.

(document on file, November 2013).

Projecting the conflict’s foundations as such is not a random choice. The use of self-determination as the primary principle justifying the Saharawi position in narrating a political project conceals other transformations in thinking about politics, economy, gender relations, law, and modes of relating to others. In the second point stated above, nowhere is it mentioned by the United Nations that the Western Sahara should become independent, nor
that the right of self-determination explicitly implies independence. Therefore, what is at work is the uneasiness through which such institutionalized bodies as the Ministry of Education, needs to find a ground for the international legal vocabulary and national project terms.

**War: Different Front Lines**

Most of the Saharawis I encountered in the four refugee camps were either born after the 1991 cease-fire between Morocco and Polisario, or have witnessed the exodus of late 1975, early 1976. In either case, they narrated different perspectives on war, and uttered diverging understandings of war. The exodus and the experience of building the camps and fighting against Moroccan troops marked a different way of narrating war. War for ordinary—not holding state positions—Saharawis was a narrative block of interwoven stories of material, spatial, temporal, social, and economic crafts. Active war was a story that is neither glorified nor propagandized. Their stories are not about death tragedies and causalities, rather, of escaping to live and breathe with new possibilities of life.

On October 16, 1975, King Hassan II addressed Moroccans saying that it is not possible for Morocco to wage war. That war wasn’t one of the state’s values. He called for the Green March, peaceful popular march, with people holding the Moroccan national flag and the Quran and entering Spanish Sahara to liberate it. The March was composed of people selected based on municipal quotas. I asked my family on different occasions what they recall from the Green March. Most of them were aged between fifteen and twenty years. I was specifically interested in knowing how the state mobilized people and the discourses deployed to persuade people to travel all the way to Tarfaya, in southern Morocco to participate in the March. One of my relatives recalls that a woman who used to live nearby their house was really excited to participate. The municipal council, which my relative has a clear memory of, promised participants various advantages. Those were either monthly food coupons provided by the state and or free medical care cards. She told me that what drew people to the idea of the March was access to these free services provided by the state, especially for medical care. The woman came back with a lot of stories; she told everyone that they had fun. The trip on board of trains and collective living in tents when they stopped in cities gave her the chance to make new friendships. A few months after the March, my relative recalls, the woman was cursing everyone. The municipal council did not keep their promise. There was no food. No free hospitalization. This however does not mean that the
March did not represent to other Moroccans a true call of national liberation. Songs made during that period such as *Sawt El Hassan* are still popular in contemporary Morocco and sung in different occasions.

The March from different Moroccan localities started on 21 October, 1975. It is said that 350,000 Moroccans participated in it. The king delivered his last speech for the March on November 5 giving the go-ahead to marchers to transgress into Spanish Sahara. Saharawis told me another story; one that did not witness the glorified image of a peaceful Green March. My interlocutors did not meet Moroccan marchers; at the time of their arrival, most Saharawis in northern regions of Western Sahara had been bombed, killed, prematurely buried, or escaped into the desert searching for shelter.

*The Exodus*

Following the military invasion of the northern region of Western Sahara by Moroccan troops, and a similar process by the Mauritanian army, Saharawis fled to seek refuge from a sudden attack on their dwellings. It is perhaps easier to designate the beginnings and ends of war from a state perspective. Yet, for the people who experienced those moments, the events are shaped in a much more specific context. Nordstorm writes “even if we begin situating the “Where is war?” question with the stereo-typical (male) soldier, the realities of such a person’s life carry the definition of war to greater complexities” (2004:52). For a soldier in a battle, that is definitely war. For others, who found themselves in it, they couldn’t simply claim they were not involved in one way or another. They take a position in it.

November 1, 1975. I was in Jdiriya region the day the Moroccans entered. I was on the outskirts. A horde of gigantic army, with the latest ammunition entered. The earth got mixed with the sky. They split then to two troops; one going the direction of Al Farcia, another to Houaza. My family escaped towards Al Farcia. We spent one month and a half in the region of Al Farcia. We lived under the light of missiles. There were a lot of people. An endless line of cars appeared in the horizon everyday. They were cars of Moroccan army incursions into the Sahara. They eradicate everything they found in their way. Camels. Humans. Grass. Anything they found. They also poisoned the wells. When they came, people fled terrified. Women put their children on their backs and dispersed. Nearby cattle stampeded when they sensed the earth trembling from military tanks. Soldiers came to our tents and sat fire on them. They tore others.
We had centered in the outskirts. Not in the same way we have done it here [camps]. In every circle there was about thirty tents. When Moroccan soldiers arrived they have found most of them empty. We centered in other places, further down. That’s when the story begins. They bombed us with planes.

We were in a tent. Injured Saharawis came to us during day and night. Planes were bombing. We stayed there until we left in December. A car took us to Bir Benzaka. Once there two trucks came to pick us again. Our family did not want to separate, so we went on our camels. Until we heard planes bombings. We did not stop moving. I don’t know where we were. We found another military convoy coming from Mahbas. Cars. Trucks. Bulldozers. Tanks. There was not a single vehicle that wasn’t fully loaded with soldiers. They bored holes with their vehicles. I saw people fleeing on foot through gravel dunes. We were so thirsty. We drunk from salt rivers. Many got sick. While on the way, two Saharawi fighters crossed our way. They took us all in their car, but we had to leave our cattle. We arrived here late December [first camp close to Rabouni camp now]. Few tents were pitched. My seven siblings died and only I and my sister remained alive with my parents. My mother made our tent with her melhfa [long piece of cloth, Saharawi female dress]. I remember we heard the news of a family that was with us in the first camp. Moroccans caught them while walking and took them back. They mass buried them. Either buried vivisepture or fired.

I was lucky to come in a car. There were those who came on foot. Many of them were caught, brought back, and then thrown from planes. We later heard stories of Moroccan planes bombarding camps in the interior of Western Sahara with napalm and cluster bombs. Only then we heard the call from Polisario to move to Tindouf.

(personal interview with Safia, January 2015)
I met by chance one of the survivors of napalm attack in Oum Dreyga while I was attending a wedding during my first week of fieldwork. She was well-known to everyone, and her photos have appeared in different humanitarian publications, perhaps because she was one of those severely injured and who survived. I wanted to talk to her, but my fieldwork attendant asked me to wait until she presents me to her first, claiming that she is very emotional when it comes to recounting her stories of the past. She nonetheless was not reluctant to have a conversation with me. We all went to her house. And she started narrating events, without me having to ask.

I left from El Argub; I don’t remember the date. The Mauritanians invaded the territory. I have reached Oum Dreyga with other fighters to resist invasion. We were called by the Front to fight against the Mauritanian-Moroccan invasion. One day in February, the region was attacked by napalm and bombs. I was severely injured and lost consciousness. I sank into coma after suffering brain hemorrhage. I don’t remember what happened around me. Tersha started taking off her clothes showing me body marks. There is almost a flesh trench in her arm. The Algerians rescued us. We were very close to their border. I opened my eyes at the hospital and started cursing nurses. I thought they were Moroccans. A Saharawi fighter approached and reassured me that these are Algerians; they operated on me few days later. The hospital was full with Oum Dreyga victims. Some had to go to Algiers’ hospitals where doctors can perform surgeries. Here, it was full of madness. You see blood everywhere. It permeated your nostrils. When I recovered I went back to front lines to fight. At the time, Saharawis didn’t have military equipment. We used to hit Moroccans with what we took from them. They wanted to exterminate us [Saharawis] so we hit them back.

Hasna cared for injured Saharawis in Oum Dreyga who at the end escaped to the camps in Tindouf. I was in Sabti camp in the southern region. February 18 began in a cold morning. About twelve o’clock, there was a sound raid alarm which we hadn’t expected. Saharawi fighters ordered us to seek refuge in hills and hide under trees. It was all quick like a light blast. From the medical tent, I hear a moderately loud explosion which seems to come from a distance and, at the same time, the equipment is broken in with a loud crash. I realize now that a bomb has burst and I am under the impression that it exploded directly over our tent. Everything is in a state of confusion. I go outside and I see bleeding people. Many are seriously injured. I stayed
with the medical group and helped people with their injuries. A group of men hid under a tree, I remember their faces. I know their names. A cluster bomb dropped on the tree. It burnt them all. The difference between us and them [group of men] was few meters. People stampeded in all directions. Wherever we went we found flames, blood, and destruction. My friend Shaya’a Mint Ahmed died in front of my eyes. She went at bombing time to ask for help from a man. An explosive fell right on her hand. Before reaching her, she was already a corpse without head. Aerial bombing remained for the next three hours. At four o’clock they started again. The next day was the same. Bombings intensified. For three days, napalm and cluster bombs didn’t stop falling on us. If you looked back to Oum Dreyga, you could never say there were people living there. It was exterminated, and those who were lucky enough to escape, were almost skeletons exhausted of terror, distance, and hunger. I left the region in the first last convoy. The trip lasted for fifteen days under bombardment between enflamed valleys. The second last convey got captured.

These stories of Saharawis are not meant here to represent their unheard voices. By writing them as I have heard them I want to point to the fact that there memories are very episodic. The act of narrating for them did not require a question from my side. They started with what meant for them the most painful or the least important. Either ways, it was a different start than what I have heard from politicians in the camps. These stories are not about heroism. They are rather about pain, sufferance, and displacement. The war in its usual understanding as a temporal event of different battles is not invoked in the stories of Saharawis. When I later asked them about the meaning of the war for them, those who have survived the exodus and remember it, replied that it was not a moment of thinking, but one of trying to survive and help others stay alive. War in this sense invokes many tropes. War is obviously about armed violence, but thinking through violence as a material-bloc of experience reflects on other dynamics that simply do not take place in the battle front. That is, the war in the Western Sahara has different front lines. To the Saharawis, especially women I have encountered, it was a moment of reconfiguring their daily lives while their husbands, siblings, and sons went to the armed battle. Their front was one of lively memories of loss and life.

Younger generations in the camps born in 1991, the cease-fire year, see war differently. For them, the highest peak of war is going now. It wasn’t the confrontation of two armies, nor the insurgencies, but the fact that the United Nations put a hold on their lives meant for them an unforgivable act. War is against the silence surrounding their stories to occult them. These people grew up in the camps; all they recall are childhood stories, life in huts and relatives’ stories of death. The cease-fire did not end war. It put an end to a visible
armed combat. Yet, the cease-fire brought another phase in the lives of the Saharawis, whether those who are now old or the younger generation. And that is the violence of the wall that separates the Saharan land into land under the control of Morocco and another under Polisario.

The Cease-fire

In 1991, Polisario and Morocco signed a cease-fire agreement whereby a range of another to-be-achieved points had to follow. The UN started monitoring the armed zone which is the area of the wall. The agreement was to put an end to the war—the battlefield—and start the census process in preparation for the referendum. Eventually, the refugees living in the camps and Saharawis in the Western Sahara had to be counted. Along this came the process of filtration of what constituted a ‘real Saharawi.’ While the debate around this contested category represented tensions of the whole problematic of self-determination to the UN, Morocco, and Polisario, the focus here is more on the idea of a post and pre war periodization. Literature on the Western Sahara further depicts the war in a temporally fragmented frame (c.f. Zunes & Mundy 2010; San Martin 2010; Hodges 1983). I do not apply this periodization and rather argue that the war among Saharawis living in the camps is not seen and lived from this discontinued temporality. In fact, my engagement with the way Saharawis I encountered narrate their experiences of the war starts from the larger mode that sets all these episodes together. A limited understanding of war as the battlefield cannot look into larger dynamics shaping everydayness and the way its has been transformed by constant violence and tropes of discourse. If war is about manufacturing violence and the economic realm that governs it, the cease-fire, understood as ‘peace time,’ then the postwar period in Western Sahara merely shifted the mode of violence.

For those who grew up in refugee camps after the cease-fire, war means to them discursive violence. One of my interlocutors told me that the fact that I was educated and came all the way to the camps to do an ethnography on another person just like myself meant a lot to her. It characterized all what she could not do, because the world and its institutions were speaking on her behalf without knowing that she did not want them to do so. She sarcastically said “I have also done my master’s in Anthropology. Now I am stuck in a tent in this gravel desert. Do you think I like it?! Absolutely not. You are just like me, except that you have your pen who represents you, and I have a political Front that tells me what will happen” (verbatim proceedings, January 2015). This anecdote came when I asked her about
what she thinks war is all about. My interlocutor never answered my question directly, but rather referred to a context that cannot be fitted into post or pre war framework.

Discursive violence is primarily manifested in the way the war continued between Morocco and Polisario in a seemingly internationally declared time of peace. Dah reflects on the cease-fire time as a moment of the collapse of a political project. “Polisario have made a mistake by signing that agreement. All we got to is an endless round of futile negotiations that we all know will never present a solution that the parties [Morocco and Polisario] will agree to.” He adds, “It was a matter of responding to a colonizer, and now became a matter of diplomatic games. There is no such thing called peace. I live in nowhere, which is so exotic to the Security Council to discuss, and to Spaniards to come and click photos of us. It is a puppet show to convince themselves that they are making progress on this file” (personal interview, January 2015). Dah and others consider their lives still under wartime, not as if there was wartime and now it is back to normalcy.

There is a tapestry of intricate power relations that came into existence after the cease-fire. Younger people were faced with a discourse of promises and a language that they were not part of. As they got their education in universities in other countries, the material world have transformed their lives in many ways. Going back to the camps meant working a lot, had they wished, but without getting paid much. Prior to the cease-fire, Saharawi males were recruited by the Saharawi Army. The narratives around this employ the term ‘job’ to designate their position in the army. Although when I asked my interlocutors if their relatives who were soldiers got paid for their job as fighters, they looked at me in surprise and responded that it is a war of defense, an army that was forced to exist to defend its people, who were at the end your family, and hence they were not supposed to have monthly salaries. But these soldiers did receive money; however little to the soldiers’ families, it did not mean a compensation for work, but rather a help to sustain their families in the camps. Yet, they stress on the fact that fighting was a job—meant more of a duty. A job without a salary, but a little compensation for their families.

The end of the battlefield meant the end of these jobs. Armed violence, however understood, generated material possibilities that are not available for the younger generations. When there is war, there is sufferance, but also money. Such could the equation be articulated. The camps have quickly transformed in terms of facilities. Polisario was well aware of the new shapes of sociality and politics that will occur after the cease-fire, and given that it took about eight years for the UN to finalize the lists of voters on the referendum, it was necessary for the camps to develop some new economic aspects. Money started flowing
from shops that offered mechanical services, foodstuff, clothes, electronics, and else. And later on, it reflected also on the dwellings Saharawis lived in. The new clay-huts offered a better shelter and allowed a new kind of sociality to happen.

At the house where I was staying, we used to gather around the television in the living room while making tea. It was the ‘sacred time’ where no one talked. Eyes fixed on the TV, all conversations were postponed until the show was over. During the day, alleys in Bojdor camp were relatively empty except from children playing. Bojdor was the only camp that had an infrastructure for electricity. While other camps relied on different sources of power to use appliances, residents were very careful in their use. I observed that whenever I went to
Esamara or Laayoune camp, I found more men and women in the streets chatting, and more visitors in the houses, during the time I knew that at Amina’s house, and the neighbors, they were all gathered around the TV watching soap operas. These were new conditions created by Saharawis to counter various modes of violence in their daily lives. Frustration and hope merge together to create a new sense of life that neither waited for the approval of the Front, nor the international actors.
Manufacturing Violence

In the calculus of knowledge production, the Western Sahara conflict erects an absolute geopolitical space. The object of knowledge of this conflict extended further to the study of Saharawi refugees in the five camps in Tindouf, established after the population exodus in early 1976 from Western Sahara to Algerian territory. Presentations of the refugees read exceptionality, resistance, and politics of survival that are also based on the same hegemonic account of Western Sahara’s independence movement, with varying degrees. Pablo San Martín, a professor of Spanish Studies, did an ethnography of Saharawi nationalism and identity after his visit to the camps in early 2000s, and laid the conflict in Sahara as an object of desire to Spanish force. San Martín (2010) locates the emergence of Saharawi nationalism in relation to “colonial technologies and strategies of control” which started from Spanish arrival in the region. Although the main aim of his study is not to draw parallels to nationalist projects and wider contexts of colonizations, San Martín still constructs a wider hegemonic historical narrative. His attempt is to “craft and plot, in a single historical narrative, a series of stories, anecdotes and events about Africa’s last colony enunciated by very different voices and from very different positions and historical contexts” (ibid:4). The desire to write a single historical narrative is perhaps illuminated by the sole conclusion of his book which is the promotion for independence as the only solution to temporariness and precarity in the camps. However, the problematic that confronts this grand narrative is twofold. First, there is no consideration of history and memory engendered by Saharawis living in Western Sahara under Moroccan control. Second, the denial that single historical inscriptions erase experiences that either do not fit into the current of the narrative, at odds, or cannot be hegemonized and totalized.

Narrativization is an act of looking at connections of the past and attributing meaning to it. The significance of telling the past as a story is a reconfiguration of matters that seemed to be separate, to be connected and referenced to each other as to imbue a meaning. Hence, events have a meaning within a story, and they do not solely relate to the real or imaginary, but rather a pre-figuration of the meaning of history in its form and mode. San Martín writes about the ‘social imaginary’ and the ‘real’ history as two realms that Western Sahara’s history. He argues that the ‘social imaginary’ is the collective memory manifested in the collective Saharawi identity (2010:133). That is, an imaginary that has the ability to recall
ideas and events that do not present an informed narrative. In his writing, the contested
difference that marks the imaginary from history of Saharawi anti-colonial struggle is the
articulation of the national historical chronicle. Despite that the Saharawi demand of
decolonization from Spain has marked the formation of guerrilla groups in Southern Morocco
and scattered parts of Spanish Sahara, the joint operation between French and Spanish armies
called *Opération Ecouvillon* in 1958 against the newly formed rebel group called Sahara
Liberation Army (SLA) does not form the Saharawi narrative about anti-colonial Struggle.
They are “contextualized in a wider-ranging narrative of Saharawi bellicosity, but not
understood as part of modern Saharawi national consciousness” (ibid:70). What informs this
understanding and “Saharawi national consciousness”?

The assumption of “Saharawi national consciousness” is that it was formed in the
consequent years following the death of Bassiri and repression of other Saharawi militants;
however, and more importantly, it was fully attained by the death of Polisario founder
Mustapha El Ouali in 1976 in an insurgency in Mauritania (Zunes & Mundy 2010:116; San
Martín 2010:79). With the “national” as a character of producing one discourse to solidify the
creation of Saharawi nation-state, the Polisario leadership appropriates events to hegemonize
history for the political purpose of state formation. Ethnographic work based on interpretation
of pictorial images of Saharawi school children shows that the markers of state institution are
used to narrate a particular history of the conflict. As San Martín reflects, there is a
reproduction of Saharawi history and cause for liberation through the political designation of
names, symbols, and discourses. Such was the case in a visit I payed to a kindergarden in
Esamara camp where teachers asked a few children to stand in front of me and tell me the
names of each and every photo that hung on the room’s wall. Looking terrified, the children
who were aged between 3 and 5 years knew already the markers of the Saharawi struggle, the
flag, and the map of a territory they have never seen. The teachers were happy and proud of
the kids performance in front of me.

The National Museum of War in Rabouni camp in Tindouf contains, as San Martín
describes and from my own visit, three divisions each creating a theatrical spectacle of
photos, barbed wires, flags, et cetera. Hence, the history of the conflict is about heroism on
the Saharawi side, and of repression and colonialism on the Moroccan side: two components
that create the wider theatre of modern (institutional) national history (Wilson 2010 & 2013).
For instance, there is no mention of what the Jamaa members (a Spanish-created political
group of Saharawi male individuals representing their respective tribes before Spanish
administration. Zunes & Mundy 2010; San Martín 2010, for fuller descriptions) and their
families have experienced in the erupting years of the conflict given that they held political accountability of negotiating Spanish resistance to decolonize through their participation in its regime. Instrumentalization of war history is not the focal point of attention given that past scholarship has argued that in most cases of modern nation-state formation, the political discourse hegemonized history and portrayed it as heroism, I rather shift the attention to the political project underpinning academic writing reckoned at engaging with the disturbing factors of overshadowing experiences and ways in which history and memory are complemented. From this perspective, the absence of experiences of violence leave the conflict narrative constructed on a structure of global domestication of time in new figures of the conflict: UN resolutions.

Violence in this narrative is therefore a condition, not simply a historical formation. It is not limited to what we think of as the modern manifestation of collision between forces, namely the nation-state. Violence is a hierarchical mode of organizing power that appears as a tendency or impulse throughout history. Foremost accounts telling the story of the conflict have put in place the general context that set the state for war later. What follows this context is a chronology of key events that is exhaustive in terms of inclusion of the historical foundations of diplomatic negotiations. The argument in the last section was about the disturbing factors in telling the story of conflict in a chronological linearity that disregards other terms. While the kind of historical narratives presented in the literature on Western Sahara can serve as a larger framework of modern conflict resolution, they mechanically reproduce a narrative that cannot be deployed in the present. In one way or another, the scholarship on Western Sahara is a mediation between praxis and theory. Each from its academic location, most of authors discussed here have a moral commitment towards the Saharawi cause; their vocabulary reflects a support for the Saharawi struggle for independence. And also an urgency for their work to find shelter within international actors that can be convinced of the Saharawi cause after having read their accounts. However, if this particular project, in its academic or praxis form, is about social transformation, then it is the moment to look at the unutterable. My argument is against filling in the blanks of the historical meta-narrative. I rather argue that Western Sahara conflict, war, and stalemate need to be revisited to emphasize on the moments and experiences that have formed structures and subjectivities that are silenced. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014; 2011b) argues, in the camps, research is considered to be either bad or good. Bad if it portrayed tensions happening within the single narrative created by Polisario Front. There can’t be political or social contestation; there is only unity and equality that make the Saharawi struggle for independence and their
organization ideal in the camps. Good research is the one that stresses on the fascinating elements of women’s emancipation, social justice, and self-management of camp population. While Fiddian-Qasmiyeh formulates the problematic position of the researcher on Western Sahara as the “[failure] to address the urgent needs of certain groups in the camps” (2014:247), I would distinguishably argue that the need is not merely to be alert to addressing these needs but to reformulating them first.

Rethinking the history of Western Sahara engages with various complicated grounds of representation, political accountability, and transformative possibilities of the cause. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argues that certain groups are seriously affected insofar self-censorship has categorized certain dynamics in the camps as private to serve the larger network of international solidarity (2014: 248). Yet, it remains a limited project to aim for countering the official discourse of situation in the camps due to the context of camps’ creation as part of a broader moment of war. And the possibilities of transforming such a situation remain within the particular reading of history that camps’ residents, Polisario Front and SADR, and international organizations and researchers tell it and address such issues. On this note, examining these narratives in relation to violence requires positing the political in relation to amissing obstructed spaces. Obstructed not in the sense of another hegemonic thinking of spatiality as pertinent to ruly/unruly or abnormal political order. Rather, obstructed in reference to the global mode of administering the social in the contemporary. Second, this analytical lens does not attempt at ignoring past accounts. The position here is to decolonize the academic grand narratives that are embedded in the practice of perpetual screening of individuals in attempt to capture the constitution of stories that never found place in our categories, understanding, and writing. In this sense, my aim is to pause for another time the necessity for a reinterpretation of voices and stories we aim to decrypt for various reasons. To acknowledge that there are myriad ways of living and becoming requires the reinvigoration of our language, categories, and research politics. Such is my aim to build on the previous literature, but also to challenge some of its foundations.

If Western Sahara today is about the precarity of the political moment, of the unpredictability, how are we to write violence? As Stephen Lubkemann has argued, anthropologists cannot help “actually ‘doing history’” in the conventional history of reconstructing the events of the past (2008:31). An alternative available to us is to commence with violences of the present. To write ethnographies of violence that do not treat violence and its ubiquitous forms of war, conflict, and camps as ahistorical formations of nuanced life trajectories. That is, reading violence in its current formation and past imprints is the juncture
when we begin to understand the larger dynamics of this conflict, and the future of the modes of transformations we find there. Arjun Appadurai (1996) argues that “the worst kind of violence in these wars appear to have something to do with the distorted relationship between daily, face-to-face relations and the large-scale identities produces by modern nation-states and complicated by large-scale diasporas” (154). Because most of ethnographies on Western Sahara focus on identity formation and its importance to shaping Saharawis in contemporary global politics, Appadurai’s argument well points to other processes that subvert the making of relations, subjectivities, and performance of violence. However, distortions of contemporary violence in its global and local contexts cannot be treated as black boxes, nor can it be silent on the sites it intersects with and functions from. I, therefore, argue that violence in Western Sahara conflict gets actualized in processes of production and consumption, venturing into varied domains of life. As argued previously, because most of scholarship on Sahara’s conflict was uttered from the legal vocabulary of international dispute solving, it has blurred other dynamics of violence taking place simultaneously along state-lead violence.
Chapter 4
Walking the Invisible: Geopolitics of Fear and Political Imaginations

Prelude

One evening my camp attendant came to the tent and told me that the man who crossed the wall wanted to talk to me. I had already met him at AFAPRADESA and the president introduced him to me but he was reluctant to converse. When we sat at the table, he told me “you know what, I don’t know if there is a beginning or and end to my story,” he smiled and continued “but I know that I have escaped hell, although the journey was another hell.” From there I didn’t ask him a single question. And this is how he thought, felt, and narrated his journey of crossing the wall.

Safar was an intifada militant and media correspondent for the National TV [SADR Channel], National Radio, and other media outlets in Europe and the camps. Along the years of Intifida from 21 May, 2005 to 12 Juin 2013, I was arrested many times and kidnapped by Moroccan repressive forces. It was tough days; it was a period of attack and retreat between us and them [Moroccan force]. In terms of human rights, forget it, there was nothing as such known to the forces. In 2013, the US Congress released a law implying the necessity to respect human rights in Western Sahara. It was May 4, 2013. Saharawi cities [in Western Sahara] all went out in protest and it had a vibrant resonance in international media. We got rid of that fear in our hearts that we had for the Moroccan executioners. 2013 was a year of peaceful intifada, and I was among those who coordinated it in May and Juin 2013. There were big demonstrations in occupied Esamara and other cities. During the days of intifada, I used to supply media outlets [Saharawi] with reports and videos. We did not work in secrecy. It was all known to Moroccan authorities which made them hysteric. Any person who was part of an organism had to be deterred. Under such conditions, Moroccan forces tried to wrangle over letting go of demonstrations. Protests kept going until Juin 6 or 7. The confrontation between us and the police in Esamara was brutal. We organized a peaceful protest and then a setting but repressive forces intervened, which made the confrontation inevitable. They beat and dragged women, children, and elderly. It generated hatred and rancor in us towards Moroccan police,
gendarmes, and Gendarmerie, and Mkhaznia [army personnel to intervene in civil situations]. Confrontation was violent, to say the least. Videos are put on the net, videotaped by Moroccan police, and they tried to broadcast them on regional channels of the Moroccan TV, Laayoune, 2M, and else. They wanted to mislead the public opinion that our protests were not peaceful, that we didn’t merely have national flags [SADR flag]. They intervened so that they drag us into violence. Confrontations lasted for three days. No sleep. No food. No drink. We continued the fight against them.

On May 10, it was even a larger confrontation between us and the forces. It reached the extent to which they had to intervene with the Sixth Artillery Unit belonging to Royal Military Forces that was based in Selwan river, south of Esamara. We were seventy young males clashing with them. This unit is specialized in royal air defense that had its military garrison proximate from MINURSO team-site in Esamara. Clashes were fierce.

At 1 A.M. I received a phone call from vice-governor of Esamara Abdelhakim Amer, I still have a lot of documents on him. He called me on my number. Those days I had an iPhone. I had a program that revealed the name of the caller. I entered the number he called me from and it gave me Abdelhakim Amer. At the beginning he talked in a normal tone. “How are you? Fine. How are you?” He asked me is this Safar Bassiri. I replied positively. He then told me “you and the guys following you should leave from that street.” I was on the rooftop recording the clashes. I told him “First and foremost, this is a way of resistance and there is nothing could be done to dismantle it. We are ready to clash with you to whichever extent.” I hung up the phone. He called again. The first time he used my first name, the second my family name and introduced himself. He told me “you will leave the street or I will fuck you up.” I hung up. Turned off my phone, and threw the sim card away.

A rock fell on my hand. I went home. Whatever cameras, recorders, laptops, and things I used in my work, I took them out of the house. I hid them somewhere else. I was expecting that they will come. They talked to my family and told them that they will raid the house. I went home at 2 A.M.. Took my things and went to my aunt’s house. I was followed by a policeman on motors. My aunt was a prisoner in Magouna [prison name] for twelve years. That time, there was no fear. I went to her, she cured my hand. I went to sleep in a room. At 5 or 6 A.M. I heard police in the street. I glanced off the window and saw police. However, they weren’t the police I knew. They were a group brought from Rabat as I later found. A group of special forces
belonging to Ministry of Interior. Their dress was composed of masks, helmet, earphone, and a pistol. They came, wandered in the street, and they found an old man doing ablutions. They didn’t know the house. I saw them looking at their GPS, but it was clear that they couldn’t locate the house. The man showed them the house. They came in twelve cars of v8 type. They knocked and told my aunt to give them Bassiri. She replied that she has no one to give. They pushed her and came into the house. The moment when I saw they were approaching, I entered the wardrobe and closed it on me. I heard them shouting “Bassir come out. Bassir the killer.” I think that they needed me to leave Esamara to control the situation. So that the city calms.

Before that, they arrested four of my friends. Anyway, they entered the house and tuned it into a mess. It was a hollywood movie. I truly wished I had my camera, I could have filmed them from the wardrobe. They were so scared. They dragged their shoulders on the wall until they reached the door, and hit it at once while screaming “be careful I will shoot, I will shoot.” They entered with pistols. Hollywood movie. My aunt sarcastically told them that they were crazy, as if they were looking for Tom Cruise. I think they came thinking I was huge in size. They were so scared. (Laughing) Had they known that if one of them caught me he could have easily folded me.

When they entered the room [Safar was at], there was my cousin laying on his bed. One [of the forces] lifted him and put him on the ground. He then overturned the bed. He reached the wardrobe. I still remember his face. He was the one to bring them home. He works in the section of DST [Directorate of Territorial Surveillance] in Esmara prefecture. His name was Mostafa Daif. He opened the first door, the second door; I was in the third one. He passed it and opened the fourth door. They stood in front of the house door shouting that the house had a basement. What made them sure I was there was another bed in another room that was still warm. Police asked my aunt who was sleeping there. There was only my aunt, cousin, and I. They asked her who was sleeping here, and there, and in the other room? This made them certain I was there. She told them that I don’t know Safar, he came or not. I don’t know. They went outside. She closed the door, and I passed to the garage. I left from the rooftop with a satchel where I put my laptop, camera, and recorder. I entered a family house. I found them having breakfast while listening to Polisario channel at 7 or 8 A.M.. The correspondence I sent the channel day before was broadcasted that moment. I entered and the man panicked. I explained to him that police were after me.
He told me to sit with them and have breakfast. After that, I went back to the rooftop and kept overlooking at them [police]. I wrote another correspondence at 9 A.M. and sent it. They broadcasted it at night [SADR TV]. The police saw it and were sure that I was still there. I ended my correspondence with “Safar Labsir from Esamara.” They heard Safar and went crazy. They went to my grandparents house. They came to our house and found a book where I used to write my reports. They tore it page by page in our living room and urinated on it. They didn’t leave a single place of family relatives without searching it, including our dwellings in the badiya.

Few days later, I videotaped a reportage and broadcasted it on facebook. They got even angrier; Safar is still in Esamara. They kept searching endlessly. That week Esamara was literally shut down, fear was dominating. They went to my mother and told her that they will keep her with them [some police station] until Safar comes. She yelled at them. They left. It remained like that until it was necessary for me to leave Esamara. It was the first time it gets as intense. I had to leave.

I left in a car belonging to the prefecture from Esamara to Tan Tan. The driver was going to Tan Tan to be at an inauguration of something. I went to his house; his son told me that his father was going to travel at 3 PM. His son is my friend. The plan was to stay in the luggage compartment. I was also sure that even if his father found me he wouldn’t have a problem. As the agreement, I stayed in the luggage compartment, and the man drove away. We reached the gas station; it was in the middle of the road between Esamara and Tan Tan. When he got into the station, I smelled gas. I opened it, and got out. I saluted him. He was surprised. He knew police were searching for me. “What are you doing here? Police are after you.” I told him “I came in your luggage compartment. You will take me with you to Tan Tan.” He fearfully asked me not to stay next to him and to remain in the luggage compartment. I was afraid that he will take me to the police, but he was even more frightened. We arrived to Tan Tan and he dropped me in a street.

Police got to know about this car. I knew from his son that he was interrogated by the police. I stayed in Tan Tan two days. I then went to Agadir. But I wasn’t comfortable. So, I went back to Laayoune on a vegetables truck. I spent there few days, but they found me. I went to a cyber café and used the internet. I think they got to know from there. I was at my friend’s place. This time policemen were even greater in number. I jumped from the second floor to the hall in the house I was at. It was night. I went to another building that overlooked the street. I escaped from the
second door, took a taxi and headed towards another friend. Police followed me to this friend’s house again. I then got to know they were following my phone. I broke my phone and threw it, and moved to the next building, I was running, and a woman shouted from upstairs “Who is it?.” I told her “nothing, I was just checking on my clothes. I am the one who lives downstairs.” She understood the situation and replied “Fine, just carry on.” She was guarding upstairs in case policemen come from the rooftop. I took a taxi and went to my uncle’s house where I spent the night. The next day I bought some clothes, put them in my bag, and took another Mercedes taxi to Esamara. Strangely they did not stop us while on the road for the usual checking. I arrived at Esamara and after two days I left again. There was only 45 kilometers between me and the wall. I had already decided that I was coming to the camps. When I reached Tan Tan, I had already made up my mind to leave Western Sahara. I was sure had they caught me they would have injected me with something, as it happened to a lot of friends.

I left Esmara and I arrived at a region called Tazoua, very close to the wall. My uncle had his cattle there in 2005; we used to go there to get it. I knew that area very well. It was 7 P.M. It was summer so at night it is clam. Any suspicious movement will get detected by the soldiers. The difference between me and them was approximately twenty kilometers. I had a bag on my shoulders where I put my laptop, camera, and few clothes. I walked along the river until there remained three kilometers between me and the wall. I had passed all the military units [backing mobile forces]. Every now and then, a soldier bypasses me. One of them was listening to music on his phone. It was so dark, they couldn’t even notice me. Whenever I felt I could move further, I walked slowly until the wall was only ten meters ahead of me. I found a hole where I sat. I put the bag in the hole, and crawled a gravel hill. I found out a military unit behind that hill and I came back. I was wearing military boots. Had they seen footprints, they would have thought one of their soldiers. I decided to keep quite for some time and then I crawled back to the hill. I couldn’t clearly see the soldier, but the light in the unit was reflecting on his rifle. I stayed there for a long time. The soldier’s phone rung, and I heard him saying “wait until chief of units comes and I will join you.” A car that seemed to have the chief passed by him later on and he saluted him. The soldier called back and said I will come. He left his place. That night I had no water. I went to his place I found some water, I took whatever was left with me.
I knew it was an area full of land mines. Fear started from there. I passed the first belt. I reached the end of the belts. I thought for a moment that if there are mines then I should walk in steps. Foot in front, foot in back. I decided to move in a linear direction. If I stayed alive, that is it. I reached safely. I took my phone and called Abdelhakim Amer. When he picked up I directly told him “Here I am at the Saharawi liberated territories. Do whatever you would like now.” I hung up. I called my family and told them I had reached.

I spent the night there alone. In the morning, a car belonging to Saharawi Army came to me. They were suspicious towards me. They brought me to the camps. And here I am now, a Saharawi refugee.

**Violent Architectonics of the Wall**

I was packing my bag for next day trip to the wall. It was going to take eight hours of driving. The trip was organized for a group of international visitors and I was one of them. I had already received security approvals from both the Saharawi and the Algerian side. My phone rang; my fieldwork coordinator informed me that security officials cancelled the trip. No reasons were given at the time. Two days later I learnt that it had rained in the wall area, and some land mines had drifted to the safe area few meters away from where visitors stand facing the wall. While Saharawi Security Forces were patrolling the area, a cluster bomb exploded and a soldier lost his leg.

A sand wall in the Western Sahara separates the land controlled by Moroccan authorities and the SADR respectively. When I first read that the separation barrier was a sand wall I thought it was the most ridicule idea. I was proven wrong. The incident that happened right prior to my planned visit and what I heard from my interlocutors subsequently made me feel that same fear they had. The wall has different names depending on who is referring to it. It is usually known in the literature as the *berm*. Moroccan authorities call it the security belt, and Saharawis call it the wall of shame (jidar thuli wal ‘ar), and in vernacular Hasaniya (Saharawi dialect of Arabic) the obstruct (*al-rabt*). In one of the discussion groups I facilitated (January, 2015) I told them that I did not understand why they call it the ‘linkage,’ thinking of another meaning to the Arabic word they used: *al-rabt*. They bewilderedly replied that it was from a Hasaniya meaning designating the process of
obstructing movement, life, and relations they had with spatial, ecological, and familial realms.

The contemporary moment is witnesses an increasing number of walling of cities, nation-states, and communities. Discourses on the walling imagination forges contradictory notions of inclusion/exclusion and opening/blockading. Reading this materialization of an imagination extends from being a discursive modality of governing masses of bodies to a mechanism of producing new sociopolitical orders based on reconfigurations of modes of mobilization, organization, and materiality. Walls, regardless of their material shape, aim to reshape dynamics around space. The practice of walling imagination to a set of spatial, social, and temporal domains unfolds the external and internal organization of space in a narrative pertaining to the logic of nation-states (Brown, 2010:52). Walls refer to particular appropriations of space by mobile subjects and states, they further deliberate new sites of interactions. Brown argues that walls and boundaries are social institutions that reproduce conditions for governance and governmentality (ibid). Conceptually, walls and boundaries constitute the same control mechanism, they are meant to keep the outside different from the inside: bodies and polities that are not wanted. However, walls and boundaries do not necessarily imply the use of same historical techniques. They have different historical genealogies and readings, and the way I use them here is not meant as a substitution, but rather as a modality of control to keep those unwanted outside its territorial sphere. It is the relation between a twofold dynamic that spatial walling imposes on the generation of governable mobile subjects from ungovernable flows. This approach explores how walling practices aim at disciplining and governing mobility without losing combat over sociopolitical productions of subjectivity. However, what I intend to reflect on is against the binary internal/external of space. The dynamic that exists between modes of governmentality portrayed in walls and the stories of navigating control raises questions pertaining to the interplay of power and its administration.

Walling remains an imagination for the inability of walls to stop generating new contexts for people in contact with it. In other words, walling is a practice for the state and capital machinery and an experience for those in contact with it. The rhetoric of the walling imagination is productive in its creation of fiction. Brown contends that walls do not work to resolve the problems posed to the nation-state: security, migration, disorder. They are rather implicated in the logic of more capital deployment in technological maintenance, subcontracting, and weaponization of sites. While there is much merit to Brown’s argument,
what remains to be also explored in relation to the production of subjectivities is the imaginary itself in its internalization, or lack thereof, and its blend with political paradoxes of associational actors that goes beyond familiar state categorical narratives.

In cases the first reading of the wall’s existence is from a military perspective, there is little to be said if the problematic is not enlarged to emergent modes of being and living in relation to materially spatialized lives. In the Palestinian domain, Abourahme (2011) argues that modes of being and living emerge in ways that help us to rethink our questions. The questions we pose regarding the rise of fortifications shape the kind of political projects we aim for. Conditions of walls as material constructions, or in Abourahme’s ethnography the Qalandia checkpoint, force subjects to learn new strategies to subvert the claimed temporariness of their situations into political action (ibid:459). Furthermore, the interaction between walls and subjects remains a one of open change even in its most banal form. Banal actions are part of the mediation of exclusion and injustices by “turning them into sources of profit or subverting their control of movement and negotiat[ing] seemingly endless liminalities” (ibid). Abourahme’s use of banal comes in the specific context of practices and actions that are a daily routine. These can be going to the market, finding jobs, building houses, and purchasing goods. Actions that are rendered banal are the ground from which individuals challenge what is taken from them discursively and materially.

The history of the Moroccan wall is one that is still grounded in the logic of anti-guerilla warfare. Zunes and Mundy write that the war in the Western Sahara turned the tide by the construction of the wall in that “Morocco switched to an entirely defensive strategy” (2010: 20). Similarly, in an interview with a military official at Rabouni camp, he told me “that for us as the military, the wall meant the retrieval of Morocco from a position of attack to one of defense.” The same official adds, “the idea of the wall was suggested by the American Intelligentsia Bureau, but the initial idea came from the Israelis” (personal interview, January 2015). However, this can only be one little part of a larger mode of displaying power. Even under the cease-fire, Morocco kept arming and renovating detection systems, and implanting land mines and cluster explosives every now and then. The effect it has on Saharawis and on the patterns of regional capital is enormous.

_The Wall: Structure_
The Moroccan Army built the wall over a period of six years in six phases. Initially the construction of a wall was sought to protect the phosphate belt of the Boucraâ mining site. Saharawi insurgencies intensified between 1975-1980 in the Western Sahara, and the Moroccan Army, under the command of king Hassan II, had to protect the transportation of phosphate from the Boucraâ mining site on conveyor belts to the Laayoune port. The first walling belt was constructed from August 1980 to June 1982 and encircled a 500 kilometers of what is called the ‘useful triangle’ of Laayoune, Esamara, and the phosphate mines of Boucraâ. Western Sahara's phosphate is often considered by political analysts as the main reason for king Hassan’s invasion, even when the king rejected this suggestion (Hassan II 1978: 163, cited in Shelley 2004: 19). In other instances, this point was disregarded considering that the bulk of Morocco’s phosphate reserves are in its northern regions, giving it between half and three-quarters of the world’s known reserves (Zunes & Mundy: 35). Zunes and Mundy contend that the protection of Sahara’s phosphate costs Morocco more than their initial worth. Between 1976-1977 guarding the conveyor belt that connects the mining site to the port of Laayoune was difficult, hence production stopped by the end of 1977. The berm provided the condition for the exploitation of the mines which restarted in 1982.

From December 1983 to January 1984, the second 300 kilometers berm surrounded Amgala. The third belt took only one month of construction between April and May 1984, enclosing Jdiriya and Houaza. Mahbas and Farcia, the area that today hosts, the only safest area for visitors from which to see the wall, was fortified in January 1985. From May to September 1985, Guelta Zemour, Bir Anzarane, and Dakhla, a strip of 670 kilometers was finished. The sixth and final belt surrounded Auserd, Tichla, and Bir Gandouz.
of warning to travelers or Moroccan settlers in the region to take precaution. The exact
especially from Laayoune
visited the Western Sahara from Laayoune to Guerguerat, which is
is not clear if the belts inside the Western Sahara are still there or not. The three times I have

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April 2014 (Colour)
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Source: MINURSO maps, April 2014. MINURSO Mandate, Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section.

In total, six berms have been constructed to amount to 2700 kilometers of a fortified wall. As the graph above shows, the belts also lie deep within the Moroccan-held areas, but it is not clear if the belts inside the Western Sahara are still there or not. The three times I have visited the Western Sahara from Laayoune to Guerguerat, which is primarily a coastal road especially from Laayoune-Bojdor-Dakhla, I did not see any fortified belts. I also never heard of warning to travelers or Moroccan settlers in the region to take precaution. The exact
number and location of belts remain a source of confusion, and I think for the Saharawis themselves. The wall that separates the Polisario zone from the Moroccan zone of the Western Sahara is the wall that my interlocutors refer to, as one in totality, and not the historically fragmented belts that make the wall today.

The wall is compared to other walls in the contemporary world both for its sheer scope and divisional purposes it serves. A military official described the wall as the culmination of all walling experiences in the past. It was a wall that gathered all the tricks of China Wall, Berlin Wall, and Morice and Challe Lines, and rectified all their flaws. “The Moroccan Wall is similar to the China Wall in its height and locus of backing mobile forces. It took from the Berlin Wall the idea of bunkers and anti-vehicle trenches. And it added from Challe Morice Line the barbed-wire, land mines, and explosives to its structure” (personal interview, January 2015).

The Moroccan wall is composed of five belts/lanes. Starting from the Moroccan-held side, there are a wide range of electronic detection systems that track down all trespassers and ammunitions. The second lane consists of anti-vehicle trenches. Beneath these two lanes there is a bunker whereby Moroccan soldiers have access to arms. The third lane consists of the sand and stone wall, followed by a field of cluster bombs, explosives, and land mines. The final fifth lane is a barbed-wire fence extension.

It is not an easy task to figure out how to write around the wall. Each word is interwoven in unending layers of obligations. These are obligations to protect those who have given me their trust, obligations to readers to clarify my stance, obligations to myself to stay alive. And the conundrum remains: how do I write on something that terrorized most of my interlocutors? Nordstorm (2004) notes that “we talk about different wars, we don’t speak off different violences.” Although most of war’s causalities across the world are civilians and battles rage across people’s hometowns, the practice of studying soldiers and the immediate carnage of battles continues. And this shapes our understanding of violence. There remains a tendency to see a soldier firing at another soldier as constituting war’s violence, while the shooting of a civilian, or subjection to physical and emotional torture, is seen as an anomaly. Brutalities against civilians are understood as different orders of violence situated along a continuum that demarcates both severity and morality. It seems as if a hierarchy of violence is invoked in war, as Nordstorm notes, with harm against soldiers and the actions of those dressed in uniform seen as greater acts of war than harm against individuals. It is hard to challenge these understandings of war in a moment where armed violence becomes the motto
in the quest for peace. For peace to come, there must be a war. In other words, it is only in war that peace as a desire, politics, and language emerge.

Undoubtedly, war at its most basic entails sorrow, dismemberment, death, and the politics of force. But, people do not engage in or avoid war because of the sheer fact of death, dismemberment, and politics of force. Death itself is largely meaningless in and of itself. It takes on meaning because of its affective content; death then becomes meaningful. Killing civilians to reduce their numbers do not win wars. “Wars are lost and won because people fear death, because they have a horror of dismemberment, because they feel the burdens of oppression so strongly they are willing to risk life and limb” (Nordstrom, 2004: 59). It is because violence feels like something that people flee, fight, and resist. And how could I ever ask how violence feels for Saharawis? What is the struggle for humanity within terror? What I felt was the possibility about human conditions and the meaning of survival within violence.

One of the NUSW planned tours for me in the camps was a visit to the victims of war habitation, an isolated center about twenty kilometers from Rabouni camp. The tour was a horrific moment, and I felt violence exercised in its other form. The people I met had stumbled across mines that blew off their limbs. They survived only to crawl or clutch through the rest of their lives. One of them lost his legs, arms, and hands. And I stood in front of him, what was I supposed to say? A facilitator asked me in front of the injured to ask them whatever I wanted to know. When I refused saying that I wanted to leave, he turned and demanded them to tell me “their full name, injury date, and what happened.” I felt the world tilt on its axis. At one group conversation, a girl had burst into tears when her friends were telling me how they felt about the wall. She dishearteningly voiced her discomfort with the talk, questioning whether I even had to listen to their stories to know what the wall is about. These moments were the toughest for me to endure throughout my fieldwork. It was, at least how I felt it, the emotional content of violence that we cripple by.

Although this project is concerned with the many manifestations of violence, it is crucial to recognize that physical violence itself holds complex sociopolitical messages. It is not by chance that the wall has been armed with anti-personnel mines. The message isn’t subtle, mines will blow off your limbs, damage your senses, but you will see and remember this terror. This is an impartial physical reproduction of technological violence of land mines. Mines are constructed to blow off limbs, not kill people.
Rippling Death

“...Death which is not the end of life but the final saturation with absence.”

In 2008, about one hundred Saharawis went to protest in front of the wall, as part of the *Scream Against the Wall* association (*Sarkha Dida al-Jidar*) and the Saharawi Youth Union (*UJISARIO*). For many, it was their first time to see the wall. A group of young men got angry and wanted to cross the wall. The organizers demanded the protestors to keep a distance of five meters from the wall lest land mines be drifted from behind the barbed wire fence. All disregarded the organizers’ orders and wanted to reach the Moroccan soldiers, standing atop filming the visitors. Few people from the group started detaching the barbed wire fence, while the soldiers threw stones at them. What appeared to be four soldiers behind the berm multiplied to about twenty. At some unknown point, the young men clashed with the soldiers. The soldiers caught one of the group members and beat him up. When it seemed to get serious, soldiers opened fire in the air to scare away the group. At that moment of retreating, Ibrahim, a Saharawi in his early twenties, stepped on a cluster bomb. “I saw his leg blown off upright in sand,” Hasna said “I was already frustrated, and I felt outrage.” Ibrahim was transported to Rabouni hospital where surgeons had to amputate the rest of his left leg.

This story was narrated to me various times as it happened to be the first time for Saharawis to witness limbs blown off before their eyes. Stories are different and this was neither the first nor the last time a person loses limbs. This story characterized a different understanding of the wall, one that was no longer sixty kilometers far from where you have lived, rather a one that has new meanings. Saharawis that were not part of the formal political leadership of the Polisario did not conclude the existence of the wall as a military fortification. The wall became part of Saharawis everyday lives, forms of navigating the material and spatial constructions were and are reproduced in routes of fear and hope. This does not mean that the wall is the hegemonic discourse in everyday lives. It nonetheless has impacted social relations and reinvigorated a political imagination.

The rhetoric on the wall is at best a victimizing one. Discourses by Polisario military officials pointed only to ways the wall have continued to present a constant threat to
Saharawis. In other words, configured social and political transformations in everyday basis evade the hegemonic rhetoric on the wall. Attributing the wall different names is part and parcel of reconfiguring relations vis-à-vis its materiality and discourses. Calling the wall the obstruct reflects a set of spatial, temporal, and social interactions. It is in this sense that the wall as a project of militarism does not resonate with the sociopolitical imaginations and experiences of Saharawis. In individual narratives, the Western Sahara wall is already in engagement with the walling patterns across the globe. This wall is compared by Saharawis especially to the Israeli wall (Israel West Bank barrier); however, uttered that Western Sahara wall violent characteristics cannot be compared to the Israeli one. Against the apparent conclusion that might read degrees of violent walling practices, the comparison is set to manifest a manufacturing of terror that compresses materiality, spatiality, and other relations into one construct. One member of the Saharawi Youth Union of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (UJISARIO) said “the wall in the Western Sahara is a delusion.” He continues “it is not about military, but militarizing,” pointing to the difference between the aim behind walling and the mechanisms used to constantly reproduce it. In the literature on other walls, especially in the Palestinian Studies field, checkpoints and barriers engender confrontation and resistance vis-à-vis an identified material construction that extends to means of navigating control. It is helpful to think of ‘surreal colonial architecture’ as something beyond the logic of a sovereign-disciplinary device. Nasser Abourahme (2008) argues that refugees in Qalandia have forged new modalities of living from the spatial arrangement of the camp and the checkpoint. The way Palestinians in Qalandia have reconfigured constitutive nodes of the present, including the dynamics with the checkpoint, reproduces new socialities that do not correspond to what we portray as resistance or survivalism (2008:455). Spaces of separation, exclusion, in all their technological manifestations are spaces on their own, a space that is sustained by a certain imagination producing its entire ecology of activities. Helga Tawil-Souri (2009) argues that checkpoints are contradictory spaces that on the one hand suffocate the individual and the collective, and on the other hand open up new forms of social and economic activities. The absurdity of certain walls to others draws on the estrangement it creates. The Western Sahara wall does not engender this direct manifestation of neither resistance nor confrontation. The invisibility of the wall—the fact that the wall is materially existent but the experiences of the Saharawis tell that the wall represents an invisible, hidden field of mines—is what creates this fluctuation of disturbances, surprises, and unforeseen events. The wall in and of itself is a “dirt block of
human sickness” as one Saharawi said. Surrounding the wall—constituted of five militarized belts—is an unknown field of fear that Saharawis confront. A fear that is made and lived.

Narratives on the walling practice among Saharawis depict the wall as a constant process of obstructing their relations to other domains. The wall is not a fortified construction that is simply maintained by sophisticated militarized technologies that can be visible. It is not a space that controls tempospatial relations between two zones usually characterized as the inside and the outside. Rather, it is a constant process of walling through arbitrary lodging of land mines and bombs into a field that represents to Saharawis the space they can live in while looking for fodder for their cattle. Because of its invisibility, the wall is not seen as a mechanism of direct control. Put differently, the Western Sahara wall does not directly regulate movement between territories held by Polisario or Morocco. Rather, the wall’s different materiality offers a new dynamic that is not only based on control of movement. While movement is the first dynamic to be reconfigured in such circumstances, it is not simply manifested as the only function of the wall to enforce difference or alienation. Many Saharawi families still have their relatives who did not leave the Western Sahara during the exodus year. The wall has differently hindered their familial ties; and many did not see their parents and siblings in years. Consequently, UNHCR with MINURSO’s logistical assistance crafted a program named “confidence-building measure programme” (CBM) that has four objectives: family visits between the Western Sahara and the refugee camps, free phone service, free postal service, and the organization of seminars on non-political topics. The program started in 2003 and the only activities functioning are family visits and the so-called non-political seminars. Although the program’s design aims to break away from the official politics of the conflict by taking a ‘humanitarian’ outfit, the program is completely dependent on the participation, coordination, and approval of Polisario and Morocco. For instance, the postal service was not put into function because of “objections raised by authorities on both sides” (Confidence-Building, MINURSO). Reports by UNHCR state that it has not been easy to negotiate and deliver between the parties (CMB 2009/2010, UNHCR). Furthermore, both Polisario and Morocco delegate lists of participants whether for family visits or for the seminars and coordinate their approval or rejection to MINURSO and UNHCR. Confidence-building measures (CBM) has a double-facet: one that contributes to establishing confidence among parties in the conflict, and another that addresses critical humanitarian needs of the population. However, the formulation of this by UNHCR as stated in its 2010 report on CBM reads “the CBM programme focuses exclusively on the humanitarian needs of the Saharans”
These needs are based on the inability of Saharawis to see their families in the Western Sahara because of the wall. In 2013 reports a one paragraph refers to this:

One of the most striking humanitarian wounds of this situation is the separation of many Saharawi families who have some members who reside in the Western Sahara Territory and others in the refugee camps near Tindouf since the mid ‘70s. The border between the Western Sahara Territory and Algeria is closed and furthermore the vast majority of the Western Sahara Territory is isolated by a sand wall otherwise known as the “berm” but which could also be referred to as the “Sand Curtain” (CBM 2013, UNHCR: para 13)

In fact, this is not one of the most, but the most serious condition for Saharawis that separates their families. Yet, the point here is not the relativity of the conditions that make the Saharawi subject today, but rather the way that this wall is concealed within the narrative of humanitarian regimes, specifically in the context of the UNHCR and MINURSO. The description of the wall fades away its materiality and the way it set the ground for humanitarian and capital circulation. In paragraph 14 of the same report (2013), the authors quote directly from Wikipedia to explain the Western Sahara wall. The result is concealing the political laboratory the wall has engendered over the past thirty years, and the way this has helped humanitarian regimes to consolidate their political programs.

Questioning the meaning of confidence-building is at the heart of understanding political narratives around it. Claimed by UNHCR to respond exclusively to humanitarian needs, the 2013 report however adds another ambition “these activities may also eventually lead to create a certain degree of confidence between the two parties involved in the conflict over the Western Sahara Territory thus facilitating a negotiated solution to the problem” (CBM 2013, UNHCR: para 17). It is hard to think of any possible ground of creating confidence neither for the people nor for involved states. If the main aim of CBM is to give the opportunity to family members to reunite again, considering that the wall is the main reason for their separation for thirty years, confidence then is ridicule. During my fieldwork, I had constantly asked my coordinator and attendant about the possibility of meeting with UNHCR confidence-building representative in the camps. They however did not give any clear answer whether there was no CBM representative in the camps, or because Polisario has chosen to manage this in its own way. El Ghaouth, Polisario coordinator with UNHCR on CBM, claims that the naming of the program as confidence-building had a political meaning. UNHCR considered that relations would be built between political parties had the program
succeeded to get them to cooperate. However, the way El Ghaouth described the process of preparation for the family visits can hardly feature any confidence. The process is wrapped in bureaucratic and securitized profiling of activities and individuals on lists of visits, and what both parties do is approve or reject the lists of seminars, participants, and visitors. The program of family visits has a selection process imposed by UNHCR and based on degrees of familiar ties. Saharawis’ visits to either side (west or east to the berm) lasts for only five days, with a fifty dollars per diem for Saharawi refugees going to the Western Sahara. For Saharawis coming to visit their relatives in the camps, Moroccan authorities have forced them to carry Moroccan passports, unlike Saharawi refugees who do not travel with neither Saharawi nor Algerian passports—as these are the travel documents they use when traveling abroad—but with a UNHCR issued passport for short family visits. Confidence has been greatly nourished for both Saharawis and the parties, but just the way around. Family visits is a usual program run by humanitarian regimes, the argument thus is not on the program of family visits per se, but rather about the way in which the wall is concealed in narratives of confidence-building.

According to El Ghaouth, MINURSO in 2012 suggested a plan to remove a segment of the wall to allow families to exchange visits. The plan relied heavily on security cooperation that asked both parties to supply MINRSO’s Mine Action Coordination Center (MACC) with land mines and explosive remnants of war field maps. Morocco however refused the plan. The UNHCR then opted for the air transfer of Saharawis. The possibilities of meeting families or escaping hell, as Safar narrates, shrink in front of the terror of the wall. However, in all possible discourses by the humanitarian regimes working on the Western Sahara conflict, the wall is concealed as if its production of violence does not exist. How can a person knowing there is a high chance to die in a field of invisible explosives and mines still decide to cross the wall?

Violence has become the condition of life. And these stories of Saharawis do not represent any exception to that. Living with weaponized structures and relations happens in many places, each with its own trajectory. Reflecting on these moments of escaping and navigating violent apparatuses, constructions, and events requires a critical engagement with the possibilities these events have generated for the people who have experienced them. The no beginning or end that Safar considered his narrative to have is at the heart of such engagement. Experimentality emerges here when there is no beginning or end, when the present is the only thing being made. Navigating “hell after hell” is what everyday life is
about, with all its reconfiguration of social orders and political imaginations. Being a freedom fighter in the nationalist sense, Safar had also belonged to the liberation struggle ideology. However, when facing death at the cells of Moroccan police, the fear he had towards the wall engendered further fear, but also was the reason of hope to find another possible shelter. From being on the margins of state-making to becoming on the margins of the subject-making after crossing the wall—being a Moroccan citizen on papers to becoming a Saharawi refugee in the camps—the situation is hell either way. The narrative is not so much about the mourned forced displacement Safar had to go through to escape either imprisonment or possible death under torture, but more about the way he navigated power structures and weaponized constructions to alternate the rhythm of his everyday life. The transposition from citizen to refugee is not so much about living outside of global temporality with the fear of losing whatever makes part of the world’s population. Being on the margins of subject-making refers here to the impotence of state belonging to be the ultimate desire of individuals. Safar did not fear losing that belonging—when he left being a Moroccan citizen (or a colonized Saharawi with Moroccan paperwork)—to become a refugee. This transposition played on becoming and losing positionality in the making of the state. Safar occupied a new place in the humanitarian regime that of a refugee, when he left his position in the Moroccan state. There are various categories that make global temporality; it becomes hard to claim that populations do not live in the same temporality. Rather, it is this imposed political temporality that makes the categories inhabit different understandings of time. The subjects of these categories do not themselves form this asynchronous temporality, rather know that their categorical existence is a contemporaneous plurality of being.

The Saharawi population in the camps is based to a large degree on pastoral economy. As previously discussed in chapter three, Polisario advocated for a free economy in the camps after the cease-fire. The battlefield generated work possibilities for Saharawis, and although income was little, it was considered to be something that helped in sustaining families in the camps and fill in days. Unemployment was a serious matter for Polisario to discuss, and given the process of preparing for the referendum was clearly taking time, these issues had to be addressed through encouraging people to invest whatever little money they have in different service shops. Notwithstanding the importance of this moment in the overall architecture of the camps as it created opportunities to live in clay-huts dwellings and afford buying electronic appliances, it did not change the one thing that almost all Saharawis had: cattle. Importance of having cattle at every household is not related to the idea of preserved
nomadic life of Saharawis as many scholars would interpret (c.f. Hodges, 1983: 12-14; Saleh, 2012: 9; Lawless & Monahan, 1987: 38-48). Cattle however constitute an economic income for families to sustain themselves in uncertain times. Selling sheep or camels may at times help a relative in need of some extra money to get hospitalized abroad—although access to health care is free of charge at camps and if needed to be treated abroad, most countries supportive of the Saharawi liberation cause take full charge of refugees—to give children some extra money when they go the Algerian cities for secondary and high school education, or to buy new furniture. At other times, it represents a nutritional element that is not provided by humanitarian food donors. The pastoral economy in the camps is primarily based on movement to find water and grass for cattle. In every June, Saharawis escape the heat to the Polisario held-areas in the Western Sahara. Amina’s mother, Halima, (the family I stayed with during my fieldwork) jokingly told me “when I go to check on my cattle the first few days of summer, I keep looking around, my daughters laugh at me because I think these are not mine. The cattle lose weight and looks depressed, I then know that it is time to leave the camps.” Most Saharawis leave during the hot summer to the areas in the Western Sahara, west of the wall. While children aged six to thirteen years go to spend summer months in Spain with Spaniard families under the program of Vacaciones en Paz (Vacations in Peace). The program is organized by the youth organization of Polisario Front UJSARIO and Spanish solidarity associations. The program has been running since 1988. And so it seems that only a few thousands of people stay in the camps during the summer. However mobility to areas in Polisario-held territories increases in the summer, as my interlocutors explained, it is still a constant variable for many Saharawis as a basis of their everyday lives. In relation to the pastoral economy, Saharawis that do not have their cattle in the camps have kept them with their relatives living in the area west to the berm. There, it is easier to find water and grass for the cattle and worry less about weather conditions. In such an economy, and a situation where Saharawis are caught between these two blocks: the camps and the field of mines, life is lived through its permanent practices. As Halima told me, “there is one thing we are sure of and another we only know of; the mines are invisible and only if you are lucky and possess the skills to notice them, you will get to know that it is a land mine. The summer is harsh here and we have to look after our income, everything is about work. If you don’t do the work [raising cattle] you will not be fed.”

Navigating geopolitics of fear, the wall has meant a shift in configuring the meaning of time and space for mobile Saharawis. The wall has its own production of fear, but it has also
engendered modalities of living that do not easily speak to resistance. Acknowledging that there is an obstruct that altered Saharawis daily routines also means pushes for further reflection on the premise that leads to emergent modalities of living. Given that Saharawi military officials claim that the land surrounding the wall has put the life of Saharawis on hold, mobile Saharawis do not recognize this idea. Life under the invisible weaponized field and the trap of movement between two sites of displacement propound the making of the present possible out of growing industry of fear; the wall being one of its manifestations.

Feminist contributions to geopolitics of fear look into connections between global and localized relations. The embodiment of geopolitics of fear engages with the ways in which particular bodies are used and represented in highlighting everyday experiences. The Saharawi spatial setting is stretched in the area of the camps and those in the east of the berm. The way they are represented always translates a political language that does not reflect sociopolitical transformations happening among Saharawis themselves. The Saharawi Association for Mine Victims (Asociación Saharauí de Víctimas de Minas, ASAVIM) is one of these organisms in the camps that works closely with international associations on issues of victims and areas of armed violence. The “victims themselves” established it in 2005 as the association history brochure states (document on file, 2015). Staff at the association are individuals who have been injured in land mine explosions. The major objectives of the association are: to assess the needs and problems of the injured, to integrate the injured socially and economically, and to create and manage data of the injured. However, in a conversation with five members of ASAVIM, one of them told me that the most pressing issue for ASAVIM now is to “convince the Saharawis of the notion of victims” (personal interview, February 2015). According to the same individual, Saharawis do not use the word “victim” unless the person loses many corporal parts. “They don’t consider us victims [pointing to his lost fingers], but if I lose my arms and legs, then I will be a victim.” When I asked them about their definition of a victim, all members agreed that according to ASAVIM victim defined based on the criteria of international law. In this definition, the victim experiences direct and indirect effects, and changes his/her relationship with other social subjects. The Saharawi body becomes the marker of these violent inscriptions. The everyday experience with a specific structure such as the wall is highlighted only when the body bears its marks. Although by employing individuals who are injured, as a way to provide them with a “normal” life, the idea is still based on the exceptionality of the experience that my ethnographic accounts do not tell.
Despite that the language of victimhood is the discursive mode of ASAVIM, its members claim that the everyday practices of the injured and their families have inspired them in their work. In a brochure of mines awareness, there is a large space of the paper attributed to a graphic design of a Saharawi family with their cattle in the area east of the berm, where the mother tells the son not to go near the identified mine.


The comment on the illustration reads: “We might live near an area polluted with land mines and other explosives, and we may not feel that sometimes. However, we have to live our lives normally but with a lot of caution” (translation is mine). Understanding the language used to express relations and imaginaries on the Western Sahara wall is projected on everydayness. Whether called the obstruct, the delusion, or the myth, Saharawis give it the characteristic of the fear producing machinery whereby fear gets produced through knowing and not knowing. It is not the wall, as a structure of dirt and sand that constitutes the five belts, that tantamount to what Saharawis refer to the wall. Rather it is the sand concealing the body destroying machine—the limbs factory—that makes a particular kind of sensibility available to Saharawis. Death is not the preoccupation of mobile Saharawis. And just as Safar felt fear while crossing the wall, that fear did not manifest itself in death. The many people who think
of dwelling the invisible architecture of weapons do not think of dying but of navigating the field. In this, an understanding of violence is different from what is usually theorized. As violence unmakes the world, Nordstrom argues that “violence is employed to create political acquiescence; it is intended to create terror, and thus political inertia; it is intended to create hierarchies of domination and submission based on the control of force” (2004:61). The appearing modalities of violence could simply reach the conclusion that violence ends with the crippling bodies. The disposition of violence, and as I argue here materially manifested in the wall, is a necessary accompaniment to dwelling. It is in this sense that the language used to describe the wall, and the everydayness of Saharawis eludes the appearance of the wall, and rather utters its aesthetics which are crucial determinations produced by space in breeding this form of violence. Space does not merely provide the context of the wall; it extends from a context to a medium, a mean, a momentum, and a measure of the geopolitics of violence.

Death is not the focus of life, or the interaction with the wall. Death comes suddenly and happens in different ways. Specific to contexts of displacement, refuge, and domains of control and violence, the Saharawis do not consider the wall as generator of death. Given that the everyday stories and practices engender the larger moment the population lives whether in the Western Sahara or the Saharawi camps in Algeria, the equation is written as: when there is an occupier, there is death. There is another machine of fear production west of the berm, one that functions with visibility: arrests, kidnapping, torture, imprisonment, and other kinds of violence practiced by the state on Saharawi activists. However, east of the berm, another machinery has altered the architecture of space. Whether in the western or eastern side of the berm, death is possible under any circumstances. Living in unstable architectures of modern weaponry redraws novel forms of lives. And perhaps one of its known forms is lives in refugee camps, as places that are the focus of international humanitarian regimes and states because of their projected exceptionality from the hegemonic sociopolitical order. Exceptional zones of disorder are hence closed spaces that are not mobile in and of themselves. Assumptions that life is suspended and lie in wait for the moment of reimmersion into global temporality does not seriously look into the ways in which displaced populations—Saharawis in this case—not only escape such humanitarian landscapes, but also reproduce their own orders and meanings of the political.

Vernaculars of the Political
Materializing fear on spatial architectures disentangles the extent to which the everyday, in its amalgam of experiences, practices, language, and feelings happen outside the realm of formal politics. Formal politics whether is part of nation-state modes of governmentality or global institutions that are preoccupied with the execution of the modern ideals of sociopolitical orders is not something that can be easily ignored in any sort of analysis on novel social and political transformations. In the second chapter, I have argued that the Saharawi struggle became narrated from the language of the Western canon of legality, self-determination, and statehood. While in the stories that I have shed light on, there was a more nuanced discourse on the meaning and navigation of forms of violence discursively and materially. The wall as the fear production machine articulates the distinction between the imaginaries of political landscapes as those that speak a defined language of modernity and those that utter what is lived and challenged. From naming the wall as the security belt to the obstruct, the difference stems from the political imagination populations have towards constructs. Any attempt to understand the meaning of fear producing machinery remains fragmented if it is not engaged with possibilities the machinery has generated on the level of the political.

The importance of considering the thread linking normative discourses of the Saharawi liberation movement and the novel modalities of transformation looks into what constitutes the dynamic between strategical survivalism and politics of hope. While in much of this analysis Polisario remained in the shadows of stories, it is clear that the liberation discourse of the political leadership could not transgress the boundaries of modern discourses as the people have challenged in their everyday present. When the Polisario speaks of the ‘right’ to decide on the way Saharawis want to order their sociopolitics, the population speaks of ‘violence.’ It is this differences that marks the line between formal politics and the political. The relation between fear (and its geopolitics) and the way its absorbed (spatially and emotionally) affects the process by which this fear gets reformulated. Networks of politics, power, violence, and destruction also forge hopes and roads of repair. It is particularly this interwork of fear and hope that portray the political in the current transformation of social and political orders of Saharawis outside the domain of formal (state) politics. Since the production of fear is not fixed, the everyday cannot be anchored to a hierarchical relationship. Similarly, the political is a part of the asserting involvement of Saharawis in their context. Unlike how many scholars portray the Saharawi domain as Africa’s last colony, the international shame, the UN deadlock and other names, they all tend to erase political inscriptions materializing on the ground.
Trajectories of hope and fear are not separated. Rather, there are assemblages of fear and hope embedded, woven, and nurture into the way specific times, spaces, and events work altogether. To develop this argument, I rethink the connectedness of the political and sites of fear and hope through the practice of everyday and material geographies. Shifting the attention from fear and the state, as a relation of control and resistance, the emphasis is on the ways fear reproduces opposite transformations that inhabit domains that are not hegemonized or controlled by formal politics. It is to say in other words, the need is to reflect on how the political modes produced in navigating violent structures exist without the approval of discursive and statist politics. The way I argue for the embodiment of the political in everydayness is neither axiomatically against domination or a reaction to control, nor a process of making politics in modernity. Thinking the political from outside epistemic territoriality poses further questions on its vernaculars and iterations. This question becomes clearer if posited against the background of the work of confidence-building measures led by UNHCR and logistically supported by MINURSO. The discussion I started earlier on the different axes of CBM work reaches here the point of a closer analysis to the meaning of ‘apolitical’ Saharawis. Events considered as ‘apolitical’ are drawn in the format of seminars that gather Saharawis from the camps and from cities in the Western Sahara in another country. The first seminar took place in 2010 in Portugal. The idea as the CBM Polisario coordinator says came to let a group of Saharawis from both sides of the wall to interact for cultural purposes. Or, as the 2013 CBM report states, the objective of the ‘cultural’ seminars was to

[...]offer opportunities for dialogue, interaction and information exchange on topics of a non-political nature between persons from civil society of Saharawi communities living in the Western Sahara Territory and in the Tindouf camps in an open and inclusive atmosphere, bringing them closer and helping them to understand each other better on sensitive topics. Even if this activity was part of the original 1999 Plan of Action which was agreed in principle by the parties and in spite of the non-political nature of the topics, the sensitivities were so high that the details of this activity were agreed only in 2010 (CBM 2013, UNHCR: para 39; emphasis mine).

Seminars took place four times since 2011 and were facilitated by Mauritanian academics, whom the report says were chosen because of their familiarity with the Saharawi culture. The seminars were entitled: “Hassania traditional heritage and practices” (2011), “the role of women in Saharawi community” (2012), “the concept of kheima (tent) in Saharawi culture”
(2013), and “the role of the camel in Saharawi society” (2014). These were the non-political topics that both Polisario and Morocco agreed to, after omitting sensitive topics. And that’s how Saharawis from the western and eastern sides of the wall were going to understand each other better.

The political content of these seminars was reiterated many times in the narratives of Saharawi interlocutors but from a different perspective. I focus here on the meaning of the tent, the camel, and women that are not culturally discussed but rather politically motivated. By culture I refer to the idea that culture is a set of practices that are unmodified, politically discharged, and historically flattened. In fact, these apolitical topics according to the UNHCR organizers, are the factors that have been produced and reconfigured since the displacement of Saharawis from the Western Sahara to the camps in Algeria for they have implied material, social, economic, and hence political transformations. The tent has modified the meaning of dwelling among Saharawis in the camps. Ferguson (2006) argues that what is usually seen as shifts in conventional cultural differences are rather expressed in material inequality. His ethnographic account shows how material inequality is woven into ideals of technological sophistication and lifestyles whereby the Western model praises the healthy style of Africans living in huts, seen as part of a cultural convention. Material inequality is what hinge discourses on cultural differences. In an evening with my Saharawi host family, Amina and I were chatting about the architecture of houses in Bojdor camp. She told me that she had to stay at her tent for a year until her house constructions finished. On a rainy day her tent collapsed; she dismantled it and did not bother to mend it again. In the mornings, we all used to go to have breakfast at her mother’s tent, few meters away from her own house, and that was all about the time family members spent at the tent. When I asked her about the way she remembers the architectural development of the camps, she pointed to the fact that clay-huts make life easier. Being a Saharawi did not mean to spend your life herding your cattle and living in a tent. “This is not the era for it anymore,” she expressed. The difference between the old clay-huts that appeared in the 1990s and the latest ones delineate considerations of materiality and household practices. Amina’s parents house has a large sand square, the rooms encircle and overlook the square. However, the style that she picked for her house is different: it is smaller, roof covered, and with a gravel ground. She states that the reason is that this architecture provides her with “less house chores which means more time to watch television.” The architecture of the four camps I visited draw on similar thoughts. Saharawis live in clay-huts and not in their tents. Even when there was a tent pitched close to every hut, there was hardly anyone considering the tent as a living space.
The materials used to build the clays are also a matter of discussion among Saharawis. Whether the house was cemented or not, its size, the electronic appliances it has and so on matter on the level of their material inequality. Amina’s goal was to save money to cement her house so that chances of its collapse decrease under heavy rain which has been a seasonal characteristic over the past years in the region of Tindouf. Whenever conversations talked about the neighbor’s or her friends’ houses, she drew upon the material inequality because of the emerging material differences among Saharawis. At the wedding of Amina’s friend, she whispered in my ear when I went to the kitchen to find her, “Did you see how big is this house. There is also running water in the taps.” The house was the focus of the evening conversation among the family and friends who came to investigate about the wedding, what kind of food was provided, etc. The house belonged to a minister, and everybody quickly concluded that his position reflects on the kind of the house he lives in. It is similar to how many heads of cattle a family owns. Having a few camels is not similar to having a cattle. It extends from being a ‘cultural’ tradition of how Saharawis have been usually portrayed as nomads to an economy based on pastoralism. In all these instances, there wasn’t an apolitical understanding of the materiality that permitted the shift from the tent to the clay-hut or from gaining more cattle. These are all politically intricate activities that engage with understandings of wealth. The sociopolitical mutation happening in the camps reflects on the slowly growing disparity between individuals that cannot be captured in the language of ‘culture.’ Culture is used by UNHCR as a black box whereby anything that cannot be fit to the ideal image of a refugee becomes a cultural and not a political concept.

Because refugees are not supposed according to the Agambian state of exception to display signs of permanency, issues of materiality become contingent on the sphere of culture. The governor of Esamara camp had asked me about my impression on the camps. Although the question was a little absurd, because ‘the camp’ could characterize many things especially in a short stay of twenty-five days, I decided to reply with the idea that has been prominent among Refugee Studies scholars. Tindouf camps have the architecture of cities in their divisions of wilayas (prefectures), dairas (districts), and hay (neighborhood). Moreover, Bojdor camp, which was previously named 27 February, was declared into a wilaya in the late months of 2014, where it has in the past hosted solely the National Women’s School and the headquarters of National Union of Saharawi Women (NUSW). The reply of the governor however showed a sense of unease to my remark, because according to the official discourse, Saharawi refugees and the SADR likewise are in exile which could not possibly lead to practices that display permanency. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s (2014) ethnographic work in the
camps draws on how camps are developing and the way their inhabitants are appropriating the space. The interlocutors she spoke to in February 27 camp (back then) have moved to live in the camp after the 2006 floods, mostly coming from Dakhla camp which is 150 kilometers far from the other four camps. They said that they did not seek “permission to establish their tent in the 27 February Camp, as is officially required, they clearly stated that they had not and that the official administration could no longer decide where people should or should not live” (2014:234). The new arrivals to Bojdor camp who are in search of permanent electricity supplies usually pitch their tents, and later build their clay-huts, far from the politico-administrative core of the camp. Reasons are given in terms of larger freedom of living. Leaving from the camp to the region east of the berm is also articulated in some cases of the independence Saharawis enjoy far from the politico-administrative eyes.

The material change that took place in the camps after the cease-fire meant also changes in social structures, significance of work, and institutionalizing notions of citizens and rights. Saharawi camps and cause depend on humanitarian regimes to receive food aid, educational scholarships, and to build solidarity networks. The camps since the 1970s have been advertised by journalists and scholars as feminized, the most organized, and the most politically conscious. Given that women were the ones who organized themselves and their children into the administrative plan Polisario planned, this image later decrypted into the politics of solidarity networks, known as solidarios, especially from Spaniards. The focus of solidarity groups is to make sure that Saharawi women are emancipated, empowered, and politically represented. Since these words have their own political genealogy in that they derive from a modern lexicon of the humanitarian and development regimes, it was necessary for Saharawis in the camps to reflect on their institutions and legal documents. One of the first arguments interlocutors holding state or institutional positions reiterate is that women are free from violence because it is a cultural norm. Asking them what is the meaning of violence in relation to women, they were surprised that it was not clear that violence meant “beating women,” that interlocutors consider to be a common practice in the Arab region. However, the Saharawis I encountered who weren’t part of institutionalized politics used the word ‘beat’ instead of ‘violence.’ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argues that Polisario’s official discourse on the free violence Saharawi culture provides resulted in the presentation of Saharawi camps as an “ideal and unique violence-free space, unlike other generic MENA contexts and refugee camps but also unlike the West” (2014:249). Furthermore, as she notes, Saharawi identified the matter as being political, not because Saharawis did not witness instances of gender-based
violence, but rather because the *solidarios* were willing to help only if they found the ideal refugee, woman, and political project they look for.

In all of these three themes revolving around the tent, camel, and women, the matter is not cultural. These structures were reconfigured to fit newer dynamics of power. A member of the AFAPRADESA said that there is an intense debate among the Saharawi leadership and activists on institutionalizing the family code. According to him, few activists are counter-arguing the necessity to have a family code, “just because the model of the state asks you to have laws for everything, it does not mean it will work for us [Saharawis]” (personal interview, January 2015). His argument is that Saharawi women may lose entitlements they already enjoy due to the nature of this kind of social inscriptions in law. “If we are speaking about law, we already have a law. I would rather call it our own organization of social, political, and economic issues. It is however, not written, simply because before now we did not feel the necessity to make it a sacred thing. As a community, we found solutions to social problems and justice has been the concern for us all. But justice is also political and this is why SADR feels it is time to translate it into a fixed law. This law will not speak into the way we handled our own matters,” he said. Veena Das argues that the state is a form of “regulation that oscillates between a rational mode and a magical mode of being” (2004:225). The life of the state is encrypted in the signature that documents bear, denoting the “aura of legal operation” which is derived from the legality of law. That is, the ‘magic’ of signature stems from the “unreadability of its rules and regulations,’ and extends to the life signature acquires in community practices. What the AFAPRADESA member denotes was in fact the documentation of the life of the state concerning its involvement in the sphere that was ordered outside its formal parameters. Das hence argues that “it is precisely because the documents can be forged and used out of context, and because the bureaucratic-legal processes are not legible even to those responsible for implementing them, that the state can penetrate the life of the community and yet remain elusive” (ibid:245). Forms of justice arise from the rough-and-tumble of everyday life as opposed to originating from the moral space of victimhood.

That institutionalizing justice is necessary to enter the time machine of global sociopolitical ordering is the way that highlights appropriations of the political without a representation. By defining aspects that have materially, socially, and politically altered the everyday of Saharawis as a cultural matter is in fact to conceal the emergent modalities of transformations. Possibilities of being and becoming are dynamically far from and at the same time close to formal political spaces. The detachment of the political from fixed
representations propels its fluid constitution and changing nature. Drawing on the everyday vernaculars and iterations of transformations of power dynamics on gender roles, space, architecture, and wealth negates the possibility of apolitical living. In other words, the relationship between everyday trajectories and the political reconstitute the fundamental point at which politics of life, of living, happen. Thus, the political is a site of continuous making and relating to subjects and objects outside modern representational frameworks.
Chapter 5
The Limbs Factory: Territorializing Capital and the Circulation of Violence

The walling imagination is endowed with the power of ordering space. In the Western Sahara, the existence of the wall remains in the shadows of contemporary circulations of images about war, violence, movement, bodies, that are connected to modern technologies and practices of control and regeneration. The limbs factory as I argued in the previous chapter is not merely a tool or a strategy of producing dead bodies. Violence, when it inhabits networks of circulation and exchange, outdoes its general perception as a strategy of control; it rather becomes a commodity on its own. And it is for specific reasons that the previous discussion has included the movement of bodies, political imaginaries, and the geopolitics of fear and hope. Saharawis and other populations that are part of the network of circulation and exchange are integral to the new regulatory logic at work in parts of the contemporary globe. The limbs factory is not something fixed. Its effect on Saharawi lives touches upon all aspects of life, where the only impossibility is to make that dynamic stagnant. It has become the condition of the African postcolony whereby “the deterritorialization of life is unleashed” from wartime dynamics but not limited to them (Hoffman, 2012:106).

Recreating the Western Saharan question beyond the battlefield exacerbates aesthetics of violence into the sphere of what is spatially invisible. War is not about the plight of justice, the intricate tapestry of politics obscure capital flows invested in the latest technologies of violent practices. For this reason, the limbs factory is not about death, but rather about blowing off limbs; making sure that the injured is still alive to remember how it happened, how the body got injured, but most importantly, how the bodies never die so that the killing is not ‘really’ violent enough to mobilize the political masses. This chapter engages with the way the Western Sahara wall has been the site of capital circulation and exchange networks, and its territorialization through novel techniques of the invisible architecture of violence. Drawing on the political framework I employ here, this discussion returns to the initial point made on the critical reformulation of the Western Sahara domain. In the same way that political considerations of the conflict of the Western Sahara cannot be reduced to with/against positions, naming practices cannot relapse into a confinement that conceals in its experimental practice. One of the implicit conclusions I spend time exploring is that the Western Sahara cannot be made legible in the mere language of colonialism and occupation,
there is more to that which characterizes the present status of the Western Sahara, and one of the dynamics at work in the world.

**Limbs Factory: Circuits of Space, Time, and Capital**

It is hard to think of violence without exploring its links to capital and architecture. Whether in the urban or the battlefield, architecture has been the accumulation site of contemporary forms of capital circulation. The architect Lambert Léopold reflects on weaponized architectures through the lens of a funambulist, inspired from the line that divides fields from one another and reorganizes politically the space and the bodies that inhibit them. That line could be the visible line that architecture constructs, but in many ways it is also the line that conceals the machinery producing the architecture: capital. On this he writes: “Capitalism necessitates a space, and architecture, more or less consciously ready to provide it” (Léopold, 2013:26). The Western Sahara wall mirrors the way these unfixed domains of power are at work. Léopold (2013) argues that architecture is a political weapon through reading the genealogy of architecture in urban and warfare contexts. The urban manifestations of capitalist designs such as shopping malls, public spaces, etc, apply different processes that alter spatiality. Architecture of constructions whether buildings, barricades, or sites echoes, alters spatial functions. The urban modifications in modernist architecture play an important role in redefining the viability of control by state apparatuses in the city. From enlarging streets to building closed malls, control becomes easier and urban space is ‘smoothed.’ However, it is not an easy task to think of the architecture of warfield as the locus of materializing tensions. Is there a warfield architecture to begin with? In the previous chapter, I have engaged with the geopolitics of fear that the wall engenders through the creation of an invisible field of land mines and explosives that Saharawis navigate. The means of using architecture as a weapon are various and this is only one domain of the violence contained by and through architecture.

When the Western Sahara wall was under construction, Saharawi fighters understood that movement will be hindered. Eyal Weizman (2007) requestioned the principles of military movement in urban conflicts by the Israeli army. The siege of Nablus refugee camp in 2002 marked a new approach to movement as soldiers were moving through the unwalled walls rather than in streets. In particular to the movement of the Israeli army, Weizman argues that the new organization of the army emerged to maximize their movement through
limiting its scope of the Palestinian counter-side. The strategy the Israeli Army uses is called “inverse geometry” which means the “reorganization of the urban syntax by means of a series of a micro-tactical actions” (Weizman, 2007:185). The conventional logic of movement, according to the military approach, means that dwellers will use the streets, courtyards, and alleys in the city and windows, internal and external doors, and basements that constitute the order of buildings. The inverse geometry allowed the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to pitch alleys and holes in walls, ceilings, and floors; these were the places Palestinian fighters navigated to the extent that they became invisible from any aerial perspective (ibid:186). Hence, guerrilla warfare took place within a space that is no longer restrained to the battlefield. Battle now happens in the rooms, corridors, and spaces that were reproduced by movement. This military plan involves tactics of walking through walls as a “conception of the city, as not just the site, but the very medium of warfare—a flexible, almost liquid matter that is forever contingent and in flux” (ibid).

Borders no longer affect militarized movement. The IDF has conceptualized the term ‘smooth out space’ to refer to operational crossings of any borders or barriers without facing a spatial problem (Weizman, 2007:187; Léopold, 2013:12). Contemporary warfare combat is increasingly focused on infringing on the limitations by architectural walls. Hence, what the IDF in fact did was to develop a new set of techniques that complement the military tactics that involve physically transgressing and walking through walls allowing soldiers not only visibility, but also the possibility of killing through solid walls. Israeli capital circulated in the making of these new tactics through Camero, a research and development company that developed a handheld imaging device that “combines thermal images with ultra-wideband radar that, much like a contemporary maternity-ward ultrasound system, has the ability to produce three-dimensional renderings of biological life concealed behind barriers” (Weizman, 2007:208). While there is much credit to Léopold’s argument concerning the compartmentalization of Palestine by the IDF as much a security device as the occupier’s expression of control over the occupied (2013:12), there is more to the nexus of capital and weaponized architecture than control.

Deploying architecture to modify modalities of weaponizing spaces is part and parcel of capital’s logic. Movement seen as a factor of speed and time is what weaponized architecture seeks to construct. Movement’s annihilation comes only through the spatial setting that can produce and reproduce its circulation. Temporality of space as a geographic entity and as a social sphere denotes a process of construction of both domains: the geographical and the social. The two are interrelated in impacting each other; thus, producing
new forms of structure and movement. Conceptualizing the historical understanding of sociopolitical and geographical spaces lacks the context of temporality in the sense that spaces are perceived as fixed, unchanging, and detached locations. The relation of time-space, what Brenner terms “time-space compression,” (1999:59) creates exceptional characters when time is experienced in a subjective dimension of the world. This relation produces certain realities in certain spaces, and other realities in other spaces, which remain alien to the first reality-space dimension, in a temporal subjectivity (Mbembe 2001:260). In the words of the Saharawi ex-guerilla fighter H’med:“When you enter the liberated-territory [Western Sahara east of the berm], you know that you do not exist in the same time. In the camps, it is the cease-fire time. In the liberated territories it is the time of a war that could be waged anytime, however only against you” (personal interview, February 2015). If there is a possible manifestation of this compression of time-space, then it is the way the movement between the camps and the landmine field dictates its own temporal relationships. In many ways, this compression is related to perceptions and shifts of peace and war in more nuanced ways. Nonetheless, in navigating these two structural confinements, it becomes clearer that these violent inscriptions are the ways in which Saharawis are governed today.

In the same space, yet on the opposite side, there is another story. What Mbembe calls the characteristic of alienation of the reality-space, my Saharawi interlocutors have portrayed it as a space that they share imaginaries about, but that has another time. The western side of the berm is where the remaining Saharawi population lives, under the administration of the Moroccan state. Subjected to different politics and governance, they are still part of the spectacle of violence circulation but with different production of subjectivities. Reflecting again on the story of Safar while he was living in the Western Sahara depicts this shift of relating to production of time and space of the wall field. Being a freedom fighter whose work had different approaches to state and governance practices is no longer what constitutes Safar’s relation to neither the world, nor to the present he lives and makes. Even when his stories between the past and the present continue to inhibit these different spaces, the change in the subject position from a citizen to a refugee has impacted the way he narrated movement through the field of the obstruct. The process of deterritorialisation and territorialization is continuous, simultaneous, and synchronous. The space through which (de)territoriality happens is not self-enclosed, timeless, or immune to historical change. Brenner considers globalisation as a dialectical, double-edged process. Terriotirialization and its contrapuntal are based on two domains. The continuous acceleration and expansion of geospace is facilitated through movement of commodities, capital, and population.
Circulation of capital and population in the Western Sahara is made possible through the circulation of processes of consumed bodies and imaginaries of futures. Further, the fixed and immobile territorial infrastructures are produced and transfigured to enable the expansion of movement. Hence, reterritorialization becomes the territorial organization on multiple geopolitical scales, and deterritorialization embodies the compression of space and time under capitalism (1999:60-63).

State-centric visions of territorialized capitalist organization is subverted when the very reproduction of capitalism is dependent on the political geography of the territory itself. In other words, the contemporary project of the state dictates a continuous territorialization of capital through fixed and immobile structures; however, the geographical space is also in a continuous mode of reconfiguring through the movement of commodities, capital, and individuals. Such is the case, for instance, in the Ceuta and Mellila Spanish enclaves that took another trajectory and spatially and historically harbored geopolitical and sociospatial reconfigurations and contradictions. These contradictory processes of state discourse, security narratives, and migratory practices, engender a perplexity to the sovereign. Yet, it is this specific moment that captures the performative recalcitrance of sovereignty. In 1986, just when Morocco finished the sixth line of the wall, its cartographic geopolitical dimension acquired a dual significance. Spain’s accession to the European Union in 1986 meant that its borders are also the EU’s (Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008:306). The settings of the EU’s external border implied that a dual perimeter and territorial cartographies was levied. The EU-Moroccan border did not obliterate the Spanish-Moroccan border. Instead, it engendered a “twofold amalgam” whereby the Spanish and EU borders interlaced to contain the territorial lines of the two sovereignties and to mark the perimeter of the supranational territorial contours (ibid). The geopolitical discussions between Morocco and Spain on Ceuta and Mellila as contested territories, and UK on Gibraltar, provides the Spanish-Moroccan border with a classical content, which neglects the fortification technologies deployed, the agreements signed to increase securitization, and the sub-saharan migratory movement. The Spanish-Moroccan border is the material effect that makes sovereignty in transit elastic and contested.

Questions raised in relation to the territoriality of the Western Sahara are embedded in this conceptual formulation of spatial deployment of capital. Embedded in what Mbembe articulates as territoriality of power and jurisdiction, and following the discussion started in chapter three and four on the interplay of the language of legality and Morocco’s interest in phosphate mines, I ask how these two domains have formed the way capital is terririotrialized
and deterritorialized in the processes of making the transnational logic of capital and also the engine of weaponized machineries. Population movements under various forms of governance continue to challenge state-centric conceptions and the questions posed to understand the various ways power structures' interact. Cocco probes the location from which deterritorialization happens (2007:309). Neoliberalism as the new mode of power solved the problem of the stagnation of capital accumulation by shifting disciplinary space from immobile to “living labor” (ibid; Harvey, 2005). Deterritorialization is not a sole feature of financial flows, but also one of population movements and interactions (Cocco, 2007:308). Mobilization of territories is accompanied by deterritorialization. Through these processes, a reconfiguration of space occurs in relation to specific historical moments. Geoscales thus serve not only as a product of political and capitalist processes, but also their presupposition and their medium. In other words, sovereignty performs on the premise of a sociopoliticized space (Brenner, 1999) and acts upon the medium of mobilized labor and capital (Cocco, 2007; Ong, 2006). The multiplicity of ways deterritorialization and reterritorialization materialize require a further exploration of what exactly marks the un-detached moments of power making. The processes that make visible new appearances of power structure is fluid, geospatial, and multi scalar. Even within a conceived spatial block, sociopolitical interactions engage in a cycle of re-scaling and reterritorialization.

The wall is being reconfigured, remade, and re-divided in marking the fundamental basis in the conjoining of state politics and machineries of violence through the flow of capital between and beyond such strict territorial boundaries. The endless accumulation of capital creates tensions with territorial logic because of a need to create a parallel accumulation of political power, or military power as a material effect. Performative sovereignty with its fluidity demystifies a movement of deterritorialization in a conversely process of new territorial constitution. The construction market in Morocco directly absorbed a great deal of surplus capital through the construction of state institutions, housing, and public facilities in the Western Sahara. The economic investment right after the Green March in 1975 altered the geopolitical scale of the territory. With this historical read, the construction of the wall is not only a strategic military response to armed conflict in the region whereby Morocco’s sovereignty seeks to justify supremacy, it is also a result of the allocation of capital and migratory influx that the deployment of military force inscribes as a modality of power. In this fluid structure, political autonomy is contested and challenged in relation to territoriality but in its spatial dimension. The wall is not a self-enclosed boundary inasmuch capital and population navigate through other structures.
Capital and the Commodification of Violence and Life

The literature that attempts to read the Western Sahara conflict from a political economy perspective often confines capital’s logic in its state-centric formations (cf. Zunes & Mundy 2010, Zoubir & Benabdallah-Gambier 2005, Zoubir 1998). Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier argue that the protracted conflict of Western Sahara is in nature ‘regional,’ which involves shifts in alliances between the nation-states involved in the conflict (2005:183). The regional character that these authors refer to is the dynamics that happen between Morocco and Algeria, regarded as the most important states in North Africa. What these kinds of readings succeeded in doing is concealing capital dynamics that are regionally territorialized but have a global logic. The UN delegation that visited the Western Sahara in 1975 prior to Spain’s departure noted that “eventually the territory will be among one of the largest exporters of phosphate in the world” (Shelly, 2004:71). One of Spain’s main concerns when it was forced to decolonize the Sahara was its loss of its share in the Fosbucraa company of phosphate extraction (Smith, 2015:5). Spain in the 1960s invested huge sums of capital in exploring phosphate mine fields and building the conveyor belt linking the mines to Laayoune port whereby the commodity was shipped to international buyers. Western Sahara was assessed by the UN delegation to be the second largest exporter of phosphate in the world after Morocco. Spain retained 35 percent of phosphates revenues in the Western Sahara upon its departure. In 1920, the Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP) was established in Morocco, and became the OCP Group in 1975 and Limited Company OCP SA in 2008. Prior to the creation of OCP in 1920, the Omnium Nord-Africain (ONA) was created by the French colonial administration under capital from Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas (Paribas). The colonial restructuring of the Moroccan precolonial state came under the 1912 Fes Treaty that set the ground for economic and financial reforms of the Sultanate. Paribas acted through its arm in the sultanate, a holding company called Compagnie générale du Maroc (CGM). Like those of the ONA, its investments penetrated a myriad of other firms in sectors of textiles, mining, infrastructure, food, financial services, agriculture, and telecommunications (Hatton, 2009:304). Notwithstanding the Moroccan nationalist campaign for independence, Paribas acquired control of ONA in 1953, and as Hatton (2009:388-95) points out, it was unclear if the new acquisition was to show confidence in and support for French rule, to ensconce Paribas in Morocco in anticipation of French departure, or both according to how events unfolded.
Colonial capital started investing in the infrastructure that would later set the ground of fiscal agreements between the French administration and the Sultanate elite. In the independence year 1956, Moroccan capital constituted five to seven percent of all economic activity across diverse domains. It then increased to thirty percent in 1960 to forty percent in 1970, until the passing of the decree entailing the Morocanization of all capital investing in Moroccan capital with the exception of textiles and the mining industries. ONA was then sold in 1980 to the Moroccan royal family. In 2010, ONA announced its merger with Société Nationale d'Investissement (SNI) which is also a Moroccan private royal family holding, of which the key figures are king Mohamed VI and members or friends of the Alaouite family. The SNI used to be the larger shareholder of ONA prior to the merger. The merging resulted in the reorganization of the company to give larger autonomy to its subsidiaries in the management of their affairs, except for letting businesses grow. One of the main sectors of capital is mining through its company Managem. The relationship between the SNI (and ONA) and the OCP is blurred in the sense that the OCP has been established as a state office at the time of the French protectorate. Given the nature of the postcolonial Moroccan state, and the consolidation of the Makhzen in economic and political domains, it is not clear who exactly are the shareholders of OCP. In an interview with Mostafa Terrab, chairman and CEO of OCP Group, he said “One of the most important elements of OCP's transition from a state office to a corporation is that our shareholder, the state of Morocco, has made a strong commitment to a dividend policy enabling a long-term investment plan that emphasizes value creation, both for the company and the environment it operates in” (Oxford Business Group, n.d; emphasis mine). The shift from a state office to a corporation by the state of Morocco is an awkward formulation that conceals capital dynamics configured by the politico-economic elite in Morocco. In 1976, the OCP acquired partial shares in the extraction company Phosboucraa (FosBoucraa) in Boucras.

When the tripartite Madrid Agreement passed over the Spanish Sahara to Mauritania and Morocco, the later seized the Boucras phosphate mine whereby a deal was established with Spain giving it thirty-five percent of the shares of OCP until it sold them in 2002. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Boucras mines cost Morocco much more in terms of securitizing the mines and the conveyor belt than their initial worth. In 1977, phosphate production in Boucras stopped as ELPS attacks intensified. Production came back in 1982 when the berm constructions was marking improvements (Zunes & Mundy, 2010:35). The export capacity of Fosboucraa had reached 10 million tons of phosphate by 1980, which was perviously only 3.7 million tons, almost reaching the amount of the US annual phosphate
shipments. The phosphate industry is one of other industries (fisheries and agriculture) that the Moroccan elite accumulated capital from. The Investment Charter of 1995 encouraged foreign and Moroccan investors to circulate their capital in these sectors, with foreign investment permitted almost in every sector. Furthermore, following the same logic, the OCP signed several venture agreements to establish fertilizer and chemical plants, which has been considered as a step towards liberalizing the phosphate industry. The industry is largely about phosphate rock extraction and turning into fertilizers. While the reports produced by the OCP neither show exactly the revenues each mining site is making, nor the export destination of the phosphates from each mining site, there is a pattern of the circulation of capital extracted from the Boucraa extraction field. Morocco’s four phosphate fields are: Jorf Lasfar, Khouribga, Gantour, and Safi, and one field in the Western Sahara, Boucraa. OCP subsidiaries had been created primarily by joint venture capital. Among the countries that circulated their capital in this industry were: India (Indo Maroc Phosphore, Zuari Maroc Phosphates Limited, Paradeep Phosphates Limited); these companies contracted with OCP deals to exploit the mines or to establish research and development units in the mines in Morocco. PhosBoucraa is the only subsidiary that is fully owned by OCP functioning from the Boucraa mine in the Western Sahara.

The territorialization of capital in the Saharan phosphate industry of Boucraa accentuated other forms of capital circulation in the region. My discussion of the Moroccan phosphate industry since its establishment as part of forcing the precolonial Moroccan sultanate to modernity as a nation-state, through the reconfiguration of its fiscal and economic activities, shows the way capital has been deployed in specific industries. Put within the framework of this project, the larger mode of governing populations follows the lines of the logic of global capital. While the discussion so far has been the way the Moroccan phosphate industry been monopolized by a politicoeconomic elite, including the monarchical family, the argument does not seek to belabor the point of where has the money of the phosphate industry gone. Rather, I argue that what has been concealed in terms of the political economy of capital under the guise of state conflicts, is in fact the sites capital has reticulated in its circulation of arms trade to harbor the contemporary moment of terror and fear production.

The idea of the ‘useful triangle’ which is the area in the Western Sahara encompassing Boucraa phosphate mines, Laayoune city with its port and conveyor belt, costs Morocco more than $1 billion year on the Western Sahara, amounting to a 40 to 45 percent of Morocco’s annual budget (Agence France Press, Juin 1997). Defense expenditure consumed
twenty-three percent of “state revenue” between 1980 and 1990, and the wall in particular maintains an expenditure of $1 billion on at least a yearly basis (ibid; Layachi, 1998:152). The expenses of the war increased the international debt of Morocco especially with donor countries such as the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia. Approaching the 1990s, the era of structural adjustment programs, Morocco with its new locale in the circulation of global capital pertaining to the arms trade, followed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advice by abolishing food subsidies as the first measurement to be taken towards Morocco’s financial restructuring.

The financial restructuring in Morocco was accompanied by a growth in the real estate market through ideas of urban change. The role of the state in this case as a regulator and promoter of urban change (Jessop, 2002) was altered by the financialization of capital in North Africa, Casablanca being its portrayed hub. This creation of the overlapping structure of power from the central state to global, supranational levels denotes the mutations of capitalist logic (Brenner, 1999; Cocco, 2007; Ong, 2006; Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Reconfiguring ways in which capitalism maintains itself does not create disjunctures in the global-local inasmuch as there is a continuity of the same logic: the function of the public-national institutions and private capital overlap from the very premise of their collaboration. The state is increasingly becoming a complex entity that has more abstract means of hierarchical subordination among its incoherent set of institutions. And while it seems that the Moroccan state is using its natural resources to the benefit of its inhabitants, the deal of armament is put in place with another discursive modality. The assemblage of these different institutions is dominated by different power structures governed by particular socio-economic groups. The reformation of socioeconomic groups is echoed in the consistent restructuring power of class and capital through the recourse of the legal apparatus of the state. Harvey argues (2007) that neoliberalism is more about regaining the power of class, and this seems apparent in the current struggles to move to a post-welfarist state in Morocco. The analysis here points to the interwoven links between phosphate and armament deals that are in nature those of capital circulation and accumulation regionally and globally, but manifested on a specific politico-economic strata in control of capital’s flow. Brenner (2004) captures this emerging modality through “statehood.” Statehood locates the political container of reconfiguring social processes but as a result of concrete social struggles against the decreasing social services and other matters. On the other side, emerging scales of capital accumulation have intensified the dynamics of this container (ibid). In other words, while war is usually considered as destruction that states and global actors bring into existence, my
argument is that this destruction has its place in the market, unleashing natural resources and labor.

The global armament trade marked the neoliberal age of liberalization. With the discursive power of moving towards securitization, technological knowledge, and novel forms of labor, the global politics of making destruction lucrative has utilized different modes of capital and discourses to reconfigure power. The armament trade since 1975 in North Africa have been constantly rising but not for a conventional war. Morocco’s purchases of weaponry and arms have been a constant client for the capital accumulation of top military sellers: U.S., France, and Italy. Other than the actual heavy military spendings of Morocco (and Algeria), land mines, cluster bombs, and munitions constitute the new logistics of this capital circulation and accumulation. These new logistics, which are the architectural constructs of violence, are actually cheap to produce. Land mines and similar war explosives can cost from $3 to $30 per mine. However the logistics play a pivotal role in the way war and violence is conducted, the real cost of the ammunition is not the scope of capital’s logic. In a paper that appeared in 1966, Richard LeKashman and John Stolle of the firm Booz Allen Hamilton, a leading management company specializing in engineering technology, considered that “the real cost of distribution includes much more than what most companies consider when they attempt to deal with distribution costs” (1966:34). The argument LeKashman and Stolle emphasized was costs “never appear as distribution costs on any financial or operating report, but show up unidentified and unexplained at different times and in assorted places—in purchasing, in production, in paper-work, processing—anywhere and everywhere in the business” (ibid:33). Hence, they are all interconnected and dependent on how the company distributes its products, as their argument concludes. Key here is that cost does not represent a major part of in the logic of selling and buying ammunition. Yet, what sells more is the fact that ammunition is tightly linked to the discursive powers state and corporate actors monopolize to make populations governance possible. If there were no needs to ‘securitize’ the territory, then capital cannot circulate in the domain of armament.

Hoffman argues that among the many plateaus of global capital is war as a violent mode of participation in contemporary global economy (2011:122). An important theoretical contribution to Hoffman’s work is Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1983) and A Thousand Plateaus (1987). Deleuzian and Guattarian theoretical insights have contributed to the theorizing of the war machines with implications far beyond the Mano River warscape. The war machine does not strive to “make war but to keep at bay structures of power that risk descending into despotism” (2011:7). Its characteristics vary
across the flexible, nomadic, and contingent functions at cross purposes to the protocol driven state. The state and war machine have an intimate relation, and at times an antagonistic one. Hoffman argues in this regard that the African contemporary scene holds illustrations of how state functions are performed by state sovereign bodies as well as multinational institutions (ibid:8). Mbembe writes on the conditions of the African continent that these seemingly contradictory aesthetics of state and multinational entities have made the contemporary formations of the postcolony. In this interplay of power, the war machine substitutes the deficiencies of the state to perform certain tasks. Particular to West Africa, Hoffman argues that scales are tilted in favor of the war machine. The practice of violence is conventionally conceived as a chaotic practice that is erratic in nature, Hoffman however argues that it can be highly organized. “The war machine is rhizomatic; it makes and breaks connections at any point along its network. War machines are active forces. They invent concepts. They experiment” (ibid:9). The organized violence at work by states and the war machine is best represented by the analogy to chess game by Deleuze and Guattari:

Chess pieces are coded; they have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations, and confrontations derive … Go pieces, in contrast, are pellets, disks, simple arithmetic units, and have only anonymous, collective, or third person function: “It makes a move. “It” could be a man, a woman, a louse, an elephant. Go pieces are elements of a nonsubjectified machine assemblage with no intrinsic properties, only situational ones … Chess is indeed war, but an institutionalized, regulated, coded war, with a front, a rear, battles. But what is proper to Go is war without battle lines, with neither confrontation nor retreat, without battles even: pure strategy, whereas chess is semiology” (quoted in Hoffman 2011:9).

Hence, war is not itself a question, but “an occasional by-product of what the war machine is really about: exteriority of the state” (ibid:7). The war machine resists the state but not necessarily in a violent way whereby the nomadic character of the machine permits it not to depend on fixed routes. In other words, the nomadic feature allows it to avoid the normative functioning of state bodies.

Moroccan state strategies of controlling the labor market have drawn on the lines of governing the Saharawi population living under its administration. Not only did it move Moroccan settlers to the territory to gain political support for the integration of the Western Sahara into Morocco, but it also excludes the Saharawis from laboring and living off from the resources of their lands. The official discourse has categorized the agricultural activities by Morocco as part of the development agenda of the southern provinces—referring to Western Sahara. The development was planned from the first day not to include any of the local
The new site of capital deployment was something unusual for the desert, whereby the regional center for investment in the Saharan city of Dakhla reported “the establishment of agro-industrial businesses has made rapid progress during these last years. In fact, the agricultural potential of this almost desert region is not negligible and promises lucrative profits to investors” (quoted in WSRW, 2009). The same report points to the financial capital already made available for such an investment. Contracts of the agricultural products were mainly signed with European and Russian companies. Brahim, who had previously lived in Dakhla, told me his experience of trying to work at the French company Azura that owns a license for the production of fruits and vegetables in the Western Sahara. The company is known for the agricultural glass houses and its irrigation technologies that threaten the aquatic ecosystem. Brahim had finished his high school in 2009 when he decided to look for a job in agriculture in his hometown of Dakhla.

I wanted to work in the field. I was always interested in agriculture. Azura is known for recruiting workers once or twice a year for their new projects. There is always a new project somewhere else. I went to the selection presentation with all my documents at hand. I also had a good knowledge of agriculture and irrigation techniques. They asked me questions and listened to the answers. I was shocked to see that I was not accepted. They have about 10,000 employees in the tomato sector only. Later on, I learnt that Saharawis are not allowed to work in these foreign companies. That only Moroccans had the right. So, I decided to go back to them and argue that I was a Moroccan, although I did not think I was a Moroccan, but my legal documents showed that I was a Moroccan. I had a Moroccan national ID! The company administrators said that these are the policies and they can’t do anything about them. (personal interview, February 2015).

Hoffman’s suggestion that rather than isolated readings of the Mano River war, these conflicts are inevitably connected to global processes of labor contracting and deployment. The war machine is a set of practices, modes of operating, and relations emerging to contest the interiorizing practice of the modern nation-state. The war machine is not always violent in its initial form, it consists of efforts of community struggle and resistance to state processes of extraction and alienation, that are often captured and reterritorialized (ibid:16). Perhaps the most important contribution of Hoffman’s analysis of the novel ways of reproducing imaginaries on West African scapes is steering class of classifying the Mano River dynamics...
as an economical curse or patrimonial outbursts of preserved tradition—approaches that have defined the Africanist field. Rather, the events taking place in secluded West African military outposts and urban communities are coetaneous to the nexus of neoliberal rationalities and economies of scale that also summon for the outsourcing of security services in other parts of the world as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Violence is a product in itself of human labor and not as a symptom of some other condition. It is produced through the circulation of processes of consumed bodies and imaginaries of futures. Hoffman engaged with the possibilities populations that had represented the excess found themselves in the postwar context without financial rewards or the security they had expected. Ethnographic observations of how young men and women figured lives in an abandoned hotel in Freetown and on the streets of Monrovia elucidates Marx’s analysis on “real subsumption” in which “there seem to be no relations not organized according to the exchange-value-producing regime, where there is no outside to capital” (2011:107). Therefore, violence is not outside of capital’s regime, it is a commodity that circulates in common with other natural resources in which its “value has translated into political subjectivity” (ibid:108).

The narratives I refer too are only few from the stories the work of the organization Western Sahara Resource Watch published. Barchiesi (2007) explores how the job creation discourse deploys language, knowledge, and representation to produce a social order by orienting values and conducts that structure social conflict. This is how capital tries to incorporate pre-existing relations of social cooperation into its force of production. Through production, labor finds a terrain of struggle in defining productive capacity. In other words, and since the living labor is different from waged labor—Barchiesi holds that the living labor is conditioned by capital whereas waged work is not—the job creation imperative represents a modality of the capitalist appropriation of the living (2007:572). Similarly, the current modes of living under the Moroccan administration pushed Saharawis to either be part of the larger labor supply to other countries or to work in different sectors that are usually categorized as informal opportunities.

Demining: More Capital and Labouring Lives

Discursive modalities of governing populations generated humanitarian regimes as a conditioner for neoliberal techniques of producing terror. Looking at how capital has been circulating in global arms trade in the postcolony, there are also similar trends with the creation of disarmament and demining regimes that are part of the same trajectory of capital
circulation. Key here is how these regime not only allocate capital to create more space for further accumulation, but also manage to fashion archetypes of life that are no longer about death, but rather about the reproduction of life under specific conditions.

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) was established in 1997 by the General Assembly as a vision to a “world free of the threat of land mines and unexploded ordnance, where individuals and communities live in safe environment conducive to development, and where mine survivors are fully integrated into their societies” (UNMAS). In other words, this statement opted to sketch the ways this organism wields modalities of governance to administer populations. The statement did not refer to nation-states; rather it articulated in a very precise manner the discursive modes of the actual governance these kind of international organisms propelled. Hence, the aim of UNMAS is a world ‘free’ of the fear production machine which would set the ground for development, the discursive tool for a neoliberal face of capital accumulation. The work of UNMAS and similar organizations on de-mining requires huge funding to detect fields, train personnel, purchase sophisticated devices, transport equipment, and do the actual work. What started as a three dollar production of a cheap way to maim limbs ended up a huge industry for capital circulation. From 1 January until 31 December 2013, UNMAS spent $3 million solely on the Western Sahara on operations in coordination with the Mine Action Coordination Center of MINURSO (UNMAS, 2013:58). The total 2013 fund for UNMAS alone amounted to $202 million with country donors who already rank top brokers of international arms trade. The end of the Gulf war in 1991 stimulated companies to opt for de-mining as an industry. Mines clearance from Kuwaiti territory between 1991-93 involved a significant use of equipment. Companies such as Royal Ordnance, ELS, BACTECT, Mine-Tech, etc, emerged through expansions into an active commercial industry and prepared for what can be today described as the theatrical performance of humanitarian contracts, serving to advertise services to clients from all various domains to compete over ‘mine action.’

The time-delayed function of land mines has marked the architecture of this type of weaponry and also the readings on it proposed by humanitarian regimes. Landmines do not have to be positioned strategically and they lie dormant once implanted in a field until they get activated to blow off limbs. Faced with this architectonic, UNMAS as most modern humanitarian regimes functions based on statistics; however, in this particular case, it is very difficult to ‘guess’ a number and map mine fields. In the 2014 GiCHD guide to mine action, the report states that “it was still not possible to put any meaningful number on the total
number of land mines or area affected” (GICHD, 2014:22). Notwithstanding the importance of numbers to the work of such regimes, key here is that numbers do not adequately explain how the work of humanitarian agencies is intricate to the arms trade in general. It is much harder to remove a land mine than to deploy it. The process of de-mining an area is not dependent on knowledge of the affected land. Whereas it is known to MINURSO that the western and especially eastern sides of the berm are fully lodged with mines, the point rests on the production of the technique of these mines: where there is fear there is a contaminated area, hence the clearance process should happen. The production of fear has engendered this notion of the field; contaminated areas are not synonyms of militarized zones. Even when the wall is projected as a military setting, its architecture is laid on a field that is far beyond what is considered by both state and international politics as militarized zones. Williams and Roberts argue that “with the millions of landmines currently contaminating the globe, even if no more mines were produced and deployed, it will take decades to overcome the problem” (1995:101). Williams and Roberts argument reflects on how land mines became the new mode of producing terror, and given that their argument appeared in 1995, at the peak of UN discursive assembles of de-mining through mine ban treaties and conventions, it should be further engaged with how the business of de-mining, as a mode of the plexus of violence, has been also about labor.

One of UNMAS’s missions is to reduce unemployment in areas that are contaminated with mines. According to UNMAS, “mine action has comparative advantages over many other sectors in providing employment through its ability to recruit, train, procure, deploy and partner quickly, delivering an early peace dividend” (GICHD 2014:39). Hoffman (2011) theorizes violence in wartimes in the African postcolony borrowing from the notion of ‘just in time,’ which denotes the business management notion of manufacturing systems that are produced and delivered immediately based on demand. Acknowledging that the ethnographic material Hoffman draws his theoretical insights from is somehow different, what his analysis offers is the kind of modes that labor is linked to when producing violence in the contemporary moment. Key to his argument is that just-in-time production does not depend on disciplinary regimes to coerce labor into performing its functions, it rather relies on movement (2011:52). Hence, instead of thinking that the factory, the office, and the shop are the only spaces that regenerate labor; movement has been a site of finding further modes of labor. The unpredictability and unlimited supply of movement provides the market shifts laboring modes from being dependent on the disciplinary ethics of modern work into the
production of precarity, and in this case of the production of destruction. Even when Saharawis did not find themselves part of militia groups Hoffman refers to in the case of the Mano River war, I have argued that they are still at the intersection of politics and the global economy. This intersection is what I explore in terms of the discursive modules claimed by the UNMAS, as an example, to rectify the ‘ills’ of the modern global political system through a touchstone of the neoliberal agenda: labor.

The aim of creating employment opportunities is not only linked to the survival of communities living in mined fields. Most regions lodged with land mines have induced populations’ excess and rendered them displaced and refugees, living on humanitarian food aid. For these reasons, the idea of creating work opportunities is not simply to make some cash available to these communities. The ‘peace process’ which is advocated by UNMAS as a result of de-mining activities, is similar to the ‘confidence-building measurements’ whereby it is put there to conceal the tensions resulting between populations escaping their categorical confinements imposed on them and the systems rendering governance possible through different techniques. As one female member of the Saharawi Youth Alliance puts it:

The UN allowed the construction of the wall, and Morocco did not cease scattering land mines and cluster bombs every now and then in the region, so why then they come and ask us to cooperate with them to clear the area?” There have been meetings on the official level to let some foreign companies pay for the de-mining work on some well-identified areas to explore possibilities of natural resources exploitation by our government [SADR]. What I understood from them is that we will have the right to move without thinking that somebody will lose an arm or a leg only if we give them the permit to exploit our resources. Conclusion is the world is full of mafia-like organizations, some dress with a business suit, others with law suits, and maybe others like to showcase their sympathy [referring to NGOs], but they all get something material at the end. (personal interview, January 2015)

In this capitalist regime, labor is not fixed, but perpetually reproduced to supply new demands of this kind of economy. The economy does not rely only on the actual positions seen as work, but also on the sorts of knowledge constituting this economy. Important to the work of UNMAS is the so-called ‘risk education.’ It entails of informing the population there of the kinds of land mines, cluster bombs, how they function, and how to stay away from the
areas contaminated. In short, they teach populations to flee them, and not to navigate them, as they already do. UNMAS conducted risk education in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, and Palestine, sensitizing populations of the contaminated area. In the Saharawi refugee camps, the local Saharawi land mines association ASAVIM held similar sensitizing events in coordination with AOAV (Action on Armed Violence) and lately with UNMAS-MINURSO. Despite its importance to the work of these organizations, Saharawi interlocutors mocked these sessions. Saharawi geography schoolbooks have specific lessons on the threats of land mines on social and economic life and as the high school director of Esamara camp told me, teachers deal with the topic of land mines as any other things they have to tell the children about it. It becomes a matter of learning how to navigate, and as I have argued previously, the geopolitics of fear in their reproduction of everydayness and life mobilize knowledge. Knowledge is the assemblage of the navigation of territorial and political confinements around the wall. Therefore, when my interlocutors mocked MINURSO’s and UNMAS’s programs on risk education they were referring to the kind of knowledge Saharawis circulate among themselves to have their own sense of ‘risk education,’ what I would rather call navigating the limbs factory. The few days later after the incident of the soldier from the Saharawi Army, whenever somebody asked me if I had visited the wall area or not, they chatted about the new roads their relatives showed them.

I think that MINURSO’s land-mines campaigns are to make them feel better about themselves. They know they have done nothing good to us [Saharawis] and they have nothing anyway to offer. I learn everyday about the land-mines through hearsay. It is simple, there is this little metal that can explode anytime. If you see a weird shape you shouldn’t go nearby and preferably mark it with something and let others know. I don’t need to know the different types of mines as that won’t change much. It will main you at best. So, what can MINURSO add to this? (Salek, Saharawi Youth Alliance member, personal interview January 2015).

Forms of knowledge display discursive power that performs in the plexus of capital and violence. Given that forms of life and violence are interlinked, the neoliberal way of governance is projected through programs that reformulate the problematization of security and violence in particular ways. Capital and technological transformations have been
complex and distinguished by their capacity to adapt and change. From the same perspective, risk education programs reflect the dominant concerns and discursive character of these transformations. Above all, it has a preoccupation with knowledge networks in their complexity and the organizational and sociopolitical technologies that populations possess to struggle with moral and economic scapes set by global capital and governance. As knowledge (and information) has come to be envisaged differently, so also they have come to be realized differently. This knowledge is based on spatial alterations and temporal inscriptions of global capital and politics. In the same way, Cocco (2007) argues that the production of new subjectivities as a result of the space reconfiguration is through new forms of labor. Governance is exercised on alterations of modes of labor. That biopolitics in the neoliberal age are reconfigured to discipline space as stable to a living labor within territories (Cocco, 2007:308). That is how “determinitorialization, then, is not just a function of financial flows, it is also a feature of civil society” (ibid). However, the other conflicting side creates a biopower through which the territory is controlled. Thus, for Cocco (2007), whenever territories are mobilized a determinitorialization happens. And whenever state-centrism is at stake, it mobilizes its modes of discipline to regain control.

Rethinking the modes of the Western Sahara scapes in relation to the set of practices and modes of operating of the “war machines,” the language of politics decrypting violence aesthetics extends from being embedded in the lexicon of colonality to one that captures contested practices of the modern nation-state and capital. Set in the background of my positionality as a researcher that has been considered by the Saharawis as belonging to the ‘enemy’s state,’ the language used to address localities and the overall contested history could not escape a false politicization—as I wish to argue—about the problematic of how do we speak of situations that seem to be about a territorial conflict. Had Morocco invaded, liberated, occupied, or annexed the Western Sahara? These were words that can either fix power dynamics emerging in the Western Sahara into boxes of hegemonic thinking about sociopolitical reordering of populations, or conceal them with pallid politics. Violence was the condition of forming the Western Sahara today. The possibilities put in front of the Saharawi population who had represented the excess in the course of anti-Spanish colonial struggle intensified social and political events facing new violent machineries that do not form the exception of the contemporary moment. As I argue that the different features of violent architectures and structures in the Western Sahara do not exist outside of global capital logic through different operating practices of circulation and accumulation, reading the regional dynamics magnifying in the Sahara display how capital violent machinery is
terриториized. This reading of Morocco’s territorialization of the Western Sahara provides us with an intellectual exist to static forms of reflecting on the many ways Saharawi everydayness is contriving a new meaning of the political, even when it claims to be part of a national liberation struggle. On the other hand, the territorialization of the Western Sahara is not a theoretical construct that could make permanent production of violence as a manifestation of state power. On the contrary, what this conceptual thinking of capital territorialization in the postcolonial moment does is enlarges the scope of understanding how capital modified the tapestry of governing populations through the complex system of linking lives to laboring practices, political claims, social orders, and material sets. The complexity emerges from their appearance as separate practices that belong to different nexus of power, but they are genuinely facades to the same logic.

Chapter 6

The Political Laboratory

The limbs factory is the new modality of manufacturing terror in the contemporary moment. As a modality of governing populations, nothing exists outside of capital. The obstruct in the Western Sahara represents a transit point for capital circulation deployed in the arms trade and the commodification of violence as the mode of living in today’s world. As Safar said, there is no beginning or an end to these sites, stories in their circulation through the everyday. The Saharawi population cannot escape being hegemonized in its anticolonial struggle. Territorializing capital in the Western Sahara has meant the deterritorialization of structures and domains of life that are experimental. To say experimental is to acknowledge that there are life threads that are novel and are not preoccupied with pre-defined categories. As the nation-state is already a historical category, perhaps a critical reformulation of the possibilities that inform populations living in contexts of armed violence suggests a closer look at what could constitute a novel political project even when the grammar used is that of the nation-state. The woman interlocutor who told me that the self-determination referendum was not the thing that she ultimately desired, that it was the grammar of the current moment, is one of the ways in which the political is becoming the domain of articulated everydayness. Saharawis navigating the invisible field of the limbs factory are not putting their lives on hold until these various violent constructions, whether materially or discursively, end. Safar’s story about crossing one hell after another in fact captures the manner of violence that is at play not only in the Western Sahara, but also in
the violent scapes of the world. Commodifying violence to serve the purpose of governing populations is not in itself the product of an unexpected event, but rather the condition of living today.

Everydayness tactics forged by Saharawis in the shadows of walking through the limbs factory draw practically and conceptually on the possibilities of these new contexts of not reading violence as a fragmented moment of state tensions. Hoffman’s (2011) theorization of the war machines as the driving mode of reconfiguring West African scapes demonstrates that capital’s machinery in fact looks at those spaces made open for the commodification of violence as a novel way of circulating and accumulating capital. Saharawi camps are sustained by the humanitarian capital distributed in the world based on donor’s interest and the hegemonic making visible of ‘dire’ need. Yahia Bouhbaini, the president of the Saharawi Red Crescent (SRC), which is the body responsible for brokering, deals with donors and providers, observed:

Saharawi Red Crescent started receiving food aid from international humanitarian organizations, including the World Food Program, only in the 1990s. Before this we received minimal contributions from the Algerian, Libyan, South African, and sometimes Cuba. But now, we are again left all alone to deal with this situation. The SRC tries to collect money from donors and then with that amount we do our best to find a seller with the best quality-price offer. Most donors now come from independent Spaniard organizations. For others, the Saharawi cause is just not appealing anymore. This is how it works for international humanitarian organizations. They can drop you at the middle of the road if they hear about another crisis somewhere else that attracts their attention. (personal interview, February 2015).

Agier describes the function of humanitarian regimes as the second hand of the empire that seeks to heal (2011:200). However, it is not only a performance done to strike some sympathetic emotions for these organizations from populations around the world. It is also a discursive modality of the power of global order dictated by the logic of work. The preoccupation of such organizations and institutions that adopt such discourses on the apolitical nature of populations, conflicts, violence or any other manifestations of the human occupation of living seem to opt for creating another order that is depoliticized, as opposed to believing that these matters are really apolitical. Yet the more critical engagements are with the particularities of precarious and hazardous conditions of living under the limbs factory,
the more it becomes clearer that the social and the political are embedded through the mundane of everydayness even when events elapse with atrocities.

Jacques Ranciere (2001:29) argues that “politics cannot be defined on the basis of any pre-existing subject.” There is nothing proper to politics. The political relationship as Ranciere elaborates, is in constituting the relationship between two contradictory terms through which a subject is defined. What Ranciere’s argument further suggests is that there could be different relationships characterized as the political, but none of them could possibly exist with a predefined subject. The sorting and unsorting of who is a Saharawi intensified the necessity of making this category stable to seemingly resolve the riddle of the Western Sahara. Furthermore, in the discursive parameters set to dictate how populations should regard themselves, talk about themselves, consider their relations with other domains, the political is always understood as something that is proper to a visible entity—namely the nation-state as the most visible entity of contemporary ideals of politics. Because the limbs factory is not visible—in the way it is not a legitimate hegemonic category of its own in today’s discursive politics—hence it is not regarded by those who are dictating the rules of the political as something that a political relationship can be formed with. In Ranciere’s *Dissensus on Politics and Aesthetics*, one of his ten thesis on politics is:

*Thesis ten. The ‘end of politics’ and the ‘return of politics’ are two complementary ways of cancelling out politics in the simple relationships between a state of the social and a state of the state apparatus. ‘Consensus’ is the common name given to this cancellation* (2010:42).

In many ways, Rancerean paradigm develops in a binary of political-politics (le politique-la police) in which this relationship is reproduced and eluded in the process of giving shape to that relationship. Intellectual models that have declared the political as dead or welcomed its return have fixed the manifestations of the political in effacing its sphere of existence at time of ‘consensus,’ which is the reduction of bodies and communities into relations between interest of these different parts (ibid). This argument had much credit in denouncing that there is a ‘pure’ characteristic of the political which we can end or return to. The idea of the ‘return’ of the political is based on the assumption that the political was inexistent under certain conditions and temporality whereby its return becomes this evacuation of tensions. Ranciere argues that an understanding of politics in relation to usurpation of the social occludes “the fact that the social is by no means a particular sphere of existence but instead a disputed object of politics” (ibid:42). Despite that the limbs factory has assumed its
circulation on the instability of the social, there is hardly a point in claiming that the social is stable anywhere. Living conditions in the world are already complex to the extent that they have exacerbated to weave all domains at certain knots to reproduce the social in specific ways. The return of the political not only does not take into consideration the ground from which it manifests itself today, but fails to understand that which constitutes a novel way of not speaking the language of a master plan.

Saharawis know well the grammar of the state apparatus. Its performance is easily executed. However, in the everydayness the expression of the political is not formulated vis-a-vis the model of state politics. Safar’s position of freedom fighter while he was facing Moroccan police repression and then his departure to the camps manifests the kind of excess certain populations are living through. The excess reflected on the unpredictable everydayness is not only escaping the control of hegemonic orders, but also as Law (2004:9) argues the “desires for certainty and for stable conclusions.” The desire of master narratives, plans, and ideals or reordering the social and the political is what has affixed meanings of the political and its misleading counterpart of the apolitical. In the constant production of the limbs factory, everydayness is the medium through which experience is materialized (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006). Not forming the cohesive set of ‘practical’ ideas that could be hegemonically displayed on larger scales is what makes these everyday experiences banal in the eyes of apparatuses dictating what is the mode of declaring the political. As Papadopoulos et al argue, everydayness is about the “imperceptible moments of social life that are the starting point of contemporary forces of change” (2008:XII). The organizational context of the world’s population cannot escape the fact that the grand narrative is persistently directed towards the grammar of the state model, but in locating those moments of exit from the imposition of institutional organizations to life without a plan is what could be possibly characterized as sociopolitical transformations under construction.

In *Men in the Sun*, Kanafani portrays how the Palestinian national paralysis after 1948 war left people to struggle to construct their own lives and futures. The journey to Kuwait from Iraq is about three men hiding in a water tank of a truck where they face death. Kanafani’s novel raises question of possibilities through an imaginative restructuring of life assemblages, but also portrays how trajectories usually organized around national liberation movements deviate from claims of cohesive plans. The story starts with how three Palestinian refugees decide to embark on a new journey to look for labor in the oil-rich state of Kuwait. In between the territorial confinement of two state borders: the road and the border, the three
men represent the excess of population in the world. *Men in the Sun* offers a vision of what happens to the project of national liberation consolidation when circumstances do not permit such a narrative. While the historical categories and concepts belong to that of the modern nation-state in its embodiment in a liberation movement, including those of rupture and discontinuity, it also enables a critical understanding or interrogation of the contemporary by defining the historical conditions that allow the contemporary to make sense. The no conclusion of the novel itself presents an opening to the possibilities of such contemporaneity. In the end, why didn’t the three men bang on the walls of the water tank? Did they bang? There is no anticipated conclusion and no clear answers.

Kanafani’s characters are not preoccupied with living in neither the past nor the future, neither thinking about the past of the Palestinian liberation struggle nor about the promise in a better condition in Kuwait. Rather, their desires are based on everyday existence, hopes and fear that transgress temporal and spatial settings. It is about the permanent present. The water tank or the Saharan wall are similar trajectories with different violent material constructions; they critically offer an understanding of how master plans are simply a new modality of living through the collisions of life. The three plot characters died at the end, but there was no apparent claim about resistance or absorption into either sides of the Palestinian meta-narrative. In their desire to continue living, leaving to Kuwait to find a job is a crucial force of change in the lives of Palestinians, and in a similar thread to Saharawis who leave the camps in search of work opportunities in Algiers and Spain especially. In two different geographical fluxes and temporal frames, the Palestinian and Saharawi liberation movements are what modern machine of capital sees as crisis, a constant revolution, that it needs to generate a unique form of surplus by continuously unproducing what it produces. Its deterriorialization comes after what it has already territorialized, only to territorialize it again. As Harvey (1990:175) argues “capital needs a crisis in order to function.” But there is a constant renovation of how it seems to commodify crisis. Labor as a pillar to modern sociality captures this deterriorialization and reterritorialization. Marx (1977:784) called it the “disposable industrial reserve army” whereby capital protects itself from overaccumulating by keeping laboring bodies out of its system so that they can be reintegrated later at an exploitative mode. Or as Hoffman (2011:11) puts it, laboring bodies “must be uncoded from the coding of the system, temporarily relegated to the smooth space exterior to the striated space of state and capital.”
The limbs factory has ensured its existence on deterritorializing the Saharawi labor force and commodification of violence, and forms knowledge (as in creating the de-mining industry). My argument about the materiality and the regulatory regimes of the limbs factory put to work emphasizes the way *la population flottante*, to borrow the term of Janet Roittman (2005:141), of nomads, migrants, and traders are part of the cycle of capital machine. Whether setting in the camp, in the state, or any other zone, these remain trajectories of the same global mode of capital. The war machine, Hoffman (2011) argues, has no specific content. It can take different shapes and localities and produce its own productive force. These are conditions that cannot be easily incorporated into a fixed plan of the nation-state. Hence, the particular questions intellectual debates raise are not necessarily about the compatibility with the discursive performances of movements such as the Saharawi one, but rather how these forces of change pushed further by the limbs factory are forming a laboratory for the present. This laboratory is not one that is fit to fabricate stable conclusions. All remain under construction and rupture.
References


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