

The Construction of Saharawi Political Identity

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is the formation of Saharawi political identity. This research aims to show how the population of Western Sahara had to cope with a situation of exile following the permanent occupation of their land by Morocco in 1975. Consequently part of the population chose exile, while the other part still lives under occupation. This situation has developed into a bitter war for independence, which even thirty years has still not been solved.

With the population separated by the war and by a wall, the identity of the Saharawi people, forged by resistance, has developed in two different ways; even though the main features are still associated within resistance and struggle.

In this essay I aim to show the consolidation of the Saharawi identity in two different contexts; that of the refugee camps and the occupied territory. The diverse situation that the population had to face resulted in two different defence strategies of their own Saharawi identity.

In looking at the two strategies of identity formation, one shaped by the presence of a omnipresent leadership given by the Polisario Front in the refugee camps, while the other dictate by the necessity to survive under a repressive occupation, I intend to demonstrate the mutual influence that the two approaches have had on the process of identity formation.

This research starts with an historical chapter, because I believe it is necessary to display the background of the story since history plays an important role in the legitimisation of struggle for both the parties. Despite the fact that Morocco and the Western Sahara have similar histories because under the rule of the same dynasty the use of the history enabled the parties to demonstrate the two different goals of

occupation and independence. Moreover, since the case of Western Sahara is a late legacy of decolonisation, I aimed to frame the conflict in the broader context of the decolonisation of North Africa.

Consequently, I shall define the theoretical framework with the first part focusing on nationalism, since the discourse of Morocco and the activists in the occupied territory is a nationalistic discourse. The nationalistic discourse has developed particularly in the occupied territory where the structure of the Polisario Front was lacking. In the last decade the Polisario Front was more concerned with the construction of the people of the future Saharawi state and its discourse it is mainly centred to set this goal.

Morocco turned the protests in the occupied territory into a nationalistic struggle since blaming the protesters to jeopardise the unity of the nation. By speaking about nationalism, I aim to depict nationalism has been a consequence of the colonisation and how it has been used as a strong legitimizing ideology ever since.

In the refugee camps there has been continuing work on the creation of a rounded Saharawi people and the battle for independence moved on to a diplomatic level with the creation of the state-in-exile and the consolidation of a collective identity. For this reason part of the second chapter is dedicated to theoretically frame the process of identity construction evident in the refugee camps, in order also to pave the way for the last chapter where I shall define the factors that have contributed to shape the Saharawi political identity.

The last two chapters form the core of this research and I aim to show how the life in the refugee camps has been constructed for the creation of the Saharawi people in order to be eligible for self-determination. Finally, I will explain how the situation has

developed in the occupied territory through the protests and the *Intifada* and its hegemonic relationship with the refugee camps.

HISTORY OF WESTERN SAHARA

The history of Western Sahara, the vast land that for one side face the ocean and on the other side fade into the desert started “to take shape” with the Spanish colonisation in 1884.

Before the European colonisation this area saw the succession of different dynasties and nomadic tribes, but there were not specific borders, especially for the nomadic tribes that travelled from what are now Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco and Algeria in search of land for their herds. The first arrival of Berber tribes in Western Sahara is dated to the first millennium B.C.¹ In the eight and ninth century is dated the introduction of Islam² and the Idrisid kingdom in the ninth century is considered the first Islamic regime in the area,³ while Berber in the central part of Morocco had also their own version of Islam, due to a the creation of another revealed book in Berber.⁴

However, it was the Almoravid dynasty that stretched from the actual Western Sahara to the Muslim Spain that firstly unify and urbanize the area, accordingly they have been the first to have shaped the border of the region, which then in the sixteenth century has been limited by the Ottoman conquest of the actual Algeria, which set the border with what is now Morocco.⁵

At any rate, before the 1884 the tribes living in the area of Western Sahara did not conceive their land as they do now, since they used to travel from Mauritania to Algeria in what has been romantically called the search of the clouds for the rainfall,⁶

¹ Erik Jensen, *Western Sahara: Anatomy of a Stalemate*, (London, Rynne Lienner Publishers, 2005).

² Jensen, (2005), p. 21.

³ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 304.

⁴ Lapidus, (2002), p. 304.

⁵ Lapidus, (2002), p. 325.

⁶ Jensen, (2005), p. 22.

and for this reason they have been known as ‘les enfants des nuages,’⁷ also due to the peculiar blue dress that they use.

It was then with the Spanish presence and the occupation of Morocco by France in 1899 that the borders of Western Sahara became to existence. It was in 1900 that France and Spain signed a convention to divide between them the possession on the Saharan coast. Then in 1904 the northern border between Western Sahara and Morocco seemed to have been confirmed with the border of the Spanish colony set along the Draa River, to the south instead the border with Mauritania was set in La Guera. Further decrees and discussion over the border continues until the World War II, when the Spanish West African administration comprised Ifni, Tarfaya and Spanish Southern Morocco.⁸ However, after the Moroccan Independence from France in 1956 further discussions took place between Morocco and Spain, also because the Istiqlaq party, which fought for the independence, had in mind a plan of “Greater Morocco” which in the future would have created problems between Morocco and Algeria. Eventually, in 1969 Spain left Ifni to Morocco, but not Ceuta and Melilla which are still part of Spain. Spain left Ifni because in 1965 the UN General Assembly called Spain to enter into negotiation with Morocco in relation to Ifni and Spanish Sahara as part of the decolonisation process.

By 1969 the Western Sahara’s border with Morocco was set behind Tarfaya and El-Ayoun was the provincial capital of Western Sahara.

The case of Western Sahara differs from other cases of colonized countries simply because was the last country to be left by the ‘European oppressor’ and also because while the other countries in North Africa were reaching their independence in 1950s

⁷ The children of the clouds, (my translation).

⁸ Jensen, (2005), p.25.

and 1960s Spain tighten more its power on its colony, making the Spanish colony of the Western Sahara a Spanish province.

However, in the stream of the independence movements in particular after the independence of Morocco in 1956 and Algeria in 1962 also in Western Sahara the first movements for independence started. It was during the 1950s that the first manifestation of rebellion appeared and consequently the creation of the first groups of liberation. Due to lack of organization and possibly inadequate level of unification among the groups where the tribal system was still dominating, these first rebellion groups failed their goals and disappeared. Hodges points out that the origin of Saharawi nationalism has to be seen in these first liberation movements⁹, which originally were inspired by the Moroccan Liberation Movement, even though the composition was mainly Saharawi and their goal was not integration with Morocco but independence. Nevertheless, Hodges suggested that it is actually in the unsuccessful of the Army of Liberation the future emergence of the Saharawi nationalism, because it had been succeeded Western Sahara would have probably been integrated into Morocco.¹⁰

Origin of the Polisario Front

It is from the experience of this first movement of liberation that in 1973 the Polisario Front (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Seguía el-Harma y Rio de Oro) was born. Before the establishment of the Polisario Front it has to be notice that the United Nation General Assembly adopted about six resolutions between 1967 and 1973 regarding the right of self-determination of the Saharawi people.¹¹

⁹ Tony Hodges, 'Origins of Saharawi nationalism', in Richard Lawless and Laila Mohan (eds.), *War and Refugees: the Western Sahara Conflict*, (London, Pinter Publishers, 1987), pp. 34-35.

¹⁰ Hodges, (1987), p. 35.

¹¹ Hodges, (1987), p. 44.

This position of the UN has undoubtedly contributed to the creation of a national consciousness among the Saharawis, while it had another effect in Morocco. Moroccan regime, in fact, had always in mind the idea of “Greater Morocco” that included the territory of Western Sahara. When the UN endorsed the cause of self-determination for the Saharawis, Morocco interpreted this as a sign of “return to the motherland”¹² and the idea of Morocco was to remove the Spanish presence in order to regain a territory that they considered part of Morocco. Nevertheless, this idea of Greater Morocco was clashing with the Algerian national sovereignty because Morocco claimed part of Algeria, this explained the future position of Algeria as ally of the Saharawi refugees in Tindouf.

The Polisario Front is the main actor in the creation of the Saharawi identity and of the Saharawi nationalism. However, these two concepts have been brought about by changes happened already under the Spanish colonization. The Saharawis were principally a tribal population; different tribes were living in the area, among those the most important was probably the Reguibat that has been also the object of studies of the anthropologist Sophie Caratini,¹³ who has also extensively written on the topic of Saharawi identity. The process of sedentarisation started under the Spanish for different causes. Firstly, Spanish developed the natural resources, such as phosphate, creating mines and thus employment and this led to movement towards the major city like El-Ayoum and consequently the nomadic activity decreased. Secondly, the tighten that Spain imposed on the territory in the 50s, despite the fact that moved further the process of decolonization, on the other hand increased a sense of statehood. The decision of Madrid to make the colony a Spanish province led to creation of institutions. In the tribal organization and as part of the Islamic culture tribes leaders

¹² Hodges, (1987), p.42.

¹³ See Sophie Caratini, *Les Rguibat*, (Paris, l’Harmattan, 1989).

generally gathered together in assembly called *djemaa* in order to discuss about important matters. The *djemaa* under Spanish became a proper institution and it was presented as the voice of the Saharawis, thus as Shelley points out this contributed to “a new sense of supra-tribal identity.”¹⁴ Hence, involuntarily Madrid, in order to have a more accessible control over the Saharan province, instilled in the population the sense of nation that would have led to the claim for independence.

The Polisario Front was established by a group of Saharawi students in Rabat and El-Ouali Mustapha Sayed became its first secretary general. El-Ouali would have played an important role as one of the myth of foundation of the Saharawi identity as symbol of courage and his death during a fight in 1976 became a symbol of the Saharawi nationalism.

The first manifesto of the Polisario Front appeared quite general, proclaiming ‘total liberty,’ but as Hodges points out it did not mention clearly the independence as a goal.¹⁵ However, one year after the proclamation of the first manifesto the Polisario announced that independence was the final goal. Presumably, the leaders realized that Morocco would have not been an allied in the struggle against independence without a second aim. Moreover, in the same year 1974, Spain started a census under the persistent request of the UN for the right of self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The census of 1974 would have been the only since the process of identification started in 1991 by the MINURSO (United Nation Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), which raised many unresolved questions and both Morocco and the Saharawi leaders could not agree on definitive results of identification.

¹⁴ Toby Shelley, *Endgame in Western Sahara*, (London, Zed Books, 2004), p. 168.

¹⁵ Hodges, (1987) p. 53.

Spain left to leave the problem unresolved

In the year 1975 Spain left the colony in Western Sahara but from that year the Saharawis started another struggle for independence that has not finished yet, they are still waiting for their country.

Before leaving, Spain secretly signed an agreement, the Madrid Accords, between Mauritania and Morocco that would have left them the control over the territory of Western Sahara. Despite the fact that the Court of Justice, consulted by Morocco, did confirmed allegiance between the Sultan of Morocco and some tribes in the territory of Western Sahara, the Court concluded that the information and materials they had “did not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the Territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritania entity.”¹⁶

The Court of Justice also pointed out that the territory of Western Sahara was not *terra nullius* before the Spanish occupation, but it was not part of Moroccan territory either.

Thus, the Madrid Accords were completely illegal according to international law. Nevertheless, when Spain left Morocco entered the territory of Western Sahara from the North while Mauritania entered from the South.

The invasion of Morocco is known as the Green March, since in the name of national sovereignty and Islam the king Hassan II, pushed hundred of civilians from Morocco to enter in the territory claiming that territory as part of their land. In this way Spain could not attack civilians and for this reason the choice to leave the region.

The Green March signed the beginning of the long exile of the Saharawi population and the occupation of the territory by Morocco.

¹⁶ Jensen, (2005) p. 27.

Many Saharawis had to leave the country and Morocco even used napalm against the escaping population.

The Saharawis that left their country moved in the Tindouf area where they established their refugee camps, still unaware of the fact that they would have created there their State and they would have lived there for more than 30 years.

Establishment of the SADR and the infinite struggle for self-determination

Algeria accepted the presence of the refugees and left them the area of Tindouf. The Saharawis built their camps under the control and organization of the Polisario Front, which started from there a process of revolution of the Saharawi society known as *Social Revolution*. This revolution will be the most important social change in the Saharawi society since it is part of the ideology of the Polisario Front and it is through the implementation of this ideology that the Polisario Front will establish the control and organization over the Saharawi society. For this reason the Polisario Front has been dubbed as 'l'âme d'un peuple.'¹⁷

The Polisario Front is not just a movement of liberation but it represents the Saharawis. On 27th February 1976 the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic was established, continuing the process of construction of the Saharawi nation, which is the goal of the Polisario Front. Looking at the SADR it is hard to define where the Polisario Front finishes and the SADR starts, because it does not exist a clear-cut division between the two. The SADR looks like an instrument of the legitimization of the power by the Polisario Front. Many leaders from the Polisario Front in fact simply moved into the SADR.

¹⁷ Soul of the people (my translation), by Ahmed-Baba Miské, *Front Polisario: l'âme d'un peuple*, (Paris, édition rupture, 1978).

Algeria was the first country to recognize the SADR as state in exile, for its opposition with Morocco. This choice increased the bitterness between the two countries and also put the question of the Western Sahara and the SADR at the centre of the Maghreb issue and it became the factor instigating the lack of the creation of the Maghreb Union.

The creation of the SADR increased the international implication of the situation, because, as a matter of fact, it was not anymore a liberation movement dedicated to war that was now representing the Saharawi population, but a political institution organized as a state, it was considered a “state-in-exile”. Moreover, this state has been recognized by numerous African countries, gaining a place also in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and for this reason Morocco left the Organization, showing how fragile the African unity could be.

In the meanwhile, the war with Morocco and Mauritania continued and it was only in 1979, after the Nouakchott coup, that Mauritania left the stage because incapable of maintaining the cost of the war.

Even with one enemy less to fight the bitterness of the war with Morocco increased. Morocco started the construction of a massive 2,000 km wall of defence known as *the berm* that divided the territory in the Western Sahara between two zones, one under the control of Morocco and the other under the Polisario Front.

It was in 1988 that the Secretary General of the United Nations and the Chairman of the OAU started the consultations with the two parties in conflict on the question of the right of self-determination for the people of Western Sahara. The aim was to sign a ceasefire and to arrive to a referendum that would have allowed the Saharawi people to decide whether to be independent or integrated into the Moroccan territory.

Consequently to this first consultation, the MINURSO was established in 1990, with the aim to proceed with the identification for the referendum.

In 1991 a bilateral ceasefire was signed and from that moment the war between the two parties halted, albeit often fragile with several threats of resumption the ceasefire is still lasting but the referendum has not taken place yet.

James Baker was nominated Special representative for the MINURSO and his proposal in 2001, dubbed as “the third way”, was rejected by Polisario as unacceptable because it replaces the referendum with a period of five years autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty after which there would have been discussion of a possible referendum. This proposal was not acceptable by the Polisario because this implied that the conflict would have become a regional issue. In so doing, the Saharawis would have lost the protection of the international law.

Another plan was discussed in 2003, in this case Polisario accepted the proposal as basis for negotiations, but Morocco rejected it and the situation stayed at a standstill.

Morocco does not accept any plans that foreseen the ultimate independence of Western Sahara, for this impossibility to arrive at any solutions James Baker resigned from his role in 2004.

In the meanwhile in 1999 king Hassan II died and his son Mohammed VI took his place. Towards the end of the Hassan’s era socio-economical problems were already visible in Morocco and this strongly influenced also the Western Sahara area. In the general context of national crisis 1999 signed also the beginning of what has been called the *Sahara Intifada*,¹⁸ manifestations of protest raised in the occupied territory, as reaction to a critical socio-economic situation, but also reaction to the strong

¹⁸ Jacob Mundy

repression operated by the Moroccan government; many in fact were the stories of disappeared Saharawi people.

This first protest was violently repressed but in 2005 another wave of protests raised in the occupied territories and since then the protest continues.

Despite the protracted ceasefire the level of crisis is high, especially in the occupied territories, where Saharawis denounce several human rights violations. Whereas in the refugee camps the situation seems at a standstill and the prolonged nor peace nor war situation might generate distress feeling and a call to go back to war seem more appealing than peace to the young dissatisfied generations.

In this tense climate of unknown the last Report of the Secretary General on the situation of Western Sahara dated 30 April 2007 led Morocco to announce in June the Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara. Albeit this attempt the critics to the plans are severe¹⁹ and the Polisario Front rejected the plan. The Autonomy Plan already in the title manifestly avoids the core of the problem of all the issue, it is in fact a plan of autonomy not independence. The plan envisages the autonomy of Western Sahara but always within the Moroccan sovereignty, plus as Ruiz Miguel points out there is a Constitutional problem related to the article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution that creates ambiguity,²⁰ since this article basically states the absolute power of the king over all the decisions related to the state.

Further negotiations are still ongoing, on meeting is dated 11th August 2007, but the referendum does not seem in the horizon yet.

¹⁹ Carlos Ruiz Miguel, 'The 2007 Moroccan Autonomy Plan for Western Sahara Too many Black Holes', GEES (15 June 2007) [<http://www.eng.gees.org/articulo/214/>]

²⁰ Ruiz Miguel, p. 7.

International Aspects

Despite the fact that Caratini claims this to be an identity conflict²¹ and this essay will focus on the question of identity rather than on the international political connotation. However, it is not possible to escape to briefly present some international aspects that have a strong impact on the situation and seem to further complicate the question.

On one side there is Morocco backed by the strongest power in the world: the United States. The United States support Morocco, since Morocco demonstrated to be an important ally in the battle against terrorism, having previously supported the United States. Moreover, considering the situation in Algeria and the raise of Islamic fundamentalism US sees in Morocco a strategic country to control and contain the Islamic power in Algeria. At the same time, Algeria is supporting the Polisario, hence even though the US claim its support in favour of a solution for the situation in Western Sahara there is the tendency to support Morocco to weaken Algeria.

On the other hand there is Europe and its inconsistent foreign policy towards the Mediterranean countries, due to internal competition among the member states. Europe aims to develop the Euro-Mediterranean relations, and Morocco at the moment seems to be the most reliable country. For this reason both Spain and France, which are the two state members most involved in the situation, are competing for the relations with Morocco. Meanwhile, the Europe is asking for the resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara because it is seen as the major hindrance to the establishment of sound economic relations with Maghreb, for the problems involved with Algeria. The politics of Europe toward Western Sahara depends only on the individual foreign politics of the member state, because the situation is too controversial.

²¹ Sophie Caratini, *La République de Sables*, (Paris, l'Harmattan, 2003).

The case of the Western Sahara appears to be stuck in an international political game that does not seem to have soon visible resolution because of the different interests at stake.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conflict in Western Sahara has been described as the conflict for the independence of the last colony. It is a struggle for the sovereignty over a territory, where one side there is Morocco and the claim that the territory has always been part of Morocco. Moroccan government claim the sovereignty justifying it with the ancient bond of the Almoravid Empire, in this way the Kingdom of Morocco is using ancient historical myth to justify their presence in Western Sahara. Anderson pointed out how history is used to legitimize the nation since he considered the nation as the product of social construction.²² In the case of Morocco history has been manipulated to justify the common roots of Moroccan and Saharawi. Some scholars consider national history as a myth, because it is created appositely to justify the nation, since the uniqueness of a nation involves the creation of a unique history.²³

In this chapter I shall developed the theoretical framework to create the scope for the discourse about the creation of the Saharawi society. Considering the territorial claiming the conflict in Western Sahara is related to a nationalistic discourse, used by both the parties. Moreover, it could be related to a discourse of postcolonial nationalism, since the border of the territory in question have been shaped under the colonial Spanish rule and afterwards the Saharawis have attached to that territory their idea of nation.

There are different theories related to the idea of nation, the so called primordialist theories claim that the nations have always been there and they had just to emerge. However, it is clear especially with colonialism how nation are a product rather than a

²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London, Verso, 1983).

²³ George Joffe, 'International Court of Justice and Western Sahara', in Richard Lawless and Laila Monahan (eds.), *War and Refugees: the Western Sahara conflict*, (London, Pinter Publishers, 1987), p. 23.

given thing. Looking generally at the situation in Africa, where the borders of the countries have been geometrically shaped according to division and agreements among the colonizer countries and this has generated tremendous ethnic conflicts, since the division have not respected the pre-existing ethnic-tribal ties. The national discourse was a subsequent consequence since, in addition to the ethnic ties, the territory acquired a political meaning for the different groups to fight for.

In North Africa the answer to the colonial occupation as resulted mainly in battles for independence raised from independent movements that acquired political consciousness under the occupation. The national consciousness provides the meaning to a land that has been 'designed' under the colonist occupation. Moreover, the situation in North Africa was considerably different from the rest of Africa because of the presence of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire provided the regions under its control of a political structure. However, different regions experienced different types of influences according to the strength of the ties that the Empire had created. Generally speaking, in North Africa, for geographical reasons, the Ottoman power was less influent than in the Middle East area. This contributed to create government structures without imposing a strong influence, but mainly economical ties. At the same time the structures created was different in the different area of North Africa and this has produced different effects during the colonization and the de-colonization period. In the case of Tunisia, for instance, when the French arrived they found an already functioning government more advanced than what it was in Algiers.²⁴ In this way the impact that France had on Tunisia was less oppressive and also Tunisia reached independence in a less dramatic way than Algeria. Morocco instead conserves a strong monarchy since it was at the border of the Ottoman Empire, but it never

²⁴ Richard B. Parker, *North Africa: Regional tensions and strategic concerns*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1984), p. 10.

became part of it and the Alawite Dynasty is in power since the mid of the seventeenth century. The Istiqlaq Party (Independence Party) was the architect of the independence in Morocco and it provided the nationalistic discourse for independence that was symbolically linked to the presence of the king as a symbol of unification of the nation, for this reason the monarchy preserved strong power in Morocco.

Independence from the colonies in North Africa has generated different national discourse since there were already difference degree of political consciousness due to the presence of the Ottoman Empire and the different political impact that it had in the region. In the case of Morocco, the Istiqlaq Party (the party that struggled for the independence) aimed to the construction of a Greater Morocco and this nationalistic ideology creates the question of Western Sahara and the troubled relations with Algeria.

I have explained that to show that even though there was already an existing political structure in North Africa previous to the European colonisation, the idea of nation and defence of that nation translated into nationalism developed during the colonization. As Moore Henry suggests in his view of 'colonial dialectic', the first response to colonialism was the emulation of the Western values, such as nationalism.²⁵

Where nationalism comes from

Western idea of nation has a "predominately spatial or territorial conception,"²⁶ this idea has been originated from Western philosophy and from the history of Europe, starting with the Westphalia process. However, this idea of nation link to the territory is apparently the only one conceived. Even though, other culture and tradition might have developed other ideas, not necessary linked with the territory. In the Islamic

²⁵ Clement Henry Moore, 'Postcolonial Dialectics of Civil Society', in Yahia H. Zoubir (ed.), *North Africa in Transition*, (Gainesville, University Press Florida, 1999), p. 13.

²⁶ Anthony Smith, *National Identity*, (London, Penguin Books, 1991), p. 9.

culture, for instance, there is no such idea as a bordered nation. The Islamic community, *umma*, is ideally in continuous expansion without physical borders but only ideological ones. Nevertheless, also in the Muslim countries the movement of self-determination and the struggles for independence, after the collapsing of the Ottoman Empire, are linked to the spatial idea of the community within a specific territory.

This has been caused by the ideas brought about with the colonisation. Colonisation, in fact, operated a division of the lands where there was a unique Empire.

Once the struggles for independence started the colonized countries use the only instrument they could use to claim independence: the self-determination.

In order to justify their claims for independence those countries had to use the language of self-determination bonded to a territory, they had to use the same language of the occupier. Kedourie explains the “self-determination has become the supreme political good”²⁷ and Kant had a seminal role in developing this idea of self-determination, since the categorical imperative is an action dictated by the autonomous will and not external command.²⁸

As Smith points out there is nevertheless a difference between the Western and non-Western idea of nation. While the Western idea of nation appears based on an individual choice and this because the Western philosophy is essentially based on the individual, the non-Western idea of nation has an “ethnic conception of the nation” because “a nation was the first and foremost community of common descent.”²⁹

²⁷ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), p. 22.

²⁸ Kedourie, (1993), p. 16.

²⁹ Smith, (1991) p. 11.

However, Smith argues that at the base of all nationalism there are ethnic ties,³⁰ this makes blurred the difference between Western and non-Western nationalism. Smith defines this approach to nationalism as 'ethno-symbolic'.³¹ Nonetheless, Smith speaks about nationalism, where nationalism is the idea behind the justification of the nation not the conception of the nation.

Nowadays, in the Western culture ethnicity has acquired a negative meaning and nationalism is more linked to culture rather than ethnicity. Whereas, in many non-Western countries besides the cultural ties the ethnic relations are still a strong justification. Especially regarding the North Africa and Middle East the presence of ethnic ties has been explained in relation to the tribal system that characterized these communities.

Nationalism is nowadays one of the most defended concepts, probably also because as Gellner points out nationalism as a sentiment is a feeling.³² Feelings can be considered construction themselves, hence subjected to deconstruction, at the same time feelings are powerful and sometimes uncontrollable instruments of mobilization. However, as Žižek sustains feelings are based upon illusion because they are based on a construction on which we as human want to believe and a choice 'retroactively grounds its own reason.'³³ For this indocile feature that it contains nationalism has been used to legitimise many contemporary struggles, because of its ambiguous character.

For this reason many scholars debate on the ambiguity of the concept, in the sense that nationalism is a construction and hence there is a margin of uncertainty since as

³⁰ Smith, 'the nation: real or imagined? The Warwick debates on nationalism', in *Nation and Nationalism* (1996), Vol. 2, p. 361.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 361.

³² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1983).

³³ Slavoj Žižek, 'Identity and its Vicissitudes: Hegel's Logic of essence as a Theory of Ideology', in E. Laclau, *The Making of Political Identity*, (London, Verso, 1994), p. 40.

construction is based on ideas, therefore construction on abstract level. Kedourie, for instance, argues that nationalism can not be implemented because it is the search of a freedom that would be destroyed once at the service of the state.³⁴

On the other hand, Gellner considers nationalism as powerful sociological reality³⁵ and not merely a concept subjected to deconstruction. Gellner's works are the milestone for the modernist approach to nationalism, for Gellner nationalism is mere a product of modernity, in opposition to the primordialist ideas, which consider nations as always existed. Moreover, Gellner argues that nationalism is the product of the mobility of the modern world; this is the reason for the inherent protean feature of nationalism. There are grounds to accept Gellner's opinion since nationalism is the defence and the ideology of the nation and nation are considered the product of modernity. Anderson states that nation have been developed in parallel with the development of the press, as vital instrument of spreading this national consciousness.³⁶

There are lively debates on the question of nationalism, and there are different opinions, however what is important is that nationalism and nation are link to a territory; the land became the symbol of an idea, so it is the concept of land that has changed and acquire a special meaning. For this reason it is said nationalism can not exist without a territory, without the concept of a land, which is not just a land but is the homeland. The idea of homeland is not probably new and specific to the recent centuries; however what it is specific in this concept is probably link to the border. The border has acquired special meaning in the history and where before the homeland did not have specific boundaries nowadays the homeland is recognized within boundaries.

³⁴ Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, (London, Duckworth, 1983), p. 12.

³⁵ Anthony Smith, 'the nation: real or imagined? The Warwick debates on nationalism', p. 358.

³⁶ B. Anderson, (1983).

This is why nomadic societies that had as their territory a space and not a bounded land are not recognized by international law, because in this way they could acquire different rights and duties according to the territory that they cross. In this world of order and boundaries this is not acceptable.

On the other hand in order to be free, legally free, it is necessary to be part of a structure. As Laclau points out freedom can be expressed just within a limit posed by a structure.³⁷

For this reason Smith states that “a landless nation is a contradiction in terms,”³⁸ hence the nationalism can not exist without a land.

In the case of communities in exile, as the Saharawi, the land becomes the myth. Even though the Saharawi originally did not inhabit just that land but they could have considered the Algerian soil as their space of travelling. Paradoxically, now they inhabit on a territory where they have created a state, but it is not their land, the homeland that they have decided, that has been carved out by the colonialist game that has created the other nation in North Africa.

The nationalist discourse in the Western Sahara conflict

The Moroccan government aims to the non recognition of the Saharawi as a separate community from the Moroccan one, because in so doing Saharawi could not ask for self-determination.

The nationalist discourse in Morocco implies the fact that the Saharawis are part of the Moroccan nation. For this reason the use of the history as a common background to legitimise the Moroccan presence and to undermine the independence movement of the Saharawis. In so doing, trying to trace back common ancestors Western Sahara

³⁷ E. Laclau, ‘Minding the Gap: The subject of Politics’, in E. Laclau (ed.), *The Making of Political Identities*, (London, Verso, 1991).

³⁸ Smith, *Myth and Memories of the Nation*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 149.

became also part of the national discourse of Morocco and Saharawi became opponents that engendered the Moroccan nation as a whole rejecting their own origins. In his first speech the king Mohammed VI refers to Western Sahara as the “Sahara provinces” of Morocco and considers the Western Sahara as a question of “national integrity.”³⁹

The king of Morocco, in order to maintain a link with Saharawi, has tried to trace the genealogical ties of the Royal Moroccan with some Saharawi tribes.⁴⁰

On the other hand there is the Saharawi community, which ask for the independence of their territory appealing to the right of self-determination.

Both the parts use for their goal a nationalistic discourse. However, the aim of this essay is to look at process of nation-building by the Saharawi, looking at the construction of the political identity.

Western Sahara has never been an independent state, and the concept of a Saharawi state is a very new one and it can be situated in the current of independence movement that have been generated with the colonization.

According to International law the quest for self-determination can be done by a population, a society based on tribe system can not claim self-determination. For this reason the Saharawi community in exile has undergone a process of construction of ‘the people of Western Sahara.’ Caratini analyses the processes of the construction of a unitary group of people that represent the Saharawi community, because as general happened in North Africa the Saharawi community was based on a tribal system and it became compact community with the presence of Spain on the territory.

The Spanish occupation has contributed to the creation of an idea of people through a process of institutionalisation.

³⁹ Excerpts from the first speech of the king Mohammed VI
[<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/408513.stm>].

⁴⁰ Z. Julien, ‘Identite Sahraoui en question’, in *l’Ouest Saharien*, (hors serie N3, 2003), p.187-188.

Processes of identity construction

This process of creation of “the people” implied also the construction of a political identity, which is identity that is mainly collective in the sense that has been created as part of a social process. The political identity is the Saharawi identity, identity as people, which is exactly the aim of the Polisario and the Saharawis for the claiming of the self-determination.

Starting from the consideration that identity is constructed I shall display some theories that will be useful in order to understand the procedure of construction of the Saharawi identity.

The case of Saharawis represents a typical case of identity construction that has developed from a social reality to another because of the necessity. Caratini sustains that is the question of identity at the heart of the problem between Morocco and Western Sahara.⁴¹ Certainly, this is more an anthropological point of view, since besides the issue of identity other questions have been raised from this conflict that will not be solved simply with the acceptance of the two identities. However, it is true that identity plays a high symbolic role and it is on this that the dispute is still debating.

Identity is an essentially link with the social context in which is shaped and that in turns identity shaped, this is the power of identity, because it react upon social structure and at the same time it is influenced by the same social structure that it contributed to form, this is also why there is the inextricable link. For this reason, Berger and Luckman argue that identity can be empirically explained according to the social context outside of which it might not have sense.⁴² This explains the role of the institutions in the social context. Institutions shape the identity and the behaviour of

⁴¹ Sophie Carantini, (2003), p. 85.

⁴² Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (London, Penguin Books, 1991).

the individual and, to put it in Berger and Luckman's terminology, the 'societal identity' act over the 'subjective identity'. The institutions represent the social structure in which the individual organizes his/her life and this organization becomes part of the identity of the individual.

According to Laclau the structure of the society is essential to the individual because it is related to his/her freedom. Laclau and Zac argued it is "*determinability* the condition for the realization of freedom."⁴³ Paradoxically, it can be said that freedom can be fully realized just *within* the scope of a structure simply because in a 'structure-less society' there would not be the concept of freedom.

I have used Laclau and Zac's idea because determinability is given by the presence of institutions which in turns are the "habitualized actions."⁴⁴ This means that institutions are created by the everyday actions of the human beings that become 'institutionalised', hence socially and politically recognized to organize and control the society and produce the meaning of it, basically to produce the societal and political identity. I have divided the terms even though, in my opinion, there is not a sharp difference between the two, since the political identity it is the identity represented in the society, hence it could be defined as societal. However, because this essay focuses on the Saharawi political identity I will use political in the following cases. Furthermore, in the case of the Saharawi where the society is shaped mainly by the structure given by the Polisario Front, which is the political representative of the Saharawis population, I consider more appropriate to speak about political identity. In addition Laclau considers that "'Politics' is an ontological category: there is politics because there is a subversion and dislocation of the social. This means that any

⁴³ Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac, ' Minding the Gap: The subject of Politics', in E. Laclau (ed.), *The Making of Political Identities*, (London, Verso,1991), p. 13.

⁴⁴ Berger and Luckman, (1991), p. 72.

subject is by definition, political.”⁴⁵ According to this explanation the case of Saharawis in the refugee camps represents certainly a dislocation of the social, furthermore everything is political in the sense that all the life in the refugee camps is built on the purpose of acquiring a political meaning. Although in the Saharawi case politics is used as the remedy for a dislocating social, in my opinion it is not always the case and social is part of the politics discourse, this is why before I said that there is a fading difference between the social and political identity.

On the grounds of the fact that the construction of the identity is subjected to the same rules of the construction of the self, in Berger and Luckman’s words “the self is experienced as subjectively and objectively recognizable identity.”⁴⁶ Therefore, identity is part of the self and one self can have more identity. Moreover, the self is continually reshaping itself, at the same time maintaining a core of accepted concepts given by sedimentation.⁴⁷

The construction of Saharawi political identity has to be explained using the self-other relation theories. Given the fact that identity can not be conceived in a vacuum, but it exists solely in relation to the other, the Saharawi political identity has been constructed on the opposite relation with the Moroccan one. Laclau sustains that “the oppressed is defined by the different with the oppressor, such a difference is an essential component of the identity of the oppressed.”⁴⁸ Namely, the identity of the oppressed is indissolubly link to its oppressor in a negative-opposite relation. This is clearly evident in the relation between Saharawis and Moroccan, despite the fact that superficially they do not show striking differences Saharawis aim to maintain the

⁴⁵ E. Laclau, *New Reflection on the Revolutions of our Time*, (London, verso, 1990), p. 61.

⁴⁶ Berger and Luckman, (1991), p. 68.

⁴⁷ Berger and Luckman,(1991), p. 85.

⁴⁸ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, (London, Verso, 1996), p. 29.

difference from Moroccan using Hassanya and Spanish as their two languages instead of Arabic and French. This shows two interesting points: firstly, how language is important in the unification and identification of the self to the society. Moreover, language is considered as a shared symbolic experience,⁴⁹ but also Mead conceived the language as a shared sign that enable the self to be social because it is through sharing the same language that it is possible to share the knowledge and to anticipate the meaning of what the other says. On this grounds Mead elaborated the concept of the ‘reflective self,’⁵⁰ that implies the ability of the self to reflect upon his own action and also to pose the self outside his own in order to be able to interpret what the other want, otherwise it would not be possible to understand each other if we would not have the capability to put ourselves “in his/her shoes”. Nevertheless, this is the core of the problem of the conflict, which could be also seen in terms of realist-competitive relation. Namely, it is the impossibility or involuntary capability to understand the necessity of the other in claiming his identity.

When signs are accepted and shared Mead labelled them as ‘significant symbol’⁵¹ and language is the most recognized significant symbol.

In this case the use of Hassanya, the specific Berber dialect of the Western Sahara region, it is clearly to state the difference with Morocco. Moreover, in the occupied territory this is used as a form of protest, since it was forbidden by Moroccan government that imposed Arabic. Whereas in the refugee camps the use of Hassanya could be interpreted as a bonding agent for the society, since it could be also assumed that originally different tribes had slightly different languages. In addition to set the difference, language shows also the relation of power, the use of Spanish as second

⁴⁹ See Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism*, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1969) and George H. Mead, *Mind Self and Society*, (Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1934).

⁵⁰ George H. Mead, (1934).

⁵¹ Mead, (1934), p. 61.

language refers to the presence of Spanish colonization while Morocco was under French occupation. This shows also the change of the context, in the sense that before Spain was the enemy, while now the enemy is Morocco and Spanish, even though the language of the former occupier is now used to express dissent towards the actual oppressor. The choice of Spanish is also related to the relation between the SADR and Cuba, for the same reason also Arabic is now taught in the schools in the camps, because of the relations with Algeria and Libya.

We have seen how language can carry important information related to identity, being language a symbol we can recall also to Blumer's approach to self construction named *symbolic interactionism*, which also states the ability of the self to interact with the other and with the environment around according to the meaning that they attribute to it.⁵² In this context it is possible to recall a fact explained by Pablo San Martin in which he described the use of money in the refugee camps in Tindouf.⁵³ San Martin explains how in the refugee camps in absence of their own currency the Algerian currency is used with another value, basically they have attached to the money another signified. San Martin explains this in terms of the "problematic relations between the signifier and the signified,"⁵⁴ in this way San Martin used Laclau's ideas related to the political identity. According to Laclau the political identity is "constitutively split,"⁵⁵ because each identity is expressed through differences and this creates the impossibility of the unity. Furthermore, Laclau continues saying that "it is the lack of something that acquired full presence,"⁵⁶ this

⁵² See Patrick Beart, *Social Theory in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004), p. 72.

⁵³ Pablo San Martin, 'Nationalism, Identity and Citizenship in Western Sahara', in *The Journal of North African Studies* (September-December 2005), Vol. 10, N.3-4, p. 574-75.

⁵⁴ San Martin, p. 574.

⁵⁵ Laclau, (1996), p. 38.

⁵⁶ Laclau, (1996) p. 94.

leads to think to the “continuous tension between the process of nation-building and its inherent impossibility.”⁵⁷ Thus, the lack of territory has acquired the full presence in the state construction, this can be perceived in the apparent obsession of recreating the normality in a situation of abnormality.⁵⁸ Every action in the refugee camps results as a process of symbolisation, and this in turns is part of the identification process. The identity is shaped mainly by symbolic interaction and everything can be considered a symbol that acquired meaning in such peculiar context like the refugee camps, which is real because it exists but at the same time it is an experience outside the normal course of life. There is a lack of ‘normality’ in the common institutionalised sense of perceiving the society, but at the same time this normality has acquired a full sense in the organization of the camps that reflects the geography of Western Sahara which is the absent land. As San Martin said the Polisario Front aims to ‘normalise’ the situation in the camps,⁵⁹ this because the social lack could be lived as disorder and disorganization,⁶⁰ but this seems to have been overcome in the camps by the precise structure imposed by the Polisario Front. Julien observed that there is a perception that the Saharawis aim to give an image of ‘peuple esthétisant’⁶¹ this because the order and the organization are the main aspiration in the camps and so every actions seem to need a reason not only for the individual but for the all community. There is no one in the refugee camps that does not work for the good of the all society. Extrapolating from stories of researchers that have visited the camps, the life in the camps from outside appears to be a totally communitarian experience. The lack of privacy is also due to the material configuration of the camps, since

⁵⁷ San Martin, p. 575.

⁵⁸ San Martin, p. 574.

⁵⁹ San Martin, p. 574.

⁶⁰ Laclau, (1996) p. 94.

⁶¹ The term could be translated as ‘aesthetic population’ in Z. Julien, ‘L’Identité Sahraouie en question’, in *L’Ouest Saharien*, hors serie n. 3 (2003), p. 207.

people live mainly in tents and there are just few brick buildings, which are mainly institution building. The fact that institution building are the only one built with bricks also testimony an attempt of further legitimisation of the power of the Saharawi Democratic Republic, a material sign of sedimentation of the institutions.

This stress on the institutions in order to show a degree of stability and the appearance as ‘people esthétisant’ seems to reflect Goffman’s theory of *dramaturgical approach*.⁶²

Goffman started from a symbolic interactionist perspective drawing also his idea from theatre, from the relation between the actor and the audience in which the actor shows to the audience what the audience is expected to see. Namely, “Interaction is viewed as a "performance," shaped by environment and audience, constructed to provide others with "impressions" that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor.”⁶³ The aim of the Saharawis is to show to the audience, the international court of justice and everyone that can stand for the Saharawi cause that they are eligible for self-determination, and plus they are ready to build a state in their own territory without the presence of Morocco. In this respect they appear to act according to a script, which they are at the same time the author of, for this reason Julien observes that the Saharawis want to ‘appear’ as a perfect ‘people’. The appearance is essential in the performance and this also explains that high level of organization presents in the camps. This is also due to the fact that every performance is successful if there is coordination among the actors, this is explained by Goffman as ‘dramaturgical

⁶² Adam D. Barhart, ‘Erving Goffman: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,’ [<http://www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/CURRIC/soc/goffman.htm>] (17/08/07).

⁶³ Adam D. Barhart, ‘Erving Goffman: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.’

loyalty.’⁶⁴ In fact, everyone in the camps has his/her own role and people are divided in a type of cellule system.⁶⁵

Moreover, “The necessity of each individual to maintain his or her front in order to promote the team performance reduces the possibility of dissent,”⁶⁶ this because everyone feels part of a common cause and so there is no space for dissent; everything is organized to respond to the exigency of the camps. Admissibly, this is normal in such an ‘extraordinary’ situation like the one in the Tindouf camps, however it is also similar to a regime system. Despite the name Saharawi Democratic Republic, the actual institutional structure is a one-party system, because the Polisario Front is the only party existent. The manifesto of the SADR foresees the future existence of a multi-party system, but not in the present situation.

There is a tension between the present and the future, the perception of the future seems more real than the presence, while the present is just a performance, the play will finish and the actors will start one day the ‘normal life’.

The next chapter will focus on the production of this performance in the camps.

⁶⁴ Patrick Beart, (2004), p. 79.

⁶⁵ This fact division of roles in the camps will be explained in the next chapter.

⁶⁶ Adam D. Barhart, ‘Erving Goffman: the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’.

THE LIFE IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS

The official image that a community aims to give of itself is important to understand how this community want to be perceived. In the Saharawi case what is more noticeable is the importance they give to the foreign presence in the refugee camps. Interviewing the deputy representative of the Saharawi people in UK,⁶⁷ I realized how they encourage people to go and visit the camps and live with Saharawi families to understand the life in the camps. This open towards the exterior might be explained in different reasons. On one hand, there is the need to acknowledge the biggest number of people about the situation in Western Sahara, because this conflict does not receive a massive media cover as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for it could appear geographically less strategic.

Another point that could be considered is the fact that Saharawi identity has been in great part built in opposition with the Moroccan one. I suggest that probably for this reason of opposing identity, while in Morocco the Sahara's topic is still a taboo and not many people feel free to talk about, the Saharawis seem to have the urgent need to explain their situation. This could also be partly typical of the situation of exile and partly for the compelling need to not being forgotten.

The Western Sahara conflict is often dubbed as the “forgotten conflict,”⁶⁸ therefore the urgency to maintain the light on the situation in order to continue the struggle for self-determination.

The Polisario Front is the mind and the crafter of the Saharawi society in the refugee camps. The main ideological programme for the realization of the Saharawi society is based on the *social revolution*. Two main instruments have been used for the implementation of the social revolution by the Polisario Front to shape and control the

⁶⁷ Interview with Limam Ali, deputy representative of the Saharawi in UK and Ireland (27th July 2007).

⁶⁸ Tim Judah, ‘Background: The forgotten conflict’ (27/01/1999), BBC News Online, [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/264052.stm>] (30.08.07).

society: the establishment of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic and the education system.

The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic

Discipline is a form of control⁶⁹ and the purpose of a state is to create a structure to have the control on the society. The SADR has been established as the official representative of the Saharawi people in the international framework and also it provides the structure of the future nation and its legitimisation. The SADR has been created to legitimise the quest for self-determination. At the same time, the Polisario Front as the only party in the 'government' is conducting the talk with Morocco in relation to the referendum as asked by the UN Security Council and UN General assembly. Hence, even though the SADR is representing the Saharawi in the Organization of African Union, it is actually the Polisario Front the main reference in the international stage.

The success of the Polisario Front was in the organization of well-structured refugee camps, which surprised the first international aid envoys that arrived in Tindouf after the Saharawi exodus in 1976.⁷⁰ This high level of coordination might also derive from a loyal spirit originated by the tribe and Bedouin ties, since, in order to survive to the harsh condition of the nomadic life, they developed loyal behaviour toward the other in the same difficult condition. Despite the fact that the nomadic lifestyle of the Saharawis, as already said in the previous chapter, changed under Spanish colonisation, they have probably maintain the sense of loyalty as the tie with their Bedouin origin, which is still regarded as an important factor, also as opposite to the Moroccan origin. Furthermore, this could be also explained with the Islamic concept

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir*, (Paris, Gallimard, 2004)

⁷⁰ San Martin, p.568.

of *‘asabya*, the spirit of unity that links the group. Besides cultural or ethnic reasons, Shelley points out how over the history the Saharawi identity “was asserted in resistance to intrusion from north, south and east.”⁷¹ On these different grounds, it is possible to explain the peculiarity of these refugees, who have their origins in the strength to resist to the desert.

The refugee camps are divided in four *wilayas* (provinces), each of them named after a city in the occupied territory, each *wilayas* is divided in *dairas* (districts), divided in *hays* (neighbourhoods). Each *wilayas* have been built close to a source of water and to a paved road, in addition the provinces have been built around the administrative centre settled in Rabouni. In terms of political division each division level has its own elected representative, who is in charged to report what is happening to the government. Women often cover the representative roles, since men are away for the military service.⁷² The Secretary General of the Polisario Front is elected by a body called the General Congress of the Polisario Front (which since 1985 meets every three years). The duration of his mandate is for three years (until the next vote carried out by the General Congress). The General Congress is made up of all the representatives of the Popular Councils, which elected their future leaders.⁷³ The Popular Council is formed by the representatives of the different divisions. As already said it is the Polisario Front that shaped the SADR, in fact there is an overlapping role of the Polisario over the SADR, which is clearly states by the fact that the head of the Polisario is also the President of the SADR and all the ministries of the SADR are also members of the Polisario, but this is justified by the fact that the

⁷¹ Toby Shelley,(2004), p. 167.

⁷² The information about the structure of the camps can be found on the *Western Sahara Online* website at [<http://www.wsahara.net/campsstr.html>] (21.08.07).

⁷³ Western Sahara Online at [<http://www.wsahara.net/sadr.html>] (21.08.07)

SADR is a government of “circumstances”⁷⁴ living in exile. Despite this can be seen as a form of regime, it is necessary to consider the peculiar environment and situation in which this State was born. For this reason it can not be considered in the same way as a Western democracy, albeit the ideological aspirations of the Polisario that has established the SADR and drove its Constitution largely inspired by the European thought.⁷⁵

Furthermore, the SADR has been established in order to cement the social revolution initiated in the refugee camps, which implies the eradication of all the tribal ties and the creation of an equalitarian society. Hence, the SADR provides the common institutional framework in which every adult Saharawi has her/his own role according to her/his knowledge and skills rather than tribal affiliation. In fact, every adult Saharawi is part of a political cellule and of a popular committee of production,⁷⁶ that make up the Popular Councils of each *dairas* and *wilayas*. The constant political participation gives the sense of citizenship and also recreates the unity and the sense of loyalty that characterised the Saharawi society, because everyone has a role in the common cause. Meanwhile, it is this being part of the same people that has founded the sense of citizenship, which is been implemented through the social revolution, the abolition of the slave system (which was still existent at the time of the tribes) and also with the active participation of the women in the political life.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Western Sahara Online at [<http://www.wsahara.net/sadr.html>] (21.08.07).

⁷⁵ Claude Bontemps, ‘The Government of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic’, in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 9, n. 1, (1987), p. 176.

⁷⁶ My own translation from S. Caratini, (2003), p. 63.

⁷⁷ S. Caratini, (2003) p.66.

Education and Discipline

Education is certainly a powerful political mean, because it is the first encounter that children have with society and institutions, therefore the control of knowledge is such an important instrument of power.

Education has been the first priority of the Polisario Front in the organization of the life in the camps. This because there was a need of educated people in order to organize the life in the camps, be as most independent from the external and secure a possible continuation of the leadership.

The first leadership of the Polisario Front was part of an educated elite, because before the exile in the camps the Saharawis considered education as an instrument of the colonial oppressor, since the schools were all run by Spain. Studies on the Saharawi population under Spain state that people refused to go to school to maintain their independence from Spain.

The leaders of the Polisario Front were part of that educated elite that received their education from the Universities in Morocco, which was at that time a newly independent country, surely this new wave of independence had influenced these young Saharawis that gathered together to establish the Polisario Front.

In this light, we can notice that education was considered as an instrument in the hand of the oppressor and was regarded negatively, hence the abstention from education as a symbol of disobedience.

The situation totally changed once the exiled Saharawis found themselves in the position of creating a structure for their own society. Moreover, education served to the social revolution planned by the Polisario, because education was compulsory for everyone, girls included, creating the first step for this equal society that is the ambition of the social revolution. Education in the camps has a very rigid structure. It

reflects: firstly, this need of organization that pervades the general structure of the camps; secondly, it creates in the children this obedience and link to the society.

High level of obedience seems to be one of the elements that have allowed the implementation of this ideal society in the refugee camps. This objective has been reached through a strictly hierarchical sense of discipline that the young Saharawis firstly encounter at school. Despite the fact that the tribal system has been eradicated the Saharawi society is pervaded by a strong hierarchical organization. This hierarchical organization is not given anymore by the tribes' affiliation but it is related to the age. For instance, since it is not anymore compulsory for the woman once married to move to the house of her husband, when the men come back home in the break of their military service they are hosted by the wife's family, however he is not suppose to sleep in the tent because he is not allow to speak with the aged males of his wife's family. The strong hierarchical structure increases the isolation of the man that for the majority of the year lives far away from his family enrolled in the military service.

The hierarchical structure is strongly present in the school where the young Saharawis can establish contacts just with members of the same age. The hierarchical system is the place of the discipline and as Foucault argued the discipline is a form of control. According to Foucault the discipline is “*anatomie politique du détail*,”⁷⁸ and furthermore the control of the detail allows the control of the private life. The organization of the camps appears to be control in detail since everyone is part of the mechanism of the state. There is a quasi-religious consideration of politics because everyone is part of the bigger project. This fact is especially felt by the young generation in pursuing their education and it is furthermore felt because everyone

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, (2004), p. 163, «political anatomy of the detail » (my translation).

studies according to the need of the camps. Children are separated from their family since the young age, because they live together close to the school. This seems to anticipate the separation due to the military service. The military service is another element that in Foucault's thought contributes to the maintenance of the discipline, because the army is the representation of the "disciplined crowd" (my translation).⁷⁹

The education that the young Saharawi generation received is mainly outside the family nest. In this way it could be argue that they are more vulnerable or sensitive to the needs of the state, rather than the family ones.

Moreover, not only the children leave their home to go to school but from the secondary school, at about 11 years old, children are transferred to 'friend countries' to continue their education. In this way they generally spend about ten years far away from the refugee camps because they attend secondary school and university studies abroad in Algeria or Libya or Cuba and in some cases Spain.

This decision of sending the young generations to study abroad has been caused by practical and political reasons. Practically, because there is not possibility of higher education in the camps since there is a lack of services and politically, because this allow the Saharawi leaders to establish international links and sensitise foreign countries about the situation in Western Sahara.

However, this choice has a strong impact on the life of the young generations. Firstly, because since the young age they have to live without their family and according to Caratini this is the cause for oppression of emotions and frustration that seem to pervade the Saharawi community in the camps⁸⁰. In addition, the structure of the society is so rigid that does not allow the space for the individuality because everything is done in the name of the community. Abjean sees education as a form of

⁷⁹ Foucault, (2004) p. 197, "masse disciplinée".

⁸⁰ Caratini, (2003), p.131.

exile, since the children are initially forced to leave their home to leave in colleges; later on they have to leave the camps to live in other countries and eventually they have to come back in the camps, continuing their situation of exile at home.

Arguably, the young educated Saharawi generation has passed through different phase of displacement.

The power of the discipline is visible in the fact that despite the several years of experience abroad and the experience of permanent exile that the young generation lives even once back in the refugee camps, they still come back to stay in the refugee camps, albeit the fact that the prospects for the future are still gloom. This is due partly because of the strong link with the traditions, but also because the education is part of this new social pact given by the social revolution and planned as a path for the return. The young Saharawis abroad were living in the host society but being aware that they would not be part of it, because they feel compelled to return.

The new Saharawi people emerged from the ashes of the tribal society has strength itself idealizing their society in exile. The Saharawi people can claim that they physically exist; nevertheless, this existence is based on a continuous idealisation of themselves as people. The Saharawi society represents tantamount the myth of the unachievable fullness given by the exile, as Laclau points out “the fascination of an ideal society stems from this perception or intuition of a fullness that cannot be granted by the reality of the present.”⁸¹

This fascination is also increased by the fact that the actual Saharawi society is based on a “collective amnesia”⁸² (my translation). The necessity to forget the tribal affiliation that was symbol of a divided society for the creation of an ideal equal society and it was precisely the social revolution that established the base for the new

⁸¹ Laclau, (1990), p. 63.

⁸² Caratini, (2003), p. 68 , «oubli» (the original).

social pact. For this reason the social revolution represents, in a way, the first allowed memory, thus is part of the newly created tradition and at the same time it is the Saharawi society itself and the young generations have been grown up and educated to build up the fullness of the myth.

What I argue is that the reason why these young Saharawis feel compelled to come back to the refugee camps is because they feel part of this myth and this is due to the education totally addressed to support the ideal.

Two related factors: Exile and Time

It is necessary to point out that there is another factor that has further contributed to the implementation of the social revolution: the exile.

Annaïg Abjean, in her study on the relation between the exile and the Saharawi identity, points out how the exile can be considered both an “instrument of action” or “source of inaction.”⁸³ Surely, the situation of exile has cemented the community and has made possible the implementation of the social revolution because of the necessity imposed by the situation. Firstly, the alteration of the displacement had already subverted the normal structure of the society partly obliterating the legitimization of the tribal system, since in condition of displacement everyone is equal. Secondly, exile itself is already a political choice and not a normal case of forced displacement. Morocco and Mauritania invaded Western Sahara and the movement of the people in the Algerian desert was initially forced, however the decision of settle there was a collective political choice of protest and sustain to the war of the Polisario Front. Hence, the Saharawi exile was born as a form of *collective*

⁸³ My own translation, original from the French “moyen d’action” and “source d’inaction” in Annaïg Abjean, ‘Histoire d’Exils’, in *L’Ouest Saharien*, hors serie n.3, (2003), p. 25.

protest. Exile has further implemented the idea that Saharawi identity has been constructed just in reference to the Saharawi people.⁸⁴

The exile was a crucial factor for the implementation of the social revolution because in the situation of the exile the daily structure were eliminated and there was a need of a new structure that was given by the social revolution. Abejan points out that the social revolution is an ‘ideological construction,’⁸⁵ this construction starts from the idea that associates people to unity while tribes to division and to this the association of social equality to social cohesion. On these grounds, it has been explained the political power of the exile, since with the exile there is a need of social equality, for the condition of displacement do not allow division in order to survive, thus the need for social cohesion provided by the social revolution. Moreover, the social revolution was the founding ideology of a movement established by an elite and it was just through the exile that this ideology was embraced by all the Saharawis and became a common cause, for this Abjean considers the exile as a source of political power.⁸⁶

Another important feature among the Saharawis in the camps is related to the question of time. The anthropologist Sophie Caratini has done important studies on the sense of time in the camps in Tindouf. Caratini acknowledges that she was surprised by the importance that the people there were giving to the time, because they were often asking for the time, since their watches were not working⁸⁷. There is the urgency to know the time for this feeling of immobility and inactivity that is felt mainly by the young generations, especially after the ceasefire that creates a hegemonic gap, since the war was providing at the same time the reason and the justification for the unity of

⁸⁴ Caratini, (2003), p.66.

⁸⁵ Abjean, (2003), p. 43.

⁸⁶ Abjean, (2003), p. 37.

⁸⁷ Caratini, (2003), p.90-91, on the question of time in social life.

the Saharawi society. Caratini suggests that in the refugee camps the moment is extremely important,⁸⁸ in the constant waiting for something to happen. Moreover, the time seems to represent an important part in the construction of a foundation of the Saharawi identity, since many places and institutional building in the camps are named after memorable date that have signed the path of the Saharawis' history. For instance, the names of the two main schools in the camps are School 12th October and School 27th February. The two dates are respectively the date of the anniversary of the National Union which marks the end of tribalism and the beginning of the social revolution and the date of the establishment of the Saharawi Democratic Republic.

As already mentioned history is an extremely important instrument in the creation of the idea of nation and of a national identity. Interestingly enough, this two dates have been used to name schools. Education is, in fact the, other chief instrument in the creation of a national and political identity, and in the case of the Saharawi the education has played an exceptionally central role.

In addition, there is a relation between time and exile, because in this case it appears that the exile is lived as a halt of the time.⁸⁹ A situation of exile that last for about 30 years has consequences on the perception of time. It has also to be considered that the place of the exile, the desert, further adds a sense of disorientation both temporal and physical. Even though it can be argued that the desert is the natural environment of the Bedouin population, from which the Saharawis establish their origins and they should feel part of the desert. However, the desert has been generally described as the reign of the subtle and undetectable movement. The idea of time also seems to be

⁸⁸ Caratini, (2003), p. 91.

⁸⁹ Caratini, (2003),p. 88.

influenced by this undetectable movement, as Caratini says it is the ‘instant’ that matters in the refugee camps.⁹⁰

The situation in which the Saharawis live appears to be a situation of physical and temporal exile. The war was a source of legitimisation of the Saharawi activity and existence in the camps, since it provided the rhythm of the activity in the camps, which is essential in a situation of exile that has subverted the normal structure of time. The lack of war enhances the feeling of ‘broken time’, thus the need to know the instant ‘to mend’ the laceration of the time due to the isolation of the exile.

Moreover, the war seemed to be the only way to feel again part of the history, with the ceasefire there is the feeling of a further isolation, from the big battle of our time. All the dates remind moment of action that contrast with the actual inactivity that invades the life in the refugee camps.

⁹⁰ Caratini, (2003),p. 91.

CHANGE OF FOCUS

Ceasefire: a scratch in the identity construction.

The war for independence was an important element of cohesion, as well as providing the rhythm of the actions in the refugee camps. After the ceasefire there was a lack of action in the refugee camps, and the young generation feels that their representatives have become too lenient toward the situation and the diplomatic way does not produce proper results.⁹¹

For this reason many young Saharawis still see in the war the only solution to their problem.⁹² They do not accept the immobility also because they have consciousness of the world outside, the majority of them have lived for many years abroad for their studies, and they have realized how the life in the camps is isolated. However, nowadays the “waiting” seems to be the main feature of the Saharawi in the refugee camps. This waiting has to be filled in order to maintain the sense of the battle, because it is in the struggle for independence the meaning of the Saharawi identity.⁹³

For this reason the events in the occupied territory are important to the people in the refugee camps and there is a mutual support. If the refugee camps before 1991 were the headquarters of the guerrilla soldiers and the rhythm of life was in function of the guerrilla, now there is a fervent work to sustain the protests in the occupied territory, with conferences and sit-in.

The upholding of attention is needed in order to limit the overwhelming power of Morocco, since the international public opinion is generally on Saharawi's side, because of the violation of human rights that Morocco is perpetuating at the expenses of the Saharawis living in the occupied territory.

⁹¹ From the interview with Mr. Limam Ali (27th July 2007).

⁹² Abjean, (2003), p. 93.

⁹³ Caratini, (2003), p. 31.

The construction of Saharawi identity has been lately challenged also by the call of a new census to determine the electorate for the referendum. Lacking of recent information, since the only census available was the one made in 1974 by Spain, the MINURSO decided to verify the number of the Saharawis through the tribal affiliation. The Polisario Front initially disagreed with the idea of launching an identification programme since this involved the re-emergence of the tribal ties. The identification programme, in fact, altered the process of identity construction because the people started again to be aware of their tribal ties and on the relation of power among the tribes that could jeopardise the project of an equal society.

The lack of the war and the identification programme were destabilising agents. For this reason the need for new socialising agencies and the Polisario's tactic shifted from the physical struggle to a more diplomatic struggle. However, the struggle is still alive, but this has shifted from the refugee camps to the occupied territory.

Saharawi Intifada.

With the ceasefire the situation seem to be at a standstill, since despite the end of war there is not agreement on the referendum yet. The different plans by the Security Council have never reached a positive conclusion by both the parties. Even the last Baker's Framework Agreement or Third Way in 2003, before his resignation in 2004, was equivocal about the final status of Western Sahara after envisaging four years of autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Jacob Mundy, 'Autonomy and Intifadah: New Horizon in Western Sahara Nationalism', *Review of African Political Economy*, n.108, (2006), p.261.

At the same time in the occupied territory the tension has increased also due to the poor socio-economical conditions and the persistence of the human rights violation of the Moroccan government against the Saharawi population.

The year 1999 has marked a crucial moment for both Western Sahara and Morocco. The socio-economic situation in Morocco was in crisis and this was weighing on the poorest part of the population like the Western Sahara. The death of the king Hassan II increased the political crisis and in this general hectic atmosphere the tension aroused in the Western Sahara giving new reason for protests.

As Shelley wrote “in the towns of Western Sahara, the second half of the 1999 was a period of sit-ins, demonstrations and confrontation with the security forces” supported by Saharawi outside the territory and students in Morocco.⁹⁵ Shelley points out that there was a project to create a semi-public oppositional civil society.⁹⁶ This is also due to the fact that in 1975 with the Moroccan occupation all the cadre of the Polisario Front moved in Tindouf leaving the occupied territory without an organized leadership. The Polisario accepted the fact that small groups could have created some sort of organization as oppositional movement against Morocco. However, the Moroccan occupation is extremely harsh and several human rights activists have been put in prison and reported being subject to tortures and violence.⁹⁷ Clearly, the politics of Morocco in Western Sahara is a politics of terror to avoid the formation of any compact groups or civil-society movements that could possibly undermine the power of Rabat. At the same time, the king Mohammed VI performs the part of the ‘good father’ towards the population in Western Sahara, because in the international platform Morocco aims to prove its legitimacy for the sovereignty over what they consider the ‘Southern Provinces of Morocco’. Notwithstanding, there is a fierce

⁹⁵ Shelley,(2004), p. 116.

⁹⁶ Shelley, (2004), p. 116.

⁹⁷ See the website *Sahara Libre*, [<http://www.sahara-libre.blogspot.com/>].

repression of any form of protest and many activist leaders disappeared or are put in jail with the charge of being *separatist* and plotting against the nation. The Moroccan discourse in Western Sahara is about nationalism and the king Mohammed VI in his speeches always refers to Western Sahara as the southern provinces. Moreover, the king has tried to establish some sort of family link between the royal family and the Saharawi tribes. The behaviour towards the Saharawis is dual, on one side strong repression of any form of association; on the other side there is an attempt to co-opt the population in the Moroccan society. For this reason Moroccan universities have increased the number of Saharawi students, but this had a counter effect for the Moroccan government, because universities are the perfect place for reunion and meeting and sharing of ideas. Furthermore, the environment in the Moroccan universities is more relax than in El-Ayoun or other cities in Western Sahara. Paradoxically, the effort to co-opt young Saharawis into the Moroccan society has instead increased the chances for them to create connections and groups of support to the protest in their region.

The first intense protest in 1999 was not totally expected and prepared. It started with a peaceful manifestation against social discrimination in El-Ayoun and it was just because of the strong repression by the riot police that the situation turns violent and spread to different areas of El-Ayoun, from the poor neighbourhood mainly inhabited by the Saharawi population to the areas inhabited by Moroccan settlers. The autumn in 1999 was characterized by violent clashes in El-Ayoun, demonstration and several arrests. Nevertheless, the events were important because in southern Morocco and in many Moroccan universities there were demonstrations of solidarity for the Saharawi population and this show the existing network outside the region and with among students in the Moroccan universities. This was important because, as said before,

lacking of the presence of a leadership in the occupied territory, this was a demonstration of the need of social organization in order to organize the spontaneous manifestation that Saharawis showed in this first popular clashes against the Moroccan repression.

After 1999 another waves of protest would have hit the region of Western Sahara in 2005. This time the spark was born by a sit-in organized by the family of the nationalist activist Sidi Ahmed Ould Haddi, also known as El Kainnan, in front of the Black prison of El-Ayoun to protest for his transfer to the prison of Agadir.⁹⁸ The nationalist activist was in jail since 2003, officially for ‘crimes against the Kingdom’ and he created a case for having rejected his Moroccan citizenship and having formally asked to the SADR his Saharawi identity documents.⁹⁹

The sit-in was broken up by the police and this provoked a series of reactions in the following days with hundreds of Saharawis gathering together to manifest and in the universities in Morocco students started protests and actions of solidarity in favour of the Saharawi independence, stating that the protest had spread over the border of the region. The Moroccan government tried to curb the damage and soothe the protest by arresting the nationalist leaders among whom Aminatou Haidar, who will become one of the symbol of the promptly named *Saharawi Intifada* of 2005.

Moroccan regime has always tried to depict the separatists as small groups of people complaining for more subsidies from the state. There has been a systematic attempt of ‘depoliticisation’ of Saharawi actions¹⁰⁰ in order to minimise the problem at the eyes of the international community and also the support for the independence. Morocco has always attempt to hide the events in Western Sahara, considering that at the public

⁹⁸ Gaël Lombart and Julie Pichot, ‘Peur et Silence à El-Ayoun’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, (January 2006), [<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2006/01/LOMBART/13130>] (29.08.07).

⁹⁹ San Martin, (2005), p. 584.

¹⁰⁰ Shelley, (2004), p. 110.

level the Western Sahara topic is still a taboo. However, in the case of the protest of 2005 Morocco could not avoid the spread of the news since the protest have been filmed and image of the Intifada spread on Internet. Furthermore, in the years the connections with human rights movements abroad and the creation of networks supporting the Saharawi cause is increased. This politics of spreading information was exactly the strategy that Saharawi nationalists and human rights activists use to keep the light on their battle and, in so doing, to safeguard the position on the international agenda.

Conversely, Rabat is trying to circumscribe the situation to a regional problem to have more control on it. The ceasefire halted the noise of the war and it has been argued that the fact that the Polisario Front chose the pacific way was detrimental to its cause because the continuation of the violence would have been a reason to accelerate towards a solution.

Thus the Intifada of 2005 and the protests that regularly happen from that year in the occupied territory provides the new instrument of legitimacy to the conflict.

This shift of focus from the refugee camps to the occupied territories can be theoretically described using Laclau's concept of *hegemonic relationship*. According to Laclau the hegemonic relation is "the relation by which a particular content becomes the signifier of the absent communitarian fullness."¹⁰¹ Hegemony in Laclau's terminology is the presence of 'empty signifiers,'¹⁰² this empty signifier lacks of signified, in the sense that potentially can acquire signified and this is the role of the hegemonic relation. In this case the struggle and guerrilla were the signified of the Saharawi identity in particular in the refugee camps, which are the signifier. Thus,

¹⁰¹ Laclau, (1996), p.43.

¹⁰² Laclau, (1996), p.43.

once the guerrilla was terminated by the ceasefire in the refugee camps there was a lack of signified. The shift of focus on the protests in the occupied territories creates the new signified, in this sense we can speak about hegemonic relationship that link the situation in the refugee camps in Tindouf and the occupied territories.

The protests in the occupied territory continue the struggle against Morocco that ended with the ceasefire. It is possible to see a link in the manifestations and the guerrilla, it is not anymore a fight guerrilla but it is a new generation type of guerrilla, legitimised by the protection of human rights and enforced by the use of technology. The Morocco government harshly repress those protests, contesting that they jeopardise the unity of the nation.

However, the protest continues and it is now known as the Saharawi *Intifada*, to link this protest to the Palestinian conflict. There are not casual similarities between the Western Sahara and the Palestinian conflict. The Saharawi leaders seem to use the same discourse and also the symbols, looking firstly at the flag, to emulate the situation in Palestine. There are indeed similarities in the two stories. Both Saharawis and Palestinians have been deprived of their land and force to displace, both people live in refugee camps for generations, at the mercy of political events that have involve the countries where they are displaced, and both population experience a strong political repression in their occupied territory. However, Saharawis in Tindouf seem to suffer mainly for the harsh conditions in which they have to live since they are in the middle of the desert, but the Algerian government seem to not interfere with the SADR, leaving wide autonomous space and letting them sovereignty inside the refugee camps.

It could be argued that the political discourse of the Saharawi leaders of comparing their struggle to the Palestinian's one is a strategy to put their struggle on the same

line with the most known struggle of independence of the twentieth century. This could be considered as another way to maintain focus on their situation, to strengthen the importance of their battle and also because solidarity is important to not relegate the battle to a solitary quest, but put it into a context.

CONCLUSIONS

The dispute between Morocco and the Western Sahara has increasingly taken the form of a battle of numbers and words.

The actual population of Western Sahara is relatively tiny, for this reason the dispute over the referendum was centred over the recognition of the electorate. It is really difficult to estimate the exact number because of the war of numbers between Polisario and Morocco. Overall, we are probably speaking of about 200.000 people in the refugee camps,¹⁰³ and according to the CIA World Factbook about 383.000 people living in the territory of Western Sahara.¹⁰⁴ These numbers are nonetheless controversial, because of the sources in the first case, while in the second case the Moroccan settlers have to be considered. At the end of identification apparently 86.412 people were found eligible to vote.¹⁰⁵ However these numbers are so contested that Shelley promptly dubbed the situation as a “demographic fog.”¹⁰⁶

The State-in-exile founded by the Polisario on the refugee camps aimed purely at meeting the request of the international legal system, on the grounds that in order to benefit from being entitled of rights and obligations in the international stage it is necessary to have a “representative organization that can come into contact with other international legal persons.”¹⁰⁷ This role is covered by the Polisario and reinforced by the SADR that even if recognized by other states can not claim to constitute a legal personality, because it has been established simply as a political agent.

However, this battle of words and the determination of a Saharawi identity defined in opposition to the Moroccan one is not the only bone of contest.

¹⁰³ Western Sahara Online, [<http://www.wsahara.net/camps.html>] (30.08.07)

¹⁰⁴ Central Intelligence Agency, [<http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wi.html>] (30.08.07)

¹⁰⁵ Jensen, (2005), p.99.

¹⁰⁶ Shelley, (2004), p.86.

¹⁰⁷ Antonio Cassese, *International Law*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 76.

This game, in fact, involved more than one power. Once we look at the international context the sky over the Saharawis' heads becomes even greyer.

Firstly, the presence of natural resources makes the territory appealing and therefore the need to legitimise the control over it both by Polisario and Morocco. Secondly, the hegemonic control over Western Sahara is one of the factors that provides the legitimacy for the monarchy in Morocco. Not to mention the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and the rise of Islamist movements in Algeria and Morocco.

I believe that the dispute in Western Sahara provides the means for the monopolization of power over the region by the powerful international actors.

Both United States and Europe aim to monopolize the relations with the Maghreb and in particular with Morocco, considered the most stable country in the region because of the power of the Alawite monarchy. In this vein, they do not aim to undermine the power of the monarchy, something that would happen in case of a positive end for the independence of Western Sahara. On the other hand, the US and the EU can not openly back Morocco because this would be against international law and would make too clear the imbalance of powers in the Maghreb, making Morocco more powerful, in particular in relation to Algeria. However, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria alarms the US that possibly sought to undermine the Islamic power in Algeria empowering Morocco at the expense of the neighbour that is backing the Polisario.

In this international game all that the Polisario can do is concentrate its strength in the construction of a rounded Saharawi identity, which is the only weapon they have to be granted the self-determination other than continuing a war that could possibly be disastrous considering the overwhelming Moroccan military power.

On the other side, in the occupied territory the strategy is based on pacific protest and on the involvement of foreign organizations in order to keep the situation on the agenda of several countries as much as possible, because it is mainly through the external legitimisation that the struggle for independence acquires value.

In the current situation, despite the recent talks between the Polisario and Morocco and the consequence re-emergence of the case on the international stage, there has not been any valuable change. The Saharawi people seems to be condemned to live its life in resistance.

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