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The Impact of the Spanish Turn in Recognising the Moroccanness of the Sahara in Latin America

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Abstract

The Moroccan Sahara conflict is a regional conflict artificially created by Algeria to counter Morocco's territorial integrity. It has been almost five decades since Spain withdrew from the Moroccan Sahara when it was overtaken by Morocco's Green March to regain its Sahrawi provinces. Until March 2022, Spain did not have a clear position on the Sahara conflict. However, the Spanish government has made a U-turn and now supports the autonomy plan proposed by the Kingdom of Morocco as a solution to the problem. This new position has had a major impact on several actors in Latin American diplomacy, who still refuse to accept the new reality.

Keywords: Sahara, Morocco, Spain, Conflict, Latin America.

INTRODUCTION

The Moroccan Sahara conflict is a matter of great importance and interest worldwide, as it remains a geopolitical and economic issue to this day. In this article, we analyze the content of a series of interviews with world-renowned Latin American political personalities, which we have collected in the form of audiovisual records and subsequently edited in the form of two documentaries on this subject.

This article examines the impact of the Kingdom of Spain's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara in March 2022 on Latin America. This act represents a significant step towards resolving a conflict that has lasted almost half a century. It is particularly noteworthy that this was preceded in March 2020 by the United States' decision to recognize Morocco's sovereignty over the Sahara.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper will examine the Spanish position on the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. Spain is undoubtedly a fundamental actor in the Sahara conflict, given its historical role in the colonial distribution at the beginning of the 20th century and its subsequent administrative division of its area of influence, which established borders that in no case should be considered intangible. In the case of the Spanish colonies in South America, for example, if the borders imposed by the Spanish colonial administration had been considered intangible, there would be no sovereign states in Latin America today. It is incontestable that Spain bears responsibility for the dispute, particularly in light of its role in establishing the disputed borders. Consequently, Spain's potential to play a pivotal role in resolving the conflict is indisputable. It would be inaccurate to suggest that Spain's decision to support Morocco's position on the Sahara has not been a significant and historic turning point, with the potential to contribute to a definitive resolution of this regional conflict that has had a profound impact on the entire North African region.

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature reveals a paucity of studies on savings literacy and its functioning in microenterprises.

This study aims to address a gap in the existing literature and contribute empirical evidence from a developing country context. It will test three hypotheses regarding the impact of savings literacy and knowledge transfer as a mediator on the ability of small enterprises to repay their debts.

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RESULT AND FINDINGS

The Sahara conflict has its roots in Latin America, where it has been the subject of articles in the written press and television reports, as well as works of literature by authors such as Adalberto Carlos Agozino from Argentina (2016), Andrés Ordóñez from Mexico (1958), and Luis Agüero Wagner from Paraguay (2015). Throughout history, the narratives and statements surrounding the conflict reflect the prevailing belief system of the collective thinking that was transmitted throughout the latter decades of the 20th century, influencing the way of thinking, feeling, and acting of each state.

The research methodology is exploratory in nature, based on a fieldwork approach that primarily relies on testimonies from individuals from countries in the Latin American region. Between 2019 and 2022, the author of this article conducted extensive research in almost all countries across the continent, which enabled him to establish a diverse range of contacts with prominent figures, including political, economic, and cultural leaders, from this region.

What are the perceptions of Latin Americans regarding the Spanish involvement in the Sahara conflict?

The Response to This Inquiry Will Be Derived from A Series of Interviews Conducted by Former Peruvian Foreign Minister Miguel Rodríguez Mackay, Who States

I believe that Spain is a decisive country in European international relations. Looking at Latin America, in my opinion, what it confirms is that political realism is imposed in Spain. Pedro Sánchez is aware of the revitalization of the relationship with Morocco and all the countries that have links with Spain look at the Spanish example and realize that a recalcitrant, indifferent position cannot be maintained, but with a serious correlate. Here we are talking about the survival of a bilateral relationship that each country builds in its international relations, and Pedro Sánchez has done so. I think that Spain's step of affirming, giving assent, recognition, and political agreement, (plus) that gesture of traveling to Rabat and the recognition of this autonomy plan over this territorial space of the Moroccan Sahara, is an elevation that other countries should look at. I am convinced that Pedro Sánchez's political attitude will generate over time – hopefully, it will be immediate – a decrease in those factual recognitions that the non-existent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic has had. If you look at scripts, the first thing countries have to do is look at international law to know that we are talking about serious things. (Personal communication, Lima, August 6, 2022)

In The Same Vein, Guatemalan Deputy Manuel Conde Orellana Points Out

Spain takes the right position by understanding more clearly that the Moroccan proposal for the resolution of the conflict that may exist in the Sahara is dialogue. It is a dialogue that can lead those who live in that important region of Morocco's territory, because the exercise of full sovereignty in the territory of the Sahara, which belongs to Morocco, is not in doubt, the Moroccan proposal endorsed by King Mohammed VI is that a dialogue be generated that can allow political autonomy to administer itself. because the idea is to propose and establish rules of coexistence, which seems to me mature, and real because Spain gives a correct reading to that proposal and now recognises that the Moroccan proposal on the construction of dialogue to establish mechanisms of coexistence in that area is the way, because only through dialogue can these problems be resolved in a firm and lasting permanent way. Spain, by recognizing that this is the way, is recognizing not only full sovereignty in the exercise of Moroccan territory but also that the proposal of the king and his government to solve this conflict is the one we would all like to see. (Personal communication, Guatemala City, August 15, 2022)

According to Former Peruvian Foreign Minister Luis Javier González Posadas, Some Involved Went Beyond the Diplomatic SphereiIn the Face of the Turnaround

Algeria responded to Spain's recognition of Morocco by announcing that it was cutting off gas, excuse me, it is a crime: because if you cut off gas to a country, you suffocate it and, if you do it in the winter season, it is catastrophic. Fortunately, with the support of the 27 European nations, the Group of 27 sent back to Spain a policy that I would describe as extortionate. This is a great triumph for Morocco. They are not alone, that is an invisible triumph for Morocco, but it is a triumph. So none of those confrontational policies that go to the clash, to imposition, are going to progress. It doesn't work. (Personal communication, Lima, August 4, 2022)

According To the Jurist and President of The Chile-Morocco Global Foundation, Roberto León, The True Leitmotif That Led Algerians to Be Part of the Conflict Was Revealed

One of the important facts is that Algeria, as we would say in good Chilean, came out of the closet because for Algeria today the issue is them and the issue is how they go out to the Atlantic. If you look at the statements and everything we have seen since Algeria took the decisions against Spain, no one talks about the Polisario. Here the only thing that is talked about is Algeria. (Personal communication, Santiago de Chile, June 23, 2022)

The Political Sign of the Spanish Government That Makes the Turn Makes It Significant According to Martha Chávez, Former President of the Peruvian Congress

It is very important because even that recognition, that turn has been taken by a government close to socialism, and then it has jumped over those ideological barriers that are often the ones that also apparently accompanied those of the Polisario. I believe that yes, Spain has a very important role and it seems to me that it is a point, a very important advance for the recognition of the Moroccanness of the Sahara and the role of Morocco, because not only do we have to look at it that way, but we have to look at it from the perspective that Morocco is an important ally concerning the entire African area". (Personal communication, Lima, August 7, 2022)

According to Peruvian Congressman José Cueto, Spain Has Concluded That It Is Time to End the Sahara Conflict

Now (that) Spain has recognized the total position of Moroccan territory and, leaving aside this Polisario Front, I hope that this recognition, this turn or this definition, I would say, I think there was always Spain's intention to close that chapter, (and) it has already done so. I believe that this will help us to understand that the way forward is not to recognize a Republic that does not exist, I repeat, but to narrow them, to increase, and once again to remain firm in the position that Peru always had until this government came and those were the things that it did and that it has done wrong. I think this is going to help, it's going to help us. (Personal communication, Lima, August 8, 2022)

For Andrés Ordóñez, A Mexican Diplomat and Writer, The Spanish Turn Should Be Paradigmatic for Latin American Diplomacy

The turn taken by Spanish diplomacy will make our diplomats in office today reflect, but that the time must come when it is overcome and the position is updated. But yes, I believe that Mexico should have a position of greater real neutrality in the face of this problem. I believe that Algerian friends must also assume the responsibility that they have as an interested party. (Personal communication, Mexico, August 15, 2022)

In Turn, Fabio Albergario Queiroz, A Brazilian Political Analyst, Pointed Out

The statement by the President of the Government of Spain, Mr. Pedro Sánchez, has expressed the importance of the Sahara issue for Morocco, which is recognized as a sacred cause in the Maghreb kingdom. (Personal communication, Brasilia, August 11, 2022)

For Parliamentarian Gustavo Pacheco, Spain, As the Country Most Involved and Historically Linked to The Problem, Should Be a Point of Reference on This Issue

Yes, Spain is a reference. Spain has turned, and the government of President Sánchez has turned 180°. And this has meant that Spain understands that its partner(s) is Morocco. The European Union understands that Morocco, along with the United States and Israel, needs to be respected in its territorial integrity. We need the United Nations to carry out the autonomy process that we have identified as the most serious, most credible plan in the region, we are respectful of autonomy from the Andean Parliament. My position is that our relations (are) with (the) States. In public international law, the subjects of law are the States. Morocco is a state and we are going to respect the territorial integrity of Morocco. (Personal communication, Lima, August 6, 2022)

The Chilean Expert Juan Carlos Moraga Also Highlighted the Exemplary Value of The Spanish Turn and Clarified

From Latin America, then, all this generates a new political fact that opens new windows, opens the eyes of many who previously had them closed, and has a multiplying effect on the positive aspects of this recognition. We believe that President Sánchez's courage is an indicator that he acts out of a sense of state, out of a sense of country, and not for minor issues, partisan or group, but simply for the good of the people, for the good of his people in Spain. And, in Latin America, we see this with great attention, with great respect, and with a lot of hope. (Personal communication, Santiago de Chile, June 20, 2022)

For Jorge Arguindegui, an Argentine diplomat and academic living in Panama, the change in Spain's position is a turning point that calls on the Polisario and its Algerian allies to consider the Moroccan autonomy proposal:

It is necessary, without a doubt, for both the Polisario and Algeria to begin negotiating this autonomy proposal which, on the other hand, has been supported by the United States and by Spain's change of position. That encourages us to find a meeting point more. (Personal communication, Panama City, July 8, 2022)

The Argentine Internationalist and Academic Adalberto Agozino Highlighted the Role Played by H.M. King Mohammed VI in the Change of Spain's Position

Thanks to the diplomatic efforts of H. M. Mohammed VI, they had a fortunate outcome. In other words, the differences were settled and new rules for the bilateral relationship were agreed. These new rules involve Spain's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara and this is fundamental. On the one hand, there is the recognition of the global power, that is, the US; On the other hand, there is the recognition of a regional power that has a very important past presence in the region. This substantially changed the rules of the game concerning the Sahara conflict and has forced other actors to adjust their positions about it since the last few years of the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty by the United States and immediately afterward by Spain. This position reinforces, even (a) some countries in the region that maintained an ambiguous position (and that) have begun to reconsider changing their position, because the concrete fact is that - let's put it in geopolitical terms - Morocco has a lot to offer, the Polisario Front has nothing to offer and Algeria has less and less to offer. So Latin American countries and Latin American political leaders have also revised their positions, this is also reinforced by other things that have happened, where African diplomatic representations have been opened in the southern provinces. (Personal communication, Buenos Aires, July 27, 2022)

Franklin Rafael De La Crzuz, Vice-President Of PARLACEN, Believes That What Spain Has Done is to Recognize A De Facto Situation

I think that what Spain did there was to recognize what it should have recognized a long time ago because we have known each other for a long time; but sometimes politics has an impact because the people do with the rulers what is convenient for them at a given time. So, I think that it has been a good decision taken by President Pedro Sánchez in that direction. (Personal communication, Santo Domingo, July 13, 2022)

Panamanian Journalist and Diplomat Demetrio Olaciregui Highlighted Spain's Weight in Latin America as a Gravitating Factor in the Region's Diplomacy

I think that the most significant thing in recent months has been the response that Spain has given to the regional proposal. We have to consider the weight that Spain has in Latin America because it is, as we say in good Spanish, "the mother country", that is, the common origins of Latin America are in Spain. That is why it is significant that the Spanish government has recognized Moroccan autonomy as the only viable, credible, and achievable alternative to the Sahara issue and this has an important impact because it changes the relationship of forces in North Africa with Spanish support. But the Spanish backing was the consequence of the U.S. backing. Later, Germany supported the issue of autonomy. (Personal communication, Panama City, July 8, 2022)

In Turn, Guillermo Alberto Cochez, Former Mayor of Panama, Celebrated the Turnaround, Highlighting Morocco's Leadership in Efforts to Assimilate the African Continent into Modernity

I think it has been a very significant point for Spain's recognition of the Sahara in favor of Morocco, and it had been reiterated by the United States in the new Biden administration. And I believe that this has given Morocco the possibility of becoming what it is today: an African power that guides in terms of development, education, agriculture, in terms of so many things that today guide Morocco to become a modern country (Personal communication, Panama City, July 9, 2022).

For Jorge Pizarro, Former President Of PARLATINO, Those Who Insist on Supporting the Polisario Are Unrealistic

It is a realistic position, I would say, (and), in the case of Spain, even more so. Spain has a long-standing relationship with Morocco and North Africa. And without a doubt what the United States does is recognize a fact. This is what they were saying recently in Latin America, (that) the same thing is happening. The rest, I believe, (and) I will continue to insist, (is) a rather ideological position, it has a basis in reality. (Personal communication, Santiago de Chile, June 23, 2022)

For His Part, the Dominican Internationalist Luis González Welcomed the Fact That An Increasing Number of Countries With International Weight, Such as Spain, Are Adhering to the Autonomy Project For the Southern Provinces of Morocco

I fully adhere to what Spain proposed and to the position of President Donald Trump of the United States at the time and reiterated (by) President Joe Biden and other powers. All the major powers of the world agree that this is the solution. First, Morocco's territorial integrity is unquestionable, that is there, it is clear. That is Moroccan territory (with) initiatives to strengthen that relationship with its historical territory. (Personal communication, Santo Domingo, July 14, 2022)

Former Costa Rican Foreign Minister Manuel González Highlighted the Momentum That the Turn Gives to the Understanding of Nations, International Harmony, and World Peace

... Any effort made regardless of the country or the organization that promotes it to maintain stability and peace, to achieve human progress in harmony in an environment of security is valuable, it must be emphasized, underlined, and supported because the world needs more peace, more tranquility, and more harmony. (Personal communication, San José, July 19, 2022)

The Deputy of the Dominican Republic Julio Brito Highlighted the Strength of the Example That Radiates from the Spanish Turn

We see it as an achievement for both the Kingdom of Morocco and the Dominican Republic. And I believe that very soon it will be produced in our country, just as it was produced in Spain. Also a manifesto of agreement, a manifesto of satisfaction with what the Moroccan Sahara is. (Personal communication, Santo Domingo, July 14, 2022)

The Former President of Costa Rica, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría, Called for the Spanish Turn to Enlighten Latin America to Achieve A Peaceful Resolution of the Problem

... I believe that these two decisions are going to have an influence on Latin America's foreign policy and on how Latin American countries are going to deal with these issues in multilateral bodies and, it seems to me, that all this contributes to establishing what Costa Rica and Morocco have been promoting for some time. Together, on different occasions, to try to ensure that all the situations that remain from past relations, which sometimes become a little complicated, can be resolved by peaceful means, ensuring that all parties can benefit from a peaceful relationship, which is always the best we can have. (Personal communication, San José, July 19, 2022)

Another Call for Reflection Has Been Made by Sarai Núñez Cerón, A Mexican Parliamentarian

I believe that this turn that Spain is making will undoubtedly make the nations reflect, and should make them reflect so that an agreement can be reached. (Personal communication, Mexico City, August 16, 2022)

Panamanian Academic Euclides Tapia Also Highlighted Spain's Importance in Latin America

The decision has strengthened and underpinned the recognition of major powers. In the case of Spain, then, obviously our relationship with Latin America. Spain is very particular and that, to some significant extent, also impacts relations with Latin American countries, because our representative, so to speak, in the European world has made a significant step. Spain's position that these relations could flourish (has had) an extremely positive impact on strengthening the relations of Latin American countries with the Moroccan State. (Personal communication, Panama City, July 11, 2022)

Mexican Academic Pedro De La Vega Was Confident That the Spanish Example Would Have a Positive Impact in Latin America

I believe that the turn that Spain has taken is very interesting, it must necessarily have an impact on how other countries that closely follow Spanish politics can modify their positions, because we also understand that geopolitics is a strategic issue and, if we are Spain's trading partners, to a large extent it is natural that, since Spain is a major trading partner of Morocco, let us understand this as a logic of equality [...] when we talk about the position that Spain currently maintains about the Moroccan Sahara issue, what we are experiencing is a modern political position, a realistic political position and, in Mexico, we have this logic perfectly permeated in addition to traditional Mexican diplomacy. (Personal communication, Mexico City, August 17, 2022)

The background: the recognition of the U.S. of the Moroccanness of the Sahara

Peruvian Expert Ricardo Sánchez Serra Recalled the Important Precedents That Preceded the Turn of Spain

... well, we have first as a precedent the decision of the United States Government to declare the territory of the southern provinces as Moroccan territory, we have the turn of the Spanish Government in some way as a former colonizing power that knows what happened in that territory because in Morocco they have fought long after their independence to recover their territories from the French and the Spanish. Morocco itself registered the territory of the Sahara as a non-self-governing territory in the fourth UN committee because Spain did not want to return it to them, so I think it has been a great gesture or, rather, a historical obligation of Spain to have done what it did. That it serve as an example to other countries? Well, I think that the Spanish decision should be taken into account. (Personal communication, Lima, August 5, 2022)

Before the Spanish decision to support the autonomy plan in the Sahara, two outstanding events changed the strategic game on the ground. First, the liberation of the Guerguerat passed in a distinguished operation thanks to the intervention of the Royal Armed Forces that restored normality and put an end to all the erosions of the separatists at once. Second, and immediately after, the important decision of the administration of the United States, a country that is an influential actor in peace and security at a global level, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Its recognition of the Moroccanness of the Sahara took place thanks to effective diplomatic work under the wise direction of H.M. King Mohammed VI.

For Fabio Albergario Queiroz, A Brazilian Political Analyst, The U.S. Decision Was Not a Major Factor in The Development of The Country. The U.S. Was Decisive

The position of the United States in recognizing the sovereignty of the Sahara was a turning point because it is the world's leading power, highlighted by a very clear position. What he did was to consolidate the Moroccan proposal for autonomy that would be alternative, possible, and would provide stability for the region.

(Personal communication, Brasilia, August 11, 2022)

The Impact of the Spanish Turn in Recognising the Moroccanness of the Sahara in Latin America

For his part, Panamanian academic Euclides Tapia expresses deep astonishment at the support received from the United States and Spain for Morocco's territorial claims in the Sahara, and describes this fact as spectacular and of considerable dimension, suggesting that it marks an important milestone in the country's foreign policy. In addition, it praises the continuity in diplomatic relations despite the change of government, which it interprets as an implicit recognition of the decision taken by the previous administration.

Honestly, that was a spectacular event, of an incalculable dimension. To have the support of the United States, and now of Spain, of Morocco's claims in the Sahara. Congratulations. With the change of government, now with President Biden, relations have been maintained as such, which means recognition of the decision of the previous government. (Personal communication, Panama City, July 11, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The interviews yielded insights into the diverse perspectives expressed by Latin American experts and politicians on the Sahara conflict and Algeria's influence on it. This reflects the inherent complexity of the situation. Additionally, he observed that, following the visit of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to Latin America, there has been a renewed interest in Morocco in the region, which has led to a reexamination of ideological positions on the conflict, particularly in relation to the Polisario Front. On the one hand, several experts have also questioned the legitimacy of the Polisario Front and argue that the lack of a defined territory, a functional government, and a permanent population weakens the claim to lands that do not belong to them. Conversely, the economic and political influence of Algeria in perpetuating the conflict is evident. However, this strategy appears to be losing support, as an increasing number of Latin American countries adopt a stance against separatism and recognize Morocco's historical rights over the Sahara.

The search for a peaceful and just solution for all parties involved remains a challenge. However, changing perceptions of the conflict may open new avenues toward a sustainable and lasting resolution. Testimonies have demonstrated that Spain's stance in support of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara has resulted in a notable shift in the geopolitical landscape, prompting diverse reflections and reactions in Latin America. Regional experts and politicians have expressed varying perspectives on this Spanish shift. Additionally, Morocco's proposal to engage in dialogue for a durable and peaceful resolution to the impasse is noteworthy for its maturity.

Spain's decision to support Moroccan ownership of the Sahara has had a significant impact for several reasons. Firstly, Spain's historical and diplomatic importance as a former colonial power in the Sahara region lends historical and diplomatic weight to its position in the conflict. Secondly, the change in Spanish position is interpreted as recognition of the political and territorial reality of the region. Thirdly, Spain's influence in the region is considerable. Spain has close political, economic, and cultural ties with Latin American countries, which makes its position on the Sahara conflict a relevant issue. The potential for Spanish support for the Moroccan side of the Sahara to influence the positions of other Latin American countries on the conflict is a further factor to consider. The third reason is the international response: Spain's decision was preceded by the backing of the United States, another influential world power. This international support serves to reinforce Morocco's position and simultaneously erode the Polisario Front's thesis on the international stage. A fourth reason for Spain's stance is the promotion of regional stability. The recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara by Spain and other countries can contribute to the stability of the North African region by fostering an approach based on dialogue and negotiation to resolve the conflict.

The Latin American region has come to recognize that expressing unfounded prejudices towards a country considered a strategic ally in the Arab and African world is irrelevant. Furthermore, Latin America has come to recognize its indebtedness to Morocco and is now willing to repay that debt. It has come to understand that it can benefit from strengthening its relations with actual countries that exist, rather than with fictitious entities. Moreover, it has come to recognize that the Sahara is Moroccan, just as Bolívar is Venezuelan and Arequipa is Peruvian.

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