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Forged on the battlefield: The influence of armed conflict on the consolidation of Saharawi identity

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Introduction

The war in Western Sahara, "the last remaining colonial dispute in Africa" (Copete 2002:12), is one of the African continent's most forgotten conflicts. Being waged with low intensity, it receives relatively little attention in the international media, except during occasional escalations of hostilities between Moroccan forces and the fighters of the *Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro*[1] briefly catapult the issue into the news cycle. It is a conflict "far removed from our everyday concerns" (Murado 2010), something seemingly only idealists and human rights activist care about. Indeed, it seems rather difficult to comprehend why people are willing to fight and die in the struggle over Western Sahara. How can the wish for self-determination arise in a barren and sparsely populated stretch of desert on northern Africa's Atlantic coast? How can an identity materialise amongst a nomadic people of no more than 400 000 (Zunes and Mundy 2001:xxi), similar in religion and culture to their neighbours, that have never in their past known a nation state or fixed territory (Hanauer 1995)?

This paper aims to show how the identity of the Saharawi[2] people has come to its present, consolidated form – a perception of self and other strong enough to render any solution to the conflict short of full independence from Morocco unrealistic. For political scientists, Western Sahara offers an interesting and yet largely overlooked case-study for why identities emerge and how they are consolidated. It is the main argument of this paper that one factor helped the distinct identity of the Saharawis consolidate in despite the absence of the most facilitating circumstances: persistent armed conflict with Mauritania and Morocco.

1   Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro, henceforth POLISARIO.
2   Saharawis will henceforth be used to identify the inhabitants of Western Sahara that perceive themselves to be citizens of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, henceforth SADR.

The research is divided into four parts. The first section provides a brief historical overview of armed conflict in the Western Sahara and a review of the existing literature that deals with conflict and identity. After highlighting gaps in the existing literature, mainly the fact that most authors are either concerned with a different causal chain or do not specifically look at armed conflict as an identity-consolidating factor, this paper argues that armed conflict has influenced the consolidation of Saharawi identity by setting in motion a process of identity differentiation. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and constructivist literature, a model of this identity differentiation process is proposed.

Based on this theoretical framework, the second chapter lays out the hypotheses and the research design. To make the somewhat vague notion of 'consolidated identity' measurable, it will be broken down into three building blocks and their respective indicators: internal manifestation, external manifestation and the general presence in international discourse, each of which is observable through a distinct mechanism. By no means claiming to provide a comprehensive list of indicators for identity consolidation, this focus on symbols and outside recognition is expected to provide a limited indication of how warfare helps a new group identity gradually amalgamate.

The third part of this paper is dedicated to quantitatively and qualitatively analysing the relationship between armed conflict, acting as the independent variable (IV), and the three dependent variables (DVs) listed above. Quantitative analysis is used in an indicative rather than a definitive, way of gaining a first understanding of the relationship between the study variables. Qualitative analysis of each variable will then be undertaken to embed the findings in the theoretical framework of the conflict-

identity nexus this paper has laid out. Finally, conclusions regarding the relationship between armed conflict and the consolidation of identity will be drawn and directions for further research will be suggested.

Part I: Understanding identity consolidation

Historical Overview

Armed conflict has been a defining feature of the common experience of the people in the Western Sahara for nearly a century. War in the Spanish Sahara[3] pre-dates the conflict between POLISARIO, Morocco and Mauritania. The region had not seen peace for many years when Spain decided to rescind the territory in 1975. Both the Moroccans and the tribes of Western Sahara had fought a long, grinding guerrilla war against the colonial power in the desert. Morocco gained independence in 1956, whilst the Sahara remained under Spanish control, eventually being incorporated into the territorial structure of Spain in the late 1950s (Marks 1976:7). Nevertheless, in 1975, the year General Franco died, Spain followed the general tendency towards decolonisation and withdrew from the territory. It left its former African province under Moroccan and Mauritanian administration until a referendum could be held which never materialised. Both countries claimed sovereignty over the territory and Morocco decided to create facts on the ground: the 'Green March', as the occupation of the Western Sahara was called, saw the Moroccan king move 350 000 of his subjects into the Sahara, accompanied by the Kingdom's army (Mercer 1976).

In 1973, the Saharawi people formed the POLISARIO to resist and eventually rid themselves of Spain's colonial rule. They had fought alongside the Moroccans up to

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3   The name give to the region during the period of Spanish colonialism from 1884 to 1975.

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the Green March. The ensuing pattern of invasion and occupation seemed all too familiar, and POLISARIO decided to "[aim] its guns at the new occupiers" (Zunes and Mundy, 2011:3). Split-off from the rest of either Mauritania or Morocco for more than two decades, the people in the desert area had started developing a feeling of separateness, making them see the invading Moroccans not as liberators, but as an occupying force that merely looked different and spoke Arabic rather than Spanish (Hodges, 1983).

The euphemistically-termed Green March was by no means a peaceful affair. It initially displaced thousands of people, with the Moroccan Army strafing and Napalm-bombing the Saharawi refugees with fighter planes whilst fleeing, driving them to refugee camps in Algeria (Mercer 1976:506-509). When the first clashes between POLISARIO and the Moroccan and Mauritanian armies occurred in 1975, they killed a small but not insignificant number of people. In 1976, POLISARIO declared the SADR in the now-occupied territory, leading to even more intense fighting that would not only defeat Mauritania in 1979[4], but also "greatly embarrass Moroccan forces" (Zunes and Mundy, 2011:3) which could do little against POLISARIO's technique of long-range desert raids. To counter this threat, Morocco constructed several walls in the desert (1980-1987) to impede the movement of the Saharawi guerrillas. Nevertheless, fighting has not halted. The overall death toll for all parties, Mauritania, Morocco and the Saharawis, lies somewhere between 5000 and 20.000. At 330 and 1300 annual dead on average the conflict has been costly, especially for the small Saharawi population (Appendix Table 5).

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4   Due to this early defeat, Mauritania will be featured significantly less in this paper than Morocco

Literature Review

It is important to note that this study does not focus on the initial emergence of a Saharawi identity, but on what is termed *consolidation* in this paper. The precise moment when a distinct Saharawi identity emerged, and to a certain extent why it emerged, is not the focus of this study. The aim is to explain why this identity became strong enough to resist being subsumed into a larger 'Moroccan identity', impeding solutions such as autonomy and perpetuating the conflict for over 25 years. Research (Cerulo 1997; Hale 2004) has shown that individuals can hold more than one identity, or at least multiple dimensions of one identity, making the Saharawi case a true empirical puzzle requiring an explanation.

On the theoretical level, there seems to be a gap in the literature concerning such an explanation. Much has been written about the relationship between identity and conflict, especially in the case of intrastate wars such as the case study on hand. Many different approaches exist within this field. Primordialist arguments that highlight "ancient hatreds" between groups (see for example Kaplan, 1993) will be dismissed from the outset. Not only can their validity be challenged due to their rather simplistic explanation since there are no major ethnic, linguistic or religious divisions in this case, this line of argumentation also seems rather unjustified (Hanauer 1995). Much of the remaining theoretical literature deals with the way identities, be they class-based, national or ethnic, cause intergroup conflict, either through structural factors (such as in Marxist literature) or elite and mass mobilisation around given identities (Petersen 2002; Kaufman 2001). These authors investigate the inverse relationship, considering identity through an instrumentalist lens: the question they ask is how identity leads to conflict, not how conflict leads to identity.

It might however be possible to infer some of the assumptions the authors mentioned above make about how identity is created and consolidated. Elite-centred approaches may see elites (POLISARIO, in this case) as the primary force perpetuating identity, using it to further their own goals, for example control over the economic resources, such as rich fishing grounds off the coast, the phosphate reserve and possible oil that lies hidden beneath the desert's sands (Hodges 1983). Yet, POLISARIO has put forward a democratic constitution and has been repeatedly challenged from within (Constitución de la RASD 1976, 1991; Zunes and Mundy 2010). As for the resources, a stable and peaceful environment may even facilitate their extraction, where cooperation with Morocco would make the construction of infrastructure for their exploitation possible. Kaufman emphasises national symbols as primary creators of identity, leaving some room for the role of armed conflict which can provide favourable conditions for the creation of symbols (2001), whilst Petersen's emotional approach opens up the possibility of armed conflict creating emotions that may cause groups to coalesce around their identities *vis-a-vis* a perceived foe. By no means a full list or an exhaustive discussion of existing theoretical approaches, this brief discussion shows that they cannot satisfactorily explain how and by which mechanisms conflict may influence identity.

From Anecdotal to Theoretical Evidence

In addition to the theoretical literature, much of the material written about the case of Western Sahara looks at the conflict from a historiographical perspective. This approach has some benefits, the most important being the exhaustive and detailed nature of the works associated with it, but faces its own set of shortcomings. Tony

Hodges' writing on the conflict serves to illustrate this point. In his paper "The Origins of Sahrawi Nationalism" (1983) he puts the nationalism felt by modern-day Saharawis into historical context and offers a narrative for why and how this distinctive identity has been formed. Very much in line with this paper's argument, Hodges claims that the experience of resistance against the Spanish colonial presence in the region has been a central factor in the emergence of a Saharawi identity (Hodges, 1983:31). From 1934 onwards, the tribes in the region resisted the Spanish and later the Mauritanians and Moroccans. Although this historical view hints at the importance of armed conflict for creating national identities, it does not explain how Saharawi identity grew strong enough to merit a decade-long fight. Nor does it clarify the mechanisms that made armed conflict influence identity consolidation or why the Saharawis are resisting incorporation as an autonomous part of Morocco (Beyun 2012).

A number of authors affirm the importance of armed conflict for the creation and maintenance of national or ethnic identities in a similar way. Çelik, describing the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds, dedicates two chapters of his book to the influence of armed resistance on the creation of, and changes, in Kurdish identity (Çelik 2002). He names the armed forces and their fight against an external enemy as one of the central aspects for the reaffirmation and diffusion of Kurdish identity amongst the population. For the case-study at hand, Bucharaya Beyun[5] stressed the importance of the fight against Morocco for creating the "feeling of being Saharan" (Beyun 2012). He describes the armed struggle against Morocco as well as the collective experience of losing relatives and friends in the war as one of the most important pillars of Saharawi identity, especially in the early stages of the split from

5   POLISARIO's delegate to Spain; equivalent of an ambassador

Morocco. He also reaffirms that becoming a part of the Kingdom of Morocco is not a viable option in an interview conducted for this paper (ibid.).

This body of evidence, however, is rather anecdotal. Whilst forming a valuable part of any assessment, two specific problems are associated with it. One of them is a problem of intuition, or "the common-sense trap". To give an example, empirical research shows that random violence against civilians may have the effect of discouraging resistance against the perpetrator. Counter-intuitively and against opinions often voiced in newspapers, this observation proves that indiscriminate shelling of villages does not increase the magnitude of insurgency, at least in the short and medium turn (Lyall 2009). This is the danger that arises from arguments based on anecdotal evidence: it is quite possible that seemingly rational reasoning does not stand up to empirical scrutiny.

Another problem emanates from separating experience from facts, especially when talking to individuals directly involved. Both armed conflict and the effort to achieve separation from Morocco have dominated Beyun's life – the fact that he sees a link between one and the other does not come as a surprise, but does not definitively indicate that such a link exists. Whilst anecdotal evidence can provide interesting insights, its validity has to be considered with care, and experience and opinion need to be separated from the facts.

Social Psychology and Identity

This paper aims to transform such anecdotal evidence, a sense that armed conflict has had a bearing on identity, into evidence that can be empirically tested. A theoretical framework, proposing a link between armed conflict and identity consolidation, is

therefore needed. Social psychology seems to be the best starting point to deal with this questions – it raises the fundamental issue of why and how different identities emerge, not how differences between them are instrumentalised. Within this discipline, Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGTC) is a prominent and influential way of explaining intergroup dynamics. It assumes that identity is part of a rational struggle over scarce resources between groups (Hewstone and Greenland 2000:137), which in the face of competition increases in-group cohesion to enhance the ability to gain advantage over the out-group. RGTC is not without merit as a starting point for the inquiries made in this paper, but a central flaw diminishes its value as an explanatory framework. RGTC seems to ignore the fact that conflicts involving identity can outlive "rational" struggles without any apparent difficulties (Hewstone and Greenland 2000:139).

Identity Differentiation

Generally, the notion RGTC provides, that identities play an important role in conflictual situations between groups, does nevertheless provide a good starting point for theoretical inquiries. Moreover, the idea of a *process* of identity differentiation is crucial to the causal reasoning of this paper, serving as the link between armed conflict and the observable mechanisms of identity consolidation. Here, SIT offers some distinct benefits over RGTC, especially concerning so-called "non-rational" struggles. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that when groups compete, the need to differentiate membership as clearly as possible arises. SIT points out that there are two discrete types of and dimensions to most conflicts. On the one hand, there is what can be labelled "objective" conflict, whose roots lay "outside the realm of social psychology"

(ibid.:139). These are competitions over power, land and resources, which need to be explained in historical, political and economic terms. On the other hand, there is a subjective dimension to most conflicts, a "psychological" one (ibid.) that can outlive objective struggles. These originate in the fact that individuals have a psychological need to define themselves: Members of a social group do so to a large extent through membership of "their" group (Ibid.:137), so that an individual's social identity "derives from the social categories to which the individual perceives him- or herself to belong" as well as "the value and emotional significance ascribed to that membership" (ibid.). Identity formation becomes a process of self-definition, driven by the desire to obtain "positive social identity" (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Keeping this in mind, the following takes place when groups find themselves pitted against one another in a conflictual situation. Hewstone and Greenland explain that "when lower status or minority groups perceive the dominant group's position as illegitimate and unstable, they use a variety of different strategies to obtain positive social identity" (2000:138). This is the first indicator of how armed conflict links in with identity. The existence of an out-group taking on an "illegitimate" and "unstable" position is exemplified by a situation of war and repression. The Saharawis, influenced by their nascent nationalism, perceived the stance taken by the Moroccans as both illegitimate and unstable with regard to their (embryonic) notion of a Saharawi identity, especially keeping in mind the indiscriminate tactics used by Morocco throughout the occupation (Mercer 1976; Zunes and Mundy 2010).

The outcome of this situation is twofold: group members "may search for a positive identity by redefining characteristics of their own group which had previously been

seen as negative" and "they may find new dimensions for making comparisons between the groups" (Hewstone and Greenland 2000:138). These reactions contain further indications about how armed conflict influences identity differentiation. In the context of this case study, the Saharawis on the one hand increasingly redefined themselves from being mere nomads into a distinct "national" group. On the other hand, a new dimension for making comparisons was created through Moroccan aggression: the collective experience of a people having fought against what they perceive to be an outside attack. The 'question on which side did you fight?' thus assumes central importance for the narrative of Saharawi identity, transforming warfare from a technique of group survival into the central building block of a collective identity.

Finally, Tajfel and Turner point to the existence of a "minimal group paradigm" (Tajfel and Turner 1979:39-40): the fact that intergroup differentiation occurs even in the absence of objective differences between groups. This does not mean that differentiation cannot be increased through a strong divergence between the two groups. Armed conflict, an extreme human experience, is likely to have further accelerated intergroup differentiation, as the following discussion of 'salient categories' will show. SIT thus lays the foundation for understanding the process of identity differentiation between Moroccans and Saharawis: armed conflict creates a strong basis for intergroup comparison, since the side on which one has fought is associated with the degree of misery and suffering experienced by both individual and group.

Constructivist approaches, such as the computer-based simulation conducted by Rousseau and Van der Veen (2005), help further elaborate upon the link between

identity and armed conflict. The study offers insights into how a shared identity is created and helps explain how it is consolidated. Both their observations about unstable environments, exemplified by armed conflict, and about "salient categories" to compare self and other (Rousseau and Van den Veen 2005:687-692) are useful for this paper's analytical scope. The number and complexity of salient categories seem to have important effects on how strongly identity is formed - when both factors decrease, the emergence of identity is facilitated (ibid.:692-693). The involvement in armed conflict may thus serve to diminish and overshadow other salient categories, reducing the primary source of identification to participation in armed resistance. Having fought on a particular side offers a category that is both simple and strong enough to override other, more complex categories, such as the more nuanced differences in language or religion between Moroccans and Saharawis. Extrapolating this to a process of differentiation over several decades, consolidation occurs when renewed peaks of violence continue to maintain it as *the* salient category for intergroup comparison for the Saharawis. The amalgamation of SIT and the constructivist framework thus creates the theoretical framework on which this paper rests.

Part II: Research Design

On that basis, this paper proposes the following line of reasoning: armed conflict, the study's independent variable, creates the need and conditions for intergroup identity differentiation. Through this process, armed conflict forces groups not only to adopt discrete identities but more importantly, it makes further differentiation and consolidation of identities necessary as the fighting drags on. To make this consolidation measurable, the notion of a "consolidated identity" is broken down into

three constitutive building blocks which serve as the study's dependent variables: (1) the degree of physical manifestation of Saharawi identity within the claimed territory, observable through the adoption of national symbols; (2) the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) gaining international recognition and joining international institutions, which in turn represents the Saharawi "identity container" being accepted by outside actors; and (3) the appearance of key words in the international media that can be associated with Saharawi identity, which represents the degree of recognition it has achieved internationally. Three hypotheses are derived, which are independent of one another, but individually contribute to the make up of a consolidate identity. Consolidation is thus observed when an increase in any of the measures associated with these variables occurs.

Variables and Hypotheses

The first dependent variable affected by the process of identity differentiation is the degree to which Saharawi identity is physically present within the territory claimed by the Saharawis and POLISARIO (internal manifestation). It can be measured through observing the emergence and proliferation of nationalist symbols, such as the flag, the national anthem or the constitution within the territory, all of which are indicators of identity. These symbols are linked to the state, and whilst it is perilous to equate the identity of a people with the existence of a state, it does make sense to do so in the Saharan case. In fact, the SADR has been central to the Saharawi's struggle for independence, setting them apart from other resistance movements and elevating their status above that of "non-self-governing territory" conferred to them by the United Nations (UN). Thus, the first hypothesis of this paper is:

H₁: The higher the intensity of armed conflict, the higher the number of symbols showing internal identity manifestation. IV (conflict intensity) and DV1 (internal manifestation) are positively correlated.

The second dependent variable affected by armed conflict through the process of identity differentiation is the external manifestation of a Saharawi identity: the wish to be perceived as a discrete group not only by Morocco, but also by other (sovereign) actors. Again, the SADR plays a central role. Despite the fact that it is a state-in-exile, governing no more than the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria (Farah 2003:20-21), it performs an important role as an "identity container" and a synonym of a distinct Saharawi identity. The consolidation of DV2 can be observed through the international recognition the SADR has gained from states and international institutions. The second hypothesis thus is:

H₂: The higher the intensity of armed conflict, the more states will extend diplomatic recognition to the SADR. IV (conflict intensity) and DV2 (external manifestation) are positively correlated.

The final dependent variable is the degree of recognition the Saharawis have achieved in the realm of 'international consciousness', indicating how many people know about the Saharawis, and more importantly accept their group as having their own non-Moroccan and non-Mauritanian Saharawi identity. DV3 is observed by counting the use of terms that can be associated with the recognition of a distinct and discrete Saharawi identity in international newspaper articles. A third and final hypothesis is thus derived:

H₃: The higher the intensity of armed conflict, the more keywords

will appear in the international media that can be related to the acceptance of a Saharawi identity. IV (conflict intensity) and DV 3 (presence in international discourse) are positively correlated.

Table 1: Relation between study variables

IV	Process	DVs	Indicator	Outcome
Degree (intensity) of armed conflict between Morocco and POLISARIO	Identity Differentiation	DV1: Degree of manifestation of Saharawi identity within the claimed territory	M1: Adoption / appearance of national symbols	Consolidated Saharawi identity
		DV2: Degree of political manifestation of Saharawi identity outside of the claimed territory	M2: State recognition, membership in IOs	
		DV3: Degree of recognition for Saharawi identity that is achieved amongst a large number of actors (internally, regionally and internationally)	M3: Amount of keywords associated with Saharawi identity used in the international press	

Method

This paper aims to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, since limited data availability restricts quantitative approaches. As discussed earlier, quantitative analysis will be used as an indicative, not a definitive, measure to indicate, not prove, linkage between the variables.

The first and second dependent variables will thus be measured following a similar procedure. Both the amount of steps indicating internal identity manifestation per year and the number of new recognitions of the SADR per year will be correlated with

conflict intensity, measured in battle-related deaths per year. Looking at variables and their movement in a temporal relation will give a first indication of whether armed conflict is driving either of the dependent variables. Furthermore, the relationship between independent variable and each dependent variable will be examined through bivariate correlation. This rather simple statistical method is limited in what it can achieve. All things being equal however, it may give clearer evidence for a correlation and also clarify the extent to which changes in armed conflict influence the respective dependent variable (Wooldridge 2002). A qualitative analysis will then be undertaken to see whether the presence – or absence – of a correlation fits into the causal framework developed in this paper.

The third dependent variable will be measured by correlating the intensity of armed conflict with the appearance of keywords (Appendix Table 4), again both in temporal and bivariate fashion. Due to the large number of articles, this part of the analysis will focus more heavily on the quantitative part. It is important to note that a lack of quantitative support for any of the three hypotheses will not be enough to establish or reject a causal relationship: qualitative data will be analysed to complete, expand and correct the picture that is being sketched by the statistics. The statistical analysis is therefore firmly rooted in the theoretical framework – even if a strong correlation exists, it must make sense within the causal reasoning of this paper.

Data Collection

The collection of reliable data poses a considerable challenge. Due to its nature as a government-in-exile with very limited resources, the SADR does not maintain a large online (or for that matter, institutional) presence which would ideally serve as a source

for official data. Instead, there are many websites that sympathise with the Saharawi cause that offer their own data collection. On one hand, this is a great opportunity, seeing that they have assembled material that would otherwise not be available, ranging from overviews of the history of the SADR to diplomatic relations with other countries. On the other hand, using this material uncritically brings the danger of reaching unbalanced conclusions in the same way that data from the Moroccan government cannot be taken at face value. As with many wars, "objective" facts very much depend on the side one is on. Therefore, information extracted from such sources will be cross-evaluated with secondary literature, newspaper reports or interviews that can confirm the numbers and facts as much as possible.

Battle intensity

Battle intensity, measured through the number of battle-related deaths throughout the conflict, is perhaps the set of data that is the most reliable. The raw data has been taken from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), which provides the number of people killed in action on all sides per year. Whilst it would have been desirable to consider in isolation the Saharawis killed in battle, the battle-intensity variable is intended to capture both aspects of waging war: killing and being killed, shooting and being shot at. The UCDP Dataset provides a high and a low estimate, of which the arithmetic mean has been taken as the number of battle-related deaths in Figures 1, 3, 5 and 7 (Appendix Table 2).

Internal manifestation

Data for the first dependent variable consists of the national symbols the Saharawis have adopted and the date of their adoption. Secondary literature has been used first to

get an overview of what national symbols include (Cerulo 1993). Then, further secondary literature, especially Zunes and Mundy (2010), but also the online sites of sympathisers in conjunction with the LexisNexis online news archive, have been used to verify which of the symbols have been adopted and when (Appendix Table 3).

External Recognition

Determining when a given country recognised the Saharawi republic is a rather challenging task. The television channel PBS has compiled a comprehensive list in the run-up to its "Sahara Marathon" (2004), an information programme dedicated to the Western Sahara. Again, the Nexis news archive has been used to verify that a given country has indeed recognised the SADR at the time specified in their list. For some countries, direct evidence has been found in more than one source. Many smaller countries have however not received that kind of attention in the media. In those cases, articles which state that at a certain time a specific number of countries had recognised the SADR can be used to validate the list. The numbers in such articles mostly correspond with the numbers on the list, so that the overall data can be treated as reliable. (Appendix Table 4)

International Discourse

Finally, the analysis of international discourse is based on articles taken from the LexisNexis news archive. The source has some inherent limitations, not least its focus on English-language sources, since the region's major language are Arabic, French and Spanish. Furthermore, data for this variable is probably the least unequivocal and most subjective. Using the Nexis online search tool for the timespan from 1975-1989, searches for two keywords have been undertaken: "Saharawi" and "Western Sahara".

These searches yield a large number of results (Appendix Table 5). In order to narrow them down to the articles that can be seen as recognising a separate Saharawi identity, each of these keywords has been combined further with four further keywords: "Nationalism", "Nation", "Nationalist" and "Identity". Again, these searches include many articles that use the keywords and their combinations in ways that are not relevant to this paper. Therefore, every article has been viewed manually to assure that, for example, an explicit reference to a "Saharawi identity" is made. Examples for uses of the keywords that can be deemed relevant include naming Western Sahara in one line with other sovereign nations (Associated Press 1989) or describing the Saharawis explicitly as a nation (Delaney 1988).

Part III: Testing, Findings and Discussion

Internal Manifestation

The data shows that the adoption of national symbols is more or less concentrated in 1976, not coincidentally the date when the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic was declared. Four steps towards internal identity manifestation can be counted in that particular year.

Figure 1: Temporal correlation of IV and DV1
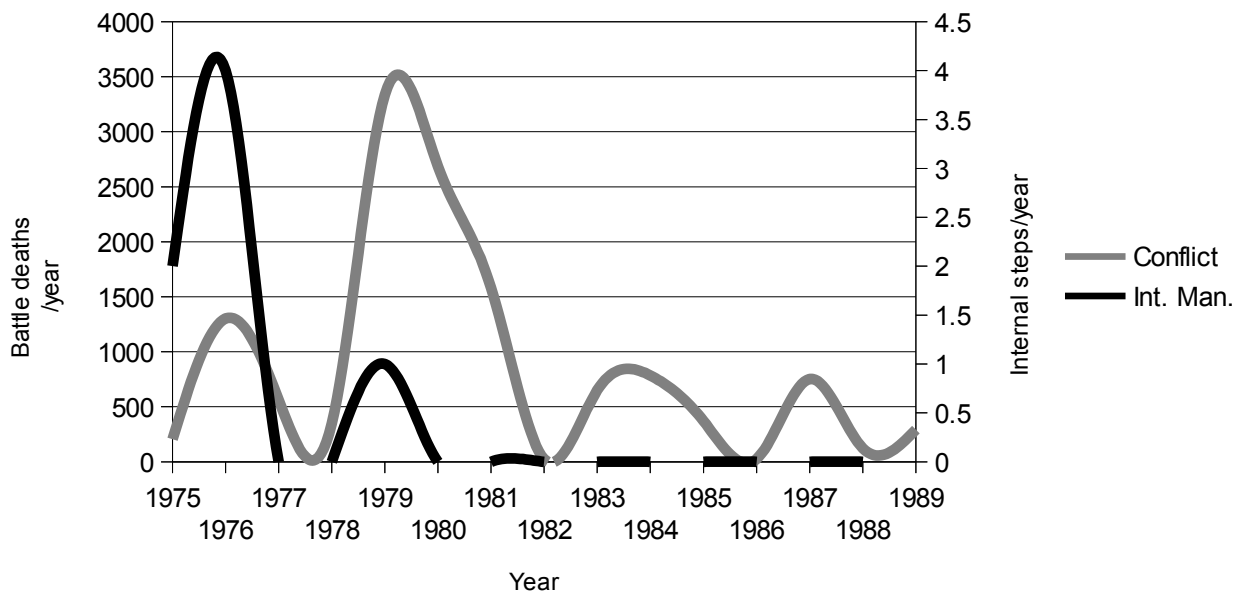
Source: Table 2 & 5 (Appendix)

Apart from the declaration of the Republic itself on February 27, a flag and a coat of arms were adopted, the constitution was published and the first government was convened. The Saharawis adopted their national anthem in 1979. Additionally, a number of national holidays have been added to the catalogue of Saharawi national symbols over time. Whilst it is possible to find out which particular events these commemorate, it has unfortunately not been possible to find out when each of these

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days became an official holiday for 'citizens' of the SADR. The temporal correlation of the independent variable and the first dependent variable thus lends little support to H_1: the first small peak in violence corresponds to the declaration of the SADR and the corresponding small explosion in internal identity manifestation, yet, the second peak in battle intensity, nearly three times as large, is only matched by one such event (Figure 1).

Correspondingly, bivariate correlation of the independent variable and internal identity manifestation cannot serve to clarify the picture (Figure 2). Both the dispersion of the data and the negligible coefficient of determination (0.03) show no linear correlation between the variables, further emphasising the inadequacy of H_1 in quantitative terms.

Figure 2: Bivariate correlation of IV and DV1

$f(x) = 0x + 0.36$
$R^2 = 0.03$
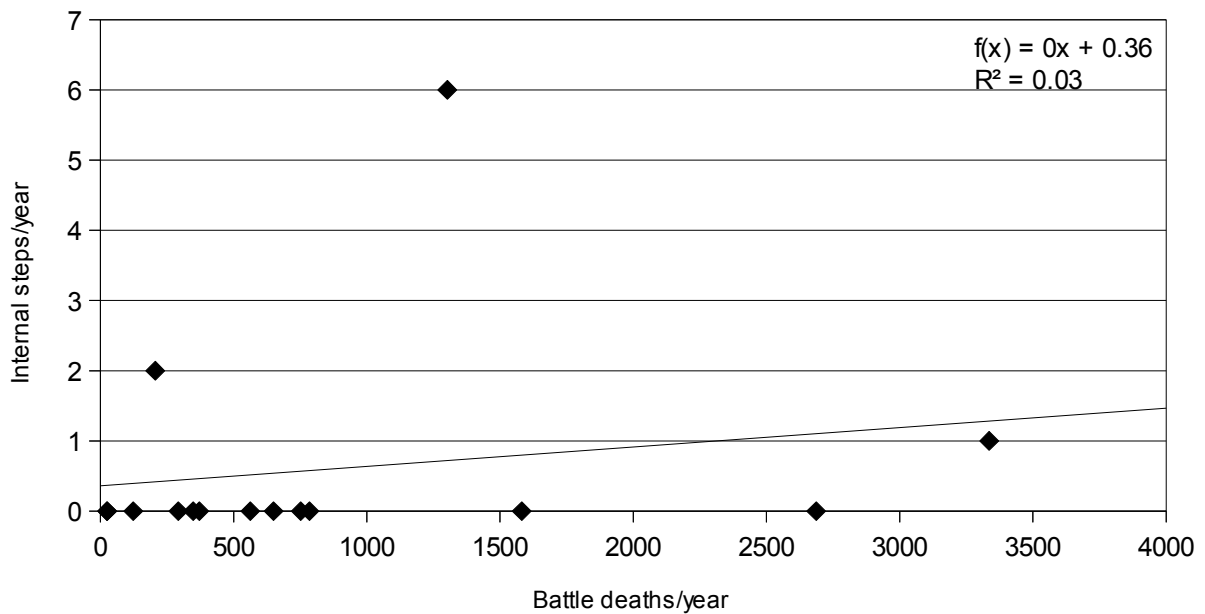
Source: Table 2 & 5 (Appendix)

The outbreak of identity-consolidating activity in 1976 may be better explained by the

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fact that the SADR was created and POLISARIO attempted to create a state that looked like any other. If the quantitative data shows anything expected by the research design of this paper, it is that the initial outbreak of armed conflict between Morocco and POLISARIO may have spurred the separatists to create facts on the ground by declaring a full-fledged republic. This, however, is a rather tenuous assumption.

Yet, as pointed out above, there is more to the picture than the quantitative data. Armed conflict seems to have had at least some influence on the symbols of Saharawi identity, manifest in national holidays, the national anthem and the constitutions. All of these seem to affirm that the acts of waging war, fighting an enemy and, not least, dying on the battlefield are central themes of what being Saharan means. The qualitative aspect of the data thus merits a closer look. Despite the inconclusiveness of the statistics in terms of H_1, there may still be a causal relationship between the variables. Quantitative analysis of the three symbols mentioned above becomes necessary. There are seven national holidays: Independence Day on February 27, The Day of the creation of POLISARIO on May 10, the commemoration of the May 20 Revolution on that same day, the Day of the Disappeared on June 5, the Day of the Martyrs on June 9, the commemoration of the Zemla Intifada on June 17 and the Day of National Unity on October 12. Of these, three are directly related to the armed struggles against Spain and Morocco: The May 20 Revolution marked the start of the armed struggle against the Spanish colonial troops, the Day of the Martyrs reminds Saharawis not only of those killed in action, but also of El Ouali, the first Saharawi leader who died in combat, and the Zemla Intifada refers to riots in El-Aaiun against Spanish colonial administration. Two of these pre-date the conflict with Morocco, yet they postdate the creation of the SADR. They seem to have been chosen precisely because they remind

people of the centrality of armed struggle to what being Saharawi means, a living tradition constantly reviving battles of the past and therefore a clear indicator of their importance.

A similar point can be made about the Saharawi's national anthem. Both the timing of its adoption and its contents reveal the influence of armed conflict. It seems strange that many national symbols were adopted in 1976 with only the national anthem missing. Most likely, it had just not been composed when the SADR was declared, but this mistake was not rectified until three years later. 1979 was a year of intense conflict: battle related-deaths reached their absolute peak and the Saharawis defeated Mauritania. The fact that a national symbol as important as the anthem was adopted that year further confirms the causal mechanism laid out in this paper.

In terms of content, belligerent national anthems are not particularly unique to the Western Sahara – a good example is the French *La Marseillaise.* Nevertheless, the experience of waging war against a perceived oppressor permeates every line of the anthem. Explicit and repeated references to "the battlefield" and "war", the repetition of "no agent, no invader" and "cut[ting] off the head of the invader"[6] (Ya Baniy Al-Sahara 1979) leave no doubt that armed struggle is a central building block of what it means to be a Saharawi.

Finally, tracing the development of the constitution, especially its preamble reveals an interesting picture. As Hałas points out, a preamble may not be important from a legal point of view, but

"[i]ts symbolic meaning has […] a more important function than ceremonial declamation

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6   Author's translation from the original Arabic: "al darb"; "al gehad", "al harb"; "la 'amil, la dakhil"; "iqta'ou ra's al dakhil"

underscoring the authority of the law making body. In a deep sociological sense, that symbolic form constitutes the collective identity of the Constitution proclaiming community that is supposed to be guided by its article" (2005: 51).

The first constitution of 1976 refers to the SADR as the "fruit of the heroic fight and history of the Saharawi people"[7] (Constitución de la RASD 1976) and then sets out to delimit the basic principles on which the Saharawi republic is to be created. The constitution of 1991 goes even further, as 15 years of fighting seem to have left their mark on Saharawi identity by the early nineties. Not only is the preamble of the 1991 constitution significantly shorter (and thus more focussed on its condensed contents), it also states that the Republic is "the historic fruit of the fight of the Saharawi people"[8] (Constitución de la RASD 1991). This seems like a marginal change, but it puts armed conflict into the spotlight of the constitution's part highlighting 'collective identity'. This finding neatly links back to the discussion of salient categories; "on which side did you fight?" is being asked at the very beginning of the SADR's constituting document. Overall, it seems safe to say that whilst the influence of armed conflict on the internal manifestations of Saharawi identity appears to elude quantification, a causal link between the two cannot be dismissed.

External Recognition

Looking at the quantitative data for the relation between armed conflict and external recognition of the Saharawi republic, a striking picture emerges. Temporal correlation (Figure 3) shows that the graphs for battle intensity and new external recognitions, especially in the period between 1975 and 1981 (the period of most intense armed
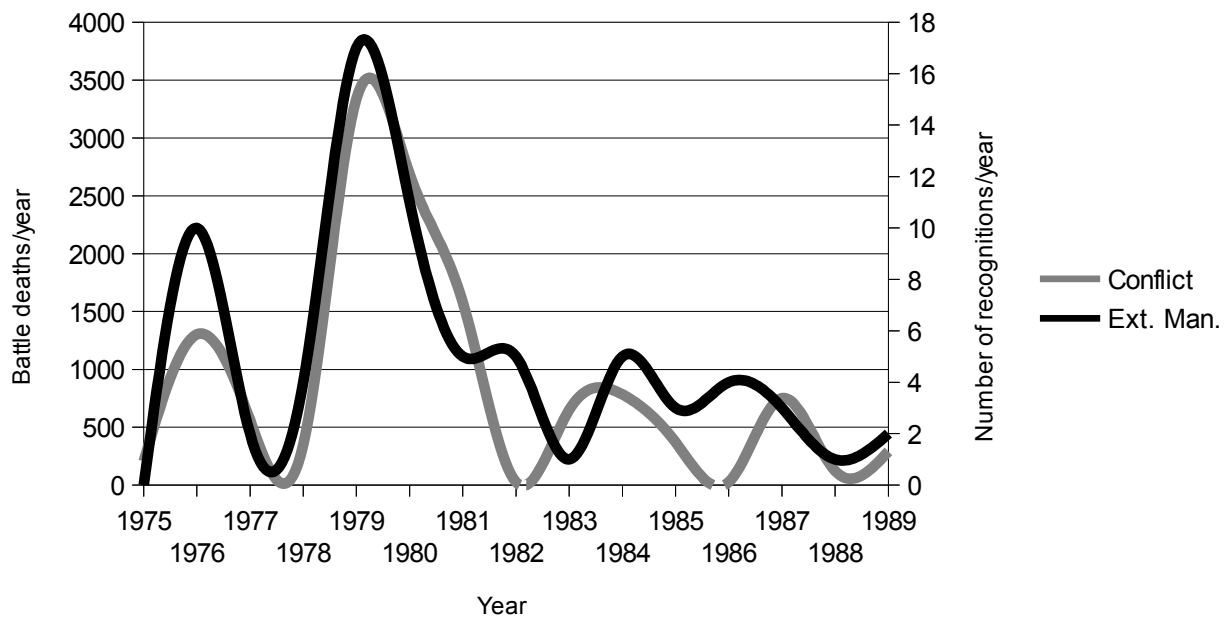
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7 Author's translation from the Spanish original: "[...] el fruto de la lucha heroica e histórica del pueblo saharuí [...]"

8 Author's translation from the Spanish original: "[...] el fruto histórica de la lucha del pueblo saharaui [...]"

conflict), seem to mirror each other's movements. Despite the fact that the amplitudes have to be disregarded due to the different axes, it is evident that both rise and fall at the same points in time. Only for the period between 1981 and 1987 do the lines diverge slightly in movement. The graphs follow the same path again between 1987 and 1989. Periods with a higher intensity of armed conflict thus seem to be closely correlated with a higher number of states recognising the SADR.

Bivariate correlation (Figure 4) further strengthens the notion that the independent variable and the dependent variable are closely related. A coefficient of determination of 0.77 seems to lend credibility to the notion that the intensity of armed conflict may, at least partly, be driving states to recognise the SADR as an independent country and the Saharawis as a distinct group. H_2 therefore finds ample quantitative support. The existence of a *correlation* does prove not *causation,* but further discussion will embed the statistical data into the model of identity differentiation outlined above.

Figure 3: Temporal correlation of IV and DV2

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The relationship between the intensity of armed conflict and the external recognition of the 'identity container', the SADR, is clearly different from the relationship seen for the first independent variable. This could be due to a number of factors: of the three variables, external recognition may be best suited to that type of analysis, seeing that recognition is a rather unequivocal and thus easily quantifiable process. The degree of correlation is nevertheless striking. Assuming that there are no further intervening factors, a coefficient of determination of 0.77 present in the data set would indicate that 77% of all changes in recognition were caused by an increase in battle intensity. This is of course no tenable assumption – the recognition that states extend to one another is based on complex decisions that are governed by many rules. This is highlighted by the period of diversion between 1981 and 1987: in 1984 the Saharawi Republic was granted a seat in the OAU. Despite being a major diplomatic achievement for the Saharawis, it created considerable diplomatic struggles within the

Figure 4: Bivariate correlation of IV and DV2
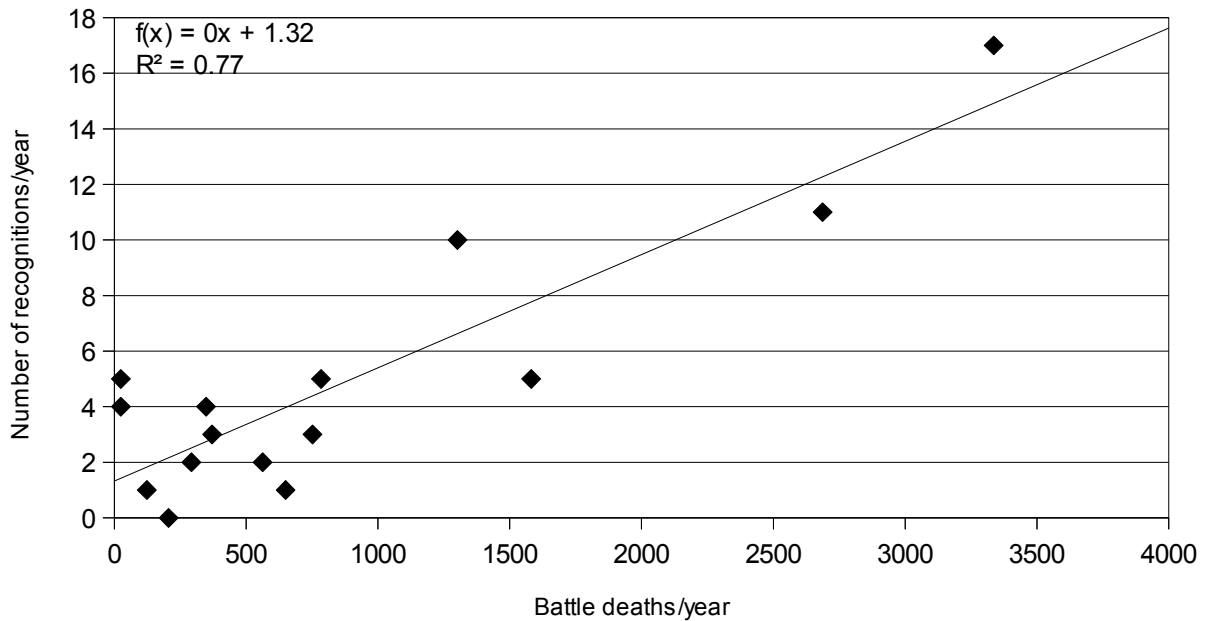
Source: Source: Table 3 & 5 (Appendix)

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institution and disagreement between countries, adding a large number of considerations to the calculation made by states when considering whether to recognise the SADR, complicating the process considerably.

There are several ways to explain the correlation between conflict intensity and the recognition of the SADR. Increasing sympathy for the Saharawis may have played a role. More intense conflict may have lead to increasing knowledge of their fight against Morocco, with a number of states extending recognition in solidarity. At first sight, this appears to be an adequate explanation of why recognition increases in step with battle intensity. However, it cannot account for why the number of states sympathising with the Saharawis diminishes when violence grows less intense, seeing that knowledge of the conflict is not dependent on continued high levels of violence.

In line with the causal argument advanced in this paper, an alternative explanation is that the continued violence experienced by the Saharawis led to identity differentiation between them and Morocco, consolidating their identity and spurring them to push forward with a diplomatic campaign. Thereby they gained acceptance within the international system, on which basis lays the system of interstate recognitions. And indeed, as Miller notes, "the late 1970s and 1980s were the apex of the POLISARIO's diplomatic work" (2012), a view that is corroborated by Pazzanita's analysis (1994). This achievement is even more impressive considering that in the time from 1975 to 1989, the Saharawis faced opposition from the United States and France, and mostly indifference from the Soviet Union.
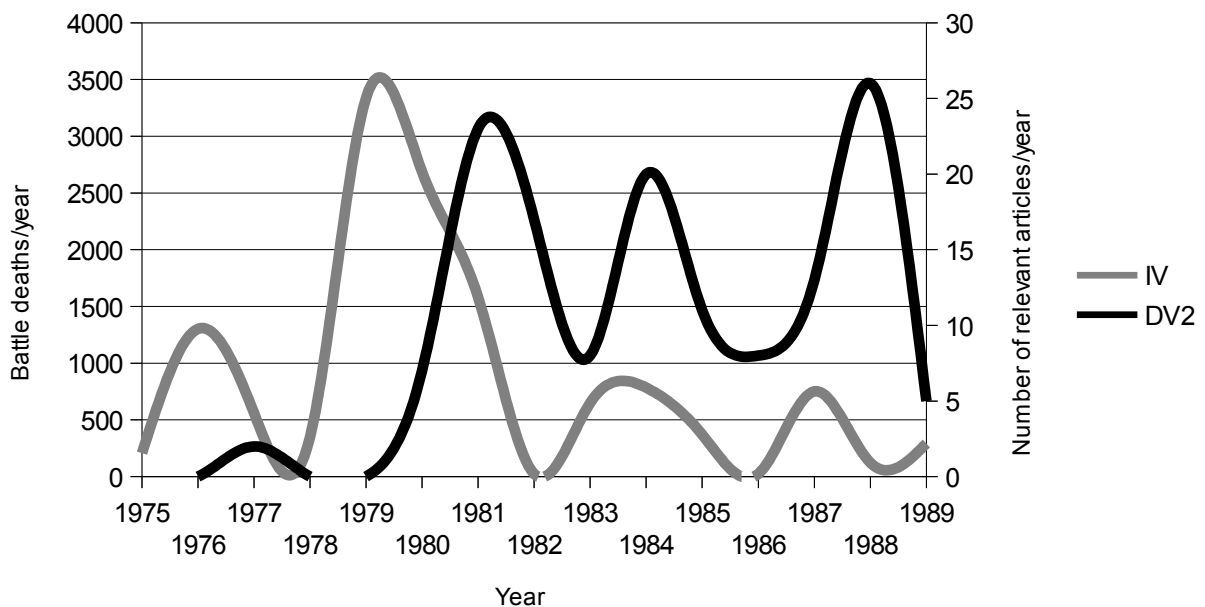
It is therefore clear that H_2 not only finds quantitative support, but also fits into this paper's causal story. There are some limitations and challenges that need to be taken

into account. Statistical analysis, for example, does not reveal the direction of the correlation. The dependent variable (international recognition) could be driving the independent variable (armed conflict), and we might expect a time lapse between warfare and the recognition of states. The case for a reverse causal relationship has to be made. It does however seem unlikely that recognition is driving battle intensity in Western Sahara. Not only are there a myriad stronger factors such as availability of arms, political decisions or tactics, but it also seems very hard to make a logical case for this inverse relationship.

International Discourse

The statistical analysis of international discourse yields no tangible results. If anything, it disproves the notion that armed conflict has an effect on the international acknowledgement that there is such a thing as a 'Saharawi identity'. The data shows

*Figure 5: Temporal correlation of IV and DV2*

that there is relatively little reference to anything related to Saharawi identity until 1981, when the highest levels of violence had already been recorded. Contrary to the model laid out above, the levels of international attention stay comparatively high after major violence has subsided, although the peaks in battle intensity are always followed, with a short delay, by small peaks in media attention (Figure 5).

Again, bivariate correlation merely emphasises that both variables seem to have no correlation whatsoever, giving H_3 no support in the quantitative data. Not only is the coefficient of determination of 0.04 negligibly low it also shows that curiously a rise in conflict intensity, seems to be correlated with a fall in the publication of relevant articles per year, contradicting the expectations formulated in H_3 (Figure 6).

*Figure 6: Bivariate correlation of IV and DV2*
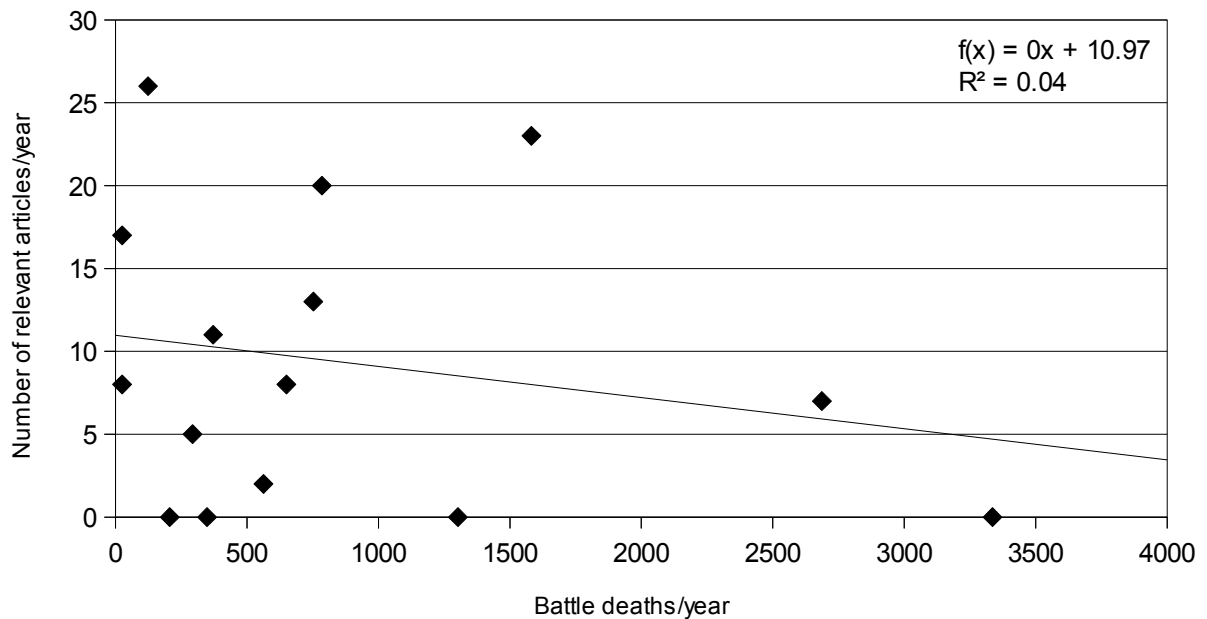
Source: Table 4 & 5 (Appendix)

Statistical analysis serves to emphasise the marginality of discourse on Saharawi

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identity (and indeed the whole conflict) in the international media's attention. Broader searches (those including only 'Saharawi' and 'Western Sahara') yield a total of 5102 articles, whereby the keyword 'Saharawi', closer related to identity, not the territory, only accounts for about 2.1% of total instances. Of all articles, the ones containing the keyword in a meaningful way described above, account for an overall percentage of 2.84% - a negligible amount both in comparative and in absolute terms of the general media output (Appendix Table 5).

Why is there no positive correlation, and indeed no correlation at all, between the intensity of armed conflict and consciousness of the existence of a Saharawi identity in the international media? Several factors may play a role in explaining why this measurement fails to lead to any viable results. The first and most obvious one is the relative obscurity of the Western Saharan case that the data emphasises. Out of the roughly 5 000 articles that relating to the topic, less than 3% on average made

Figure 7: Temporal correlation of IV and articles containing K1&K2
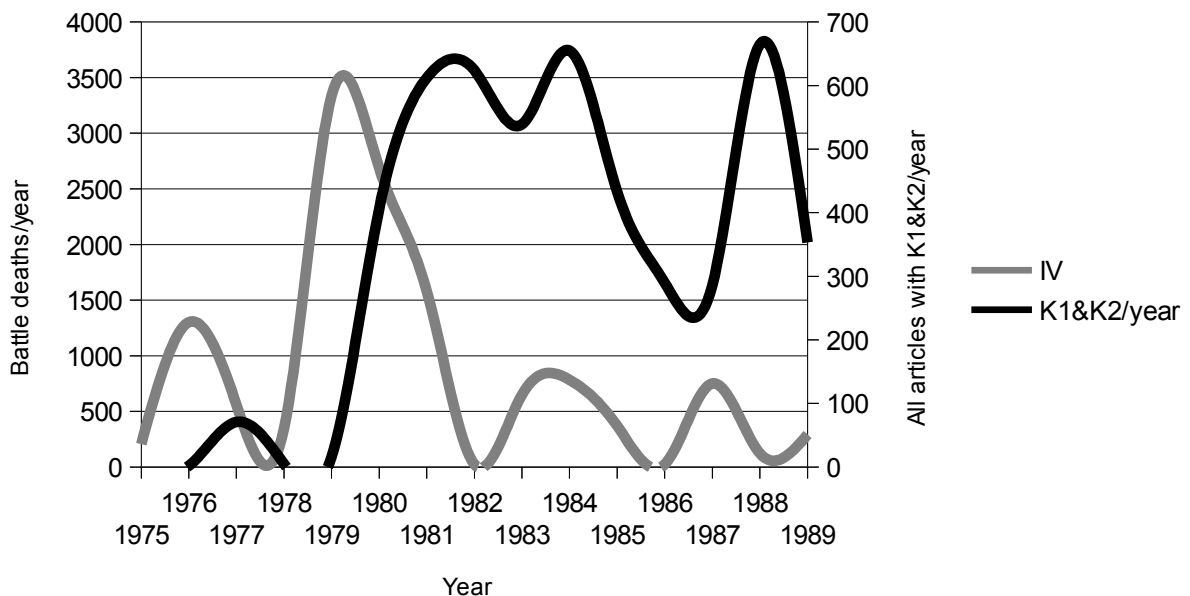
reference to identity or the distinctiveness of the Saharawi people in any meaningful way. The overall quantity of articles over 15 years from 1975 to 1989 is equal to three articles per day and the articles that relate to identity equates to one article every 18 days. This illustrates the relative lack of importance the case of Western Sahara has, which applies to general reporting and even more to the more nuanced writing that is needed to discuss matters such as 'identity'. Combined with the increasing amount of information that has been produced over the past decades, it is not hard to understand why the topic in general terms, and an acknowledgement of Saharawi identity in particular, has not been given a lot of attention in the media.

Secondly, as previously discussed, the fact that the interest in the case of Western Sahara, POLISARIO and the Saharawis has been decoupled from the intensity of armed conflict points to how external actors have tended to view the struggle of the inhabitants of Western Sahara. It is not viewed in terms of a struggle over identity, but in terms of a conflict destabilising Africa and the OAU (especially around 1984, the year of admission), a human rights case and, prominently, an important task for the United Nations. This is supported by consideration oft the data for the overall publication of articles about the case of Western Sahara in relation to conflict intensity (Figure 7). They clearly show that in 1982, when discussions about admitting the Saharawi state picked up steam and increasingly split the OAU, there was significantly more overall interest in the conflict. Together with other African conflicts such as Chad, it appears on the international news agenda only as a side note when discussing the tasks, successes and failures of the UN.

Part IV: Results and Conclusions

Results

Overall, the analysis of the relationship between the variables presented in this paper seems to confirm that armed conflict has had some influence on the consolidation of Saharawi identity. Internal manifestation of that identity, despite the inadequacy of H_1 and the lack of correlation between the variables in statistical terms, can be detected in the substance of many important national symbols. The link between external manifestation and armed conflict is confirmed both by the data, where H_2 finds solid support, and qualitative analysis, suggesting that battle intensity does indeed drive the external recognition of the Saharawi 'identity container' through a process of identity differentiation, at least to some extent. There is no discernible relationship between armed conflict and a stronger international consciousness of a Saharawi identity. H_3 finds no support in the quantitative data, nor can its failure be explained by quantitative analyses, making the third dependent variable null for this study.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to create and test a model of how armed conflict influences identity consolidation. Based on SIT and constructivist literature, this paper proposed that armed conflict helps new identities consolidate through a process of identity differentiation. Because of the inherent difficulty of measuring a concept such as identity, breaking it down into three blocks has been proposed These are internal manifestation of identity in symbols and institutions that represent the Saharawi's fight for an independent identity, the external recognition of that identity and separateness (in the form of the SADR) and the perception of that identity in the international

media. Each variable has fared differently, leaving a number of different conclusions to be drawn.

This case study has highlighted that the Saharawi national holidays and the national anthem, often sung in the refugee camps, are heavily influenced by the notion of fighting and dying for the dry stretch of desert that is called Western Sahara. The national anthem, adopted at the end of the worst period of fighting between Morocco, Mauritania and the Saharawis, particularly seems to confirm the assumptions behind this paper. Like the evolution of the constitution, the founding document of the SADR, and the national holidays, it shows that armed conflict, especially with Morocco, seems to have assumed the position of a 'salient category' that the Saharawis use to differentiate themselves from their neighbours.

The correlation between intense fighting and a higher ratio of external recognitions not only suggest that the fighting has brought the plight of the Saharawis to other countries' attention, but that it also spurred them to press for more recognition, leaving the Saharawis to perceive themselves as less and less 'Moroccan' with increasing intensity of their fight against the Kingdom's troops. This relationship between armed conflict and diplomatic recognition is a finding that deserves more attention and should be explored in further research. Such work could look into similar cases and the exact nature of Saharawi diplomatic activity, or consider a fuller picture of why states recognise the SADR, and thereby the identity of the Saharawis. The third assumption made about the degree of international awareness has to be discarded due to a lack of any quantitative or qualitative support.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge a number of limitations. The most obvious of

these is the fact that controlling for other variables has proved very difficult due to the scope of the paper and the lack of reliable data. Again, further research could aim to include a larger sample of case studies to test the mechanisms behind identity consolidation in more than one case, possibly giving them a more generalisable notion. Nevertheless, this paper presents a first indication of how a thus far overlooked causal mechanism could be contributing to the consolidation of identities. At least two of the building blocks of identity seem to be affected by armed conflict, giving the proposed framework a degree of explanatory power and consistency. For Morocco, and perhaps any other country with a separatist problem, these findings may highlight that violent crackdowns on separatism are not only costly, but possibly counterproductive: their strengthening separatists' identity and their subsequent resolve to resist.

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Data

Databases used:

Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCPD)
http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/ucdp_battle-related_deaths_dataset/

Nexis UK News Articles Database
http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis

All links and pathways correct as of February 1, 2013.
For data sources used to create tables see below:

Table 2:

Association de soutien á un référedum libre et régulier au Sahara Occidental (ARSO). 2012. Last accessed: November 2, 2012. http://www.arso.org/

Nexis UK Database. 2012. Last accessed: November 10, 2012. http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis

Zunes, S. and Mundy, J. 2010. *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism and Conflict Irresolution.*   Syraucuse, New York: Syracuse University Press

Table 3:

Association de soutien á un référedum libre et régulier au Sahara Occidental (ARSO). 2012. "States which recognize the SADR". Last accessed: December 12, 2012. http://www.arso.org/03-2.htm

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Table 4:

Nexis UK Database. 2012. Keyword searches as specified in section "Data Collection" (pp.19-20) Last accessed: January 23, 2013. http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis

Table 5:

UCDP. 2012. "UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2012". Uppsala Conflict Data Program. www.ucdp.uu.se.

Appendix: Data Tables

Table 2: National symbols and adoption date, 1975-1989

Year	Events	Number of Steps
1975	Saharawi Peseta (Currency)	2
1976	Declaration of National Unity	4
	Declaration of SADR	
	Flag	
	Constitution	
	National Government	
1977	-	0
1979	Adoption of hymn	1
1980	-	0
1981	-	0
1982	-	0
1983	-	0
1984	-	0
1985	-	0
1986	-	0
1987	-	0
1988	-	0
1989	-	0
Total	**-**	**7**

Sources: Zunes and Mundy, 2011; LexisNexis

Table 3: Recognitions of the SADR, 1975-1989

Year	Recognitions (verified)	Recognitions (unverified)
1975	0	0
1976	10	10
1977	2	2
1978	4	5
1979	17	17
1980	11	12
1981	5	5
1982	5	5
1983	1	1
1984	5	5
1985	3	4
1986	4	4
1987	3	3
1988	1	1
1989	2	2
Total	**73**	**76**

Sources: PBS, 2004; LexisNexis

Table 4: Relevant keywords in international press, 1975-1989

Year	Keyword Saharawi (K1)	Identity (K1.1)	Nation (K1.2)	Nationalism (K1.3)	Nationalist (K1.4)	Western Sahara (K.2)	Identity (K2.1)	Nation (K2.2)	Nationalism (K2.3)	Nationalist (K2.4)	Total K1+K2	Relevant
1975	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1976	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0
1977	0	0	0	0	0	71	0	2	0	0	71	2
1978	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	5	0
1979	5	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	16	0
1980	3	0	1	0	0	403	0	5	0	1	406	7
1981	5	0	0	0	0	607	0	13	0	10	612	23
1982	20	0	0	0	0	604	0	13	0	4	624	17
1983	8	0	1	0	0	531	0	6	0	1	539	8
1984	10	0	0	0	0	645	0	12	2	6	655	20
1985	9	0	0	0	0	424	0	7	0	4	433	11
1986	9	0	0	0	0	281	0	3	1	4	290	8
1987	10	0	0	0	0	276	2	10	1	0	286	13
1988	20	0	0	0	1	645	1	16	0	8	665	26
1989	8	1	0	1	0	345	1	5	1	1	353	10
Total	107	1	2	1	1	4850	4	92	5	39	5102	145

Table 5: Conflict intensity (battle-related deaths), 1975-1989

Year	Actor A	Fatalities A (low)	Fatalities A (high)	Actor B	Fatalities B (low)	Fatalities B (high)	Low Estimate	High Estimate	Average
1975	Mauritania	110	110	Morocco	96	96	206	206	206
1976		579	731		349	945	928	1676	1302
1977		362	655		54	54	416	709	562.5
1978		25	25		25	621	50	646	348
1979					921	5751	921	5751	3336
1980					1151	4223	1151	4223	2687
1981					484	2679	484	2679	1581.5
1982					25	25	25	25	25
1983					95	1205	95	1205	650
1984					377	1192	377	1192	784.5
1985					25	717	25	717	371
1986					25	25	25	25	25
1987					354	1150	354	1150	752
1988					51	196	51	196	123.5
1989					207	378	207	378	292.5
Total		**1076**	**1521**		**4239**	**19257**	**5315**	**20778**	**13046.5**