

# **The Sahrawi Refugees and their National Identity**

*A qualitative study of how the Sahrawi Refugees present their national identity in online blogs*



**Silje Rivelsrud**

Master's Thesis in Peace and Conflict Studies  
The Department of Political Science  
The Faculty of Social Sciences

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO  
May 2010

## **Acknowledgements**

The work on this thesis has been both challenging and rewarding, and would not have been possible without the support from a number of people.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Inger Skjelsbæk, for your encouragement and valuable feedback at every stage of my work with this thesis. I also want to thank Aashild Ramberg, for your patience and support.

I am very grateful for the support and feedback I have received from my dad, Mari, Ida, Hanna, Anura and Marianne.

Finally, I want to thank my husband, as well as all other friends and family for your patience, support and encouragement throughout my work on this thesis.

# Western Sahara – Chronology

compiled by Silje Rivelsrud

1884	Congress of Berlin. The European powers divide Africa. Spain commences its colonization of Western Sahara.
1960	UN Declaration 1514 (XV). Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and people.
1963	Western Sahara included in the UN list of countries to be decolonized.
1967-73	Formation of Sahrawi resistance.
1973	Foundation of Polisario.
1975	The Green March.
1974/75	Spanish census and the plan to hold a referendum.
1975	(May) UN fact finding mission to Western Sahara.
1975	(October) International Court of Justice advisory decision: Western Sahara has right to self-determination and referendum.
1975	(6 November) Moroccan Green March.
1975	(14 November) The Madrid agreement. Spain concedes Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania.
1975	(November) Moroccan and Mauritanian troops invade Western Sahara.
1976	The Sahara Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is declared.
1979	Mauritania withdraws its claims of Western Sahara and recognizes the Sahrawi right to self-determination.
1988	The UN/OAU proposal. Ceasefire is accepted by Polisario and Morocco.
1991	The UN mission MINURSO is established. The ceasefire begins.
1992	The referendum is delayed.
1998	The referendum is postponed again.
2000	A provisional list of 86 000 voters is published. Morocco presents another 130 000 appeals.
2001	The Framework agreement (Baker plan 1).
2003	Baker plan 2.
2007-present	Informal talks lead by the UN.

## **Abstract**

The Sahrawi refugees have lived in refugee camps in Algeria since the invasion of Western Sahara in 1975. The flight to the refugee camps marked the start of their refugee existence, and has become a critical event in the history of the Sahrawis. The Sahrawi nation and national identity was created in the refugee camps, as a part of a national project. This thesis aims to explore the national identity of the Sahrawi refugees, as it is presented in blogs on the Internet.

The national identity of the Sahrawi refugees is an established and continuous identity, sustained by cultural foundations from the Sahrawi past. The importance and content of the national identity may be explained by looking at the nature of the refugee situation. Ideals of struggle and sacrifice in the past and the present have a strong position in the Sahrawi national identity, and are interpreted as a part of the Sahrawi destiny. The destiny of the Sahrawi refugees signifies future independence in the homeland Western Sahara.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	1
Western Sahara - Chronology.....	2
Abstract.....	3

### CHAPTER ONE

#### **Introduction**

1.1 Introduction.....	6
1.2 Research Question.....	8
1.3 Scope and Limitations.....	9
1.4 Thesis Outline.....	9

### CHAPTER TWO

#### **History and Background**

2.1 Western Sahara and the Sahrawis.....	11
2.2 The Territorial Conflict.....	13
2.3 The Refugee Camps.....	17
2.4 Summary.....	19

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **Theory**

3.1 Theories of Nation and National Identity.....	21
3.2 Definition of Nation.....	22
3.3 Definition of National Identity.....	23
3.4 Individual and Collective Identity.....	24
3.5 National Identity and the Others.....	25
3.6 Change and Continuity.....	26
3.7 Pre-existing Ethnies.....	27
3.8 Cultural Foundations of National Identity.....	28
3.9 Summary.....	29

### CHAPTER FOUR

#### **Empirical Material and the Analysis Process**

4.1 <u>Empirical Material</u> .....	32
4.1.1 Description of the Blogs.....	33
4.1.2 Social Research within Blogs.....	35
4.1.3 The Narratives.....	38
4.2 <u>Analyzing the Narratives</u> .....	39
4.2.1 Phase One: Line-by-line Coding.....	39
4.2.2 Phase Two.....	42

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Analysis

5.1	<u>Narratives of the Past</u> .....	44
5.1.1	The Golden Age.....	44
5.1.2	The Silenced Past.....	46
5.1.3	The Critical Event.....	48
5.1.4	Collective Memory.....	49
5.1.5	Presence of the Past.....	50
5.1.6	The Past and National Identity.....	51
5.2	<u>Narratives of the Present</u> .....	52
5.2.1	Cultural Traditions and National Symbols.....	52
	<i>Sahrawi Child</i> .....	56
5.2.2	Ideals of Struggle and Sacrifice.....	58
	<i>Separation from Family</i> .....	59
5.2.3	The Present and National Identity.....	61
5.3	<u>Narratives of the Future</u> .....	61
5.3.1	Education for Independence.....	61
5.3.2	Dream of Homeland.....	63
5.3.3	Independence.....	65
5.3.4	Destiny.....	66
5.3.5	The Future and National Identity.....	69
5.4	<u>Conclusion</u> .....	69

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

6.1	The Online Battlefield.....	71
6.2	Sahrawi Women.....	73
6.3	Myth of Origin – Myth of Election.....	76
6.4	Education.....	77
6.5	Collective National Identity.....	79
6.6	Summary.....	81

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Concluding Summary

7.1	Methodological Aspects.....	83
7.2	Empirical Aspects.....	84
7.3	Theoretical Aspects.....	84

<b>List of References</b> .....	88
---------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the national identity of the Sahrawi refugees, and to examine how this national identity is presented to the outside world. In order to study the presented Sahrawi national identity, I have analyzed narratives in blog<sup>1</sup> postings, written by Sahrawi refugees themselves.

#### 1.1 Background and Motivation

The Sahrawi refugees live in refugee camps in Algeria. The nearest city is named Tindouf, however the camps themselves are located in the middle of the Saharan desert. The refugee camps have existed for 35 years, and are the home of more than 100 000 people<sup>2</sup>. The Sahrawis are the native people of Western Sahara.

Morocco claims historical rights to the area, while the Sahrawi resistance organization *Polisario* struggles for the Sahrawis' right to self-determination. The ultimate goal of Polisario is an independent Sahrawi state in the Western Saharan territory. The Sahrawi state is named *The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic* (SADR). The SADR is currently a one-party state, closely related to Polisario, however the SADR government contemplates implementing a multi-party system upon a return to an independent Western Sahara (Rossetti, 2008, p. 7).

The territory of Western Sahara is frequently referred to as Africa's last colony. Western Sahara became colonized by Spain in 1884, and the area was named *Spanish Sahara*. War broke out between Morocco and Polisario when the Spanish colonial administration of Western Sahara ended in 1976 (Hodges, 1984, p. 9).

---

<sup>1</sup> Blog is short for "Web log". A blog is a website which is frequently updated; the posts are organized by date, with the last posting on the top of the site. The blog commonly have a feedback system where other may comment the postings. Blogs are accessible from major websites with software programs that enable users of low technical competence to manage their own blogs.

<sup>2</sup> According to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, the number is 116 530 people. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e4861f6> Accessed May 7, 2010. This number is highly disputed. According to Polisario's estimates, the number is roughly 155 000 and another 10 000 Sahrawis living in Tindouf (ICG, 2007b, p. 5).

The war between Morocco and Polisario lasted for more than 15 years. The UN, in collaboration with the *Organization of African Unity* (OAU), initiated a ceasefire and drew up a peace plan in 1988. In 1991, Morocco and Polisario agreed to the peace plan. The final goal of the peace plan was to organize a referendum on self-determination for the people of Western Sahara (L. E. Smith, 2005, p. 547).

Today, 19 years later, the referendum has still not been implemented. Since 2007, the main parties of the conflict have participated in informal talks. In addition to Polisario and Morocco, the neighboring countries Mauritania and Algeria has been present at the talks as well. However, the parties have not yet reached any agreement regarding a future referendum. Until a compromise regarding the initiation of a referendum is reached, the Sahrawi continue to live their lives in the refugee camps.

The Western Saharan situation is a stalemated, forgotten conflict with little media exposure. One may argue that power asymmetry between the two main parties has influenced the peace process. In this view, the referendum was postponed due to Morocco's power politics, and ability to stalemate the peace process (Durch, 1993, pp. 169-170; Sola-Martin, 2006, pp. 370-373). The notion of power asymmetry, and the extensive duration of the conflict, were both contributing aspects when choosing the topic for this thesis. Due to the minimal media coverage, and generally lack of attention to the conflict, I find it incredibly important to make more people aware of the Western Saharan situation.

The Sahrawi refugees and their situation are in many ways similar to that of the Palestinian people. Both refugee populations experience a continuous refugee existence, where a whole generation is brought up as refugees. However, while the Palestinian conflict is considered newsworthy, and reaches newspaper headlines around the world, the Western Saharan conflict is largely neglected by the media. The situation in Western Sahara is a continuing, long-lasting conflict, disregarded by the world community.



## 1.2 Research Question

When I first explored the opportunities of research on Western Sahara and the Sahrawis, I learned that previous research had described the Sahrawi national identity, nationalism and processes of nation building in the Sahrawi refugee camps. Central studies are: Kirkerud (2004), Martin (2005) and Mundy (2007).

In order to add to these studies, I chose to focus my effort on *national identity*. This thesis aims to offer an analysis of the presentation of the Sahrawi national identity put forward by the Sahrawi refugees themselves. I have analyzed narratives from two blogs written by Sahrawi refugees. While nationalism, nation building and national identity might be concepts that hold great similarities, my focus will be on the aspects of national identity and the process of national identity formation. I will use theories from the field of national identity and combine these with the analyzed narratives, in order to shed light on the Sahrawi national identity. My research question is:

*How do the Sahrawi refugees present their national identity?*

The Sahrawi people include both the Sahrawi refugees, Sahrawis living in Moroccan controlled Western Sahara, Sahrawis living in Polisario controlled Western Sahara and other Sahrawi populations around the world. This thesis focuses on the refugees living in the refugee camps. Even though I assume there are numerous similarities between all Sahrawi, no matter where they live, I also believe there might be differences. The daily life in the refugee camps is different from other places, and the experiences of the refugees might differ from the experiences of other Sahrawis. I have chosen to focus solely on the national identity presented by the Sahrawi refugees, in order to highlight how the national identity is communicated from a refugee perspective.

This thesis focuses on the presentation of national identity. By studying the presentation of national identity, it is suggested that the presentation is interpreted by somebody else. In the case of this thesis, the interpreter is the researcher. One might also argue that inherent in a presentation lies a presumption of an audience. The idea

of presentation for an audience will be addressed later in this thesis.

The term *national identity* will be explored in chapter three. The manner in which one produces and reproduces ones national identity is implied in the definition of national identity described in chapter three.

### **1.3 Scope and Limitations**

Western Sahara and the Sahrawi population is a large field of study, and cannot be fully examined in this thesis. I have made an effort to remain close to my research question, which has caused me to limit the examination of a number of topics related to the Sahrawi and to the Western Sahara conflict.

I will offer a summary of the territorial conflict in chapter two, in order to provide a more comprehensive account of the conflict, and the situation of the refugees. Another area of conflict relates to human right issues, both in the refugee camps and in Moroccan controlled Western Sahara<sup>3</sup>. The human rights will be briefly mentioned, in order to describe the national identity situation in the camps.

The core of this thesis is to explain how the Sahrawi national identity is continuously reproduced and reinterpreted. The thesis aims to describe how the past, present and future are connected in the Sahrawi national identity. The Sahrawi cultural past, as well as cultural traditions that are carried out in the present, are important aspects in the analysis.

### **1.4 Thesis Outline**

Chapter two offers a presentation of the history of the Sahrawi and the territorial conflict. The chapter also proposes a short introduction into the situation in the refugee camps. Chapter three is the theory chapter, where I will present definitions and theories for further analysis. In chapter four, I will describe the analyzed material and

---

<sup>3</sup> MINURSO is the only UN lead peace operation without mandate to watch over human right violations. [http://www.vest-sahara.no/index.php?parse\\_news=single&cat=1&art=1487](http://www.vest-sahara.no/index.php?parse_news=single&cat=1&art=1487) Accessed May 3, 2010.

the research process. The chapter also proposes a short discussion of research with blogs as empirical material.

Chapter five is the analysis, where my main findings are presented. The material is categorized in compliance with theories of national identity offered in chapter three. The chapter is organized as a timeline of the Sahrawi history as well, since the national identity of the Sahrawi is very much related to both the past and the future.

Chapter six is a discussion of the Sahrawi national identity, and explores the implications of the analysis. In the last chapter, I will present and conclude my main findings, and suggest further research opportunities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### History and Background

This chapter starts with a general description of the Sahrawi people and the distant history of the Sahrawis. I will present an introduction to the territorial conflict, in order to describe the background for the Sahrawi national identity formation. As a final point, I will describe the living conditions in the refugee camps, as well as the ideology behind the creation of the camps.

#### 2.1 Western Sahara and the Sahrawis

The native people of Western Sahara refer to themselves as *Sahrawis*. In the most basic sense, the word *Sahrawi* is an Arabic adjective which simply means *Saharan*. However, in the context of the Western Saharan conflict, the word *Sahrawi* has a political importance. The term is associated with the people of the Western Sahara territory, and related to the Sahrawi resistance organization *Polisario*, and the Sahrawi state: *SADR*<sup>4</sup>. Moroccans generally see the Sahrawis as a sub-set of the Moroccan nation. Some Moroccan officials even refuse to use the expression *Sahrawi*, and rather uses the expression *Saharan tribes* because they feel there is no specific Sahrawi people, there are only Moroccans. Instead of *Sahrawi*, the term *hassani* (i.e. *hassaniyyah*<sup>5</sup> speaker) is often used instead. The UN, as well as the general public, refers to the refugees as *Sahrawis*<sup>6</sup> and this is the term I have chosen to apply as well (ICG, 2007b; Mundy, 2007, pp. 277-278).

Western Sahara is located on the north-western coast of Africa, between Morocco and Mauritania. The geographic area includes 266 000 square kilometer (Cuervo, 2007, p. 25). The Sahrawis are ethnically a mixture of Berber, Arab and African descent. This fact, along with the Sahrawi nomadic culture, discriminates between the Sahrawis and the Moroccan population (Cuervo, 2007, p. 25).

---

<sup>4</sup> The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.

<sup>5</sup> The language of the Sahrawis is an Arabic dialect named *hassaniyyah*, which is also spoken in Mali and Mauritania.

<sup>6</sup> The term "Saharawi" is also frequently used.

In the time before colonization, the Sahrawis lived as nomads. The Sahrawi nomads were organized in a number of tribes and castes, which were intricately tied together. Cultivation of crops was marginal to the economy, and only small impoverished tribes along the coast engaged in fishing. The Sahrawi nomads were primarily traders. The Sahrawis also escorted, and functioned as guides for the long-distance caravan traffic across the Saharan desert. The territory necessitated migration in small groups. Likewise, the territory made the Sahrawis effectively beyond the control of the sultans of Morocco (Hodges, 1984, pp. 4-5).

The city of Smara is the only pre-colonial city in Western-Sahara. Smara is situated about 160 km east of the capital *Laayoun*<sup>7</sup>. The construction of Smara started in 1898 by Cheikh Ma el-Ainin. The Sahrawi nomads unified under the leader Ma el-Ainin and he became leader of the anti-colonial resistance in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hodges, 1982, p. 323).

One of the initial icons of the nationalist movement in Western Sahara was exactly Ma el-Ainin. Ma el-Ainin was not himself a Sahrawi. Shelly (2007) interprets this fact as an indication that at this point in time national identity was not important, maybe even nonsensical to the Sahrawi (Shelley, 2007, p. 31). As late as in the 1950s, many fighters were fighting against invasion, rather than for a national project (Shelley, 2007, p. 32). The idea of a Sahrawi nation developed later, as a national project in the refugee camps. As for all peoples that are engaged in long-term conflicts, the Sahrawi national identity has been formed by the resistance. For Sahrawi nationalists, their identity is forged in a history of struggle (Shelley, 2007, p. 31).

In 1884, the Congress of Berlin<sup>8</sup> started to designate basic regulations to the partition

---

<sup>7</sup> Also transliterated: El-Ayoun, El-Aaiún Laâyounne or El Ayun. Arabic: لاء عيون, transliterated al-'Ayūn, which literary means "eyes". [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El\\_Aai%C3%BAn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Aai%C3%BAn) Accessed April 5, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The Congress of Berlin, or the "Berlin Conference", lasted for three months from 1884 to 1885. During the conference, the major western countries in the world came together and negotiated questions and ended confusion over the control of Africa. Before the conference 80% of Africa remained under traditional and local control. The new map of the continent and its new countries divided coherent groups of people and merged

and distribution of Africa. The geographic area of Western Sahara became colonized by Spain, and the area became known as *Spanish Sahara*. Spanish Sahara was a colony of no economic value and no interest for Spain until late 1950s (Hodges, 1984, pp. 5-6).

In the 1960s and -70s, the Sahrawi society rapidly changed and became more modernized. Discovery of Western Sahara's natural resources signified quick economic development (Hodges, 1984, p. 6). Almost all Sahrawis continued their nomadic way of living during the colonial years. However, due to the rapid economical developments, in addition to periods of drought (Shelley, 2007, p. 33), the majority of Sahrawis settled in towns during the 60s and 70s. In towns, the Sahrawi sought wage employment, set up shop as traders and sent their children to school (Hodges, 1984, p. 6).

## 2.2 The Territorial Conflict

Western Sahara was already in 1963 recognized by the UN as a *non-self governing territory*. This recognition signifies an acknowledgement of the Saharawi people's right to self-determination (L. E. Smith, 2005, p. 546).

In October 1975, 350 000 Moroccan civilians crossed the border into Western Sahara as a symbolic act to reintegrate the territory. This event is referred to as the *Green March*<sup>9</sup> (ICG, 2007a, p. 1). Spain, Mauritania and Morocco agreed to divide the area between Mauritania (one third) and Morocco (two thirds). The Mauritanian and Moroccan armies invaded Western Sahara. The Saharawi resistance organization *Frente Popular para la Liberacion iugaS ed a el-Hamra y de Río de Oro* (Polisario) tried to hold key Saharan towns, but was greatly outnumbered. The Sahrawi state *SADR* was declared by Polisario in 1976. Polisario and their followers sought refuge near Tindouf, Algeria. When Spain formally withdrew, the two armies were in control

---

together disparate groups. <http://geography.about.com/cs/politicalgeog/a/berlinconferenc.htm> Accessed May 2, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> November 6 is a public holiday in Morocco celebrating the anniversary of The Green March. <http://www.morocco.com/discover/public-holidays/> Accessed May 1, 2010.

of most of Western Sahara. In 1979, Mauritania renounced its claims to the area, and Morocco annexed the territory (Durch, 1993, pp. 155-165; L. E. Smith, 2005, pp. 546-547).

At this point in time Polisario resumed to guerillas tactics<sup>10</sup>. The effectiveness of the guerilla warfare caused Morocco to construct the *Berm*; a 2200 kilometer heavily militarized sand wall. The Berm divides Western Sahara between the Moroccan occupied area (about 80%) and the Polisario controlled area. Both parties accepted an UN-supervised referendum in the territory in 1985. UN intervened in 1988, negotiated a ceasefire, and drew up a peace plan in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Durch, 1993, pp. 155-165; L. E. Smith, 2005, pp. 546-547).

In 1991, the ceasefire started and the *MINURSO* (the UN mission for the referendum in Western Sahara) operation was deployed. The primary task of MINURSO was to identify and register voters, and to administer the referendum (Durch, 1993, pp. 155-165; L. E. Smith, 2005, pp. 546-547). According to the 1988 UN-OAU settlement proposals both parties had agreed upon some criteria for being registered as a voter in the referendum. The criteria included being a Western Saharan included in the 1974 Spanish Census of the population in the territory, and being aged 18 years or more (Sola-Martin, 2006, p. 371).

The detailed plan for the settlement proposals was released in 1991, with some modifications. The criteria for being registered as voter in the referendum were modified from the original proposal. The mandate was now to update the 1974 census by removing deceased Sahrawis from the list and consider applications by Sahrawis previously omitted. The introduction of an appeal process for individuals not included in the voters list was also a significant change (Sola-Martin, 2006, p. 371). Sola-Martin (2006, pp. 371-374) argues that the peace plan was adapted to Morocco's

---

<sup>10</sup> Polisario became a lot more successful at guerillas tactics than they had been at conventional warfare. This was because of the relationship between the two armies. The Moroccan army was significantly larger and better equipped than the Polisario army. Guerillas tactics enabled the Polisario to make use of the knowledge the Sahrawi had of the territory and nature, which made the two armies more equal in strength (Bhatia, 2001, pp. 294-295).

policies by the inclusion of new criteria of eligibility. Polisario had not agreed upon the new criteria. By accepting the 1988 peace plan, both parties had consequently accepted the 1974 census list as basis for the voters list for the referendum. One may argue that the adoption of new criteria can have hindered the peace process to move forward (Sola-Martin, 2006, pp. 371-374).

Morocco did not agree with the revised list being published based on the 1974 census in the territory. In 1991, Morocco presented a list of possible voters to the UN, which included more than 120 000 names not included in the 1974 census list. 18. September 1991, the Moroccan Interior Minister publicized that these individuals would be transported into the Western Sahara area. A number of people who claimed to be Sahrawis were moved to the territory (Sola-Martin, 2006, pp. 371-372). Sola-Martin (2006, pp. 371-374) argues that the MINURSO operation was constrained by power politics and Morocco's strong ties to powerful members of the Security Council. To bring new settlers into the area that were not confirmed entitled voters, might be seen as a measure to hinder the completion of a free and fair referendum (Sola-Martin, 2006, pp. 371-374).

At the end of 1999, after numerous delays, the identification commission presented a provisional voters list of 86 386 voters. Shortly after, the voters list were faced with 131 038 appeals. The UN was reluctant to dismiss these appeals and tactically dropped the 1991 Settlement Plan. Kofi Annan asked *James Baker*<sup>11</sup> to explore the possibilities for a compromise solution (ICG, 2007a, p. 2).

Baker presented the *Framework Plan* in 2001. The plan entitles a period of autonomy prior to the referendum, and that all settlers in the territory are entitled to vote. The plan was rejected by Polisario, Morocco and the UN Security Council (ICG, 2007a, pp. 2-3). In 2003, Baker proposed the *Baker plan II*. The plan was a modified version of the Framework Plan. Polisario surprisingly accepted the new peace plan. Morocco

---

<sup>11</sup> James Baker, a former US minister of foreign affairs, was appointed UN Secretary General's personal envoy in 1997 (Olsson, 2006).



on the other hand, rejected the plan (Martin, 2004, p. 653).

Instead, Morocco promoted a plan for autonomy in the region (Martin & Lakhal, 2006, p. 1) *Autonomy* signifies the right to be left alone, and the right to be different (Hannum, 1996, p. 4). *Sovereignty*, on the other hand, can be defined as a claim of absolute political authority within a territory (Thomson, 2004, p. 173). In order to achieve autonomy, it is sometimes necessary to create a sovereign state. However, autonomy does not necessitate sovereignty (Hannum, 1996, p. 4)

The autonomy idea is not a new one, it has been proposed both in the 70s, 80s and 90s. The idea has been rejected each time, both by Polisario and the international community. The Moroccan proposal suggests that Western Sahara becomes an autonomous territory, governed by Moroccan political authority. Morocco is willing to have this affirmed in a referendum (Martin & Lakhal, 2006, p. 1).

In 2007, Polisario offered a counter proposal to Morocco's autonomy plan. The counter plan advocated self-determination through a free referendum with sovereignty as an option. The Polisario proposal offered some guaranties, for example guaranteed citizenship for all Moroccan residents in the area (ICG, 2007a, pp. 6-7).

Because UN declared the Western Sahara territory a non-self governing territory in 1963, the territory should, according to the UN Charter, be subjected to a decolonization process. A decolonization process implies a free and fair self-determination referendum, with independence as an option (Martin & Lakhal, 2006, p. 1).

Police brutality, beatings, torture and disappearances are repeatedly reported among Sahrawi students in Morocco and Sahrawis in Moroccan controlled Western Sahara<sup>12</sup>. In 2005, the first round of the Sahrawi intifadas began. The intifadas were a number of

---

<sup>12</sup> At the web page "asvdh" (The Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State) there are countless testimonies from Sahrawi victims. <http://asvdh.net/english/> Accessed April 30, 2010.

demonstrations in big cities in Western Sahara as well as the Universities in Morocco. The intifadas were harshly handled by the Moroccan police (Skogseth, 2006).

### **2.3 The Refugee Camps**

There are four Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria. The name of each camp is identical with a place inside occupied Western Sahara. The population in each camp descends for the most part from the equivalent area in the occupied territory (Vest-Sahara.no, 2009).

Vegetation is scarce and temperature frequently exceeds 40 degrees Celsius, sometimes even 50 °C .The environment, coupled with the poverty of the refugees, has lead to a number of health problems. The maternal mortality rate is 8 percent. Malnutrition affects nearly 8 percent of the children. Chronic difficulties linked to the region's climate include arterial hypertension, lung disease and eye conditions, as well as illnesses connected with cold weather like flu, throat infections and bronchitis (ICG, 2007b, p. 6). Sahrawi refugees are highly dependent on international aid, and the delivery of the aid is very irregular. The population regularly suffers from acute food shortages (ICG, 2007b, p. 10). Malnutrition often leads to vitamin and growth deficiencies among camp residents. The health facilities in the refugee camps are insufficient and poorly equipped. Access to water varies. Some of the camps rely on truck deliveries, which are strictly rationed. The refugees live in houses made of bricks or sometimes cement. Some of the refugees live in tents (ICG, 2007b, p. 6). Landmines are a huge risk<sup>13</sup>. More than 350 survivors of landmines live in the refugee camps, with varying degrees of injury (ICG, 2007b, p. 7).

According to Mundy (2007), the camps have economically opened up in recent years and the refugees have become more focused on building a descent life in the camps. Possible reasons for this include the stalemated peace process may propose a possible explanation for the new economic society. Since there is no immediate return to

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Pascal Bongard, program director at "Geneva Call", between five and ten million mines can be found around the Berm, with an additional two to five million throughout the affected region (ICG, 2007b, p. 7).

Western Sahara, Mundy (2007) argues that the refugees are more reluctant to accept a peace plan that does not offer them independence (Mundy, 2007, p. 293).

The refugees are separated from family and friends on the other side of the Berm. The separation would have been total, if not for the family visiting program launched by the UN. The program enables camp members to meet with family members in Moroccan-controlled territory (ICG, 2007b, p. 6).

Primary schooling is free and mandatory. The Sahrawi refugees claim one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. Nevertheless, there are no possibilities for higher education in the camps and students have to travel to foreign countries to obtain university degrees (Mundy, 2007, p. 287).

The freedom of movement is central in a discussion about human rights in the refugee camps. Moroccan authorities refer to the refugees as Polisario's captives. According to a Human Rights Watch report from 2008, the refugees have the possibility to move away from the camps if they want to. It is however dependent on the financial and social resources of the individual (HumanRightsWatch, 2008, pp. 122-131).

Bontems (1987) argues that the SADR is a *state in exile*. SADR is recognized as a state by the governments of sixty-five countries and is a full member of the OAU (Organization of African Unity) (Bontems, 1987, p. 166). The SADR defines itself as a free, independent and sovereign state governed by a national democratic system. Polisario is currently the only party represented, however SADR contemplates a multi-party system after independence (Rossetti, 2008, p. 7). The UN defines the area Western Sahara as a *non-self governing territory* (L. E. Smith, 2005, p. 546). I will not discuss the legal issues of statehood in this thesis<sup>14</sup>, nevertheless, according to the definition of state offered by Smith above (A. D. Smith, 1991, pp. 14-15), SADR can be seen to fulfill the criteria of statehood.

---

<sup>14</sup> For in depth legal discussion of the Western Sahara conflict: K. Arts & P.P. Leite (eds.) *International law and the question of Western Sahara*. Leiden:2007.

The Tindouf refugee camps are unusual because they are a result of a nationalist project. The refugees refer to the first years in the camps as the *Sahrawi Revolution*. It was a large focus on projects for education and technical training. The aim of the camps was not simply to offer a short-term safe haven for displaced civilians and a logistical support to *the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army* ("SPLA", sometimes just referred to as "SLA"). The idea was to combine the broken identities of pre-colonial time and colonial time and to create a new, modern nation state. The tribal society and tribal identities are suppressed by Polisario and the new national identity (Martin, 2005, pp. 569-570). The old traditions like slavery and tribal conflicts exists to a small degree, but are not accepted by Polisario and the SADR politicians (HumanRightsWatch, 2008, p. 151).

The nationalist project of Polisario was led by a few young militants and influenced by ideological movements of their time, for instance Che Guevara and Mao Tsetung. Their vision was not only independence, but a new, modern society, without slavery, tribalism or inequality. Even though their project was never rigorously communist or socialist, the result was a community with strong internal loyalty and social equality (Martin, 2005, pp. 569-570).

## **2.4 Summary**

The Sahrawi are the native people of Western Sahara. Western Sahara was a Spanish colony from 1884 until 1975 (Olsson, 2006). The territory of Western Sahara has been an issue of conflict since Spain's initial plans for decolonization of the region. Morocco claimed historical rights to the area, while Polisario fought for the Sahrawis' right to self-determination as an independent state. The war between Polisario (the Sahrawi resistance organization), and Morocco lasted for more than 15 years.

The UN, in collaboration with the OAU (organization for African Unity) organized a ceasefire and drew up a peace plan. The ceasefire was deployed in 1991 and the MINURSO operation started. MINURSO aimed to register and identify voters in order

to hold a referendum to decide the fate of Western Sahara. It can be argued that the peace process was biased in favor of Morocco as a result of the asymmetry of power between Morocco and Polisario.

The refugee camps were founded by Polisario. The vision of the camps was independence, as well as a new modern society, without tribalism or social inequality. The Sahrawi refugee population is a highly organized community, and can be argued to constitute a state in exile.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Theory

This chapter examines the concept *national identity*; its elements, limits, foundations and implications. I will present a definition of *nation* as well, in order to attain an enhanced comprehension of national identity. Since theories of nation and national identity are closely related, I seek to clarify differences between the two concepts, in order to clarify the notion of national identity as much as possible.

#### 3.1 Theories of the Nation and National Identity

Gellner (1997), a significant theorist in the field, asserts that the nation is a product of modernity and nationalism. Nationalism does not evoke dormant nations, rather nationalism creates nations. The concept of *nation* is thus a modern phenomenon, dated to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the French and American revolutions (Gellner, 1997). Gellner's theory of nationalism and nations is closely connected to the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th century. The industrial revolution signified a development from local communities to an industrial society. People migrated to the cities to work. The power of the family weakened, as the family was no longer a production unit. The need for food, a place to live, a spouse and a sense of belonging could not be satisfied locally in the same way as before. People were no longer one-sidedly anchored to their local communities as they used to be. The state administration and its management of the citizens developed in parallel with the economic changes. Nationalism, and the creation of nations, had the capacity to heal the symptoms of dissolution of society, to smoothen out differences and create loyalty and unity (Gellner, 1998, p. 10).

According to Renan (1991, p. 19)<sup>15</sup>, a nation consist of the history of past sacrifices and the feelings these sacrifices propose, as well as the intention and preparation to continue these sacrifices in the future, for the sake of the nation. The nation is hence

---

<sup>15</sup> Originally a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882.

constituted by the feelings of sacrifice, as well as the desire and will to uphold the solidarity that is a *nation* (Renan, 1991, p. 19).

Anderson (1991), another important scholar in this field, refers to the nation as an *imagined community*. The nation is imagined as a limited and sovereign community. Even the largest of nations, or the most extreme nationalists, do not envision a nation to be all-inclusive, and cover all members of human race. The nation is thus imagined as limited. The limitation of the nation implies the existence of other nations. The nation is imagined as sovereign because the concept was created in a period of revolution and enlightenment. The sovereign nation was freedom from the divinely-ordained legitimacy. The nation is imagined as a community, because of the comradeship and solidarity among the members of a nation. It is never possible to meet or know every member of the nation, still the union of the nation makes up a community. Even though a nation is no more than a *limited imagining*, millions of people have been, and will be, willing to die for their nation. The notion of the *imagined community* makes it possible to understand the reasoning for self-sacrifice for the sake of a nation (Anderson, 1991, p. 7).

Connor (1994) describes a believed and felt psychological bond, or *sense of belonging*, that tie members of a nation together. This *sense of belonging* defines and sustains the nation. The psychological bond is based on a belief in shared ancestry. Connor (1994) asserts that the sense of belonging is based on the common conviction of being ethnically related, even though history might suggest otherwise (Connor, 1994).

### **3.2 Definition of Nation**

The definition of the ideal typical nation, according to Smith (2008), is:

*[...] a named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws.* (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 19)

I will argue that the Sahrawi community is a nation, according to the quoted definition. The Sahrawis share a public culture, customs and common laws as well as myths, memories, symbols, values and traditions. These elements will be elaborated in the analysis. The only element that is not fully met in the definition of *nation* is the element of historical homeland. The Sahrawis certainly identify with a homeland (Western Sahara), but not all Sahrawis reside in their homeland. One may argue that the Sahrawi are a *nation in exile*.

### **3.3 Definition of National Identity**

National identity is characterized by its interest in collective attributes and their historical-cultural foundations (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 44). Every nation has a distinctive historical culture, a special way of thinking, act and communicate that every member, at least potentially, shares. The assignment of the nationalists is to retrieve and recover the unique cultural spirit of the nation and give back to its people their authentic cultural identity (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 45). In the past, one applied other terms than *national identity* for somewhat the same phenomenon; for example *national character* and later *national consciousness* (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 32).

Smith (2008) defines national identity as;

*[...]the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 19).*

Values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions are all important elements in the Sahrawi national identity. These elements and their relation to the Sahrawi refugees will be explored in the analysis chapter.

National identity can be identified as a component of nationalism (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 21). According to Smith (2003, p. 38), the basic doctrine of nationalism includes a world divided into nations, where the nation is the only source of political power. In addition, Nationalism signifies that the loyalty towards the nation is stronger than all



other loyalties and that every individual has to belong to a nation in order to be free. Moreover, every nation demands full autonomy and global peace and justice demands a world of autonomic nations (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 38). The ideology of nationalism has three interrelated goals or ideals; national autonomy, national unity and *national identity* (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 21).

### **3.4 Individual and Collective Identity**

Smith (2003, p. 33) makes a distinction between two categories of identity: Individual and collective. On the individual level, every one of us holds a complex and multifaceted identity. We might be wife or husband, as well as Norwegian or American, Christian, Muslim or Atheist, have high education or no education at all, and so on (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 33). One might interpret Smith's definition of individual identity as similar and analogous to the concept of role identities or categorical identities often referred to in social psychological research. Such identities are ascribed to others in an effort to orientate, and place others in the social space (Snow, 2001, p. 2213).

On the individual level, national identity is only one of the many identities that the individual holds. However, national identity holds the capacity to subsume and color other identities, especially in time of crisis. National identity, as well as religious identity, is capable of evoking great passion, commitment and mass self-sacrifice (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 25).

On the collective level, one may view these identities as groups or cultural collectives, defined by common values and symbols (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 34). There exists no generally agreed upon definition of collective identity. However; the concept is highly related to a shared sense of *we-ness*. This *we-ness* resides in real or imaginary likeness, in shared attributes and experiences. In addition, the *we-ness* or collectivity exist in relation to, or in contrast with, one or several real or imagined set of *others* (Snow, 2001, p. 2213). I will elaborate on the idea of *others* later in this chapter.

Cultural collectives or groups are put together by individual members, however this does not mean that we can reduce the collective to merely groups or clusters of individuals, that share certain traits or that simply lives together. The other way around, one cannot predict one individual's action from an analysis of a specific collective identity or group (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 34).

Collective identity based on cultural elements is especially stabile, and should be analyzed separately from individual identification (A. D. Smith, 2003, pp. 34-35). This should not, however, be understood as collective identities being fixed or static. Collective identities are constructions that exist over a long period of time; still they are as transient and perishable as everything else. The changes can be gradual and cumulative or sudden and intermittent (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 35). The continuum between change and continuity, in relation to national identity, will be explored later in this chapter.

### **3.5 National Identity and the Others**

The existence of the *others* is inherent in national identity. The concept of national identity defines both who is “inside” and who is “outside”, who is a part of “us; the nation”, and who is not. Fellow members of one nation are not only similar to each other; moreover they are dissimilar to members of other nations (Triandafyllidou, 1998). According to Anderson (1991), since the nation is limited, and no nation is world-wide, the existence of one nation presupposes the existence of other nations as well. Triandafyllou (1998, p. 599) asserts that *nation* do not hold any meaning in itself, without the existence of other nations. The existence of other nations is a intrinsic part of the ideology of nationalism as well, seeing as the ideology of nationalism claims that the world is divided into a plurality of nations (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 599).

The identity of a nation is defined and re-defined through the influence of *significant others*. By *significant others* Triandafyllidou (1998) refers to other nations or ethnic groups, that poses a threat to the nation. A “significant other” needs not to be larger or more resourceful than the *in-group* (us: the nation). However, a *significant other* is

necessarily a nation or community that poses a threat to the nation's individuality, uniqueness and/or independence (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 600). In the case of the Sahrawi refugees and the Sahrawi nation, it can be claimed that Morocco threatens their independence, as well as their individuality and uniqueness. Accordingly, one might characterize Morocco as the *significant other* of the Sahrawi nation.

### **3.6 Change and Continuity**

*Change* is built into the definition of national identity. Every generation provides new cultural elements and reinterprets the national identity. The continuum between change and continuity is in this way related to the process of reproduction and reinterpretation of national identity. However, the changes work within certain parameters, to ascertain the *continuity* of national identity. The changes in national identity have to follow the culture, traditions and characteristic heritage of the nation. Even revolutions usually return to the nation's central values. This is the only way that one might talk about the same nation from one generation to the next (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 36).

For example, *change* in national identity might take the form of lessened importance of cultural or religious traditions, if a new generation finds the traditions old-fashioned, out-dated or just plain wrong. In Norway, one might argue that there has been a change in national identity over the last decades, regarding the role of Christianity. This change does not alter an individual's personal identity as Christian, however it might be possible to argue that Christianity has lessened its importance as an element in the national identity of Norway.

The relationship between the collective and individual categories of identity and the relationship between continuity and change is vital for the definition of national identity. These relationships have to be balanced if the idea of national identity should hold any meaning. It is in the reciprocation between change and continuity, collective and individual identity that national identity locates its meaning and significance (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 33).

According to Shelley (2007) the idea of a Sahrawi nation developed in the camps. International events, as well as the resistance and struggle against Morocco, pushed the Sahrawi to view themselves as a nation (Shelley, 2007, pp. 31-33). Martin (2005, pp. 569-570) states that the Tindouf refugee camps are unusual because they are a result of a nationalist project. If the Sahrawi nation and national identity was created in the refugee camps, then the Sahrawi nation has had very little time for reinterpretation of national identity from one generation to the next. I will discuss continuity and change related to the Sahrawi refugees in subsequent chapters.

### **3.7 Pre-existing Ethnies**

*Ethnie* is originally the French term for “ethnic community”. Smith (1991, p. 21) describes *ethnies* by applying six main attributes: A collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, at least one element of common culture, an association with a specific territory or homeland and a sense of solidarity (A. D. Smith, 1991, p. 21). *Ethnies* are often mistaken for biological ties or races, although it is the believed ancestry and cultural history that matter rather than biology (A. D. Smith, 1991, p. 22). Connor (1994, pp. 93-94) maintains that the important part in ethnicity is not the actual history of common kinship, but the felt and believed sense of shared ancestry (A. D. Smith, 1991, p. 39). Hodges (1984, p. 4) asserts that the Sahrawi are ethnically and culturally a distinctive group. Historically, they are a result of fusions through wars, conquest, alliances and inter-marriage between Sanhaja Berbers, Bedouin Arabs and black African slaves (Hodges, 1984, p. 4). According to the description above, the Sahrawi may be categorized as an *ethnie*.

The *ethnie* represent an ethnic community prior to the nation, and many nations are based upon pre-existing *ethnies*. The Sahrawi nation did not develop until the refugee camps; however one might argue that the Sahrawi *ethnie* existed as a nomadic community prior to, and during the, colonization by Spain. One can argue that the Sahrawi nation is based on a pre-existing Sahrawi *ethnie*. *Ethnies* represent the distinctive cultural heritage of nations. In this way, one might argue that *ethnies* signifies the history and cultural foundations of the nation. This argument suggests that

the Sahrawi national identity is based on cultural heritage from the historical Sahrawi *ethnie* (A. D. Smith, 1991, p. 39, 2008, pp. 30-31).

### **3.8 Cultural Foundations of National Identity**

The nature and power of national identity and the stronghold and durability of the nation can be explained by looking at the cultural foundations, or sources, of national identity. The cultural sources can be seen as composed by the cultural heritage of the nation, and the pre-existing *ethnie*. In addition to cultural sources, these components can be interpreted as resources as well, and may be used actively by for example leaders seeking political goals. Some of these cultural sources may become “sacred foundations” of the nation through sanctification of major social and symbolic aspects or components. In addition, the cultural sources of national identity emphasize and support four essential deep-seated dimensions of nationhood; *community, territory, history and destiny* (A. D. Smith, 2008, pp. 39-40). The analysis will explore the cultural foundation of national identity in relation to the Sahrawi refugees.

The dimension of community in national identity is described by Smith (2008) as maintained by *Myths of Origin* and *Myths of Election*. *Myths of Origin* include elaborative myths of divine creation, yet the most widespread form is perhaps the myth of common ancestry. A belief in common ancestry is vital for group identity, consequently national identity, and is fruitful in uniting and activate action for common goals (A. D. Smith, 2008, pp. 40-41). *Myths of Election* refer to the belief that one’s people are unique and “chosen” for a particular, sacred task, mission or purpose. *Myths of Election* can be found in various communities, the most classical example is probably the Israelis (A. D. Smith, 2008, pp. 41-42).

*Territorialization* refers to the majority of the members of the nation inhabiting the territory of homeland, the development of collective memories as well as bonding to particular historic geographic area. The dimension of territory in nationhood incorporates a process of *sanctification of homeland*. The process of sanctification of the territory may be related to deeds of ethnic heroes, holy sites, or in some cases the

whole people might be sacred. Once sanctified, the homeland becomes a very potent cultural resource for maintaining national identity (A. D. Smith, 2008, pp. 42-43).

*Ethnohistory* is the third form of cultural resource and signifies narratives with shared memories of the past handed down from generation to generation. The tales are told orally, and the *ethnohistory* is therefore always changing. The *ethnohistory* emphasizes crucial events and turning points in the past. Some of the most important parts of the *ethnohistory* are the *golden ages* of the nation. The *golden ages* implies points in time where the nation was great and glorious. The greatness might have arisen from politically, military, intellectually, artistically or religious power. The *golden ages* suggest a time the nation wants to remember, and is related to the authentic nation (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 44).

*Destiny* is the fourth dimension of nationhood. The concept of destiny is intimately tied together with *ideals of struggle and sacrifice*. Ideals of struggle and sacrifice can be found in the Bible and in texts from ancient Greece and Rome. Monuments, tombs and memorials as well as ceremonies with flags and anthems serve as examples of how to honor fallen soldiers. The ideals of sacrifice have the power to transform mass-slaughter in the battlefields to glorious self-sacrifices for the nation, in a true patriotic spirit (A. D. Smith, 2008, pp. 45-46).

These cultural resources maintain the national identity through critical periods. The strength and durability of the national identity is directly related to both how many of these resources the nation has access to, and the level of maturity and extensiveness of the cultural resources (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 46).

### **3.9 Summary**

The ideology of nationalism is closely connected to national identity. National identity is a goal and ideal of the ideology of nationalism (A. D. Smith, 2003, p. 21). The analysis chapter aims to explore the elements listed in the definition of national identity related to the Sahrawi nation. These elements include values, symbols,

memories and traditions, which make up the cultural heritage of nations. Every member of a nation shares an identity, related to the cultural and historical legacy of that nation. I have argued that the Sahrawi nation was created in the refugee camps.

National identity is constantly reproduced and reinterpreted within an “identity scale” from individual to collective identity. The reinterpretation of national identity signifies changes, yet change appears within parameters set by the nature of the national identity. The concept of the *others* is intricately linked to national identity. The levels of identity, the concept of the *others* and the continuum between continuity and change, will be further explored and related to the Sahrawis in subsequent chapters.

The cultural foundations of national identity will become valuable tools for organizing and explaining the analyzed material. The cultural foundations relates to the nation’s cultural past, and the historical Sahrawi *ethnie*. The stronghold and durability of any nation is connected to the access the nation has to cultural foundations of national identity (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 46).

The following figure describes the relationship between the different aspects of national identity, in order to explain and explicate the concept. In addition, the figure provides a review of the contents of this chapter.

## NATIONAL IDENTITY

<b>Elements of national identity:</b>	Values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions	
<b>The process of national identity:</b>	Change and Continuity	National identity is reproduced and reinterpreted in constant reciprocation between change and continuity.
	The continuum between collective and individual identity	National identity is balanced between the collective and individual levels of identity.
	The <i>others</i> and the <i>significant other</i>	The idea of the <i>others</i> is intricately connected to national identity. The <i>significant other</i> represents a community or nation that threatens the national identity.
<b>Cultural sources of national identity:</b>	<u>Community</u> → <i>Myths of Origin</i> and <i>Myths of Election</i> <u>Territory</u> → <i>Territorialization</i> and sanctification of homeland <u>History</u> → <i>Ethnohistory</i> The <i>golden ages</i> represent a specific memorable period in the <i>ethnohistory</i> of a nation. <u>Destiny</u> → Ideals of struggle and sacrifice.	The cultural sources of national identity are founded in the history of the nation, and the historical <i>ethnie</i> . The cultural sources emphasize and support four essential dimensions of nationhood; community, territory, history and destiny.

Figure 1



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Empirical Material and the Analysis Process**

This chapter consists of two main parts. The first part offers a presentation of the blogs that constitute my main empirical material, and a discussion on research within blogs. The second part of this chapter is a description of the process of analysis.

#### **4.1 Empirical Material**

My primary empirical material consists of two blogs. Both blogs offer personal views on the reality of being Sahrawi. In the blogs I have found personal narratives regarding being Sahrawi in the refugee camps, written in English. The personal narratives propose material for analysis of the Sahrawi national identity. These narratives are the core of my analysis.

In addition to the blogs, I have accessed supplementary sources such as the documentary *Lives on Hold* (UJSARIO & CJE, 2006) which is a project put together by UJSARIO (Unión de Juventud de Saguia el Hamra y Río de Oro) which is the youth organization of Polisario and *The Spanish Youth Council* (Consejo de la Juventud de España, CJE), in collaboration with *the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Spain*. It is a colorful meeting with the Sahrawis in the camps and contains several interviews of young Sahrawi people. YouTube videos, documentaries with interviews<sup>16</sup>, quotations from a Human Rights Watch report<sup>17</sup> and quotations from interviews in a Swedish magazine<sup>18</sup> are also among my supplementary sources. The material has been gathered from internet searches, through human rights organizations, pro-Polisario organizations and *the Support Committee for Western Sahara in Norway*. The additional material proved important in the early stages of the research process, in

---

<sup>16</sup> Especially "Spekter" spring 2008: "Vest-Sahara – Et norsk problem" from <http://www1.nrk.no/nett-tv/klipp/322428> Accessed April 27, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights in Western Sahara and in the Tindouf Refugee Camps from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2008/12/19/human-rights-western-sahara-and-tindouf-refugee-camps-0> Accessed April 27, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> "Tidskriften VästSahara", four editions per year, can be ordered from <http://www.vastsahara.net/>

order to situate the two blogs within a Sahrawi online community. I will return to the idea of a Sahrawi online community later in this chapter.

#### **4.1.1 Description of the Blogs**

One of the two blogs is written by a young Sahrawi woman who was born and brought up in the refugee camps. The title of the blog is *FreeWesternSahara* (Hemeida, 2006-2009). The author is currently a student and is one of the first Sahrawi ever to come to the US and graduate from an American high school. The first posts on *FreeWesternSahara* were published in 2006 while the last posting is from 12<sup>th</sup> June 2009. The posts are published at an uneven pace; sometimes the posts are clustered together, while in other periods there are no posts at all. On average, there are about 1-2 published posts per month.

Some of the postings are news-feeds about the conflict, written by the author or cut and pasted from other websites. Some postings contain mostly pictures while other posts simply present YouTube videos, or video-clips together with text. The language in the blog is primary English, though a few of the postings are written in Spanish. In addition to this material, the blog contains personal narratives covering an array of diverse topics. These narratives have been my main focus when analyzing this blog.

The second blog is a communication channel where young female Sahrawi writers are given an opportunity to publish their thoughts. The name of the blog is *Zeina* ("Zeina," 2007-2008). The blog is dated in time from August 2007 to May 2008. There are roughly 1-2 published texts each month. The majority of the published texts are personal narratives concerning issues regarding being a woman and being Sahrawi. All the texts are written in English. Some of the texts are identical with texts from *FreeWesternSahara*, and are also signed by the author of *FreeWesternSahara*.

The blogs (*FreeWesternSahara* and *Zeina*) provide links to Sahrawi embassies, Sahrawi artists, blogs written by other Sahrawis and blogs and web-pages with information and news about Western Sahara and the conflict. There are also links to

YouTube web-pages and video-clips about Western Sahara and the conflict. Zeina include a list of books about the western Saharan conflict.

Some of the videos are accompanied with action-packed western music, while others have Sahrawi music in the background. There are documentaries, news-clips about the conflict, videos posted by human rights activists in the occupied territory, home-made videos consisting of photographs with accompanied music and text and videos of Sahrawi artists, singers and performers.

Among others, there is a link to the Norwegian support committee's web-page<sup>19</sup>, to the web-page *Sahara Occidental*<sup>20</sup> which consists of newsletters about the conflict and the blog *Sahara-watch*<sup>21</sup> written by "an American observer of the Western Sahara conflict" ("Sahara-watch," 2010). All these web-pages include links back to Zeina and/or FreeWesternSahara together with links to a myriad of other internet sites related to the conflict.

Elkouria "Rabab" Amidane was awarded the Student Peace Prize 2009<sup>22</sup> (Friden, 2009). The prize was given to her because of her commitment and effort to document the situation in occupied Western Sahara. She takes photographs, writes reports and publishes videos on YouTube of police brutality and human rights violations in occupied Western Sahara. Both Zeina and FreeWesternSahara include videos of Rabab, as well as links to pages where there are videos of Rabab and other videos of human rights violations and activists in occupied territory.

The information and video-clips travel the Internet. Both Zeina and

---

<sup>19</sup> [www.vest-sahara.no](http://www.vest-sahara.no)

<sup>20</sup> [www.arso.org](http://www.arso.org)

<sup>21</sup> [www.sahara-watch.blogspot.com](http://www.sahara-watch.blogspot.com)

<sup>22</sup> The Student Peace Prize is awarded every year to students who fight for democracy or human rights. The prize uses the ISFiT festival in Trondheim as arena and collaborating partner. <http://www.studentpeaceprize.org/> Accessed May 18, 2010.

FreeWesternSahara include a poem called *Saharawi Child*<sup>23</sup>. The poem is written by Agaila Abba Hemeida who is the writer of FreeWesternSahara. The poem, and a video clip of a reading of the poem together with photographs of Sahrawi children, can be found at several other web-pages<sup>24</sup>. This poem serves as an illustration of the flow of texts and videos on the web-pages, blogs and YouTube sites related to Sahrawis and the aspiration of a free Western Sahara.

The blogs refer to each other, to other blogs by Sahrawis and blogs that support the Polisario standpoint. They put forward links to a number of web-pages. These blogs and web-pages form a net of internet sources with information, news and discussions about Western Sahara. One can argue that the blogs are a part of a larger *Sahrawi community* on the Internet.

#### **4.1.2 Social Research within Blogs**

Blogs typically hold the form of online diaries or self-narratives. Personal and intimate content is posted on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Diary research is an established strategy in historical and anthropological research, and is increasingly employed also in social research. Diary research might be categorized into two main types; research with diaries written spontaneously by respondents and diaries written on request from researchers. Both versions present challenges. When the diaries are written spontaneously the challenges include identifying potential participants and matching diary content to research aims. When the diary is written for research purposes there is a question of participant willingness to record moral decisions without compensation. In addition, there are dilemmas of validity and bias associated with dealing with material constructed for the purpose of research (Hookway, 2008, pp. 95-96).

Blogs offer a feasible alternative to diary research. Participants are easy to find, one only needs to search online for blogs and profiles. Blogs are not written for research

---

<sup>23</sup> The poem is presented in the analysis chapter.

<sup>24</sup> <http://freesahara.ning.com/video/saharawi-child> Accessed January 7, 2010.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21l\\_-sq0Wpw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21l_-sq0Wpw) Accessed January 7, 2010.

[http://www.upes.org/body2\\_eng.asp?field=articulos\\_eng&id=275](http://www.upes.org/body2_eng.asp?field=articulos_eng&id=275) Accessed January 7, 2010.

purposes which is another positive side about blog research. Still, while blogs are naturally occurring texts, they are nevertheless written for an implicit, if not explicit, audience (Hookway, 2008, pp. 95-96).

Blogs offer a special combination of privacy and publicity. Blogs are publicly accessible, nevertheless most blogs have none, or very few, readers, or they do not know their readers. The typical blogger posts personal and intimate information about his/her life. However, the anonymity of the online context means that they can remain relatively unidentified and unselfconscious about their writing (Hookway, 2008, p. 96). How do we know that the bloggers are telling the truth? In the same way as you never can know if your interview objects or other respondents are truthful, it is impossible to make sure that bloggers are entirely honest (Hookway, 2008, pp. 96-97). Hookway (2008, p. 97) questions if the truthfulness of the blogger really matter. Even if we accept the notion that bloggers are creating a specific bloggers identity online, which differ to some extent to their everyday identity offline, the information posted on the blog still offer viable information on the blogger sphere (Hookway, 2008, p. 97).

Do researchers need to gain permission from bloggers when recording their posts? Is blog material fair game, or is informed consent needed? According to Hookway (2008), there exist no consensus among social scientists on this matter yet. It is possible to argue that online postings, though publicly accessible, are written with an expectation of privacy and should be treated as such. On the other hand, one may argue that consent is not necessary because of the public availability of the blogs. Blogs that are interpreted as private by the blogger are made “friends only”. In this view, blogs are personal, but not private (Hookway, 2008, p. 105).

I will argue that it is a mistake to categorize all blogs alike. Some bloggers are anonymous, while others offer full name, pictures and e-mail address. In FreeWesternSahara, the blogger is presented with full name, the blog Zeina, on the other hand, is anonymous. None of the blogs offer e-mail addresses or any means of

communicating with the authors, besides the commentary space below each post. I have not been in contact with the blog creators. As contact information on the blogs is not offered, contacting the creators has not been possible.

Some blogs are well known. There exist blogs which define communities. Celebrities who blogs cannot expect other media to stay away from their blog content (rather they expect and rely on the publicity of the blog). I would like to draw a line between *theme-blogs* and *diary-blogs*. Theme-blogs are less private than diary-blogs. Theme-blogs include health blogs written by nurses, doctors or private persons, blogs with comments of political events or blogs concerned about specific topics for example fashion, cats or interior design. The blogs I have analyzed can be categorized as “theme-blogs”. The topic, or theme, of the blogs is clearly stated in the user profile descriptions. In FreeWesternSahara, the name and address<sup>25</sup> suggests a blog about the struggle for a free and independent Sahrawi nation. The User profile description related to FreeWesternSahara states:

*Well I am just a Saharawi student who want to see my people rising their flag in the land of freedom (Western Sahara).*

Likewise, the founders of Zeina maintain:

*We are two Saharawi girls who are very proud of our Saharawi identity and heritage. Our interest is to raise awareness about our culture and our struggle for independence, that is why we have this blog..*

The user profile description in Zeina suggests a blog with postings about Sahrawi identity and heritage. The stated goal is to raise awareness about Sahrawi culture and the Sahrawi struggle for independence. This might suggest that the blog is primarily created to reach outsiders to the conflict. This idea is supported by the fact that the blogs are written in English, rather than Arabic.

One can argue that the nature of the analyzed blogs supports the notion that blogger

---

<sup>25</sup> <http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/>

consent is not necessary. In addition, the stated goals of the blogs might suggest that the blogs are not private, they are not simply personal diaries posted online. The blogs appears to attempt to reach an audience of outsiders, to communicate about the Sahrawi culture and Western Sahara conflict. The blogs may thus be interpreted as a form of internet activism, where the aim of this *Sahrawi community* is to present the Sahrawi struggles to the world.

### **4.1.3 The Narratives**

I approached the material by applying three guiding principles. First of all I was interested in material presented by sources that live in, or have earlier lived in, the Sahrawi refugee camps. Secondly; I wanted personal accounts of the life of the refugees. Finally; the accounts should preferably offer insights on the community of the Sahrawi refugees, and their feeling of belonging and togetherness.

Although the blogs offer a number of resources and ways of communication, I have chosen solely to analyze narratives presented in the blogs. The narratives offer personal accounts of the reality of being Sahrawi, and are written by the refugees themselves.

The narratives are mainly in the form of personal essays. They are written by the author of the blog FreeWesternSahara, and different contributors to Zeina.

FreeWesternSahara contains a couple of narratives not written by the author; however, I have chosen not to apply these to the study. As a main rule, I have not included narratives where I was not completely sure whether the guiding principles were met<sup>26</sup>. These narratives contain in average about 800 words each, or 1 ½ - 2 pages when written in Times New Roman, size 13, space 1,5. I have analyzed 14 narratives from Zeina and 6 narratives from FreeWesternSahara.

In addition to the narrative essays, I have also chosen to analyze nine poems. Many of

---

<sup>26</sup> Of course; I cannot be entirely sure of the origin of any of the narratives, but that is an entirely other debate which will be addressed in the Discussion chapter.

these poems have a narrative form. Some of the narratives are written very poetically, and could be characterized as poems. The poems are posted right next to the personal essays and seem to communicate the same message. There is not always entirely obvious to me whether the text should be defined as lyrics or elegant, short-text prose. Two of the nine poems appear in both blogs<sup>27</sup>. The rest of the poems are from FreeWesternSahara. All in all, the empirical material that I have analyzed comprise about 50 pages (Times New Roman, size 13, space 1,5).

## **4.2 Analyzing the Narratives**

During the early stages of the analysis, I focused primarily on the texts. The literature review of national identity was postponed awaiting the second phase of the analysis process. I wanted to explore the narrative texts and what they might offer, and let the texts guide my reading of literature. I did however read general literature on Western Sahara and the situation in refugee camps.

I quickly realized that a functional method, with techniques for analyzing and systematizing the narratives, would be beneficiary to my research. I sought a procedure for approaching the narratives in a systematic manner. The following is an account of how I proceeded:

### **4.2.1 Phase One: Line-by-line Coding**

I chose to conduct *line-by-line coding* in accordance with Grounded Theory<sup>28</sup> principles as described by Charmaz (2006). The line-by-line coding helped me get started, and offered a manageable procedure to go about the material. The technique made me more aware of the themes in the narratives and underlying issues. By looking at one line at a time I was forced to dig deeper into the material and really perceive each line of text.

---

<sup>27</sup> The poems Sahrawi Queen and Sahrawi Child.

<sup>28</sup> Grounded Theory developed in the 1960's through the cooperation of the sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. Grounded Theory was first presented in: Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Andine Publishing Company.



Line-by-line coding refers to the method of giving each line in the text a name or label; a code. The analysis is built from the bottom-up, by coding the smallest meaningful unit available. Line-by-line coding forces you to code a small amount of data at the time, preventing the urge to invent broader codes before there is actually reason to do so. One attains a distance between oneself and the material. In this way, line-by-line coding helps refrain from imputing personal motives, feelings or fears onto the data (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 47-53).

Of course, not every line is important. Not every line will include a full sentence and some lines might not make any sense at all. The idea behind the coding of each line is that new thoughts and inspirations might reveal themselves, ideas that might have stayed in the dark if one only focused on a general thematic analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50). When coding the material, one needs to remain open to all possible directions that the material might take. One should stay close to the material, and not make use of pre-existing labels or theories. The coding in Grounded Theory are not based on preconceived ideas, one create one's own codes and categories (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 47-50). The codes should preferably reflect action and be active, as well as short, precise and simple. The codes are not permanently fixed, one is free to name and rename the lines to find the best fit. When going through the material, both a speedy pace and spontaneity in the labeling of lines might facilitate the thinking and analysis (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 48-50). The codes should preferably be *in-vivo*. In-vivo codes refer to codes taken directly from the empirical data, the wording of the code is directly what is referred to in the analyzed text. The application of in-vivo codes helps the researcher to avoid to import existing theory into the analysis (Willig, 2001, p. 34).

In the original version of Grounded Theory, it was all about *discovering* data, and let the categories *emerge* from the data. The researcher's background, ideas or thoughts should not influence the research and the creative role of the researcher was played down. The idea that categories and theories can simply emerge from the data reflects the belief that phenomena create their own perceptions that are directly perceived by

observers. The researchers discover something that is already there (Willig, 2001, pp. 43-44). Charmaz (2006) offers a *social constructivist* version of Grounded Theory. According to social constructivism theories do not emerge from the data, but rather are constructed by the researcher through an interaction with the data and the respondents. We construct our social worlds. The role of the researcher becomes more important. The theory produced offers not a objective truth about the data, but one possible interpretation of the data (Willig, 2001, pp. 43-44).

The line-by-line codes applied in this study are constructed by me. There are no clear-cut rules of how I have chosen to decide which name to put on each line. I have simply followed the guidelines stated above and tried to make active, short and straightforward codes that describes the line in a comprehensible manner. Below is a digest from FreeWesternSahara in the essay named: *My Struggle to get a Good Education* posted on April 27, 2008<sup>29</sup>. In the figure I want to show how I labeled each line in the text.

Separation	Not only has leaving my family and country has taught me
Strong, independent	how to be strong, independent, and responsible, but it also
Taught me	has taught me other important fundamental principles such
Respect culture	as honesty, trust and respect for people and their cultures.
Learn	Having learned these principles they have opened so many
Opportunity	doors with some extraordinary opportunities such as going
UN	to the UN to speak, meeting diplomatic and politicians from
relationships	around the world. Also building relationships with people
Culture	from different cultures and backgrounds than mine. It is
Learn	because of these principles that I have learned how to
Friendship	build a strong friendship based in trust, love and respect.
Dignity	Through these principles, I have become the young dignified women I am today.

Figure 2

<sup>29</sup> <http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2008-06-28T20%3A14%3A00-07%3A00>  
 Accessed January 5, 2010.

Willig (2001, pp. 37-38) stresses the importance of making a distinction between full implementation of Grounded Theory and abbreviated versions. Grounded Theory is compatible with a wide range of empirical data, including existing documents and texts (Willig, 2001, p. 37). Shortened versions of Grounded Theory work with original data only and simply involve the coding of data (Willig, 2001, pp. 37-38). This thesis is a reduced Grounded Theory study. I have applied principles from Grounded Theory when conducting the line-by-line coding.

#### **4.2.2 Phase Two**

After finishing the initial coding, I looked at the rate of recurrence among the line-by-line codes. Frequent line-by-line codes were for example separation, education, struggle, past, culture and freedom. I assembled the codes that repeatedly had made its appearance in the material, and categorized these codes into broader themes. While the frequency reports were valuable tools in the analysis process, my main focus were on the significance of the codes, rather than the frequency of their appearance. I rated the significance according to whether the codes could communicate aspects of collectivity, identity and nation, as well as feelings of belonging and togetherness.

When going through the material the second time, I applied significant codes and thematic categories established by the process of line-by-line coding. These categories were employed as starting points for further analyzing. I was attentive to themes and issues, and perceived the entirety of the texts. I noticed that much of the material centers on the past generally, and significant episodes in Sahrawi history specifically. In addition, the narratives contain tales of suffering and personal accounts of trauma and sacrifice. The descriptions of cultural markers are another central element discovered in the material. The cultural heritage of the Sahrawi is mentioned in a large amount of the narratives. The cultural heritage is specified as traditional rituals, head covering, music and so on. The idea and aspiration of a future free Western Sahara appeared to be an integral part of the narratives. Almost every posting ends with a couple of sentences about the dream of freedom, homeland and independence.

The final stages of the analysis required a more integrative approach to the material. I focused on combining suitable literature to the areas highlighted by the analysis and looked at both text and literature to complement each other. The literature of focus for the analysis was presented in chapter three. I performed a close examination of the literature on national identity, and combined and connected important literature to the categories and themes of earlier stages of the analysis. The thematic categories were gradually shaped, reshaped, created, recreated, constructed and reconstructed through a continuous analysis of narratives and literature. The narratives become further categorized according to their relevance for describing the phenomenon of national identity in the refugee camps.

Chapter five presents a selection of narratives gathered from the empirical material. The narratives in the analysis chapter are examples and descriptions of the final product of the categorization of narratives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Analysis**

The analysis aims to explore the national identity of the Sahrawi refugees today, as it is presented in the two blogs *Zeina* and *FreeWesternSahara*. The analysis describes the process of reproduction and reinterpretation of national identity through the presentation of different elements of national identity. Sahrawi traditions, values, symbols, memories and myths are presented and demonstrated in the analyzed material. In addition, the analysis will relate the elements of national identity to their corresponding cultural sources.

The structure of the chapter is an interpretation of Sahrawi time conception, as well as a categorization of the material. The chapter is structured as progress in time. The narratives in the analysis chapter are categorized in three main parts; narratives of the past, narratives of the present and narratives of the future.

### **5.1 Narratives of the Past**

The Sahrawi past can be organized in pre-colonial time, colonial time, the invasion and flight to Algeria, and the years of war before the ceasefire in 1991.

#### **5.1.1 The Golden Age**

The period before colonization was, according to the Sahrawis themselves, the time when the Sahrawis were free and lived in their own territory. The people were free and lived in harmony, the women were free and the tribes lived in peace with each other. The past is idealized as a golden past (Kirkerud, 2004, pp. 69-74). In the theory chapter, I referred to the *golden ages* of a nation as a part of its *ethnohistory*. I interpret the pre-colonial Western Sahara as the *golden age* in Sahrawi history. Pre-colonial Western Sahara is described as a community with freedom and justice. The period before colonization does not fill a lot of space in either of the blogs, or any of the other empirical material for that matter. However, the period serves as a precept of

what the Sahrawi people is, and what constitutes the “real way of life” for the Sahrawis.

I will use the role of women as an example of the influence of pre-colonial era on national identity today. The local leadership in the camps is primarily female. Since 1975 and the Green March, Sahrawi women have successfully worked their way to local administrations and, in recent times, to the ministry level of their government-in-exile (Rossetti, 2008). The next quotation is a piece from the blog Zeina named *Sahrawi Women and their Struggle for Independence*. It was posted on December 24, 2007<sup>30</sup>. It serves as an example of the *golden age* of the Sahrawi, and how this point in time has a role in the Sahrawi national identity. The topic of the narrative is the role of women in the Sahrawi community. In the traditional Sahrawi nomadic society the women had prominent positions.

*Historically in the Saharawi nomadic life, women have been involved in many leadership positions in the society. [...] Moreover, women ruled the tents and played a major role in tribal life. Since most men spent a lot of time away from the frig (a group of families or a camp) warring or trading, it was the women who had the full responsibility for everything. They watched over the cattle, took care of the children, the guests and the community as a whole. Moreover, women were the ones consulted when it came to tribal decision-making. There are historical accounts of women's direct participation in the ait Arbeen's meetings. Ait Arbeen used to be the highest political and social constitution in the Saharawi society and it was made up of representatives from the forty tribes in the region. In these meetings many issues are discussed concerning matters in the frig as well as in the nation as a whole.*

Women's strong and independent role in the Sahrawi community is an important aspect of the Sahrawi national identity. The reason why the role of women is important for the Sahrawi national identity has to do with the fact that it is a part of their pre-colonial heritage. The pre-colonial time represents the natural, authentic way of the Sahrawi. The *golden age* refers to a point in time where the Sahrawi led lives uncorrupted by outsiders. The golden age refers to the natural, genuine and authentic. The role of women is important to the Sahrawi because it is the natural way of things. It is the way it is supposed to be; how it used to be and how it should be. The next

---

<sup>30</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed March 31, 2010.

quotation demonstrates the genuineness of free and powerful Sahrawi women. It is collected from the blog posting *Women in our Society* in the blog Zeina, posted on August 11, 2007<sup>31</sup>.

*Many people think that the Saharawi women are different from the Muslim and Arab women, even though the majority are recognized as Arabs and Muslims, they [Saharawi women] are more outspoken, powerful and independent.*

The pre-colonial history of the Sahrawi talks of culture rather than nurture. There is no direct reference to any myth of common origin in the blog narratives. However, the idea of common origin is implied in the cultural history of the Sahrawis, and in the reference to the Sahrawis as different from other groups of people.

Even though the *golden ages* seldom are referred to, the Sahrawi national identity is based on cultural foundations dated back to the pre-colonial period. The analysis will reveal cultural traditions, values and symbols which are core elements in the Sahrawi national identity, and are acquired from the Sahrawi cultural past.

### **5.1.2 The Silenced Past**

The colonial period is never really described in the blogs. It might be mentioned in parts of a sentence, but then as a manner of comparison to present time, or as a way of explaining some other aspect or piece of information. When referred to, the colonial time is always portrayed as a time of repression and a downhill period in Sahrawi history. An example is collected from the blog Zeina and named *Sahrawi Women and their Struggle for Independence* and posted on December 24, 2007<sup>32</sup>:

*At the present, it is believed that more than 90% of the teachers are women. In contrast, in the early years of the camp, there were only two women teachers because females were not allowed to study during the Spanish colonization.*

---

<sup>31</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7&reverse-paginate=true> Accessed March 31, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed March 31, 2010.

In this quotation, the only thing written about the colonial period is that females were not allowed to study. In itself this is not important, yet used as an approach of communicating the enormous progress from two to more than 90 % female teachers in the camp, the fact about the colonial time becomes useful.

The social structure of memory might contribute to our understanding of the Sahrawi history, and consequently the Sahrawi national identity. Why do we remember the past the way we do? There exists a difference between what actually happened, and more importantly, what we remember happened. What we remember happened is more interesting, because our remembrance of the past contribute to our comprehension of the present (Zerubavel, 2003).

Why is there no memory of the colonial period? One might argue that the Sahrawi lost their authentic way of life during the Spanish colonization, because the Sahrawi went from leading nomadic lives to settling in towns. However, the majority of Sahrawis continued their nomadic life during the colonization, until the 1960s and 70s (Hodges, 1984, p. 6). One might argue that the cultural foundations of the national identity are generally acquired from the pre-colonial period. On the other hand; Martin (2005, p. 569) maintains that Polisario's goal with the refugee camps were to create a new Sahrawi identity from the pre-colonial *and colonial* heritage. Nevertheless the colonial era is a silenced past in the blogs.

The colonial period holds little relevance for the Sahrawi and their national identity. The colonial time represents a time of repression. In colonial time the Sahrawi were un-free, yet strongly affiliated with their tribes, and still not organized as a nation. From a national identity perspective, there is no reason to remember this period. The period does not propose anything further to the national identity. The colonial period is therefore a silenced past.



### 5.1.3 The Critical Event

According to Irwin-Zarecka (1994), a *community of memory*, or *collective memory*, refers in its simplest sense to a togetherness created by one specific memory. For people to feel a connection with others, based on one shared experience alone, the quality of this experience would often be extraordinary, maybe also traumatic (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 47). I argue that the escape to the refugee camps certainly is an extraordinary event and an extraordinary memory. The escape marked the start of the Sahrawi refugee existence. The descriptions of the escape contain elements of traumatic character; the experiences are horrifying and disturbing. Consequently, I argue that the escape can be categorized as a traumatic event. The history of the Sahrawi nation is a history of struggle. The struggle of the nation has importance because it is a part of the cultural resources of national identity. Renan (1991, p. 19)<sup>33</sup> argues that suffering is more unifying than joy. Memories of grief and suffering are more important in a national identity perspective than triumphs, because grief imposes duties and common effort (Renan, 1991, p. 19). I have selected a section from Zeina to illustrate the traumatic character of the narratives of the past. The narrative is named *the story of my grandmother* and is posted on January 8, 2008<sup>34</sup>.

*Three days later, they run out of food and water since they could carry limited amounts. So, they had to survive on whatever they found in the naked desert. Not long after that, unfortunately, Brahim died of dehydration. Still, they had to continue or worse could happen. Just another two days after that, while taking a break, the other two young boys died on a landmine explosion. "Half of the family was gone. It was a true devastation and heartbreaking", she tells with tears in her eyes. The tragedy did not end here. As my tears continue to drop, she says: "and then I lost my sight". On the following day, as they continue their journey, an airplane dropped a bomb before them. Since my grandmother was in the front, some of the ashes got in her eyes and she lost her sight forever.*

The connection or togetherness, which is originally created by a traumatic event, will expand over time. It is the shared meaning awarded the experience that defines the community of memory. Personal witness to the trauma is not as important as self-defined personal relevance. The meaning given to the memory is what is important,

---

<sup>33</sup> Originally a lecture delivered the Sorbonne, 11 March 1882.

<sup>34</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed March 2, 2009.

not the trauma in itself or the “truth” about the episode (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, pp. 48-49). The narratives of the past demonstrate the importance of the Moroccan invasion for the Sahrawi national identity. The shared meaning given to the escape is its relevance as a turning point in history. Morocco’s invasion of Western-Sahara and the following exile appear to be the most important event in Sahrawi history. The occupation and flight to the refugee camps in Algeria has created a new community. The Sahrawi nation and national identity was forged by resistance, during occupation and in the refugee camps (Shelley, 2007, pp. 31-33). The occupation of Western-Sahara has become an event of critical significance, with the power to redefine previous categories and social order. Veena Das (1995) refers to such occurrences as *critical events*.

#### **5.1.4 Collective Memory**

A central element in the blogs is the accounts of the past. The references to the past are most often in the form of extensive narratives. The struggles of the past include descriptions of the flight from the Moroccans during the occupation, and the years of war. The flight towards Algeria is an especially apparent component in the narratives. An extract of one of these narratives of the past is selected from Zeina. The narrative is posted on January 8, 2008, under the headline *the story of my grandmother*<sup>35</sup>:

*On that day, the whole Frigg or neighborhood was forced to abandon their properties and village. “They had strange looks and indeed looked unmerciful”, she describes the Moroccan soldiers. On that instant, her husband, my grandfather went to fight for his people. She and her three daughters and three sons had to cross the desert to seek refuge in Algeria. They had to cross on feet, no camels, cars or any other form of transportation could be used because they were afraid of airplanes dropping bombs on them. During their journey, they could only walk at night and hide behind trees or rocks during the day to take a rest. “Lala and I had to take turns watching for airplanes, while the other ones took a nap”, Asisa recalls. Lala, my mother, was only twelve years old as the oldest child, while Brahim, the youngest was eight months.*

The authors and contributors of the blogs are all relatively young. They cannot themselves have experienced the hardships and incidents that they describe. The

---

<sup>35</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed March 2, 2009.

accounts of occupation and escape from the Moroccans were experienced by their parents and grandparents. The quotation below is an extract from the same essay as the last quotation. The author explains that this is a story that her grandmother has told her.

*The night has just worn its black coat with bright stars. My grandmother and I sit on the cold-soft dunes of the Algerian desert. She points with her fingers to the wide sky and starts to explain the Saharawi astronomy. Though she is utterly blind, she still can sense what once was a reality for her. She usually tells me stories at night, some are fairytales and others she considers real. However, on this night she was about to tell me a different kind of story, a story that does not make me fall asleep, but one that wakes me for the rest of my life. It is her story.*

The concept of *collective memory* can be handed numerous meanings and definitions. Irwin-Zarecka (1994, p. 4) identifies collective memory as shared ideas, images and feelings of the past. These ideas, images and feelings are best located not in the minds of the individuals, but in the resources they share. The resources that hold the collective identity might have the form of history books, movies, or numerous other texts and sources. Collective memory differs from personal memory, because personal memory manifests itself in the mind of the individual (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 4).

Because the blogs are filled with accounts of the past, and the writers, because of their young age, cannot themselves have experienced these events, I argue that there consequently exists a collective memory in the empirical material. This collective memory manifests itself specifically in the extensive narratives of the past, specifically the critical event; the flight towards Algeria. However; collective memory of the past can be found in almost all the texts.

### **5.1.5 Presence of the Past**

Irwin-Zarecka (1994, p. 92) asserts that for people who struggle to keep their identity against oppression, conquest or occupation, the past becomes extremely important. The presence of the past in the empirical material is overwhelming. Even in texts where the topic has nothing to do with past struggles, the history of the Sahrawi

emerges.

The next passage serves as an example of the overwhelming presence of the past in the blog-postings. The citation is selected from the blog Zeina from a text named *his story* posted on August 5, 2007<sup>36</sup>. The focus of the text is the fact that Sahrawi children attend schools in foreign countries. The text is about the writer and her father Bachir, and the writer employs the past hardships of the Sahrawi people as an explanatory factor in the text. The fact that Bachir experienced the flight to Algeria made him want to study medicine:

*As a young boy, Bachir and his family had to cross the desert to the refugee camps. The Moroccan planes were dropping booms, so they had to hide behind rocks and trees. In his journey, Bachir saw the victims and people injured who died because there was no medical care, there were no nurses or doctors. He then decided to study medicine and become a doctor because he saw the call for doctors in the refugee camps.*

### **5.1.6 The Past and National Identity**

How one defines a situation depends largely on socially shared framing strategies and devices. Humans might ignore even the best stories, if it does not fit into their already established schemata, or world view. Humans focus their concentration solely on the representations of the world and the past that fit the existing notions of the past (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 4). What do the narratives of the past tell us about the Sahrawi national identity? The narratives of the past consist of collective remembrance of a critical event in the history of the Sahrawis. The narratives of the past can be defined as a cultural resource of the national identity, the *ethnohistory* of the nation, as described in the theory chapter. One of the characteristics of a nation, and national identity, is the shared historical memories or myths.

Collective memory is tied to moral obligations towards one's kind, justice and ethics. Collective memory is a crucial normative power of orientation in a complex landscape of right and wrong (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, p. 9). When trying to make sense of what moral obligations is tied to the Sahrawi collective memory, it might be fruitful to look

---

<sup>36</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-08-05T19%3A46%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7> Accessed February 8, 2010.

at the shared meaning of the flight to Algeria, and what this shared meaning tell us about the Sahrawi national identity. Because of its colossal consequences for the social order, the Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara has become a *critical event* in the Sahrawi history. The collective memory of the Sahrawis focuses on the escape from the Moroccans foremost and the war with the Moroccans secondly. I argue that the moral obligations tied to the collective memory have to be linked to the fight for independence.

## **5.2 Narratives of the Present**

The narratives of the present are organized in two sub-chapters: *Cultural Traditions and National Symbols* and *Ideals of Struggle and Sacrifice*.

### **5.2.1 Cultural Traditions and National Symbols**

The most frequent mentioned cultural traditions mentioned in the blogs are the traditional female headgear *Mehlfa*, the tea ceremony and the Sahrawi Arabic dialect *Hassaniyyah*.

The Melhfa comes in variety of colors, patterns and material. It may be simple, or with artistic shapes and patterns, or even with the flag of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. The Melhfa has different names depending on the colors; the materials are made of and even sometimes the age group of women. The Mehlfa is characterized as a specific Sahrawi headgear, which differentiates the Sahrawi from other ethnic groups. The next quotation is selected from Zeina, from the narrative named *The Melhfa, the Sahrawi female beauty*, posted on August 12, 2007<sup>37</sup>. The writer emphasizes that the Mehlfa is unique to the Sahrawi people. The Melhfa is a tradition that is found in Sahrawi culture far back in time. The Melhfa is one of the cultural traditions that make the Sahrawi nation distinctive from other peoples.

---

<sup>37</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7&reverse-paginate=true> Accessed February 8, 2010.

*Melhfa is a four miter long by one miter wide piece of fabric. It is not any ordinary piece of cloth; it is the symbol of the Saharawi female beauty. Melhfa has existed with the existence of the Saharawi culture. Many people may view it as religious, specifically Muslim symbol. However, the Melhfa is strictly cultural and unique to the Saharawi people.[...] the Melhfa makes the Saharawi women exceptional and different from the rest of the women.*

The next section is selected from a narrative named *Language evolution and cultural transitions* posted December 24, 2007<sup>38</sup>. The writer emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Hassaniyyah language. The writer also emphasizes language's role as carrier of culture. It is maintained that it has been the responsibility to each and every individual to speak and hence preserve the language, and that the language is a result of the Sahrawi history.

*In my country, we speak Hassaniya, which is a mixture of Arabic, Spanish, French, Swahili and English. Very few Arabs understand me when I speak it because it is the least close to the classical Arabic and that is due to the colonial powers we experienced. Hassaniya has traditionally been transmitted orally from one generation to the next. It has been the responsibility of each and every individual to carry on this spoken language or else it would have died centuries ago. In addition, it has undergone many changes and transitions, in the same way the culture has evolved. Furthermore, language, any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communications and a carrier of culture.*

The tea ceremony is a very important part of the Sahrawi daily life, and is believed to be unique to the Sahrawi people. The next quote is gathered from Zeina and the narrative *The tea struggle*. The narrative was posted August 5, 2007<sup>39</sup> and refers to the Sahrawi tea ceremony:

*One of the greatest features of the Saharawi culture is that of Tea ceremony. It is special and unique to the Saharawi people. It is a time of unity and celebration of happiness. Family members, neighbors, relatives or simply people passing by gather around to chat about everything and nothing and at the same time enjoy a cup of the special tea. The Atay or tea in Hassania the Saharawi native Arabic dialect is three cups and each one represents a different thing. The first cup is bitter as life, the second is sweet as love and the third is soft as death. The tea ceremony can take few minutes to make or can last as long as hours.*

---

<sup>38</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed February 15, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7&reverse-paginate=true> Accessed February 8, 2010.

Kirkerud (2004) argues that the Sahrawi tea-ceremony is not exclusively a Sahrawi ritual, but rather a ritual that can be found in a great part of the Sahara. Nevertheless, when trying to question the uniqueness of the Sahrawi tea ritual, Kirkerud (2004) describes strong responses packed with feelings. Kirkerud (2004) argues that to question whether the tea ceremony was unique to the Sahrawi was to question the very distinctiveness and identity of the Sahrawi people (Kirkerud, 2004, pp. 139-140). It can be argued that the focus on cultural traditions facilitate the maintenance of distinctiveness and heritage. The national identity is reproduced through the utilization of the cultural traditions in daily life. The reproduction and reinterpretation of cultural traditions is part of what compose the distinctive heritage of the Sahrawi nation.

The contributors in the blogs emphasize that the Sahrawi never forgets their cultural traditions. They explain that it is hard to keep their identity when they are away for many years; still, they never forget where they come from. The reproduction of traditions, and hence the stability and *continuity* of the national identity is valued. The next passage contains the narrative *Not forgetting our Sahrawi heritage* posted on August 13, 2007<sup>40</sup>. The writer describes how her Sahrawi identity has been challenged. Still, she states that she has not met a single Sahrawi woman who has denied her identity or heritage. No matter for how long the Sahrawis are gone, they always maintain their Sahrawi identity, traditions and values.

*One of the easiest things one lose when exposed to western culture is that of his own identity and cultural principles. Having been exposed to European and American culture myself; I have met people who denied their belonging to their cultures of origin. It is sad and frustrating because to me, each culture has its unique characteristics and values that distinguish it from the others. [...] However, I have observed one thing about the people from Western Sahara. It is the fact that it does not matter how long they are gone for, still they maintain their Saharawi principles. [...] It doesn't matter for how long or where they gone, Saharawis always return to their own people. They also never forget the very long tea process (Atay), the Melhfa or Daraa or most importantly Hassaniya, which is the Saharawi native Arabic dialect. Many Saharawi refugees went to attend school in Cuba. After tens of years they come back and still able to integrate with the society.[...] I must say that*

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7&reverse-paginate=true> Accessed February 8, 2010.

*it is not easy to keep up with your cultural tradition while trying to mix with the host society. It is particularly true for women in general and Saharawi women specifically. Saharawi female's expectations are very different from that of an American female, for instance. The Saharawi culture is built upon respect, unity and acceptance. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with adopting modern ideas that could give a special flavor to one's lifestyle. However, it – I believe – is essential that one conserves her or his basic cultural principles. Saharawi women have set a great example in this matter. From experience, I have not met a single Saharawi woman who denied her identity and cultural heritage.*

If the Sahrawi refugees were to lose their cultural identity, their argument about being a distinct people, a nation, would no longer apply. The reproduction and reinterpretation of the Sahrawi cultural traditions is an imperative part of the Sahrawi national identity. I interpret the Sahrawi cultural traditions and rituals as vital tools for maintaining distinctive, individual and unique. In addition, the cultural traditions may work as national markers because they identify individuals as Sahrawi.

One of the narratives in Zeina is a personal account of a woman about her choice to wear hijab. The narrative describes the reactions she got from family and friends and the struggles she faced in the refugee camps. The posting is posted December 24, 2007<sup>41</sup> and is named *Hijab: danger or respect*:

*I decided not to start wearing it immediately that summer because of the difficulties I would face from my family and community. I, thus, started wearing it when I went back to boarding school in northern Algeria, for it was easier since most people wear it there. [...] When I arrived home after a four days long trip in the bus from my school in the north to the camps in southern Algeria, the first thing I received after “welcome back” was criticism. The first person said: “You have become like them [extremist Muslims or commonly known terrorists]”, and then my aunt agreed: “Yes, this is the way they brain wash your young generation.” My grandmother had a whole other approach to it. Even though she was blind and obviously could not see how I was dressing, immediately I was fully described to her by my younger aunt. She then went on to say: “This is not our culture, this is not Islam. Islam is to pray five times a day and fast if you ‘can’.”*

The hijab has traditionally no place in the Sahrawi culture. The female headgear is the mehlfa, not the hijab. The form of the criticism the woman received, the arguments against the hijab, is interesting in a national identity perspective. Her grandmother's

---

<sup>41</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed March 30, 2010.



response was simply: *this is not our culture*. The hijab is not Sahrawi culture. The criticism she receives may be interpreted as a critique of her identity, and an evaluation of her “Sahrawiness”.

### Sahrawi Child

Both blogs include poems. Some poems are written by the authors themselves, some poems appear to have been written by professional poets and others are not presented with any name or author. One of the poems I have already mentioned in the methods chapter; *Sahrawi Child*. This poem is from Zeina, posted on August 13, 2007<sup>42</sup>. The headline of the posting is *Sahrawi Child*. The poem is written by Agaila Abba Hemeida who is the author of FreeWesternSahara.

#### *Sahrawi Child*

*Saharawi child, take hold of a paper and pencil  
and learn literature, math and science.*

*Saharawi child, sit closely by your elders  
and listen carefully to the wisdom; this is the way which in the  
future will come to your rescue.*

*Saharawi child, have your mind open to understanding.  
Let wisdom be your best friend.  
Let wisdom be your professor.  
Let wisdom be your Father your Mother and your Brother.  
Let wisdom embrace you; its path will never let you down.*

*Saharawi child, open your eyes to the world around you;  
choose your friends wisely, let every choice be guided  
by a good counsellor.*

*Saharawi child, take advantage of every opportunity  
wherever you go, but don't forget your principles, language or  
culture, or that you are “Saharawi!”*

*Saharawi child, accept every nation, every race and*

---

<sup>42</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7> Accessed April 2, 2010.

*every language and the door of blessing will be opened to your house and to your nation. (Western Sahara)*

*Saharawi child, don't be afraid of making mistakes or be afraid of correction because that is where the lesson is and that is when you will learn who you are, because you are valuable.*

*Saharawi child, share your seat with justice and reconciliation that you may become the turban of peace.*

*Saharawi child, let the truth be the foundation of your dignity. It will let your light shine and will build the walls of your generation and your nation.*

*Saharawi child, be independent!*

*Be strong*

*Be humble*

*Be kind*

*Be patient*

*Be honest*

*Be joyful*

*Be just*

*Be trustworthy*

*Be righteous*

*Be generous*

*Be diligent*

*Be faithful*

*and the favor of life will always be yours!*

*Saharawi child, listen, learn, grow, laugh, teach, forgive, love, share, trust, heal, hope, dream, sing and dance; do this and you will never lose your smile*

One can argue that the poem *Sahrawi Child* has become a national symbol for the Sahrawi. National symbols make national identity comprehensible and concrete. National symbols are tangible entities that express the uniqueness of the nation. Political leaders typically give national symbols much spotlight. Anthems, national flags, emblems, monuments and ceremonies are examples of national symbols (Cerulo, 2001, p. 10329). The reproduction and reinterpretation of national symbols is a part of the definition of national identity. Sahrawi national symbols both symbolize

and concretize the individuality of the nation. The cultural traditions (mehlfa, hassaniyyah, tea-ceremony) might be interpreted as national symbols as well<sup>43</sup>. The poem embraces several important aspects of the Sahrawi national identity. It focuses on education<sup>44</sup> (education will be explored in *narratives of the future*) and to be independent<sup>45</sup> (independence will be explored in *narratives of the future*). The poem also appears to have been written in the form of an appeal to Sahrawi children. The Sahrawi children should “stay Sahrawi”<sup>46</sup>, reproduce the pattern of traditions, symbols and values, and consequently maintain the stability of the national identity.

### 5.2.2 Ideals of Struggle and Sacrifice

A crucial theme in the empirical material is the daily hardship in the refugee camps. The refugee camps are situated in a part of the Sahara which has never been inhabited before. The weather is brutal, with temperature ranging from below zero °C to 50 °C. The food delivered to the camps is meant for crises of brief duration. It is based on a minimum basic calorie requirement, intended to keep people alive for a short period of time. A large part of the population in the camps, four out of ten children, suffers from chronic malnutrition. The delivered aid has been reduced as the years has gone by (Vest-Sahara.no, 2009). The next section expresses the daily hardships in the refugee camps. The section is collected from the blog FreeWesternSahara and the blog posting *Sahrawi girl diary*. It was put on the blog 11 March 2007<sup>47</sup>

*I come from the biggest refugee camp in the world. It has existed for such a long time in such a remote place that I imagine most people elsewhere do not even know about it. [...] I was born in a refugee camp and have lived as*

---

<sup>43</sup> There are other displays of Sahrawi national identity in the blogs, but these are not referred to in the narratives. The narratives are my primary source of empirical material. Suggestions of other national symbols include the Sahrawi flag, Sahrawi music and artists that sing and play Sahrawi music. Some human rights fighters from occupied area might also be argued to have become national symbols.

<sup>44</sup> “Saharawi child, take hold of a paper and pencil and learn literature, math and science.

*Saharawi child, sit closely by your elders and listen carefully to the wisdom; this is the way which in the future will come to your rescue.”*

<sup>45</sup> “Saharawi child, be independent!”

<sup>46</sup> “Saharawi child, take advantage of every opportunity wherever you go, but don’t forgot your principles, language or culture, or that you are “Saharawi!””

<sup>47</sup> [http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/2007\\_03\\_01\\_archive.html](http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/2007_03_01_archive.html) Accessed April 2, 2009.

*refugee my whole life. I was born in a tent, where seven members of my family still live. The temperature can climb to 125 Fahrenheit. It rains once or twice a year. We get everything from food to cloths from International Humanitarian Aid. Due to unavailability of educational facilities, I had to leave my family to attend a boarding school in Algeria, thousands of miles away from my camp. I would come back only for the summer break to see my family.*

The refugees maintain that the hardships they are going through are part of what it means to be a Sahrawi. The writers appear to value struggle as a tool to become better humans. I argue that the striving and hardship are valued because they are part of what it means to be a Sahrawi, and a vital part of the Sahrawi national identity. In the section below the writer grant her family's tent (El-Khaima) personal motives and thoughts, and compares the tent to herself. She maintains that she was taught to face life's obstacles. The quotation is selected from the narrative named *The desert "Where the stars shine"* and was posted on October 16, 2007<sup>48</sup>.

*The El-Khaima where I was raised taught me how to face life with its sweetness and bitterness. I learned how to face life the way it faces nature and its distractive hazards: sandstorms, the 120 degrees Fahrenheit summers and at times the unmerciful floods. Despite all of these natural challenges, El-Khaima never disappointed me and always gave the best it can give. It stood for more than seven years at a time. Although, it can also experience aging; it would always hold on until its next sister takes over. In the same way I was taught to face obstacles in life. [...] Although I have lived a life that was deprived from many advantages that other children from other parts of the world experience, I have learned many things that allow me to face life in a much stronger way. [...] Also, it is important to be optimistic in life and face it in a strong way, just like the El-Khaima.*

### Separation from Family

The Sahrawis have all experienced separation from family and loved ones. There are hardly any Sahrawis who has not lost someone to, or become separated from by the war (ICG, 2007b). The real sacrifice for young people in the camps is the sacrifice of separation from family during higher education. The separation is described as a sacrifice by the young Sahrawis themselves. The separation from family is a definite break with family and friends in the camps. Each year, 800 Sahrawi children leave the

---

<sup>48</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-11-15T20%3A04%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=7&reverse-paginate=true> Accessed March 30, 2009.

camps to pursue an education in foreign countries, especially Algeria, Libya and Cuba (UJSARIO & CJE, 2006). The separation is long-lasting; the Sahrawis in my material explain that some have been away for 15 years, without seeing their family at all in that time. Some students might come back for summer break, others who traveled farther away, had to stay in a foreign country for the entire time of their studies. The first quotation below is a section from the essay *My struggle to get a good education* posted on April 27, 2008, on the blog FreeWesternSahara. The second quotation is selected from Zeina under the headline *His story* posted August 5, 2007<sup>49</sup>. Both selected pieces are included to exemplify and demonstrate the sacrifice of the separation.

*It was at the age of ten when I made the decision to stay in Spain to begin my education. It was not an easy decision to make after having to leave behind my most beloved ones for twelve years. This decision made me miss the births and the most important stages in the life of my four younger sisters. Not only has this decision made me sacrifice my family, but also my culture, language and values.*

*Due to unavailability of educational facilities, Saharawi children go to school in foreign countries, namely Libya and Cuba but the majority attends Algerian schools. When I was nine years old, I had to leave my family to attend a boarding school in northern Algeria, thousands of kilometers away from the camps. I would come back only for the summer break to see my family. I was luckier than my father, however. Bachir left to study in Cuba at the age of eight in 1976, just few months after arriving to the refugee camps and returned as a twenty four year-old doctor.*

The life of an oppressed or exiled people is often a life in suffering. However, what is it about a nation that makes the group members so inclined to self-sacrifice for the sake of the nation? Smith (2001) argues that the ideals of the nation are inspired by old ideas of sacred communities, and past religious and classical rituals and faiths. Modern national ceremonies, monuments and images are modeled after old Christian rituals (A. D. Smith, 2001, pp. 573-574). A nation is a form of secular sacred community. The potency of self-sacrifice, heroes and the glorious dead, derives not solely from the belief system of nationalism and its ideal of the sacred community of the nation. They

---

<sup>49</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-08-05T19%3A46%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7> Accessed April 6, 2010.

draw upon the strength and the power of mass-mobilizing from a long history of national religious symbols, myths memories and traditions (A. D. Smith, 2001, pp. 583-584). Anderson suggests that the nature of the nation, its solidarity and comradeship, is the reason for sacrifices on behalf of nations (Anderson, 1991, p. 7).

Furthermore, the sacrifices hold promise of immortality or rebirth, not for the individual, but for the nation. The destiny of the nation is its course towards fulfillment of its inherent potential, hence its fate and future (A. D. Smith, 2001, pp. 583-584). One of the cultural resources mentioned in the theory chapter is the ideal of suffering and sacrifice. The ideals of suffering and sacrifice are intricately tied together with the concept of destiny. In the case of the Sahrawi nation, the fulfillment of its potential and its destiny appears to be independence in a free Western Sahara. Destiny is one of the topics in *narratives of the future*.

### **5.2.3 The Present and National Identity**

The narratives of the present includes cultural markers in the form of traditions and symbols of national identity, as well as values of struggle and sacrifice. The cultural markers of national identity are essential in the production and reproduction of the Sahrawi national identity. The values of struggle and sacrifice are directly linked to the dimension of destiny, and the future of the Sahrawi nation.

## **5.3 Narratives of the Future**

The third part of the analysis is categorized in four themes; education, homeland, independence and destiny. They all overlap, and one might argue that the real theme of *Narratives of the Future* is the dream of independence.

### **5.3.1 Education for Independence**

In the past, especially in the 70s and 80s, education was a primary goal for Sahrawi refugees. Eradicating illiteracy was a strategic objective for Polisario, believing an educated population was an important contribution to the collective national struggle

(Chatty & Crivello, 2005, p. 19). The Sahrawis are proud of their level of literacy and education. In the posting *Women in our Society* posted on August 11, 2007<sup>50</sup> the pride is exemplified in this quote:

*At the time of the Moroccan invasion, the legacy of Spanish colonization was a 90 % illiteracy rate among women. A refugee woman, Zahara Ramdane, remembers “the first thing POLISARIO (The People’s Liberation Front of Saqiau al-Hamra and Rio de Oro) did in cooperation with the women’s organization was to launch a literacy campaign in the liberated zones of the Western Sahara and in the refugee camps. Today, we are proud to say that all Sahrawi women can at least read and write.*

The headline *Education for Independence* refers not only to the level of education in the camps, but moreover to the relationship between education and the hope of a return to the homeland. In the blogs, education are frequently mentioned at the same time as is expressed a hope of independence for the Sahrawis.

The war is over. The ceasefire entailed a long-lasting period of waiting in the desert. For young Sahrawis, it appears that the only manner in which they might contribute and help their country is by studying to attain an education. The war is over and there are no direct battles anymore, as a result there are very little young Sahrawis are able to contribute to in relation to a free Western Sahara. Education seems to be one of the ways which they may contribute to their nation. When the referendum has been held and Western Sahara is free at last, the Sahrawis needs to be prepared to manage, control and administer the state and country. When independence is a fact, there are going to be a high demand for trained professionals. The education of the Sahrawi people is part of the preparation for freedom and the nation-building process. The next quotation demonstrates education as a preparation for independence. It is selected from Zeina under the headline *His story* posted August 5, 2007<sup>51</sup>:

*My dream is to do something for the people whom I have lived with my whole life even though I had never seen*

---

<sup>50</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7> Accessed April 1, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-08-05T19%3A46%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7> Accessed June 15, 2009.

*my homeland, its green landscape or its beautiful beaches. The Saharawis are considered to be one of the best educated African nations. We want to be prepared for independence by educating all the skilled people, who once would run the independent Western Sahara.*

Education is a personal opportunity, but also, and more important, it is an opportunity to contribute, an opportunity to do something, instead of just passively waiting in the desert. Education has a significant value for the Sahrawi nation. It is a part of what makes the Sahrawi distinctive. Moreover, education is a way of contributing to the Sahrawi nation, and a tool in the building of the Sahrawi nation.

The main form of sacrifice for young Sahrawis today is separation from family during higher education. The sacrifice of separation is made because of the opportunity of education. Education appears to be a part of the struggle for a free Western Sahara. Sacrifice, education and independence are all intricately connected.

### **5.3.2 Dream of Homeland**

The definition of a *nation* requires territorial roots. The nation is a territorial entity and necessitates a recognized *homeland*, to where it rightfully belongs through history and origin. When nation and state coincide, possession of territory poses no threats or problems. However, when they do not, which is by far the more common situation; state and nation often come into conflict over territory and its peoples (A. D. Smith, 1981, p. 188).

The national territory is tied to the nation, and considered to belong to the nation, through historic right. The national territory belonged to the forefathers for many generations. The national territory evokes sacred memories, mythical ancestors and heroes, glorious battles and events. However, no nationalists have monopoly on history. There might be rivaling interpretations of history and historic right (A. D. Smith, 1981, p. 193). The conflict between Polisario and Morocco, as described in chapter two, can be interpreted as a conflict of truth and legitimacy.

Emotional ties to a homeland, and a naturalized identity between people and places,



may be demonstrated by the not so uncommon act of kissing the ground when returning to the homeland, as well as to take along a handful of the soil when going into exile. Furthermore; the body of persons who have died on foreign soil is routinely transported back to their homeland (Malkki, 1992, pp. 26-27). Malkki (1992, p. 27) argues that the linkage of people to place, nation to territory, is a deeply metaphysical assumption .

*Territorialization* and the *sanctification of homeland* is one of the cultural foundations of national identity. The emotional tie to homeland is well demonstrated in the posting from November 07, 2007<sup>52</sup>, named *Don't cry ya Laayoun*.

***Don't cry ya Laayoun***

*but let me weep your tear way.*

*Don't cry ya Laayoun*

*but let me take your sadness way*

*And bring a smile to your face.*

*Don't cry ya Laayoun*

*but let me tell you jokes and*

*play dama with you.*

*Don't cry ya Laayoun*

*but let me sing your favorite song.*

*"yal li gayes laayoun 7agal la 7anini"*

*Don't cry ya Laayoun*

*but let me be the glass of tea that takes  
your headache way.*

*Don't cry ya Laayoun*

*but let me be the sea fire that will*

*bring your children peace.*

*Don't cry ya laayoun*

*But let me be the freedom that  
you are waiting for.*

*Don't cry ya laayoun*

*But let me be the vaccine that will heal your  
wounds and diseases.*

*Don't cry ya Laayoun*

---

<sup>52</sup> <http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2008-01-06T17%3A38%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=20&reverse-paginate=true> Accessed April 3, 2010.

*but let me be the unity that will bring  
all the Saharawi together to your homeland  
(Western Sahara) .  
Don't cry ya laayoun  
but let me be the word of wisdom  
that will guide your path straight .  
Don't cry ya Laayoun  
but let me be the justice that will  
Bring blessing to your Jaima.  
But let me be your dignity and prosperity  
that will raise your name up high.  
Don't cry ya Laayoun  
but Let me be your Sahara libre.  
don't cry, don't cry ya Laayoun  
because all I want to be is for you, and that what you are is for me.*

*Also because  
I love more than anything.*

*Dedicated to all young people in the Occupied Territory our unity is sending our  
Sahara Free.*

### **5.3.3 Independence**

The Sahrawi refugees are a nation in exile. Homeland for the Sahrawis is the physical territory of Western Sahara. However; homeland is not only a physical placement in space, it is also a moral destination. A return to homeland is equivalent to independence and self-determination. The dream of independence coupled with the dream of homeland is present in a great part of the texts and other postings in the blogs. The dream of independence and the return to homeland may be read between the lines in all the other sub-parts of the Sahrawi national identity.

Under the headline *my statement to the UN IV Committee*, posted on 16 October, 2007<sup>53</sup> on FreeWesternSahara. Agaila Abba Hemeida, the author of FreeWesternSahara, has been to the UN IV Committee and this is a segment of what she said here. The quotation from this statement to the UN states the goal extremely

---

<sup>53</sup> <http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2008-01-06T17%3A38%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=20> Accessed March 29, 2010.

clearly and exemplifies the idea of freedom, homeland, independence and self-determination summarized in a few lines.

*Even as the nightmare continues daily, marking its own dark history, using its own hand to crush our dreams with a goal of taking our hopes away and making the Saharawi people wait in the heat of the sun for a promise of the referendum that hangs in the air leaving its own truth and principle of doing justice against colonialism, against the occupation and giving the people the key of liberation and the gift of self-determination. Even to this day we have not lost hope. This hope is the determination that is written in the hearts of every Saharawi person.*

*As Martin Luther King said a half century ago "I have a dream today." We the Saharawi have a dream today, for the present moment and for the future, for our children of the upcoming generations.*

*A dream to overcome the root of the nightmare.*

*A dream to restore the beauty of our Saharawi identity.*

*A dream to celebrate our Saharawi culture without being insulted.*

*A dream to govern our resources and the ability to be able to share it with the widows and orphans.*

*A dream to see our children's smile again and have a nation to call their own*

*Again as Martin Luther King said half century ago "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed" We [the Saharawi] also have a dream today to see the rise of our colorful flag and to see freedom reigns in our capital city of Layooun in a Free Western Sahara soon.*

In the quotation above; the Sahrawi national identity is demonstrated from the collective end of the continuum between collective and individual identity. The author applies the phrase *We the Saharawi*, and focuses on the collective of the Sahrawi rather than one's own individual identity.

#### **5.3.4 Destiny**

As discussed earlier in the analysis, the stories of the war and the flight to the camps are stories told by the writers' grandparents. The references to the grandparents enclose characteristics of glorious self-sacrifices, heroic deeds and moral commitment, all for the sake of the Sahrawi nation.

The value of independence and self-determination, and the belief and conviction that the Sahrawi will gain these, are extremely important aspects of the national identity. The belief in future independence is crucial to be a good Sahrawi. The author of the posting *the story of my grandmother* explains that her grandmother, despite her struggle, have not given up the hope of returning to homeland. The grandmother in the

quotation below also asserts an important element in the Sahrawi national identity, namely the values of patience and determination. The Sahrawis have patience to keep on waiting and hoping for the point in time when the Sahrawi will return to a free Western Sahara. The Sahrawi have determination and a belief in the destiny of the Sahrawis. The narrative was posted on Zeina, January 08, 2008<sup>54</sup>.

*For me, she is the example of courage and just struggle. Despite all of that she gone through and three decades in one of the most inhospitable corners, she still hopes to go back to her homeland. "They [Moroccans] may have weapons, guns and airplanes; we [Saharawis] have patience and determination", she always tells me.*

The quotation above states a distinction between Moroccans and Sahrawis. This distinction relates the extract to the "us versus the others" balance inherent in national identity. According to Triandafyllidou (1998), the fundamental feature of national identity is that it introduces and stimulates a dichotomous view of the world. This dichotomy signifies a world divided into the *in-group* (us; the nation) and the *others* (members of other nations). Concrete elements of national identity, such as traditions, myths or values, reinforce the nation's identity. What is more, the concrete elements of national identity concretize the distinction between nations, thereby justifying the dichotomy. By differentiating between the in-group and the *others*, the elements of national identity are reinforcing the dichotomy between the in-group and the *others*. (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 597)

As well as stating a distinction between Morocco and the Sahrawi, the grandmother also stresses the content of this distinction. The Moroccans have weapons, guns and airplanes, while the Sahrawis have patience and determination. In chapter two, I described how the asymmetry of power between Morocco and Polisario might have influenced the peace process. The statement above may be interpreted as a realization of the power asymmetry. However, power asymmetry aside, the Sahrawis' patience and determination will ultimately signify the fulfillment of the Sahrawi destiny.

The struggle of the Sahrawis is intricately tied together with their dream of homeland

---

<sup>54</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed October 20, 2009.

and independence. According to Smith (2008, pp. 45-46); the concept of destiny is closely tied together with ideals of struggle and sacrifice. The next quotation is collected from the Zeina and the narrative *Who I admire the most and why*, posted on January 8, 2008<sup>55</sup>.

*He wasn't only the foundation of my life, but also he was a freedom fighter for my country. In 1976 he fought in the war between the Western Sahara, and Morocco. He left his family and his new bride when he went to war. This war cost him his sight, his legs, and his health. He made this sacrifice because of his belief in freedom for my nation, and for my people.*

The struggling and sacrifices might be interpreted as a part and place in time that the Sahrawis have to get through in order to reach the ultimate goal; the point in time where they will reach their freedom, their homeland and their independence. The quotation below offers the perfect representation of the Sahrawi destiny. It compares the Sahrawi destiny with the tradition of the tea process. Each part of the process is compared to a point in time in the history of the Sahrawi people. The quotation is taken from the blog Zeina, the name of the posting is *the tea struggle* and was posted August 5, 2007<sup>56</sup>.

*The Atay is the perfect parallel to the Saharawi struggle for freedom and independence. This struggle is three stages and during each period, the Saharawi people drunk from one of Atay's three cups. Even though the Saharawi struggle has gone through these stages in different order from that of the Atay, still a great comparison can be drawn between the two. The bitter stage began with the Spanish colonization, which last more than a century. When the Saharawis got independence from Spain, however, their celebrations of freedom did not last longer than a couple of months before the double invasion by Morocco and Mauritania. The latter withdrew couple of years later and Morocco took over the whole territory until now. During the bloody war with Morocco, which last for years; mothers lost their sons, orphans lost their parents and families separated from their loved one. During this period, the Saharawi people drunk from the bitter cup. Then the Saharawi struggle entered its soft stage, which is not so soft but a lot like death. This period is the time of waiting in one of the most unbearable corners of the planet. Softly and quietly, the Saharawis wait for the international community to act upon their case. For more than three decades, the Saharawi refugees in south west of Algeria have been dependent on the outside world. Food, water, clothes and health care are basic necessities that we [Saharawis]*

---

<sup>55</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/> Accessed April 7, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2007-09-07T11%3A41%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=7> Accessed January 28, 2010.

have no control over. This stage of our struggle is -as we say in Hassania- the slow death. This were the first two stages of the struggle, however, the question is when will the Saharawis enjoy that last sweet cup of freedom and independence?

### 5.3.5 The Future and National Identity

The narratives of the future concern issues of struggle for independence, dream of homeland and the destiny of the Sahrawi nation. The striving and sacrifice in past and present are interpreted as a part of the destined route to future self-determination. The hope and determination of independence are powerful values and moral obligations inherent in the Sahrawi national identity. These values are vital because they are a part of the Sahrawi destiny. The ideals of sacrifice and struggle are important values because it is through struggle that destiny will become fulfilled.

### 5.4 Conclusion

The strength and stability of any nation can be explained by looking at the cultural sources of national identity (Anthony D. Smith, 2008, p. 46). I have located clear indications of *ethnohistory* and shared memories of the past as well as destiny and the ideals of struggle and sacrifice. The blogs also exhibit apparent signs of sanctification of homeland. The demonstration of cultural sources suggests that the Sahrawi national identity is stabile and strong.

The history of the Sahrawi might be interpreted as a set of phases, or categories of time and events. In the light of the analysis, I choose to categorize the Sahrawi timeline into five phases. The five phases is illustrated in figure three.

<u>Phase 1</u>	<u>Phase 2</u>	<u>Phase 3</u>	<u>Phase 4</u>	<u>Phase 5</u>
<b>Pre-colonial time</b>	<b>Colonization</b>	<b>Occupation and escape</b>	<b>Refugee existence</b>	<b>The future</b>
<b>Golden age</b>	<b>Silenced past</b>	<b>The critical event</b>	<b>Lives on hold</b>	<b>Destiny is Independence</b>

Figure 3

This categorization begins with the distant past where the Sahrawi lived as nomads. At this point in time, the Sahrawi were not yet a nation, but organized in tribes.

However, they shared a number of cultural traditions and customs.

Phase two is the colonial period. At first the Sahrawi lived as nomads, although more and more Sahrawis settled in cities and lost their historical nomadic ways. The colonial era is a silenced past. There is no mention of it in the material.

When Spain withdraws from Western Sahara, Morocco (and Mauritania) moves forward. The Green March marks the date of the Moroccan invasion, and half of the Sahrawi population seek refuge in the south of Algeria, near the city of Tindouf. This flight marks the start of the refugee existence, which has lasted for 35 years. It is a critical event of great importance, that have altered the world view and with the power to redefine previous social order. The third phase refers to this critical event in the history of the Sahrawi.

The fourth phase is the refugee existence. The life of the refugees is put on hold. Their lives are dominated by struggle and sacrifice: First by the bloody war with Morocco, later by the daily struggles of living in refugee camps in the unmerciful Saharan desert.

The fifth phase refers to the future and what is yet to happen. The future holds the promise of freedom and self-determination. Moreover; the future holds the promise of a return to freedom and a return to the authentic Sahrawi ways.

Independence is the goal, the moral commitment and the destiny of the Sahrawi. The destiny is linked to the struggle and sacrifice of past and present. Its moral commitment is connected to the struggle for freedom and self-determination. The goal is to maintain the Sahrawi identity and to gain independence, freedom and self-determination in a free Western Sahara.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

This chapter aims to explore the process involved in national identity, and to discuss implications of the analysis of the Sahrawi national identity.

#### 6.1 The Online Battlefield

I will argue that in the case of the Sahrawi, Internet has become a resource in the conflict, as well as a new setting where the conflict can be acted out. Eriksen (2007) states that nations, diasporas and collective identities thrive on the Internet. The new technology strengthens national identity rather than weakens it. Through the Internet, national identities can be reproduced over vast distances. Populations that are scattered around the world might connect through virtual communities. Immigrant groups might postpone assimilation into their new nations, because the technology makes it possible to maintain contact with friends and family in their homeland, as well as keeping track of national newspapers, TV-channels and more (Eriksen, 2007, p. 7). Eriksen (2007) applies the Kurds and the Kurdish Diaspora, and their use of the Internet, as an example of pre-independence Internet nationalism (Eriksen, 2007, p. 14). The Kurdish Diaspora is substantial, especially in Germany, USA, the UK, Sweden and Australia. The Kurds are a large ethnic group, with distinctive cultural heritage, language and a collective self-identity. Yet, they have never controlled a state. Kurds in exile have created a variety of media resources to make themselves known to the outside world as a nation without a state (Eriksen, 2007, pp. 8-9).

In chapter four, I argued that the analyzed blogs may be part of a larger online *Sahrawi Community*. The analyzed blogs provide links to other Sahrawi blogs and web-pages. These web-pages also provide links back to the blogs FreeWesternSahara and Zeina. Information about the conflict, as well as poems and video-clips about the Sahrawi and their struggle, travels the Internet. The analyzed blogs in this thesis are presented in a public sphere, with stated goals and themes. From the user profile descriptions, as well as the name and address of FreeWesternSahara, it can be argued that the theme of the



blogs is the Sahrawi people and the Western Sahara conflict. One may also argue that the blogs are primarily created for an audience of outsiders, both since the blogs are written in English and because the blogs can be interpreted as information channels about the Sahrawis. If so, then the blogging can be interpreted as a part in the struggle for freedom, self-determination and the fulfillment of destiny for the Sahrawi nation. In this way, Internet generally, and the analyzed blogs specifically, may have become resources in the struggle for a free Western Sahara.

I will argue in the following that in addition to the *Sahrawi online community*, the territorial conflict between Morocco and Polisario might be sustained in an *online battlefield*.

The commentaries below each blog post are mostly supportive. However, some comments have offensive language and offer striking examples of the Western Sahara conflict online. The blogs attempt to shed light on the conflict, and in this way might apply the blogs as resources for the struggle for independence. I have chosen to include some of these comments as a mean of illustrating the online battle.

The first passage is the text on a post called *WesternSahara Isn't for Sale*<sup>57</sup>. The post includes photographs from the capital in Western Sahara; Layoun. The two subsequent passages are from the commentary space below the posting.

*These are pictures from my homeland Western Sahara that I never seen..Someday it will be free than my people and I can walk peacefully on it.*

### Comments:

*who built this amazing infrastructure? Morocco!*

*Too bad you choose to live in Tindouf and eat dirt while your normal compatriots chose Morocco and its Sahara as one united Morocco :) Too bad you are on denial and maybe one day you will wake up and appreciate Morocco and disguise evelish Algeria!*

---

<sup>57</sup> <http://freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/> Accessed May 2, 2010.

*hehe this is a joke! Sahrawis are living the good life in Morocco while you traitors are sucking algerians dicks all day! Most of you travel with Moroccan passports! Did Algeria offered you their useless passport? No. That's what I thought. Morocco is in its Sahara and the Sahara is in Morocco :) hate it or love it's the truth :)*  
*Peace*

In the analysis, I described how the references to grandparents enclose characteristics of heroic deeds and moral commitment for the sake of the Sahrawi nation. The analyzed blogs and their postings might be interpreted as a form of Internet activism. One may argue that the Internet has become a resource in the Sahrawi struggle for independence. The conflict is acted out on the Internet; I refer to this as the *online battlefield*.

This *online battlefield* might suggest a way for the young Sahrawi to continue the struggle for independence. The refugee existence was described as a situation where the lives of the refugees are put on hold. Since the war is over, the Sahrawi do not fight the Moroccans with weapons. The “online battlefield” might suggest an alternative way of fighting for their nation.

The Internet, and the *online battle*, suggests possibilities of further research on the Sahrawi national identity, nationalism and internet related behavior.

## **6.2 Sahrawi Women**

The analyzed narratives are written by women, offer insights of the life of the Sahrawi women and refers to women’s role in the Sahrawi community. When I approached the analysis process, I had not included a gender perspective into the equation. As a result, the theory chapter does not include a gender perspective. However, throughout the analysis process I came to realize that a gender perspective might have proved fruitful to the study. Women’s role in the Sahrawi nation suggests a starting point for further studies on the Sahrawi refugees, by adding a gender perspective to national identity.

The Sahrawi women have traditionally had significant roles in the community. There exists historical accounts of the *Ait Arbeen*’s meetings, the highest social and political

organization in the Sahrawi tribal society, where women participated directly (Rossetti, 2008, pp. 7-8). During the war, men were fighting while the women organized and maintained the camps. In the early days of the camps, the most critical needs were to protect the camps from enemy attacks and provide the population with food, shelter and clothes (Lippert, 1992, p. 647). The Sahrawis established committees on literacy and children's education, health, sanitation, crafts supplies and arts<sup>58</sup>. Every Sahrawi in good health joined a committee. Both members and the leaders of the committees were, and are, mostly women (Lippert, 1992, p. 648).

Sahrawi women have gradually become an integral part of the SADR<sup>59</sup> democracy, management and power. *The National Union of Sahrawi Women* (NUSW) was founded in 1979. The union participated militarily and politically alongside Polisario (Rossetti, 2008, p. 8). During the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of Polisario, held in December 2007, a women's quota were introduced. This fixed quota of 1/3 of Sahrawi women representatives in the run for Parliament became a success. Women achieved more than one third of the total seats in Parliament and three ministries were given to women as well (Rossetti, 2008, p. 9).

According to Lippert (1992, p. 648), only about six women in Western Sahara had secondary-school education prior to the conflict. Most Sahrawi women were illiterate. Polisario started literacy campaigns immediately after the onset of the conflict and the building of the camps. Schools were set up in tents (Lippert, 1992, pp. 648-649). Rossetti (2008, p. 7) states that the SADR based its administrative structure on two principles; detribalization of society and women's imperative role. The education of women has been a priority over the years. The liberation and education of Sahrawi women has been a vital Polisario strategy in order to achieve societal unity among the different tribes and across age groups (Lippert, 1992, p. 650).

---

<sup>58</sup> As the years went by and the conditions of the camps changed, the structure of the committees changed as well. According to Lippert (1992), there were five committees in 1992: Preschool education, health, supplies, production and justice (Lippert, 1992, p. 648).

<sup>59</sup> The Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.

Kandiyoti (1991, pp. 431-432) argues that nationalist movements and national reformers often search the past, and the *golden ages* of the nation, for aspects of a new national identity. In this way, the modern nation becomes more authentic than the period before nationalist movements (Kandiyoti, 1991, pp. 431-432). In the analysis, the role of women is portrayed as an authentic aspect of the Sahrawi community, as well as a unique feature of the Sahrawi nation. The role of women is in the analysis referred to as a part of the description of the pre-colonial time; the *golden age*.

Women regularly serve as cultural markers and symbols of authentic culture and traditions (Kandiyoti, 1991, pp. 431-432). The fact that the blogs are written by women may in itself be an indication of Sahrawi women's role as carriers of national identity. The *Melfha* is a cultural tradition, as well as female clothing, and may work as a cultural marker. The education of women, and their active roles in the community, is a vital component of the Sahrawi national identity. If the Sahrawi women are interpreted as carriers of national identity, then the protection of this identity might be more important for Sahrawi women than it is for Sahrawi men. Seeing as the analyzed narratives are written by women, it could be argued that the analysis represents the national identity of the Sahrawi women.

Kandiyoti stresses that even though nationalist movements often invite women to participate more actively, as educators, workers or even fighters, they nonetheless reaffirm boundaries of culturally accepted female conduct in terms set by the national discourse (Kandiyoti, 1991, pp. 432-433). Whenever women are interpreted as boundary markers of national, ethnic or religious identity, their rights as complete citizens will be jeopardized. In addition, any rights they might have achieved during the nation building process, might be sacrificed for the sake of nation and nationalism at a later point in time (Kandiyoti, 1991, pp. 435,441). If the strong position of Sahrawi women is interpreted as a consequence of nationalism, the role of Sahrawi women may change, given a situation where the national identity becomes less relevant.

### 6.3 Myth of Origin – Myth of Election

The *Myths of Origin* are a part of the cultural sources, or resources, listed in the theory chapter. The most widespread of the *Myths of Origin* is the *myth of common ancestry*. When analyzing the narratives, I did not find any evidence of *Myths of Origin*. Evidence support that the Sahrawi do in fact share a common heritage (Hodges, 1984, p. 4). In spite of these facts, I have not been able to locate any support of a belief in this shared kinship in the analyzed narratives.

Belief in common ancestry is considered crucial by many theorists. According to Smith (2008, pp. 40-41) a belief in common ancestry is vital for group identity, national identity, as well as being a fruitful resource for unity and activate action for common goals. Connor (1994) stresses that the belief in common ancestry is the source of the psychological bond that sustains the nation.

It can be argued that a *Myth of Origin* is built into the narratives, that shared descent is presupposed. In the analysis, there are descriptions of the *cultural* past of the Sahrawi community. The Sahrawi national identity is created from the cultural heritage and traditions from colonial and pre-colonial time (Martin, 2005, p. 569). Although common descent might be an intrinsic part of sharing a cultural heritage over centuries, ancestry is still non-existent in the text of the narratives.

The analysis chapter presented the Sahrawi national identity with descriptions of the cultural sources *territorialization* and sanctification of homeland, *ethnohistory* and ideals of struggle and sacrifice. The cultural foundations of national identity are claimed to sustain four essential dimensions of nationhood, and are related to the power and stability of the national identity. The analysis is closely connected to cultural foundations listed above. These cultural foundations are resources that sustains three of the four dimensions of nationhood; territory, history and destiny (A. D. Smith, 2008, pp. 39-46).

*Myths of Origin* support the community dimension of the nation, together with *Myths*

*of Election*. The *Myths of Election* are not as universal as the myths of common descent. *Myths of Election* entail a belief in the idea that the people are chosen for a specific purpose or mission. One might argue that it is possible the Sahrawi encompass a *Myth of Election*. In this way, one may claim that the Sahrawi destiny; the struggle for freedom and independence, is a special purpose or mission for the Sahrawi people. If the Sahrawi refugees enclose a *Myth of Election* to their cultural resources, then all the dimensions of nationhood are sustained, regardless of if they include any *Myth of Origin* into their national identity presentation.

The cultural foundations of national identity function as resources for a powerful and stable nation and national identity (A. D. Smith, 2008, p. 46). The analyzed narratives offer many examples of cultural sources. The analysis presents different elements of national identity which are intrinsically tied to cultural foundations. One can argue that the narratives demonstrate signs of a nation supported by a powerful, compelling national identity.

#### **6.4 Education**

Education play a great role in my empirical material. As mentioned previously in this thesis, the Sahrawis are proud of the level and extent of education in the refugee camps. The Sahrawi refugees are on the top of literacy rates in Africa (Mundy, 2007, p. 287).

Education might be useful as a tool for nation building, and amplification of national identity. Bass (2008) describes how education is applied in the *Tibet Autonomous Region in China* (TAR), as a vital tool of nation building. Education is used to strengthen Chinese national identity and teach Chinese socialist morality (Bass, 2008).

Kirkerud (2004, pp. 103-107) describes how *cultural training* has become the most important factor in primary education in the camps. Education in the camps aims to teach the children about the cultural history of the Sahrawi, and what it is that identify the Sahrawi as a people. However, the Sahrawi teachers do not tell the children about

differences and conflicts that existed between tribes. Kirkerud (2004, pp. 103-107) asserts that the presentation of the Sahrawi as one powerful united people, with common history and culture, is vital for the legitimacy of the claim of independence. This presentation is also significant in order to maintain and strengthen the unity and spirit in the camps. By incorporating *cultural training* and national identity into the Sahrawi primary school system, education in the camps becomes an important resource in the struggle for independence (Kirkerud, 2004, pp. 103-107).

Since there are no possibilities of higher education in the refugee camps, the Sahrawi leave the camps to study for University degrees in foreign countries (Mundy, 2007, p. 287). While the primary educational system in the camps strengthens the national identity, higher education signifies separation and detachment from the camps.

I have argued that higher education in foreign countries is a resource in the Sahrawi struggle for independence and in this way a resource for the Sahrawi national identity as well. In the analysis, I described the sacrifice of separation as part of the Sahrawi destiny. The striving and sacrifice in past and present is interpreted as a part of the destined route to future self-determination. Because the sacrifice of separation is made in order to study, higher education might be interpreted as a part of the destined route to independence.

When the students return to the camps, they might have lived in a different culture for up to 12-15 years. According to Mundy (2007, p. 287), one of the main social challenges the Sahrawi refugees now faces, is the reintegration of students. This might signify that the preservation or *continuity* of national identity becomes a crucial challenge. The theory chapter described how the national identity is reinterpreted within a continuum between change and continuity.

I previously argued that in order to uphold legitimacy for the struggle for independence, and maintain a united people, it is essential to maintain a consistent national identity. The narratives describe reproduction and continuity of national

identity as an important Sahrawi value. In the analysis, I described how one woman faced critique when returning to the refugee camps wearing a hijab. The hijab was interpreted as a foreign element, not consistent with a Sahrawi national identity. The returning students may in this way be interpreted as a challenge to, or confrontation with, traditional Sahrawi principles.

### **6.5 Collective National Identity**

I described in the analysis how the collective were clearly stated in the phrase: *We the Saharawi*. In the following, I will argue that the Sahrawi national identity presented in this thesis is, on an identity scale, close to a collective identity level.

The analysis described how the notion of the *others* is present in the Sahrawi national identity. National identity production signifies reinforcement of national identity. More importantly, national identity production signifies maintenance of the distinctiveness of the nation, in contrast to that of the *others*. The concept of the *significant other* refers to a nation or community that represents a threat to the *in-group* (us: the nation). A *significant other* may be perceived to threaten the in-group's distinctiveness, or their independence or self-determination. For the Sahrawi, the significance of national identity production is located in its contrast to the *significant other*, interpreted as the Moroccans (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 600).

The Sahrawis struggle to uphold their national identity in a time and setting where their national identity is threatened. I have previously argued that the Sahrawi nation, and national identity, was created after the onset of the conflict with Morocco. The Sahrawi national identity was created, and has from the beginning existed, in a conflict. The national identity of the Sahrawis is defined by the relationship to their *significant other* (Morocco), and as an attempt to remain distinctive from the *significant other*. I have previously argued that the legitimacy of the claim for independence is dependent on the distinctiveness of the Sahrawi nation. Taking this into account, the fulfillment of the Sahrawi destiny relies on the Sahrawis' ability to maintain a distinctive national identity. The *continuity* of national identity is essential



to uphold a stable national identity, thereby maintaining a distinctive nation.

The nature of the refugee camps implies that the refugees can never forget their identity as Sahrawi. The living conditions of the Sahrawi refugees serve as a constant reminder of this fact. In the analysis, I described the refugee existence as *lives on hold*. The national identity becomes a prominent identity, because the refugees are living in a constant state of temporary existence. This temporary existence is signified by the Sahrawi goal for the future; fulfillment of the destiny of independence in a free Western Sahara. Fulfillment of the destiny means that the temporary existence comes to an end. The lives in the refugee camps are interpreted as a step in the process to the goal and destiny. The refugee existence is interpreted a struggle and sacrifice, and the struggle is endured in order to reach the ultimate goal. The most important element of the national identity, presented by Sahrawi refugees in the blog narratives, is the Sahrawi destiny. The destiny of the Sahrawis can be interpreted as independence and a return to the homeland. The ideals of struggle and sacrifice can be interpreted as a path to this destiny. In order to uphold the legitimacy of the claim for independence, the Sahrawi needs to remain distinctive from others, especially the *significant other*; the Moroccans. To “stay Sahrawi” and maintain the *continuity* of the national identity is in this way crucial for the fulfillment of the Sahrawi destiny.

The refugees live in a continuous temporary existence. In the analysis chapter, I referred to the refugee existence as *lives on hold*. The situation in the refugee camps suggests that the role as refugee is not likely to be forgotten. Their lives are put on hold as they wait for the referendum and the return to the homeland. The refugee camps may serve as constant reminders of the conflict, and of the destined future.

I have previously argued that the Sahrawi nation, and national identity, was created in the refugee camps. The Sahrawi national identity is thus a result of a national project and a nation building process (Martin, 2005). It can be argued

The collectivity of the Sahrawi is related to the nature of their national identity. The

conflict and the relationship to the Moroccan, the Sahrawi *significant other*, shape the national identity of the Sahrawi. Collective identity has the inherent ability to mobilize and motivate; cognitively, emotionally and sometimes even morally. The shared perception of a common cause, threat or fate mobilizes and motivates action in the interest of the collectivity (Snow, 2001, pp. 2213-2214). One may argue that the Sahrawi national identity is located on the collective level of the identity scale, because the common threat as well as the destiny mobilizes the Sahrawi to action for the common goal.

According to Renan (1991, p. 19), the memory of sacrifices made in the past unifies and require a shared effort. One may argue that the collective memory of suffering and traumatic events mobilize and motivate the Sahrawi to action for the sake of the nation. In the narratives, the action that is offered is *education for independence*, as well as remembering the cultural heritage and maintain the Sahrawi national identity. I have argued in the discussion that blogging might be a way of action for the sake of the nation. The national identity of the Sahrawi refugees includes a sense of *we-ness*, as well as a notion of a *significant other*. The national identity signifies action for the sake of the collective; the nation. National identity exists in a constant reciprocation between collective and individual identity levels (A. D. Smith, 2003, pp. 33-34). Although the national identity of all nations will include aspects from both prototypes, it can be argued that the Sahrawi national identity presented in the narratives is a collective national identity.

## **6.6 Summary**

I have argued that the blogs might be interpreted as Sahrawi online activism and that there exists an *online battlefield*, where the conflict is acted out. The *online battlefield* supports the struggle for an independent Western Sahara.

Sahrawi women can be interpreted as carriers of national identity. I have offered a short introduction to the role of Sahrawi women in the refugee camps, and suggested a gender perspective on national identity.

It can be argued that the Sahrawi national identity includes a *Myth of Election*, where the Sahrawis are destined to achieve independence and return to the homeland. The cultural foundations of national identity, acquired from the historical Sahrawi *ethnie*, suggest a compelling national identity with power to sustain the nation.

Education is portrayed as a resource in the struggle, as well as a factor that challenges the continuity of national identity. I have argued that the Sahrawi national identity primarily is a collective identity, and that the role of the *significant other* is essential to this interpretation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Concluding Summary

This last chapter is divided into three main parts. I will approach the conclusion from a methodological, empirical and theoretical perspective. In addition, I will discuss the implications of my findings and suggest further research opportunities.

#### 7.1 Methodological Aspects

In this thesis, I have explored the national identity of the Sahrawi refugees as it is *presented* by the Sahrawi refugees themselves. In order to do so, I have analyzed narratives from two blogs.

Blogs are publicly accessible and intended for an audience of readers. I have categorized the analyzed blogs as *theme blogs*, since the blogs propose a clearly stated topic and goal. The aim of the blogs is to raise awareness of the Sahrawi people and the Western Saharan conflict, and to ultimately achieve the dream of independence in a free Western Sahara. Rather than being aimed at fellow Sahrawis, the stated theme and goal suggest that the blogs are primarily directed at an audience of outsiders to the conflict. The fact that the blogs are for the most part written in English, rather than Arabic, add to this notion. In view of the presentation for an audience of outsiders, I have argued that the blogs can be interpreted as a form of Internet activism.

I have situated the blogs in a net of Internet sources, as a part of a *Sahrawi community* online. In addition, I have described how the conflict is acted out in an *online battlefield*. The refugee existence does not propose many ways of contribution to the struggle. Blogging is one manner in which the struggle can be acted out, and the blogs can in this way be interpreted as resources in the struggle for a free Western Sahara.

The presentation of the Sahrawi national identity on the Internet, suggests new field of research within the area of national identity and the Western Saharan conflict.

## 7.2 Empirical Aspects

In the analysis, I described the Sahrawi national identity as a history, divided into five periods of time. The *golden age* refers to the period before colonization. The period is described as the point in time where the Sahrawi lived freely as a nomadic people. The *golden age* is described as the authentic and natural state of life for the Sahrawis. The role of women in the pre-colonial era is described as especially important. Women had a natural and authentic place as active participants in the Sahrawi community.

The period of colonization represents a silenced time in the history of the Sahrawi, with not much reference to at all in the narratives. The flight from the Moroccans, and the settlement in the camps in Algeria, is described as a *critical event* in the history of the Sahrawis. The collective memory of this event includes horrible recollections and dreadful details. The critical event changed the social order in the Sahrawi community, and marked the start of a new period as refugees.

I have referred to the refugee existence as a point in time where the life of the Sahrawi refugees has been *put on hold*. The narratives of the present describe cultural traditions that are carried out in the refugee camps, as well as ideals of struggle and sacrifice. The main sacrifice for Sahrawis today is the sacrifice of separation from family and friends during higher education.

The last of the five phases in Sahrawi history is the future. The ideals of struggle and sacrifice are interpreted as a part of a destined path towards the future. The dream of the future is a dream of homeland and independence. The dream of homeland signifies an example of *territorialization* and sanctification of homeland. Education is portrayed as a resource in the struggle for a free Western Sahara.

## 7.3 Theoretical Aspects

The concrete elements of national identity include values, symbols, traditions, myths and memories. In the analysis chapter, I described the elements of the Sahrawi national identity.

The cultural foundations of the Sahrawi national identity are acquired from the historical Sahrawi *ethnie*. In the analysis, I described the presence of *ethnohistory*, *territorialization* and ideals of struggle and sacrifice. I argued in the discussion that the Sahrawis have a *Myth of Election*, as they share a strong conviction of the Sahrawi destiny. Although the narratives do not propose any descriptions of *Myths of Origin*, the narratives still suggest a powerful, compelling national identity based on the historical Sahrawi *ethnie*, and cultural aspects of the identity of the nation.

I have argued that the national identity of the Sahrawi refugees is a primarily collective identity, rather than an identity on the individual level. The collectivity of the Sahrawi refugees is closely related to the *significant other*, which in the case of the Sahrawi nation are the Moroccans. The *significant other* is perceived to threaten the nation and the national identity. In order to uphold legitimacy for the claim of independence, the Sahrawis need to remain distinctive from “others”, especially the “significant other”. The Sahrawi national identity becomes in this way supported through the reinforcement of the dichotomy between the *in-group* (us: the nation) and the *significant other*.

Education presents challenges to the *continuity* of the Sahrawi national identity. When the Sahrawis move to foreign countries in order to study, they will also be subjected to other cultures and values. When the Sahrawi students return to the camps, they have attained cultural experiences that may be interpreted as threatening to the Sahrawi national identity. The *continuity* of the Sahrawi national identity can be interpreted as a goal in order to remain distinctive, and uphold legitimacy for the claim of independence. The narratives emphasize that the Sahrawis keep their traditions and principles, no matter how many years they have stayed abroad. The notion of “staying Sahrawi” is an important value. The maintenance and *continuity* of the Sahrawi national identity in order to remain a distinctive nation, adds to the power of the national identity.

The most important element of the national identity, presented by Sahrawi refugees in the blog narratives, is the Sahrawi destiny. The destiny of the Sahrawis is an independent Western Sahara. The refugees live in a continuous temporary existence. In the analysis chapter, I referred to the refugee existence as *lives on hold*. The situation in the refugee camps suggests that the identity as refugee will have a prominent role. Their lives are put on hold as they wait for the referendum and the return to homeland. The refugee camps may serve as constant reminders of the conflict, and of the destined future. In this way, the refugee existence may strengthen the Sahrawi national identity.

I have previously argued that the Sahrawi nation, and national identity, was created in the refugee camps. The Sahrawi national identity is thus a result of a national project and a nation building process (Martin, 2005). I have referred to the Sahrawi nation as a *nation in exile*. The Sahrawi refugees live in refugee camps, however they are also part of the SADR state and the Sahrawi nation. The extraordinary Sahrawi situation may help explain why the notions of destiny, homeland and impence hold such prominent roles in the Sahrawi national identity.

In this thesis, I have described the Sahrawi national identity as it is presented by the Sahrawi refugees in online blogs. My findings are generally in accordance with the theory suggested in chapter three. I have described the elements of the Sahrawi national identity, and their relation to the cultural foundations of the nation. The process of reinterpretation of national identity is addressed through the description of *continuity* of the national identity, as well as a description of a collective level of identity.

However, the theory provided in chapter three does not include a gender perspective on national identity. One may interpret the active and influential role of women in the Sahrawi community as a result of the national project of Polisario. In this way, the liberation of Sahrawi women may represent a resource in the struggle for independence. In this study, a gender perspective might have been a productive

approach, seeing as the narratives are written by women. Gender perspective on national identity represents a future research opportunity on the Sahrawi refugees and their national identity.

The interpretation of education as a resource in the struggle for independence represents a fresh point of view, and may offer further research opportunities, within research on the Sahrawis and their national identity.

This thesis has explored the demonstration of a national identity in online blogs. I have described how the blogs have become part of an *online battlefield*, and in this way a resource in the struggle for an independent Western Sahara. The demonstration of national identity on the Internet, as well as the description of the *online battlefield*, suggests that it is possible to combine national identity theory and aspects of Internet behavior. In this way, my findings might imply an addition to theories of national identity.

I have argued that the national identity of the Sahrawi refugees is characterized by its continuous and collective nature. The extraordinary situation of the Sahrawi refugees is an important factor in the explanation of the importance and content of the national identity. The core of the Sahrawi national identity signifies the destiny, dream and goal of an independent Western Sahara.



## List of References

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2 ed.). London: Verso.
- Bass, C. (2008). Tibetan primary curriculum and its role in nation building. *Educational Review*, 60(1), 39-50.
- Bhatia, M. (2001). The Western Sahara under polisarario control. *Review of African Political Economy*, 28(88).
- Bontems, C. (1987). The Government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. *Third World Quarterly*, 9(1), 168-186.
- Cerulo, K. A. (Ed.) (2001) *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. New Jersey: Elsevier Ltd.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*: Sage Publications.
- Chatty, D., & Crivello, G. (2005). *Children and Adolescents in Sahrawi and Afghan Refugee Households: Living with the effects of Prolonged Armed Conflict and Forced Migration*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre.
- Connor, W. (1994). *Ethnonationalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cuervo, J. I. A. (2007). The Ancient History of Western Sahara and the Spanish Colonisation of the Territory. In K. Arts & P. P. Leite (Eds.), *International Law and the Question of Western Sahara*. Leiden: International Platform of Jurists for East Timor (IPJET).
- Das, V. (1995). *Critical Events. An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Durch, W. J. (1993). Building on Sand: UN Peacekeeping in the Western Sahara. *International Security*, 17(4), 151-171.
- Eriksen, T. H. (2007). Nationalism and the Internet. *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1).
- Friden, S. M. (2009). Student Peace Prize goes to Rabab Amidane Retrieved 06.01.2010, 2010, from <http://www.studentpeaceprize.org/news/article/show/7>
- Gellner, E. (1997). *Nationalism* New York: New York University Press.
- Gellner, E. (1998). Forord av Thomas Hylland Eriksen *Nasjonalisme*. Oslo: Spartacus Forlag.
- Hannum, H. (1996). *Autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination: the accomodation of conflicting rights*: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hemeida, A. A. (2006-2009). FreeWesternSahara Retrieved 04.14, 2009, from <http://www.freewesternsahara.blogspot.com/>
- Hodges, T. (1982). *Historical Dictionary of Western Sahara*. Metuchen N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, INC.
- Hodges, T. (1984) *The Western Saharans. Vol. 40. The Minority Rights Group*. London: The Minority Rights Group.
- Hookway, N. (2008). 'Entering the blogosphere': some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research*, 8(91).
- HumanRightsWatch (2008). *Human Rights in the Western Sahara and the Tindouf Refugee Camps*.
- ICG (2007a). *Western Sahara: Out of the Impasse*. Cairo/Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- ICG (2007b). *Western Sahara: The Cost of the Conflict*. Cairo/Brussels: International Crisis Group.

- Irwin-Zarecka, I. (1994). *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1991). Identity and its Discontent: Women and the Nation. *Millenium - Journal of International Studies*, 20.
- Kirkerud, E. H. (2004). "Our homeland is not our destination, it's our destiny": Diaspora og nasjonsbygging blant vest-sahariske flyktninger i Algerie. UiO, Oslo.
- Lippert, A. (1992). Sahrawi Women in the Liberation Struggle of the Sahrawi People. *The University of Chicago Press*, 17(3), 636-651.
- Malkki, L. (1992). National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1).
- Martin, P. S. (2004). Briefing: Western Sahara: Road to perdition? *African Affairs*, 103(413), 651-660.
- Martin, P. S. (2005). Nationalism, identity and citizenship in the Western Sahara. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 10(3), 565-592.
- Martin, P. S., & Lakhali, K. A. y. M. (2006). Moroccan Autonomy for the Western Sahara: A solution to a Decolonisation Conflict or a Prelude to the Dismantling of a Kingdom? *Grupo de Estudios Estrategicos, Collaboration number 1106*,
- Mundy, J. A. (2007). Performing the nation, pre-figuring the state: the Western Saharan refugees, thirty years later. *Modern African Studies*, 45(2), 275-297.
- Olsson, C. (2006). The Western Sahara conflict - Chronology. In C. Olsson (Ed.), *Current African Issues No. 33: The Western Sahara Conflict. The role of natural resources in decolonization*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Renan, E. (1991). What is a Nation? (M. Thom, Trans.). In H. K. Bhabha (Ed.), *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rossetti, S. (2008). *Formal and Informal Gender Quotas in State-Building: The Case of the Sahara Arab Democratic Republic*. Paper presented at the Australian Political Studies Association Conference.
- Sahara-watch (2010). Retrieved 06.01.2010, 2010, from [www.sahara-watch.blogspot.com](http://www.sahara-watch.blogspot.com)
- Shelley, T. (2007). Resistance and Colonialism: Building the Sahrawi Identity. In K. Arts & P. P. Leite (Eds.), *International Law and the Question of Western Sahara*. Leiden International Platform of Jurists for East Timor (IPJET).
- Skogseth, G. (2006). "Intifadaen" i Vest-Sahara og i vestsahariske miljøer i Marokko 2005, situasjonen i ettertid: Utlendingsforvaltningens fagenhet for landinformasjon (LANDINFO).
- Smith, A. D. (1981). States and Homelands: the Social and Geopolitical Implications of National Territory. *Millenium - Journal of International Studies*, 10, 187-202.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National Identity*: Penguin books.
- Smith, A. D. (2001). Will and Sacrifice: Images of National Identity. *Millenium - Journal of International Studies*, 30, 571-584.
- Smith, A. D. (2003). *Nationalisme. Teori, ideologi, historie* (A. Nygaard, Trans.). Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Smith, A. D. (2008). *The Cultural Foundations of Nations. Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Smith, L. E. (2005). The struggle for Western Sahara: What future for Africa's last colony? *The Journal of North African Studies*, 10(3), 545-563.

- Snow, D. A. (2001). Collective Identity and Expressive Forms. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Vol. 12, pp. 2212-2219). Oxford: Elsevier Science
- Sola-Martin, A. (2006). Lessons from MINURSO: A contribution to new thinking. *International Peacekeeping*, 13(3), 366-380.
- Thomson, A. (2004). *An Introduction to African Politics* (2 ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Triandafyllidou, A. (1998). National identity and the 'other'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21(4), 593-612.
- UJSARIO, & CJE (Writer) (2006). Lives on hold. In A. Medina, M. Sierra & M. Salama (Producer).
- Vest-Sahara.no (2009, 13.02.2007). Flyktningene Retrieved 29.05, 2009, from <http://www.vest-sahara.no/index.php?cat=53&art=0>
- Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology. Adventures in Theory and Method*: Open University Press.
- Zeina (2007-2008). Retrieved 04.14, 2009, from <http://saharawiyazeina.blogspot.com/>
- Zerubavel, E. (2003). *Time Maps. Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.