

REVIEW OF “*BREVE HISTORIA DEL SAHARA OCCIDENTAL*” BY ISAÍAS BARREÑADA¹

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Introduction

The unresolved conflict in Western Sahara can be considered one of the most complex and that puts a strain on contemporary international dogmas, values, and institutions. The book “*Breve Historia del Sahara Occidental*” (A Brief History of Western Sahara), published in 2022 by Editorial Catarata, highlights precisely this aspect. Not that it wasn’t already noticeable: those who study the dynamics of self-determination and the “Intractable Conflicts” can easily understand the intricate relationships that permeate the deterioration and the lack of international interest in resolving the conflict.

Although the book is entitled “*Breve Historia*” (A Brief History) and provides the historical elements that are essential for understanding the subject, it breaks away from the manual and historiographical approach that characterizes “historical” publications on the subject. It goes far beyond historicism. It offers views based on political theory, the international institutions involved, the economic dynamics that justify its maintenance, and the political resistance and reluctance of the actors involved. It is a wide-ranging analysis that combines theory and practice, an up-to-date and accurate view that allows anyone interested to understand the current geopolitical importance of the conflict.

Six chapters are presented. They cover Spain’s position on Western Sahara and the recent – and ongoing – bilateral crisis with Morocco. It reveals that there are a series of political disturbances surrounding the issue, even though almost 50 years have passed since the Moroccan occupation and the 1975 Madrid Tripartite Agreement. The chaotic process of territorial maintenance on both sides is still alive and kicking. Themes

relating to colonialism, failed decolonization, occupation, and war are addressed as keywords capable of translating the conflict process from its antecedent environment. This is the historical heart of the work.

A theoretical articulation shows the possibility of fitting the conflict into the international model of "Intractable Conflicts", taking into account the multilateral impossibility of offering a plausible solution. The author makes an interesting counterpoint in relation to the dynamics of the Palestinian conflict, based on axes such as its long duration, transformation, asymmetry, fragmentation, the relevance of occupation and annexation, and the construction of national identities around the conflict. Key theoretical and conjunctural factors for understanding the panorama.

In addition, we look at conjunctural issues through the impact of the strategy of both parties (Morocco and the Polisario Front), but above all, we expose the clear ineffectiveness of international organizations, especially the UN, in mediating and conducting a resolution strategy, with the complicity of the international community. This process ends up allowing the *status quo* to be maintained, clearly favoring Moroccan interests. It also reveals the strategic facet of the attempt to legitimize the occupation and Moroccan oppression of the Saharawis through economic investment, be it through the phosphate booty, solar energy, fishing banks or even direct financial investment by the Moroccan state, which urgently needs to "Moroccanize" occupied Western Sahara. Finally, the brave Sahrawi popular resistance in the occupied territory and beyond is discussed.

The work reflects an exercise in extreme clarity in a highly complex context. A "*Breve Historia*" of immense contributions and greatness.

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