

THE POLITICIZATION OF SELF-DETERMINATION: A STUDY OF THE WESTERN SAHARAN QUESTION AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES*

¹Thompson O.O., ²Afolabi, A.S., ³Onifade C.A, and ⁴Awotayo, O.J.

^{1,3} Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria

²Department of History and International Studies/ Unilorin Archives and Documentation Centre (UADC), University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

⁴ Doctoral Candidate, University of Ilorin

Corresponding Author's Email: olakunleolasupo@yahoo.com

Abstract

Western Sahara or Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is the only country under colonialism in Africa. Worrisomely, failure to achieve decolonisation of the country can be linked to the activities of her North Africa neighbour, Morocco, backed by some western governments. Although, the international community, regional, sub-regional and global organisations, particularly the United Nations Organisation has intervened to liberate the SADR, much success has not been recorded. In the light of the aforementioned, the paper examines the Western Saharan Question and international responses, including Nigeria: being a regional power *vis à vis* her erstwhile roles in the decolonisation of Africa---a feat which earned her the 'big brother' and 'giant of Africa' status on the continent. The paper concluded that the liberation of the colony has taken so long because of the interests of foreign powers, the declining powers and complicated principles of the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) now Africa Union (AU), the politicisation of self-determination by the western powers among other considerations. Recommendations were made based on ways to liberate Africa's last colony, Western Sahara.

Keywords: POLISARIO, Western Sahara (SADR), Self-Determination, Decolonisation, Morocco.

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Western Saharan Question Conference organised by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), 2-4 June, 2015. We are grateful to the panelists for their valuable comments on that earlier version.

Introduction

The Western Saharan question hinges on the right to self-determination. The Western Saharan question is complex, with many regional and world powers nursing their national and self-interests in the age-long conflict. Indeed, the Western Sahara remains the only entity in the region, yet to be totally liberated. But, the question remains unanswered despite the efforts of African states, including Nigeria, which claims to be a big brother.

Nigeria colonial history (Baratt, 1963: pp.189-90, Smith, 2000: p.57) shaped her conversations with the outside world, especially its stance towards the decolonization of the continent. With all the physiognomies and potentials, she was a power to reckon with, not only in Africa, but in world politics, particularly, in the decolonisation of some African countries (Akadiri, 2003: p.545). She also possesses regional economic and political wherewithal within the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) sub-region and the continent as a result of her human and physical resources (Siollun, 2009). Presently with a population of about 200 million, she is Africa's most populous country.

However, while a lot was achieved in the decolonisation of the continent in her hey days, much progress has not been made into the decolonisation of Africa's last colony---Western Sahara. An entity that has continued to struggle for self-determination under an African power bloc, Morocco. Presently, Morocco occupies 80 percent of Western Sahara; also goods exploited from Western Sahara carry Morocco trademarks thereby denying the people of both political and economic rights (Besenyo 2017). Since the European and foreign powers have interest in Western Sahara. Most states in Africa especially the supposed big brother, Nigeria have also been found culpable of looking aside.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the issues of self-determination surrounding Western Sahara, specifically, international responses, including Nigeria, the erstwhile 'Big Brother' of Africa. To begin with, the central issue of self-determination will be examined. The History of the problem of the Western Sahara as well as international interventions will also be reviewed. Finally, contention that has risen

from Nigeria lately to the effect that the 'giant of Africa' has not been doing enough to actualize this goal, will also be critically examined.

Self-determination: Meaning and Issues

In the history of modern Africa, Self-determination has been of special significance. Self-determination is the principle by virtue of which a people freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Self-determination is in essence the right of self-government (Blay, 1985: p. 147). Thus, Amankwah (1998) stated that self-determination is synonymous with freedom and therefore of universal application. That is, it enjoys international recognition. The United Nations (UN) Resolution 2625 states that:

Every state has the duty to promote, through joint and separate action, realisation of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples in accordance with the provisions of the Charter and to render assistance to the United Nations in carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Charter regarding the implementation of the principle, in order ... to bring a speedy end to colonialism, having regard to the freely expressed will of the people concerned (UNGA, 1970).

From the above, self-determination leading to secession is only conceivable within the decolonisation paradigm. Thus, a group can seek for self-determination in so far as the group is a colonized, oppressed and its colonial government did not adequately represent its interests (Sterio 2018). For example, the Supreme Court of Canada held in the Quebec question that all people are entitled to self-determination, as long as such people are subjected to conquest, colonization, and perhaps oppression (Carley 1996; Leslie 1999). Hence, once a group satisfy the above, then it must be tested by its popularity or majority acceptance through the supervision of the UN. Little wonder, the UN has supervised several act of self-determination of people through plebiscite, referendum, or election- particularly where the act will determine a change of the status of the people concerned (Amankwah 1998: p. 119).

The Politicization of Self-Determination

More so, another issue that has profound effect on self-determination is territoriality or boundary. With respect to Africa, the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) took the decision to respect all colonial boundaries (Bereketeab 2012). Consequently, inherited colonial boundaries were sacrosanct. Yet, conflicts have arisen on the basis of borders (though few), identity, self-determination and secession, among others. The right to self-determination is invariably defined and understood to mean right of people to freely determine their own government. The variability in the forms of free also points to the, sometimes, uneasy relationship between self-determination and secession. It appears there exist a thin line between self-determination and secession. To better understand this thin line, Bereketeab (2012) states that:

Self-determination centres on the free will of a people who are legally as well as politically entitled to decide their destiny. This free will could express itself in constituting an independent state (political independence); joining another state (union); or autonomy within a state (cultural independence). Secession is generally interpreted as splitting from an existing state. It involves separation of a part of that state from the rest of its territory, leading to political withdrawal of a region from the original state. While self-determination is seen in positive terms, secession is frequently perceived negatively (2012: p.2).

It is clear that most states do not want to experience or allow for secession; even in cases where there has been approval from international community. Notably, one of the reasons for such is often as a result of internal or international politics. Be that as it may, these issues affect the successes or failures of the implementation of self-determination.

While sub-regional and regional powers could make huge impacts on self-determination, the influence of the international community, particularly the Western powers tend to be assertive. However, that of the two major powers, the United States of America

(USA) and Russia remain the most influential. Yet, they are both unpredictable when it comes to the issue of self-determination, especially in Africa. For instance, while the US prioritizes its interests when the issue of self-determination arises; that of the Soviet Union was unclear on the Western Sahara (Zoubir, 1987). As Pomerance (1976) argued, the politicization of issues by the two powers continue to pose dilemma for US lawmakers during the cold war and aftermath. For example, this played out during the Crimean question; where Russia and the US had contrary opinion over Crimea's referendum (Simpson 2014).

Similarly, the European Union (EU) is not left out of the alliance with Morocco as a result of some strategic alliances. Hence, Europe's strategic location---which is directly above the sub-Saharan region on the western corner of Africa, the Maghreb, and across from Spanish shores, links the passage of one of the most important gas and oil pipelines feeding Europe (Dawson 2009:5; Labac 2016:10).

For Africa's regional organisation, such as the Organisation of Africa Unity (now known as the (African Union), the challenges of the cold war and international politics has also affected its mandates. For example, the then OAU under the right of self-determination supported liberation movements in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique; though it denounced that of Biafra, southern Sudan, Chad and Eritrea (Kamanu, 1974), and lately, Northern Cameroon, when they all met most of the conditions for self-determination, which are: they were under oppression and not adequately represented by the government. From the above analysis, it appears that, while the OAU was enamored by contradictions between African support for self-determination under colonialism and opposition to the application of same principle in a post-colonial settings; the Western or Eastern powers have their divergent interests in nations---chiefly their resources. Thus, White (2014) argued that natural resources has been underpinned as a significant factor in the conflict over time, with resource-related developments lending legitimacy to each party in different ways. But, is this the case of Western Sahara?

History and Origins of the Western Sahara Question

The Europeans arrived to the Canary Islands first in 1309. Subsequently, the Europeans started an unsuccessful war of extermination, due to the resistance of the Guanche population in 1401 (Besenyo, 2010). Among the Europeans, the Portuguese were first to set-up the colony in 1415. The Portuguese considered the Sahara to be the ideal place for gold and slave trading in the sixteenth century. Initially, the Portuguese were the first to make inroads at the coast and were closely followed by the Spaniards who seemed to concentrate on the wealth across the Atlantic. Finally were the French who actually determined the current borders that defines Western Sahara. Of these three, Spain became the colonial power (Munene, nd: p. 89). Hence, Spain and the Sultan of Morocco, Sidi Mohamed bin Abdallah, signed the treaty of Marrakech in 1727 (Besenjo, 2010: p. 197).

By 1881, it was already in Spanish possession and subsequently sealed by the Berlin Conference of 1885, though effective colonial rule did not take place until the 1930s because of the resistance of the Saharans. But when mineral resources (phosphate) was discovered in the area in 1945, its fate in the grip of the western powers changed (Calvocoressi, 2001). Thus, as a nation, Western Sahara is a historically evolved, stable community- of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up, manifested, in a community of culture. Forman (1959) stressed that a community possessing all four of these essential features, and lacking none of them is capable of leading an independent political existence, and that such entity is entitled to self-determination.

A wave of nationalism swept through the African continent from the 1950s to 60s. This was instrumental to the independence of Morocco on 26 March, 1956, but Spain delayed that of her colonies including Western Sahara. This act revived anti-colonial sentiments in Western Sahara, culminating in an armed attack on Spanish military positions near the river *Qued Draa* and in the Rio de Oro in 1957. A combined military campaign, called "Operation Cleaning-Brush" involving large units of the French army stationed in Mauritania and the Spanish Foreign Legion finally suppressed the resistance in 1958 (Uwechue, 1991). Subsequently, Spain officially announced the presence of iron and phosphate deposits in 1962.

In 1963, the UN declared Western Sahara as non-self-governing and in October 1964, Mauritania informed the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation of her desire to initiate discussions with Spain. Thus, the UN General Assembly resolution No. 2072 (XX) called for Spain to decolonize the territory in 1965 (Uwechue, 1991: p.1553-54; Miguel, 2011). Although some Sahrawi people looked up to Morocco, others claimed they wished to continue ties with Spain, and yet others demanded full independence.

There was, however, a change of event when the Spanish government announced that it was in favour of the principle of self-determination. Spain matched words with actions when a decree, which was intended to lay the foundations for a measure of self-government by creating the *Djemaa* or General Assembly as the highest administrative body to promote the interest of the territory on 11 May 1967, was passed. With the proclamation, some political groups emerged to take over the political affairs of their nation.

Subsequently, the movement for the liberation of the Sahara was born with its leader Sid Brahim Bassiri in December 1967. He was however, later arrested and died in a Spanish prison. Other movements were Organisation for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Oued el-Dheb (OLSHOD), which later became the *Mouvement Revolutionnaire pour la Liberation des Hommes Bleus* (MOREHOB) led by Edouardo Moha. While these movements were preparing to take over the political leadership of their anticipated independent nation, Spain had other plans. Spain, rather than grant them independence, handed a city on the Southern coast of Morocco, very close to Western Sahara, *Sidi Ifni*, to Morocco in 1969. This act bludgeoned into a nationwide protest and conflict on 17 June, 1970. Consequently, a more broadly based political force, embodied by the *Frente Popular Para La Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y Rio De Oro*, [Translated as Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro] (POLISARIO), emerged under the leadership of a law student, Mustapha Sayed El-Ouali, on 10 May, 1973. Subsequently, the *Djemaa* adopted a declaration addressed to General Francisco Franco of Spain to grant the peoples' wish of self-determination through a referendum.

Spain then announced in August 1974 that she would organise a referendum in May 1975 to enable the people determine their future. Although, King Hassan of Morocco rejected the Sahrawi independence, he did not oppose a referendum. He however gave a condition that Spanish military and administration were first withdrawn. One of the reasons for this change of policy was also as a result of the increase in global price of phosphate, from \$13 to \$70 a ton, which was abundant in Western Sahara. Morocco then seek the opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal status of Western Sahara. The court was asked two questions:

1. Was Western Sahara at the time of colonization by Spain a territory belonging to no one (*terra nullius*)? If the answer to that question was that it did belong to somebody, the Court should give an opinion
2. What were the legal ties between this territory and the Kingdom of Morocco and the Mauritanian entity? Morocco also demanded that Spain be requested not to hold the referendum planned for May 1975 (Uwechue, 1991:p.1555; Calvocoressi, 2001:p.601; Arieff, 2014).

While the case was still under litigation, Morocco and Mauritania at the Arab League meeting in Rabat agreed to split Western Sahara between them and to share in its phosphate wealth; while Algeria preferred to support the POLISARIO in October 1974. In May 1975, a fact finding mission was set up and on 14 October 1975, the mission reported that the majority of the Saharans desired total independence and their representative body was the POLISARIO Front.

Subsequently, in its advisory opinion, the 16 member judge of ICJ ruled that at the time it became a colony, the Sahara did belong to somebody, namely, the Saharans who lived there; by 15 votes to one on 16 October 1975 (Uwechue, 1991:p.1555). It further claimed that certain legal ties existed between the Sahara and both Morocco and Mauritania, on the other hand, while there were no establishment of ties of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity (p. 1555). King Hassan II of Morocco rejected the Court's opinion and said,

Legal ties did exist; there is no legal foundation for the Court's opinion that they do not amount to a justification for a claim for territorial sovereignty; I shall, therefore make that claim and act on it (p.1556).

He further claimed that there could be no independent Sahara and there would be none as long as a single Moroccan lived (p.1556). He followed this up by announcing a 350,000 march on 31 October, 1975 (Kamm 1975:17). Despite persuasion from the then Secretary-General of the UN, Dr. Kurt Waldheim, to persuade the King Hassan II to call off the march, the "Green March" was eventually held on 6 November, 1975. About 40,000 unarmed Moroccan marched from the border town of Tarfaya into the Western Sahara before they were halted by the Spanish troops and the march was called off on 9 November; but the last Moroccan left on 13th November 1975.

Spain entered negotiations with the two parties, Morocco and Mauritania, which led to the signing of the Madrid Accords to establish a tripartite (Spain, Morocco and Mauritania), agreement without the POLISARIO. However, immediately Spain withdrew on 26 February 1976, Morocco took control of Saguia El Hamra, while Mauritania took control of Rio De Oro. The following day, the provisional council of the POLISARIO proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Algiers under the auspices of Mohammed Abdelaziz. With the proclamation, a war ensued (Uwechue, pp. 1557-1559).

The POLISARIO fought on the two fronts with the assistance of Algeria and later Libya. While it was able to suppress Mauritania from the South, it dragged with Morocco from the north. Mauritanian army removed President Moktar Ould Daddah, gave up the fight in 1978 and signed an agreement in August 1979, but Morocco did not; rather, she annexed and renamed the Mauritanian sector, bought off late Libyan Quadafi (over the Chadian question) and Chadli Benjedid, built walls of sand across 3,000 km of desert as a strategy to curb the POLISARIO resistance (Calvocoressi, 2001:p.602).

Morocco's armed forces and POLISARIO guerrillas fought a long war in the desert until the United Nations (U.N.) proposed a settlement plan in 1988 and arranged a cease-fire in 1991. This was

followed with the U.N. Security Council Resolution 690 (1991) which established the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and called for a referendum to offer a choice between independence and integration into Morocco. Same year, King Hassan II made it clear in the UN General Assembly saying that Morocco was willing to cooperate and will respect international observers and the outcome of a referendum.

Subsequently, Morocco and the POLISARIO differed over how to identify voters for the referendum, with each seeking to ensure an electoral roll that would support its desired outcome. In March 1997, then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan named former U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III as his personal envoy to break the deadlock. Baker brokered an agreement to restart voter identification, which was completed in 1999 with 86,000 voters identified. The MINURSO then faced over 130,000 appeals by individuals, backed by Morocco, who were denied voter identification (Arieff, 2014:p.1).

However, King Hassan II died on 23 July, 1999 and another stage began for his successor, King Mohammed VI. This coincided with the emergence of the new Algeria's President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. With new monarchs, the drawing board was revisited as Morocco, then proposed decentralisation and later in April 2007, an autonomous plan for the Western Sahara connoting Western Sahara to be subjectively liberated under Morocco' sovereignty.

International Responses to the Western Saharan Question

The United Nations (UN)

The UN has been at the forefront since the 1960s. However, a compelling diplomatic response from the body was when it approved a resolution calling on the Spanish government to expedite the self-determination process under its supervision on 21 December 1975. The resolution was passed by 84 votes to three, with 42 abstentions. Spain abstained while Morocco and Mauritania did not take part in the debate. Also, countries that supported Morocco and Mauritania generally abstained from the resolution. Among some African countries that voted in favour were Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, Libya

and Mali. While voting was 48 to 32, with 52 abstentions, Algeria voted against (Uwechue, 1991:p.1556).

In January 2003, Baker presented a proposal, known as the Baker Peace Plan, to which he called on all interested parties to agree (UNSC, 2003; Arieff, 2014:p.3). It proposed a U.N.-organized referendum in which voters would choose between integration with Morocco, autonomy, or independence. It further stated that, voters would be Sahrawi people, who were on the December 1999 provisional voters' list, or those on the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees repatriation list as of October 2000, or continuously resident in the Western Sahara since December 30, 1999 (therefore including Moroccan settlers). Morocco objected, mainly questioning why the U.N. was reviving the referendum option; it also was upset by the use of the word "independence" instead of the vaguer "self-determination" to describe an option (Arieff, p.3). In April 2004, Morocco declared that it would accept only autonomy as a solution (UNSC, 2004; Arieff, p.3).

In June 2004, Baker resigned as the U.N. Secretary-General's personal envoy after Security Council Resolution 1541 seemed to express stronger support for a mutually acceptable political solution than for his peace plan (Arieff, p.3). In July 2005, Annan appointed Danish diplomat Peter van Walsum as his new envoy. Walsum indicated that he could not draft a new plan because Morocco would only endorse one that excludes independence, while the U.N. could not endorse a plan excluding a referendum with independence as an option. He concluded that the remaining options were deadlock or direct negotiations. Since the former was unacceptable, he asserted, responsibility rested with the parties. Walsum also reported that the Western Sahara, was not a priority on the international political agenda and that most capitals sought to continue good relations with both Morocco and Algeria. Hence, they acquiesce in the impasse (Arieff, 2014:p.4).

Hence, the Security Council Resolution 1754 (2007), called on Morocco and the POLISARIO to negotiate without preconditions on a political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of the Western Sahara. In 2007 and 2008, the two sides met and held consultations with Walsum four times at Manhasset, New York, US but neither was willing to discuss the other's proposals—that is,

Morocco's autonomy and the POLISARIO, for a referendum. Algeria, Mauritania, and other interested countries were present. In April 2008, Walsum stated that "an independent Western Sahara is not a realistic proposition," prompting the POLISARIO to accuse him of bias in favor of Morocco, called for his replacement, and refused to return to negotiations. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon did not reappoint him in August 2008.

In 2009, a U.S. senior career diplomat, Ambassador Christopher Ross, was appointed Personal Envoy of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the Western Sahara. Ross initially suggested that the parties hold small, informal preparatory meetings for full talks. However, several rounds convened by Ross did not deliver any progress. It was about the time, Aminatou Haidar, went on a 32 day hunger strike at a Spanish airport over the Western Sahara question.

The European parliament also voted to revoke fishing agreement that allowed European Union (EU) fleet to fish in Western Sahara waters, judging that the deal with Morocco was illegal because the Sahara people did not have a say in the matter. In March 2012, Ross stated that "each party continued to reject the proposal of the other as the sole basis for future negotiations, while reiterating their willingness to work together to reach a solution" (Arieff, 2014:p.5) and in May 2012, Morocco announced that it was withdrawing confidence in Ross, accusing him of giving "biased and unbalanced guidance" (p.5). While this initially appeared to threaten Ross's tenure, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon publicly reaffirmed his support for Ross, who has remained in his position. The EU also reversed course in 2013 (Pecquet, 2015).

According to the U.N. Secretary-General's April 2014 report to the Security Council such violations "do not jeopardize [the cease-fire] in the medium term," but "they have resulted in a gradual shift in the military balance between the parties over the years," apparently in favour of Morocco (Arieff, p.5). While advocating the extension of MINURSO's mandate, the report states that, given the increase in the military build-up on the Moroccan side of the berm, MINURSO's operational effectiveness "is being compromised by a shortage of military personnel" (Ibid). Mission personnel operating east of the berm,

meanwhile, are "exposed" to terrorist threats emanating from neighboring regions. MINURSO's budget, to which the United States contributes, has decreased slightly in recent years, from \$65.4 million (July 2011-June 2012) to \$58.1 million (July 2014-June 2015) (Arieff, 2014:p. 9). The U.N. Security Council further raised MINURSO's troop ceiling by 15 military observers, noting that it was supporting the Secretary-General's request for the increase "within existing resources"(Arieff,p.9).

The Organisation of Africa Union (OAU) /African Union (AU)

In 1978, the Organisation of Africa Union (OAU) formed the "Committee of Wise Men," including Nigeria, to look into the Western Sahara question. Meanwhile on 2 November, 1979, the UN Decolonisation Committee called for the recognition of the right to self-determination and condemned Morocco's actions. By then 34 countries had recognized the SADR. In Africa, recognition continued, and by March 1980, Sierra Leone brought the number of African favoring the SADR as a defunct OAU member to the required 50 percent of existing members. Libya accorded recognition on 15 April, 1980 (Uwechue, 1991:p.1558).

In June 1980, at the OAU's Council of Ministers' Meeting in Freetown, the SADR submitted an application for membership which was consented by 26 of the 50 members. The meeting was attended by countries like, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali and Guinea, among others. Consequently, the Implementation Committee of the "Committee of Wise Men" converged in Freetown over the SADR status in September 1980. Although, the disposition of Morocco forced Nigeria out and the outcome necessitated the OAU Secretary-General, Edem Kodjo to inform the SADR of its acceptance and recognition as the 51st member.

Morocco's representative, Mr. Ahmed Reda Guedira, frowned at the OAU's support for Western Sahara and tagged it as trampling on its own legality and declared that King Hasan II had requested its country withdrew from the OAU. Zaire, through her foreign minister, Umba Di Lutete, which had supported the recognition of the Western Sahara, also suspended its participation in the peace deal that would have addressed

the Western Sahara question at the OAU (May, 1984) Morocco withdrew its embassy from Nigeria subsequently.

In January 2013, the Africa Union Executive Council at its 22 Ordinary session held in Addis Ababa, reaffirmed its commitment and measures to organise a referendum for the self-determination of the Western Sahara. The African Union Peace and Security Council, recommended a global boycott of products of companies involved in the illegal exploitation of the national resources of Western Sahara as further proof of Morocco's growing isolation and its officials continue to privately decry MINURSO and its personnel as biased. MINURSO continues to operate in a challenging political and security environment. The mission regularly reports violations of the cease-fire accord (Arieff, p 5).

Africa on its part, through a concerted effort took some steps on the Western Saharan question. For instance, the AU Peace and Security Council in a Communiqué at its 496th meeting on the situation in Western Sahara held on 27 March 2015 reached the following resolutions:

- (i) It appealed for an enhanced and coordinated international action towards the early organization of a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, in compliance with relevant OAU/AU decisions and UN resolutions;
- (ii) It renewed its support to the calls made by the UN Security Council for direct negotiations between the two Parties, namely the Kingdom of Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO, without preconditions and in good faith, with a view to achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, in the context of arrangements consistent with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter;
- (iii) It appealed to the larger international community to lend its full support to the efforts aimed at overcoming the current impasse; further decides to regularly review the situation in Western Sahara, at least twice a year, on the basis of updates and recommendations provided by the Chairperson of the Commission; among others (SPS, 2015).

Nigeria

With the emergence of General Muhamad Buhari, as Nigeria's military ruler and in line with Nigeria's national liberation and anti-colonial policy, Nigeria, recognized and established diplomatic relations with the SADR on 11 November 1984. On the other hand, Morocco, despite her promises to sit at the negotiating table, having countenanced a referendum in Western Sahara supervised by the OAU and the UN, Morocco announce its decision on the 12th to leave the OAU in protest at the SADR's presence. Then the only support it got was from Zaire (Uwechue, 1991: p.1559; ICG, 2007:p.16). Nigeria allowed the SADR to establish its diplomatic mission under President Obasanjo in 2000. Even private individuals and intellectuals in Nigeria including the former president of the West Africa Bar Association (WABA), Barrister Femi Falana has continued to champion the radical stance of Nigeria on the Western Saharan question.

The POLISARIO, Algeria and partly Libya at a time seems to be the protagonists when Africa were handicapped by the non-intervention clause of the defunct OAU, and Nigeria being one of the early protagonist have not turned her rhetoric to action as she had exhibited in other places. The reasons for this can be substantiated through some debilitating domestic and foreign issues such as; corruption, incessant, insecurity challenges of its territory, dwindling economy, politicization of the Nigerian Army. Little wonder, Chairperson, House of Representatives Committee on the Diaspora of the seventh assembly, Abike Dabiri in an interview said "as a country, we have not been firm enough... our Federal Government has not taken decisive steps or been decisive in its foreign policy" (cited in Aworinde, 2015). When then will Nigeria be firm enough?

No doubt that stakeholders expect a Nigeria that could be reactionary and confrontational when need be, proactive when necessary and precautionary when obligatory; that which failed to fail and fall when some predicted (Campbell, 2013: pp.163-170). That, which will be beautiful at home and outside, not the one regarded as "beautiful abroad and ugly at home!" (Akinboye, 2013). For instance, Nigeria was prominent in peace keeping and liberation struggle for countries such as: Congo, Angola, Lebanon, Mozambique, Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia),

South Africa, South Sudan among others. That, in which during the post-civil war, was able to face her destiny without external aid and rendered gigantic financial, moral and diplomatic supports to African countries under colonial rule and apartheid regimes (Owoeye, 2014). That which started the decolonisation of Western Sahara in the 70s and followed with actions and all through the 1980s to 1990s which witnessed innovative foreign policy with focus on Africa; that which was brain behind the Technical Aid Corp (TAC), the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and Monitoring Groups (ECOMOG), helped in Liberia, Sierra Leone, restored hope to Sao Tome and Principe, instrumental in the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), persuaded ECOWAS to reject flawed election in Togo in 2005 by threatening economic sanctions unless new elections were held (Falola and Heaton, 2008).

Moreover, that which helped in the refurbishment of the senescent OAU to the African Union (AU), aided to curb the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) Epidemic in Western and Africa as a whole; and played a pivotal role in the restoration of President Michel Kafando of Burkina Faso in September 2015, Gambia in 2017. President Buhari also played a pivotal role in the restoration of peace in Gambia through assistance in restoring President Adama Barrow but one wonders why Buhari has ceased the chance in the Saharawi's case?

The Politicisation of the Western Sahara Question

There are sufficient reasons to believe that the Western Sahara question has been politicised. Indeed, this has been spear-headed by Morocco which had developed the capacity to manipulate bigger powers to its own advantage. It had already proved its ability to juggle the big powers during the 'War of the Sands', one of whose peculiarities had been playing Washington and Moscow and securing support from both (Isidoros, 2011). As Zunes and Mundy (2010) points out,

In word and deed, France and the United States have shared a profound and longstanding desire to protect, help, and bolster the Moroccan regime. Holding a key geostrategic point at the mouth of the Mediterranean, the postcolonial Moroccan state has become, by virtue of

historical and geographical contingency, pivotal to global stability (i.e., Western hegemony) (p5).

While the Soviet Republic provided the weapons used by Morocco to rout Algeria, the US provided Morocco with logistical support (Shelley, 1993:pp.14-15; Zoubir, 1993:pp.105 & 112; Munene, p.108). Moscow had chosen to remain on the good side of Rabat and refrained from criticizing Moroccan expansionism in order to secure a supply of phosphate and continued to sell military equipment to Morocco with both finding a useful leverage in the West (Munene, p.108).

A convergence of United States and Moroccan interests enabled irredentist Morocco exploit American preoccupation with the Cold War to snatch Western Sahara. To America, Morocco had special strategic value as a military storage facility, detachment and communication centre, and staging post for intervention in the Middle East. Although, after independence, there were symbolic withdrawals from some bases, this did not affect Morocco's strategic value to Washington (Shelley, 1993:pp.14-15; Munene, p.109).

With the United States, by the early 1970s, suffering diplomatic paralysis as a result of humiliations in Vietnam and Angola, Morocco has been a consolation. On its part, the United States wanted to prove that it could still be counted to stand by 'friends'. Western Sahara was a good place to prove 'friendship' as a 'revolutionary' POLISARIO, backed by Algeria, threatened a 'friend' called Morocco. To prove this, the then Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, declared that 'the United States will not allow another Angola on the east flank of the Atlantic Ocean' (Zunes, 1993: p.54). Kissinger went on to press Spain to accept Morocco's demands (1993: p.54) and lobbied African leaders to boycott the OAU summit in Tripoli in 1982 (Jega, 2015).

Although Senator John Kerry was among a number of senators who wrote to the then Secretary of State, Colin Powell, expressing concern and calling for the application of the principle of self-determination of the Sahrawi people and the adoption of the referendum as a solution to the conflict in 2001 (Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier, 2005); the terror attack on the country changed the narratives. Thus, in the aftermath of the 9/11, the United States saw more need to continue to

support Morocco, as an ally. And with the Arab Spring, the relationship became even consanguine. In early 2013, the US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, circulated an initial draft proposal to the so-called Group of Friends of Western Sahara, which includes the US, Britain, France, Spain, and Russia, to expand the authority of MINURSO to investigate human rights violations in the disputed territory. Surprisingly, the US then did a U-turn on its proposal.

For many years, the US has played a major role in Western Sahara conflict and has been a great supporter of the Moroccan position on the disputed territory. In fact, she has on a number of occasions, exercised its veto power to block similar initiatives that were not in Morocco's favour (Azzouzi, 2013).

During President Obama's visit to Rabat in November, 2013, Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a statement calling on President Obama to inform King Mohammed VI that 'US support for the reform process in Morocco depends on moving beyond rhetoric and making tangible change,' instead Obama applauded the monarch for 'deepening democracy' and 'providing economic progress and human development' (Zunes, 2013).

Morocco on its autonomy proposal ruled out the possibility for the independence option to be submitted. Despite this, the White House Spokesman, Jay Carney announced that President Obama believed that the Morocco's autonomy plan was more serious, realistic and credible and that it represented a potential approach that could satisfy the aspirations of the people of Western Sahara to run their affairs in peace and dignity (Zunes, 2013).

In a speech before the UN in November 2014 to mark the 39th anniversary of the Green March, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, made it clear that he had no intention of giving up Moroccan claims over the territory. He said "The Sahara is a crucial, existential issue, not just a question about borders...Morocco will remain in its Sahara, and the Sahara will remain part of Morocco, until the end of time" (Pecquet, 2015). On the issue of exploitation of Sahrawi's resources and commonwealth, He further said:

It is a fact that what is produced in the Sahara is not even enough to meet the basic needs of its population...Let

me say this in all sincerity, Morocco have borne the cost of developing the southern provinces. They have paid out of their own pockets given from their earnings intended for their children so that their brothers in the South may live a dignified life as humans [sic] (Pecquet, 2015).

The question is, are the Sahrawi's not humans before now? There is no doubt, Morocco has been massaging the egos of the western powers in order to frustrate all diplomatic efforts within and outside Africa and dashing a peoples' hopes.

The United States does not currently contribute uniformed personnel to MINURSO, but offers funding for the mission under the U.N. system of assessed contributions. She contributed an estimated \$15.9 million for MINURSO in funds appropriated in FY2014 via the State Department's Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) account. The Obama Administration requested \$17.5 million for MINURSO in FY2015.

It is instructive that, Washington's proposal to change the nature of MINURSO's mission is a déjà vu scenario of the US using the UN as a political tool to further its own interests in the region. The implication of this is that the Mission may continue under the shadows of the US financial support; he who plays the piper dictates its tune. It was reported that Morocco paid lobbyists in Washington to continually support its claims over Western Sahara. There are allegations that the Office Chérifien des Phosphate (OCP) ---a major player in the exploration of mineral resources from Western Sahara doled out \$1million dollars donation to Clinton Foundation as part of her campaign fund (Al Monitor, 2015). In fact, there were submissions that the total money provided to the foundation had totaled \$5 million by 2016 (Zunes 2016).

And even with the emergence of Donald Trump and his doctrine of 'America First,' it may seem even hard than ever to expect any positives from a country that has been at the fore-front of preaching self-determination, democracy, liberalism, liberty and freedom and equality. To be sure, a top US diplomat, John Sullivan, backed Morocco's plan for autonomy in the disputed Western Sahara and also reiterated that

Morocco remains her oldest and closest ally anywhere in the world. He put it thus:

We view Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara as one potential approach to addressing the situation. It is a serious realistic credible plan that is able to satisfy the aspiration of the people of Western Sahara. We support the UN diplomatic process and efforts to find a mutual acceptable political solution to end the conflict that provides for self-determination to the people of Western Sahara, but the most important is our dialogue with the government of Morocco (AFP, 2018)

Be that as it may, it is unfortunate that while the world look aside, cases of genocide, hunger, refugees, internally displaced, ethnic cleansing, landmines, poverty, terrorism, torture, human rights abuses enforced disappearances are often reported in Western Sahara on daily bases (Equal Rights Trust 2009; Allan, & Lakhal, 2015; HRW 2017; AI, 2018). Although, the United States has continued to deny this through its reports, which mostly relied on Morocco's inputs (US Dept., of State 2017).

Concluding thoughts

The objectives of the study were to examine the nature of the Western Saharan Question and the power play as well as the role that Nigeria had played in time past and what she should play in the future.

The study found among other things that, the Western Saharan question is about conquest upon conquest and no doubt that the cases presented by both the SADR and Morocco is a case of two rights; right to self-determination and right to occupation based on historical antecedent respectively but it seem the latter has no basis based on The UN resolution 1514 and the ICCPR 1(1, 2) applicable to any nation or group to seek self-determination (ICCPR, 1966). The Western Saharan question is seeded in the colonial, hegemonic and Hobbesian nature of Morocco with the backing of the western powers. When a country violates fundamental principles of international law and the UN Security Council defines its behaviour as illegal, one might expect that the world body

would impose sanctions or other measures to foster compliance. This has been the case with Iraq, Libya, and other international outlaws in recent years. Why should Morocco be exempted?

One would not expect of the United Nations to respond to such violations by passing a series of new and weaker resolutions that essentially allow for the transgressions and impunity to stand. As with the analogous case of East Timor, it may take a mass mobilization by human rights activists around the world to force the major powers to allow the UN to enforce its obligations and allow an oppressed people their right to self-determination. Thus, the study further revealed that Africa cannot continue to rely on the Western powers as regards the Western Saharan question.

In the wake of the conflict that bludgeoned Africa in the aftermath of the cold war in the early 1990s, late Ali Mazrui though heavily criticized in his theory of benign recolonization believed that Nigeria, if politically stable, with her resources and size could lead the West Africa region (Mazrui, 1996). The reasons Africa, and indeed, Nigeria must stand up to the Western Saharan question are based on certain facts. First, the ICJ ruling of 1970s, secondly, the UN fact finding mission, third, the defunct OAU rule that inherited boundaries from colonialism should be respected, forth, to avoid another Rwandan Genocide since the case of Human Rights violations is increasing by the day, and finally because as the big brother or giant of Africa as have been called, it is the right thing to do as shown in Angola, Rhodesia, South Africa, and others (Falola and Heaton, p.244). Nigeria has played the big-brother role in the past, until recently that she has gone cold especially on the liberation of the last colony which she started as an early protagonist. In the words of Joe Garba:

“... but it is my belief knowing Nigerians as I do, that their resilience and belief in their country’s survival will combine with the workings of the international system to enable Nigeria **to play again**, and even more forcefully, the role in the world that it displayed after independence and in the late 1970s (Garba, 1987:246).

Dr. Sule Maitama reiterated this at a conference on Western Sahara in 2009 that "by helping get their freedom, we are not doing them a favour, but we are doing our duty as Africans to ensure that all Africans are free. Nigeria must play its role and not shirk its responsibilities" (Oyedele, 2009).

Nigeria cannot continue to show sympathy or look aside as the people of Western Sahara are under oppression. Rather, Nigeria must be pragmatic, focused and dynamic in her foreign policy especially towards Africa---the center -piece of our founding father's legacy which continues to lay the background for our diplomatic existence. Put differently, since Africa is the centre piece of Nigeria's Foreign Policy (FRN 1999), Nigeria must be more proactive. Africa's failure to decolonize Western Sahara, the last man standing or Africa's last colony would be a negation and anathema to Africa ideas and ideals.

The study recommends that while private individuals and members of the academia have been at the forefront in recent times, the giant himself has looked-on. It will not be a sign of weakness if Nigeria ceases the day, to continue from where she stopped towards the decolonisation of Africa's last colony.

References

- AFP (2018) "US says it backs Morocco autonomy plan for Western Sahara" 29 June. At <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/us-says-it-backs-morocco-autonomy-plan-for-western-sahara-20180629>.
- Akadiri O (2003) *Diplomacy, World Peace and Security* Akure: Ondo State Government Press.
- Akinboye S (2013) "Beautiful abroad, ugly at home: Issues and Contradictions in Nigeria's Foreign Policy" The 9th Inaugural Lecture of the University of Lagos, Lagos. July 17.
- AL –Monitor (2015) "Is Hillary Clinton taking 'blood phosphate' money from Morocco? 10 April. At <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/hillary-clinton-morocco-blood-phosphate-money-donation.html>
- Allan, C Joanna & Lakhal, H (2015) "Acting with Impunity: Morocco's Human Rights Violations in Western Sahara and the Silence of the International Community." Norway: SAIH, April.
- Amankwah (1998) "Self-determination Asia-Pacific Style: Alien Domination and Freedom's Tortuous Pat Revisited*" *JCULR*, 5: 113-158.
- Amnesty International AI (2018) "Morocco/Western Sahara: UN Must Monitor Human Rights in Western Sahara and Sahrawi Refugee Camps" AI Public Statement, 10 October.
- Arief, A (2014) "Western Sahara: A CRS Report" CRS 8 October
- Aworinde, T (2015) "Blame Nigeria for being indecisive---Dabiri Erewa" *The Punch*, 3 May.
- Azzouzi El Adra (2013) "Why did the US change its mind about Western Sahara" *Your Middle East*. 5 May. At <http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/columns/article/why-did-the-us-change-its-mind-about-western-sahara-14753>
- Baratt, B. (1963) *After Imperialism* London: Heinemann
- BBC (2017) "ECOWAS agrees to admit Morocco to West Africa body" 5 June Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40158089>

- Bereketcab (2012) *Self-Determination and Secessionism in Somaliland and South Sudan: Challenges to Post-Colonial State Building* Nordiska Afrikainstitute, Uppsala, Discussion 75.
- Besenyó J. (2010) "Western Sahara under the Spanish empire" *AARM* 9(2):195-215.
- Besenyó, J. (2017) "Guerrilla Operations in Western Sahara: The Polisario versus Morocco and Mauritania" *Connections Quarterly Journal* 16, no. (3): 23-45.
- Blay, S.K.W (1985) "Changing African Perspectives on the Right of Self-Determination in the Wake of the Banjul Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights." *Journal of African Law*, 29 2: 147-159.
- Calvocoressi, P. (2001) *World Politics 1945-2000* India: Pearson Education.
- Campbell John (2013) *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink Updated Edition* Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Carley Patricia (1996) "Self-Determination: Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and the Right to Secession" United States Institute of Peace.
- Dawson Carl (2009) *EU Integration with North Africa: Trade Negotiations and Democracy Deficits in Morocco* London: I.B. Tauris.
- Equal Rights Trust, (2009) "Torture and Discrimination in Western Sahara" Vol 4:77-84.
- Falola, T and Heaton M.M (2008) *A History of Nigeria* UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- Forman (1959) *Self-Determination in South Africa: A contribution to Discussion*. 14-19.
- Garba, J., (1987) *Diplomatic Soldiering: The conduct of Nigerian Foreign Policy, 1975-1979* Ibadan: Spectrum.
- ICG (2007) "Western Sahara: The Cost of the Conflict" Middle East/North Africa Report N°65. 11 June.
- International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966).
- Isidoros K (2011) "Morocco's violations of International Law in the Western Saharan Conflict" *Allthad* (2): 87-85.

- Jega, M. (2015) "Phone Call to Morocco" *Daily Trust* 16 March
- Kamanu, S. Onyeonoro (1974). "Secession and the Right of Self-Determination: An O.A.U Dilemma." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 12, 3: 355-376
- Kamm, H. (1975) "Morocco Responds with Fervor to Appeal for Sahara march" *The New York Times*, 29 October.
- Labac K.L (2016) "The Sources of Protracted Conflict in the Western Saharan" Unpublished Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.
- Leslie, Peter (1999) "Canada: The Supreme Court Sets Rules for the Secession of Quebec" *Publius*, 29, 2: 135-151
- May, D.C (1984) "Morocco quits OAU over POLISARIO" *The New York Times*. 13 November. At <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/13/world/morocco-quits-oau-over-polisario.html>
- Mazrui, A. A (1996) "Recolonization or Self-Colonization? Decaying part of Africa need Benign Colonization" *International Herald Tribune*. 4 August.
- Miguel C.R (2011) "The rights to self- determination and the natural resources of the Western Sahara" *Allthad* (2): 102-95
- Munene M (nd) "History of Western Sahara and Spanish colonization" Being a Proceedings of a Conference of Western Saharan. Retrieved from <http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/faculties/law/docs/04munene.pdf>
- Owoeye J (2014) "One Hundred Years of Nigerian nationhood? Narratives around Governance, Foreign Policy and Development" A Keynote speech at the International Conference, hosted by the Department of International Relations, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife Nigeria 10 November.
- Oyedele D. (2009) "Turai, Maitama Sule back Western Sahara Independence" *NBF News*. October 11. Retrieved from <http://www.nigerianbestforum.com/blog/turai-maitama-sule-back-western-sahara-independence/>
- Pecquet Julian (2015) "Is Hilary Clinton Taking 'Blood Phosphate' Money from Morocco" *AL-Monitor*. April 10. At <http://www.al->

monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/hillary-clinton-morocco-blood-phosphate-money-donation.html

Pedler F (1979) *Main Currents of West African History 1940-1978*
London: Macmillan.

Pomerance, Michla (1976) "The United States and Self-determination: Perspectives on the Wilsonian Conception" *American Journal of International Law*, 70, 1:1-27.

Sahara Press Service (2015) "Communique of AU Peace and Security Council, at its 496th meeting held on 27 March 2015 on the situation in Western Sahara" SPS. Retrieved from <http://www.spsrasd.info/en/content/communiqu%C3%A9-au-peace-and-security-council-its-496th-meeting-held-27-march-2015-situation-west>

Shelley (1993) "Endgame in the Western Sahara," In Zoubir, Y.H. and Volman, D. Eds. *International dimensions of the Western Sahara conflict*, 14-15. London: Westport Conn.

Simpson Brad (2014) "Self-Determination in the Ae of Putin" *Foreign Policy*, 21 March.

Siollun Max (2009) *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976* New York: Algora.

Smith (2009) *Understanding Third World Politics* 3rd Edition US/UK: Palgrave.

Sterio, Milena (2018) "Self-Determination and Secession under International Law: The cases of Kurdistan and Catalonia" *American Society of International Law*, 22, 1.

U.N. Security Council (2003) *Report of the Secretary-General*, Annex II S/2003/565, May 23.

U.N. Security Council (2004), *Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2004/325/Add.1, April 23, 2004, "Reply of the Kingdom of Morocco to Mr. Baker's Proposal Entitled 'Peace Plan for the Self-Determination of Western Sahara.'"

UNGA (1970) *Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations*. UN

US Department of State (2017) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017: Western Sahara Human Rights Report*.

- Uwechue R (ed.) (1991) *Africa Today* London: Africa Books Limited
- White, N. (2014) "Conflict stalemate in Morocco and Western Sahara: Natural Resources, legitimacy and Political Recognition" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42, 3:339-357.
- Zoubir Y.H (1993) "Moscow, the Maghreb, and conflict in the Western Sahara" in Zoubir Y.H. and Volman, D.(eds.) *International dimensions of the Western Sahara conflict* London: Westport Conn.
- Zoubir, Y (1987) "Soviet Policy toward the Western Sahara Conflict" *Africa Today*, 34, 3: 17-32.
- Zoubir, Y.H and Benabdallah-Gambier, K (2005) "The United States and the North African Imbraglio: Balancing Interests in Algeria, Morocco, and the Western Sahara" *Mediterranean Politics*, 10, 2: 181-202.
- Zunes S (1993) "The United States in the Sahara War: A case of low-intensity intervention" In Zoubir, Y.H. and Volman, D.(eds.) (1993) *International dimensions of the Western Sahara conflict* London: Westport Conn.
- Zunes S. (2013) "Illegal Occupation and Human Rights Abuses: The Obama's administration's policy in Western Sahara constitutes nothing less than a rejection of fundamental principles of international law" *Foreign Policy In Focus*. 20 December. Retrieved from <http://fpif.org/obama-ignores-moroccos-illegal-occupation-human-rights-abuses/>
- Zunes Stephen, and Jacob Mundy, (2010) *Western Sahara: War, Nationalism and Conflict Irresolution* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Zunes, S (2016) "Hilary Clinton, Phosphates and Western Sahara" *HuffPost*, 29 September.