

„Unity in Exile“



The Practice of Homeland and Nation Amongst Young Sahrawis in Exile

Master's thesis in Visual Anthropology by

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Summary

The ethnographic film „Unity in Exile. Becoming Sahrawi“ and the related thesis are based on a multisited, three-month fieldwork of which I spent two months in the Sahrawi refugee camp El Aaiun in Algeria. The additional weeks focused on the diaspora group in Germany. The film is the result of an intense exchange with young Sahrawis in the age between eight and thirty who grew up in the camps and of which the majority also spent a longer period abroad before returning to the camps.

Sahrawis are the native population of Western Sahara – a country that is occupied by Morocco since 1975, following Spanish colonialism. Ever since, a great number of the population lives in five refugee camps that are located in the Algerian desert, however having own governmental structures under the liberation movement „Polisario Front“. Due to the long period in exile that is also caused by international political ignorance and passivity towards the conflict, new generations were born and raised outside of their „homeland“. However, Western Sahara remains the key symbol of the Sahrawi struggle and fight for independence.

The fundamental question that the research was based on was how the young generations that grow up in exile construct their relation to the homeland that they have never experienced themselves. How is this omnipresent relation, which forms the basis of continuous political activism, nurtured by public accounts and shared collective memories? An important observation in this context is the duality of perceiving the camps as familiar „home space“ simultaneously with learning about the „other“ home and place of origin. Also, the voluntary return of many Sahrawis from abroad demonstrates how the camps themselves become „home“ and a place to long for: in my view the motivation of Sahrawis to return is not only to support their families but to stay in the familiar space or the place where they know the way of living since their childhood. Considering this duality, film and thesis consequently examine the ways in which the strong relation to Western Sahara is sustained and how young Sahrawis learn to represent and ultimately perform the „true“ discourse of homeland and a unified nation in exile. Therefore I seek to demonstrate how the camps themselves become constructive spaces of identification and national agenda.

The process of learning also entails at times conflicting perspectives and narratives, which become especially evident in the interaction of children and adults in the film: I

argue that it is important to examine the ways that children learn to represent a „true“ image of Sahrawi refugees, an influential part of this image being the notion of „suffering“. The film shows how children internalize dominant societal discourses, that mostly become relevant to them when encountering non-Sahrawi „audience“. With pointing to my presence – and especially to the aim of conducting a film project – the thesis argues that I represented a potential audience „out there“ that might support the Sahrawi struggle: hence, film and thesis thematize how my presence influenced social reality and how I became involved in a dispute of being politically engaged and preserve the position of a „neutral observer“.

In my view, the ordinary representation of dominant narratives points to the common struggle being an inherent part of daily life for Sahrawis. Furthermore, the contemporary struggle is what gives their lives in the camps – which is characterized by a constant state of stagnation – a meaning, and vigorously constructs national identification. At the same time, whilst most efforts circle around considerations of how to support the cause, the actual reason of the conflict, Western Sahara, remains a very abstract concept for young Sahrawis: as one participant puts it, it remains a „*principle* to love“. Though many interlocutors feel connected to their country of origin through keeping traditions of ancestors alive, it is however not only the geographical place as such that is the motivation for the continuous struggle, but a sense of injustice that contributes to a self-perception as Sahrawi nation – a nation that is formed outside of the homeland.

Access to the film product “Unity in Exile. Becoming Sahrawi” as part of the thesis is provided with the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0By22z3NerBCDWEJ5QnNmMi1ndTA/view?usp=sharing>

List of Abbreviations and Glossary

Frente Polisario – Popular Front for the Liberation of al-Saqiat al-Hamra’ and Rio de Oro (Polisario)

MINURSO – United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

NGO – Non Governmental Organization

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization

SADR – Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

UJSARIO – Sahrawi Youth Union

UN – United Nations

al-badiya – by the Polisario liberated (eastern) area of Western Sahara

al-nakba – „the catastrophe“: proclamation of the state Israel in 1948 that caused the expulsion of Palestinians

hammāda – local word for the desert in which camps are located

khayma – tent

milhafa – traditional wrap robe for Sahrawi women

shahyd – „martyr“

taḍāmun – solidarity

wakhīrd – word for describing a person contributing to personal well-being

waṭan – meaning of homeland

wilāya – meaning „district/ prefecture“, here naming different camps

1. Introduction

*„[Western Sahara]... It is our country ... something like a principle to love it, to fight for it. To make our children and any generation to know about it and love it and to be ready since their childhood to fight for it ...
But like home? For me, it is the camps!“*

The prevenient question of the fieldwork that this thesis and the ethnographic film „Unity in Exile. Becoming Sahrawi“ are based upon, was how generations of people growing up in exile – more precisely in refugee camps – perceive their homeland. What is the foundation for their strong connectedness to this country of desire, that they however have never experienced themselves and therefore constructing their relation entirely on memories, history, and accounts from other people?

The particular situation of the Sahrawi population of which a large number is growing up outside of their homeland (*waṭan*) Western Sahara shows the extent to which this *waṭan*¹ is „real“ to them – even though based on imaginative processes – and influences their lives profoundly. For Sahrawis – and in this case mostly referring to the young generations which are spending their lives in exile – it is undoubtedly the primary aim and vision to reach independence and return to their homeland.

Paradoxically, I encountered that this constantly envisioned aim and the related narrations are not including a future actually *living* in an independent Western Sahara. Although the vast majority of Sahrawis believe in their return – and, in my view, they need to believe in it to cope with the conditions under which they currently live – at the same time the future is extremely uncertain. The introductory citation of the film participant Mahjouba indicates the conflict that Western Sahara functions as principle – as it will be shown it is almost a moral duty – that Sahrawis learn to long for, while the achievement of independence remains in an unknown future. Hence, she expresses the desire of a return to the homeland while her tangible „home“ is the refugee camp in which national identification is nurtured.

When Mahjouba asked the children of my host family what they want to become in the future they responded very reservedly and uncertain. Her explanation was the following: „That is the problem: in Germany and other countries, the parents are sure about the future... so they [the children] could imagine what they become. But here our

1 All transliterations throughout this thesis have been developed in consideration of the „IJMES Transliteration Chart“ of the Journal of Middle Eastern Studies.

future is unknown. So it is rare to find someone who knows what to be because we don't know what is coming!“ Still, I sought to find out imaginative processes towards a (yet uncertain) future Western Sahara and how these imaginations would determine the ways that homeland and identity are perceived (Crapanzano, 2004: 17). I would even expect that *because* people are living under the exposed conditions, there must be some imagination or daydreaming related to the *waṭan*, even if it seems unreachable. I was surprised to experience the contrary: most people I spoke with never really thought about what their lives will be like in an independent Western Sahara. Instead, during fieldwork I realized that different recurring public discourses and narratives demonstrated the extent to which the struggle for independence itself is an inherent, prioritized part of daily lives since decades.

Precisely these discourses and how they affect individual Sahrawis of the „young“ generations in their perception of the homeland and their national identification today, is at the center of this thesis. Based on the introductory question about how Sahrawis relate themselves to the land that they have never personally lived in, it asks for how this very personal relation is embedded and in exchange with public discourses – or more specifically Sahrawi nationalism.

Examining both factors of personal and official accounts, I experienced contradictions in different narratives which developed to a central theme for both film and thesis. I will thus distinguish between „dominant“ and „personal“ narratives. These contradictions have been as well observed by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh in her study about official gender discourses and representations amongst Sahrawis: „(...) although the mainstream representation dominates Sahrawi and Western accounts of the camps, careful analysis reveals multiple contradictions and discontinuities on a variety of fronts” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 171).

It is important to elaborate in this context on notions of power because „each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true“ (Foucault, 1980: 131). Foucault argues – and what I regard as important for the case in point – that it is precisely a matter of power and its processes that enable to distinguish what is perceived as false and truth. In many situations during the period that I spent in the refugee camps in Algeria, I was stunned by the at times conflicting nature of dominant and personal narratives and to which extent the dominance of the former revealed itself. As Foucault states, „Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects

of power which it induces and which extend it“ (Foucault, 1980: 133).

As it will be argued in this thesis, the „true“ dominant discourses – of which the most common was described with „we are suffering here since more than forty years“ – root in the powerful system of Sahrawi nationalism. In my opinion, it does not only concern narrations but as well perceptions and actions, which are constantly practiced from the collective point of view and reflect societal conventions. In addition, I regard this practice as part of a learning process. Representing „the nation“ or Sahrawi refugee society is based on a process of rehearsing from an early age on. I will examine how Sahrawis growing up in exile internalize discourses and how they learn to represent „Sahrawiness“, so to speak.

To sum up, this thesis argues that the demonstration of a collective struggle for independence remains the highest priority amongst Sahrawis growing up in exile. Furthermore, I argue that the country Western Sahara remains a rather abstract concept, a „future utopia“ that they *learn* to long for. Thus the motivation for their personal dedication and the absolute aim for independence is not necessarily based on the geographical space per se but on the deeply rooted perception of being victims of political injustice. However Western Sahara functions as constantly memorized, glorified homeland and as legitimation for nationalist agenda.

Moreover, the thesis will examine and reflect on the ways in which the ideals of homeland and nation are practiced and ultimately performed in the context of an ethnographic film project. It is this performative aspect that prompts to redefine the one-sided image of refugee camps. Following Foucault who perceives „power“ not only in terms of oppression but of constructive nature, I argue that the camps can be seen as spaces of development and productive practices (Malkki, 1991: 222) instead of the unilateral view of refugee camps as places of subjugation and loss of „culture“. National agenda as „technique of power“ that characterizes the refugee camps ultimately leads to a process of *becoming* and learning refugeeness (Malkki, 1991: 222).

Thesis overview

To provide contextual knowledge, the subsequent part reflects first on the ethnographic background, here focusing on the most important historical frame. An individual abstract will deal with the „roots of nationalism“, arguing that the discourse „nationalism“ was actively generated and performed as political strategy facing the particular conflict situation. Furthermore, the chapter will provide a theoretical and

methodological frame: the former explaining why it is of importance to examine the concept of nationalism, the latter presenting main methodological approaches and ethical challenges that are important for the thesis' context.

The following chapter will discuss the relevance of the topic, beginning with my personal motivation and background ideas, after it will briefly relate to academic relevance considering former publications. Chapter four elaborates on the central concept of nationalism and its rehearsing, before linking it to empirical material in the analysis.

The analysis itself is divided into six paragraphs, each of them with a varying focus that are however closely related to each other: the first is using different examples from the fieldwork and the film to examine on how Sahrawis growing up in exile are a part of the national agenda that is embodied in a learning process. In this context, the second chapter asks for how a „homeland“ is constructed and represented from generations growing up in exile, in particular considering how homeland and traditions are used to uphold the belief in a Sahrawi nation. Here, it also points to differences and parallels to the Palestinian diaspora which is often compared with the Sahrawi case. The following chapter goes into detail with the notion of „solidarity“, that binds in my view Sahrawis firstly to the political conflict, and secondly to the home-camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013: 633) and homeland. The fifth chapter of the analysis examines how the national agenda and also self-stigmatization as political strategy are expressed through the use of certain dominant narratives. Moreover, in the chapter „camera witness“, I argue that these narratives are especially important regarding the encounter of a certain „audience“, which also reflects on my commonly perceived role as „non-Sahrawi“ filmmaker. Hence it asks for how my project and research was part of an intended representation itself.

The research and film project was conducted as multisited three-months-long fieldwork, of which I spent two month in the camp El Aaiun living with a host family. The focus of the third month was the Sahrawi diaspora in Germany, and later I also had the chance to visit a Sahrawi group on Mallorca.

2. Framing the Field

„Africa's last colony“: ethnographic contextualization

The camps in which the major part of fieldwork took place are located in the southwestern Algerian desert since 1975. Different interlocutors described the time of the arrival of Sahrawi refugees commonly as follows: As the people searched for refuge, children suffered and some died on the fleeing while Morocco was bombing with phosphor on civilians. When people reached the area, they faced very severe conditions: there were no clothes, no food, no schools and the *khaymas* (tents) just consisted out of pieces of cloths. However, „Algeria opened the door“ for the refugees. It is no coincidence that these accounts have been told by a female, elderly interlocutor because in the beginning it were mostly women building up and „taking care of the camps“ while men fought in the war against the Moroccan and Mauritanian invaders.

Precisely, the camps are located in close distance to the border of Western Sahara – the Sahrawi country of origin and reason for the still ongoing conflict. Its eastern area consists mostly of uninhabited desert, which is in addition a densely land-mined territory. Nevertheless, there exist some small, scattered settlements by Sahrawis (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 273) who live for example as camel herders. This „liberated“ area – in the local Hassaniya dialect called *al-badiya* – belongs to the liberation movement „Frente Polisario“, hence to the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) which has been established and announced in 1976 (Mundy, 2007: 280). *Al-badiya* is circumscribed by a sand wall of 2700 kilometers length – commonly also called the „wall of shame“ – that has been constructed by Morocco (Herz, 2013: 371) and is until today mined and guarded by the military.

The larger, western part of Western Sahara is controlled by Morocco since the territory has been invaded with the „Green March“ in 1975, simultaneously with the withdrawal of the previous colonial power Spain. This „march“ caused the described exodus of Sahrawis as the armed conflict with the Polisario intensified and civilians were threatened by Moroccan bombardments (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 27). However, the claims to the territory by Morocco and Mauritania were clearly denied by the International Court of Justice (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 26).

Today the native population of Sahrawis is outnumbered twice or third by Moroccan settlers in the occupied territory and is struggling amongst others with suppression of freedom of speech going along with a „media embargo“ (Dann, 2014: 50).

Nevertheless, especially young generations growing up here are often the impetus of protests for independence (Mundy, 2005: 279). Different authors and reportings describe increasing nationalist movements and uprisings in the territory (Mundy, 2005; Smith, 2007).



Figure 1: Map in the Sahrawi „national resistance museum“: left of the red line the occupied area („Sahara occidental“), right the liberated area, the upper right corner shows the location of the camps.

Although being dependent on humanitarian aid support, the camps themselves are controlled by the Polisario and operate under a separate Sahrawi legal system, hence not under Algerian law (Farah, 2009: 62). Generally the camps are perceived as self-governed space in which the Polisario is offered a chance to „practice“ forms of governance that would be established after gaining independence (Mundy, 2007: 275). Hence it can be said that the camps function to transform „refugees‘ into virtual citizens of a Sahrawi state-in-exile and entrenching a sense of belonging to a unified Sahrawi nation” (Farah, 2009: 58). Because of the long existence of the camps, new generations of Sahrawis are growing up here, most of them yet have the chance to study or travel abroad with partner programs of the Polisario and countries as Algeria, Spain or Cuba (Muñoz-Mallén, 2014: 439).

Considering that no country worldwide recognizes the Moroccan claim on Western Sahara, it needs to be examined *why* Sahrawis are still forced to endure in the desert, the *hammāda*. At the core of the Polisario demands lies the final implementation of a referendum that offers the chance for independence, which was initially supported by the UN (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013: 642). Still, after the ceasefire of 1991 – with

renewing these resolutions that should include clear guidelines and goals – the referendum has not been implemented until today. Simultaneously with the ceasefire, the „United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara“ (MINURSO) was established in order to organize the referendum, consequently failing in its agenda mostly due to Moroccan forces hindering the voting procedures (Farah, 2009: 60).

Therefore Western Sahara is commonly called „Africa's last colony“ (Smith, 2005; Muñoz-Mallén, 2010) because it is the only country that did not complete a decolonization process although Spain „confirmed its intentions to hand over administrative power of the territory to a Polisario-led government“ (Farah, 2009: 61) in 1975. With the passing decades after the ceasefire, the conflict disappeared increasingly from international political and medial agenda. Today, it is only being scarcely mentioned for example in contexts of growing tensions at the border to the occupied territory or the exploitation of resources (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 30), of which different countries profit.

The roots of Sahrawi nationalism

Before Western Sahara was colonized by Spain, the native population of Western Sahara lived nomadic and as such in tribal structures. Even with the spread of Spanish power in the 19th and 20th century (Herz, 2013: 370) and the construction of first larger cities as El Aaiun, many Sahrawis preferred to live „in the nature“ and to continue their nomadic lifestyle. With colonialism, a „world of fixed boundaries“ was introduced, at the same time establishing concepts about the world being geographically separated in communities (Billig: Ch.4, 4).

Nomadic groups moved through areas designated as Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria or Mali, keeping trading relations alive (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 18). Although living scattered over the whole country without administrative boundaries, there existed local power structures which one interlocutor described as follows:

„The Sahrawis lived there but [there was] no state. But there is some kind of regime and this consists of tribes which governed the people in Western Sahara. All the tribes agreed that there are some representatives... to represent them if there is a conflict, if there is a war, if there is a dispute between tribes... they solve these problems peacefully.“

He continued explaining that these tribes or families formed a group of tents, consisting of four to six families with a distance to the next settlement of about one hundred kilometers. When I asked him what his parents told him about the nomadic life, he

responded:

„They told me life was easy and difficult at the same time. Easy because they were living in normal, natural ways and there were no problems as occupation, or problems of money or gas (...) they didn't think about the time or the car, or something like this. They lived on the nature.

Hard also because they needed to move around to bring goods, maybe by going to neighboring countries to bring goods; they need to go to a water source, need to collect wood for cooking... but it was good for them that life!“

Already under Spanish colonization, the „Frente Polisario“ – founded by students in 1973 (Mundy, 2007: 279) – aspired a social order moving away from these traditional structures (Herz, 2013: 371) in order to create a sense of comradeship. The efforts increased since 1974 when the Polisario released a „program of national action“ that aimed to destroy the old tribal hierarchies (Farah, 2009: 63) which have been the reason for internal tensions amongst Sahrawi tribes. Therefore – in the view of the political leaders of SADR – the tribal ideology conflicted with national intentions and interests (Farah, 2009: 83). Instead of being fragmented into individual families or tribes – and for example distinguish in „scholarly“ tribes – the overall aim was to continue with a unifying process amongst the society. In addition, the debate about Sahrawi ethnicity was of great importance in first attempts for holding the referendum in the 1970s: „Given that tribal identification is the primary basis for the referendum for self-determination (...), precisely which tribes are defined as "Sahrawi" rather than "Moroccan" or "Mauritanian" is politically and legally highly significant“ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 17).

Tribal identification remained a daily issue still in the 1990s within the scope of a MINURSO identification program that called for families, groups and tribes registered by Spain in the colonial era (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 31). Thus, paradoxically, the previously rejected tribal belongingness became “criterion for the construction of nation” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 31).

Even though these processes are highlighted in the different literature on the topic – for example with Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh writing about how tribalism was actively suppressed by notions of comradeship (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013: 641) – they ignore how the genealogical construct is still of importance today. As one interlocutor affirmed, most of all amongst members of older generations it is still a present topic, even though uncomfortable to speak about: it is common that everyone knows which „family“ or „tribe“ he or she belongs to and how it is – or rather was, in former days – related to

another group.

Even though „tribalism“, or rather the tribal genealogical structures are cautiously treated topics, the importance of „tribal traditions“ was however openly explained by different fieldwork interlocutors. Additionally, they were constantly outlined as central part of Sahrawi society and it became clear that the majority of young generations living in the camps aspire to keep these traditions alive. In my view, the attempt to revitalize „cultural heritage“ that roots in the era of nomadism, maintains on the one hand the perception of a unified Sahrawi culture and on the other hand serves to culturally dissociate oneself and thus stressing cultural uniqueness. This aspect is especially relevant concerning the relation to Moroccan society, as I heard numerous times that it is necessary to stress cultural differences to Sahrawis. For instance, one film participant said that it is important to protect the traditions because the Moroccan king claims that Sahara is part of Morocco and therefore Sahrawi people part of Moroccans (Mundy, 2007: 278). In this regard she argued that it is of even greater significance to stress distinct traditions in terms of language, clothing or the use of medicine. She summarized in this discussion: „Traditions are the symbol of that you are a nation“ (28:15). Hence I argue that traditions are perceived as an essential part of the national identification that indicate cultural uniqueness.

As it will become clear throughout the thesis, „unity“ is an important ideal for Sahrawi society in exile and follows the Polisario political strategy of maintaining societal equality when striving for the collective goal of independence. Moreover, representing – and consequently *practicing* – unity is particularly important to demonstrate the existence of a nation in exile that faces the loss of the homeland. To conclude with, the idea of unity and solidarity that was motivated as alternative concept to tribal division, is crucial for a belief in the continuity of a Sahrawi nation claiming independence.

Theoretical introduction: a nation in exile

Briefly I want to discuss here why it is of importance to include nationalism as a concept, considering that Sahrawis still cannot claim the country of Western Sahara their own. As Malkki argues, social settings of displacement demand to scrutinize anthropological concepts of societies as bounded, territorialized units, concluding that „in the national order of things, refugeeness is itself an aberration of categories, a zone of pollution“ (Malkki, 1995: 4). Therefore contexts of a population in exile can be used

to examine how this situation is influencing imaginative processes of constructing nationness and identity (Malkki, 1995: 3).

Additionally, in the case of Sahrawis, it needs to be stressed that they follow an undaunted belief in the rightful legitimation to claim the country. This absolute conviction that their homeland Western Sahara belongs „to them“, even if they do not *own* it entirely, leads in my view to the perception that they are not stateless, but that the country of desire is „stolen“ from them. It seems almost like a belief in the rightful destiny (Smith, 2010: 33, Malkki, 1995: 238), based on a legitimate claim to their land, the land of their ancestors.

At the same time the Sahrawi cause demonstrates, how the „zone of pollution“ - being refugee outside of the homeland – serves as breeding ground for nationalism in a „supralocal, transnational form“ (Malkki, 1995: 6). The following comment of the film participant Hamdi who currently lives in Germany underlines this aspect, by challenging the importance of the geographical space per se: „I think that for us it is not an issue just about a piece of land. Maybe it is important for our parents because they lived there and experienced it. But for us [the young generation] it is not just about the land but about the agreement of a nation. From people with an own culture and own language and the world tried to get rid of [these people].“

This statement demonstrates on the one hand the perceived inequity and on the other hand that the Sahrawi demands go beyond a „piece of land“ but the recognition of their rights. Also it is argued that Sahrawis need to be seen as a nation with „own culture“, though being scattered in different countries outside of their territory. Therefore, the situation of Sahrawis in exile illustrates not only processes of a collective, imaginative nation but also how it is uniformly practiced in everyday life.

Notes on methodology

What does it imply to do research – in particular research combined with ethnographic filmmaking – in a refugee camp? Although many Sahrawis regard it as important to stress that their cause is rather of political than of humanitarian nature, the official discourse of „being a refugee“ cannot be neglected and requires to be kept in mind. This is especially relevant when analyzing the relation between Sahrawis and non-Sahrawis: in the camps they are mostly NGO-workers, journalists, policy makers and researchers.

The state of being refugee as such shall neither be the core of thesis nor film. However, I argue that the *consequences* of this condition are of critical importance and

influenced the research in many regards because the public perception of Sahrawis as refugee society determines political strategies and representations. Consequently, the public representation involves a performative character because the existence of outside observers impacts the perception of Sahrawi self (Fiddian-Qasmiyah, 2014: 14). How the official discourse and individual perceptions about „refugeeness“ determine each other reciprocally will be further discussed throughout the thesis. Here, I seek to address on the one hand the methodological approaches of my research and on the other hand its challenges which have been primarily of ethical nature.

A central aspect of the methodology has been to reveal my intentions and main ideas to potential participants and in addition, to include their suggestions, ideas, and critique especially for the film. Therefore I aimed to work in collaboration, one reason for this being to avoid generalization and at the same time stigmatization, and instead following individual perspectives. Rather than aspiring a general representativeness of „Sahrawi youth“, I was working intensively together with only a few people for the film.

As amongst others Liisa Malkki argues, generalizations in the case of a seemingly vulnerable population might lead to further stigmatization. Moreover she points to the general tendency to universalize refugees in texts and images (Malkki, 1995:10). The common perception of refugees residing outside of a national order is, as she criticizes, often going along with an „assumption that 'the refugee'- apparently stripped of the specificity of culture, place, and history – is human in the most basic, elementary sense“ (Malkki, 1995: 12). Although in the range of this fieldwork it becomes clear that contemporary Sahrawis are far from being stripped off from „culture, place, and history“, it was still one of my central intentions to avoid stigmatization. In addition, Manuel Herz criticizes the range of reports on refugees that are accompanied by a flat and onesided media representation: „Such photographs do not give us any information beyond the mere fact of suffering. They do not help us understand; they do not elucidate the underlying causes of the disaster“ (Herz, 2013: 367).

However I was startled to encounter widespread *self*-stigmatization amongst interlocutors. I argue that it is important to notice this process as a political act, for it follows specific political purposes, of which the most important is to attract attention by international agencies. Thus, this stigmatization ended up being an own explicit theme in the film for demonstrating how the political discourse influences these individual perspectives. How it was addressed in particular narratives and the consequences of this self-stigmatization for filmmaking, will be further examined in the analysis.

The introduction described the perception of the homeland Western Sahara being „real“ in the lives of young Sahrawis, even though they did not experience it themselves. It is interesting to think in this context about a seeming reality produced by visual approaches – a theme of great importance in (visual) anthropological discourses. For instance, Sarah Pink discusses the relation between reality and visibility in *Doing Visual Ethnography* and challenges here the assumption that just because something appears to be visible, it does not necessarily mean that it is true (Pink, 2007: 32).

After realizing contradictions in the field, it was even to a lesser extent my purpose to show „reality“ with a film, but rather what is *perceived* by the interlocutors as their personal reality. Hence I got the impression of a multiplicity of „realities“, one being reflected in dominant, public discourses and narratives, others in personal relations toward the conflict and homeland. This supports Pink's argumentation because: „Just as reality is not solely visible or observable, images have no fixed or single meanings and are not capable of capturing an objective reality“ (Pink, 2007: 32).

Throughout my fieldwork in the camps, it was repeatedly appreciated that I – as a non-Sahrawi – „came to see reality“ with my own eyes. I argue that consequently the opposition between „reality“ – being equated as „the truth“ – and falsehood needs to be kept in mind. This is of even greater importance when considering the politically highly sensitive context in which both conflict parties, here generally speaking as Moroccans and Sahrawis, mutually blame the other to spread lies in public. At this point, it already became clear that doing fieldwork in this particular context contained to be ethically responsible in many facets.

When facing challenges of doing research amongst refugees it unavoidably implies the particular challenge of „doing no harm“ to seemingly vulnerable people whose situation massively depends on their representation to the „outside world“. This bears the potential danger that information given by refugees can be used against them or serve to stigmatize them in a particular way (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003:10; Soukarieh, 2009: 27). Therefore researchers might find themselves facing a „dual imperative“, meaning an inner disunity between following the demand to fulfill a high academic standard and to reduce „suffering“ (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003: 2) by promoting the refugee's situation. In the case of filmmaking it not only refers to the mere information given by a refugee, but the informant becomes visible, in return losing anonymity. Therefore filmmaking in a refugee camp comes along with a particular responsibility towards the participants.

3. Fieldwork Relevance

Personal motivation

In the beginning, I staggered between amazement and shock concerning my personal – and in fact also the public – ignorance of the topic regarding its absence in international media and political discussions. It was followed by even greater amazement about these people, that I have never heard of before, enduring in refugee camps in one of the world's most hostile areas called „the devil's garden“ since more than forty years. Soon I started thinking about the generations of young people growing up in the camps and asked myself how these generations relate themselves to their „lost“ homeland even though they did not share the experience of being exiled. In addition I was stunned by the fact that many Sahrawis of the „young generations“ – thus everyone up to the age of forty who has been born in exile – return to the camps in the *hammāda* after studying. They voluntarily choose to live under difficult conditions rather than continue living and working for example in Europe. These considerations obviously resulted in the question what motivates them for doing so, and hence how their relation to Western Sahara is manifested or what it is based on.

As it became clear soon – and what is already addressed in different literature on the topic, for example in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's article on politics of memories connecting to the camps (2013) – not only the relation to Western Sahara is of importance but in addition the relation to „home-camps“ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013: 631). Most Sahrawis I talked to would first stress that their *waṭan* is Western Sahara, as it gets clear in the following citation: „Home, it is in Western Sahara, because it is in our country; it is a good situation for us and where I can get my work or get a good life. So my home is not here, it is in Western Sahara because I can live all my hopes there with my family and all the population (...).“ However, the great influence by growing up in exile cannot be denied, as also the introductory citation implies. Nevertheless facing the harsh conditions in the camps, it is still the geographical area in which they grew up. It is their familiar space in which an own „culture“ and own customs, so to speak, developed.

In the beginning before entering „the field“, the research and film project was explicitly meant not to fulfill political purposes or being political in itself. But as it turned out every research activity followed in the camps was in some ways of political nature. Sahrawis welcomed me with huge hospitality because on the one hand they appreciated my interest, but on the other hand naturally followed their own intentions

and expectations that my project might „change something“. Constantly I faced high hopes, addressed either subtle as in this comment from an elderly woman: „We want a good position from the population in Germany (...).We are suffering, we are thirsty, we are in this bad conditions in bad weather and there were many victims of the war (...).We need just one good position with us to say to Marocco that they have to leave the country. Just one!“ Or rather direct as another man said that we should try to make pressure in the German parliament or powerful institutions and that projects as films or exhibitions give him new hope.

To sum up, facing these hopes and encountering the trust of participants to share their perceptions and indeed living under the camp's conditions myself, changed my personal motivation in the subject to be of political nature. It resulted in an ethically sensitive balancing act between my own „scientific“ position and the expectations of Sahrawis.

Academic relevance

The mere fact that the conflict remains mostly excluded from public discourses does not alone explain its relevance – and the relevance to approach it from an anthropological and filmic point of view. Indeed there have been several interdisciplinary studies on Sahrawis and especially on the refugee camps (Chatty et al., 2010; Dann, 2014; Farah, 2009; Herz, 2013; Muñoz-Mallén, 2014). Among others they deal with collective memory, national consciousness, the influence of historical conditions and – most important – with issues of representation and dependence.

However, I argue that much of the body of literature on the topic tends to oversee that the public discourse is maintained *because* of the people in Sahrawi society. Thus, I criticize the underlying argumentation that constructs rooting in Polisario policy are not only a frame imposed on the society. The listed literature examines to a lesser extent how these policies affect people personally – and indeed how it is sustained by society – especially by people who were born in it. Yet, in my view it is important to understand these processes in a reciprocal relation: as outlined in the introduction, I argue that the camps need to be examined for its constructive potential which roots in the local power structures and Polisario policy.

Additionally, although questions of representation in contexts of a „national agenda“ - especially in relation to non-Sahrawis – are examined, it has been largely overlooked how researchers *themselves* are part of these politics of power. It seems as if it is constantly pointed to the work of „the others“, without reflecting on the own

interrelation in these discourses. Thus I argue that it is important to ask which impact does my research have on how the official discourses are sustained and how it influenced (the observed) social reality.

4. Approaching Nationalism

There have been numerous publications on the interrelation of nationalism and displacement or studies on societies in exile. One central concept that many authors draw upon is Anderson's approach of the „imagined community“, which is especially relevant when speaking about societies residing outside of their homeland, however ideologically justifying „their“ nation-state (Eriksen, 1991: 265).

Many of the relating debates center firstly around the importance to perceive the nation as such with imagined social boundaries and secondly, to understand nationness and nationalism as „cultural artefacts of a particular kind“ (Anderson, 1991: 4). „Cultural artifacts“ suggests considering the historical context in which the development of nations is situated and places nationalism alongside „artifacts“ as kinship or religion. Thus this approach argues for examining nationalism to a lesser extent solely in relation to political ideologies (Gil, 2015: 5). However, as the descriptions of the conflict's history clarified, Sahrawi nationalism was actively supported in the light of concrete Polisario ideologies.

Putting it in unambiguous words, Comaroff points to the banality of many discourses on nationalism that constantly seem to circle around two approaches – the primordialist and constructionist – and resumes: „How many more times, for example, is it necessary to prove that all ethnic identities are historical creations before primordialism is consigned, finally, to the trash heap of ideas past?“ (Comaroff, 1996: 164).

Referring to the former discourses and including the notion of „identity“, van Beek uses the concept „Identity fetishism“ which criticizes that the identification as belonging to a certain community is misleadingly suggesting that identities can be understood as natural properties of groups (van Beek, 2001: 527). Furthermore Michael Billig argues that it seems as if „nationalism“ exists only on the periphery with certain rather problematic connotations: „It is as if the term ‘nationalism’ only comes in small sizes and bright colors. The word is comfortably wrapped around social movements, which seek to re-draw existing territorial boundaries, and which, thereby, threaten the existing national status quo“ (Billig, 1995: Ch.8, 6). Additionally, he asks for an investigation of the reasons *why* people in the contemporary world do not forget their nationality,

concluding that established nations have confidence in their own continuity (Billig, 1995: Ch.8, 7).

Though I agree in general with this perception I want to point to a weakness here: how are „established nations“ in that regard defined? All Sahrawis – I would argue – have a strong confidence in the continuity of their own nation, though not living on „their“ own territory (yet). After talking with different interlocutors about the term „nation“ (*waṭan*, *umma*) it can be summarized that for them it includes a rather psychological connection, perceiving Sahrawis as a nation with a distinct „culture“ that differs to other nations. In addition, the term *waṭan* describes the emotional relation towards a geographical space that is commonly seen as the homeland.

Not only these emic perceptions show that it is obvious that the sense of nation is not necessarily linked to national territorial boundaries (Billig, 1995: Ch.8, 8). However, neither Western Sahara nor the camps as a state in exile could be defined as „established state“, because of lacking official international recognition. A fitting approach in the complex situation of Sahrawis is that nationalist thinking by members of society requires taking the *idea* of nationhood and – especially relevant – the link between peoples and their homeland for granted. Even though the nation as such might have an unstable nature, its *imagining* as stable is crucial (Mavroudi, 2007: 396). This idea also includes that „the nation“ is being equalized with „us“ in demarcation to „them“ from whom it is differently identified (Billig, 1995: Ch. 4, 2).

Edward Said provides another helpful perception by stating that „Nationalism is an assertion of belonging to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and by so doing, it fends off the ravages of exile“ (Said, 2000: 50). Still, I would disagree with Said's – and also a frequently stated – argument that people in exile are cut off from their roots, their land and their past (Said, 2000: 55). Amongst Sahrawis living in exile camps, rather the opposite is the case because the past is constantly revived and nurtured by residing outside of the homeland. One interlocutor was even convinced that once Sahrawis will be back in an independent Western Sahara, the perception and *performing* of a unified nation will not be equally relevant as it is today: „I think there will not exist nationalism. Maybe just when there is a soccer match. But actually you can forget about it now [then], everything is fine, we are home now.“ In addition, another interlocutor underlined the existence of Sahrawi unity *because* they reside in exile. Smith describes this phenomenon as follows: „Nationalism only becomes of paramount importance

ephemerally – in crises of nation-building, conquest, external threat, disputed territory (...)“ (Smith, 2010: 27).

Putting the discussions about the definition of „nationalism“ and if a society can be defined as „nation“ aside, the film and thesis examine the consequences of the Sahrawi society perceiving itself as unified in their struggle amongst other nations.

During the time of the fieldwork, I became increasingly interested in the children's perception of the conflict and in this regard how they get educated about the situation they live in. How does a refugee child learn to see its familiar space, the camps, with other eyes? Or in other words: how do they become customized to represent refugeeness and suffering, because as Malkki notes, „the condition of refugeeness required a process of *becoming*“ (Malkki, 1991: 223). In addition, it was very interesting to note age-dependent differences in the perceptions of the conflict based on whether a child has already been abroad and saw the „world out there“ or not. This leads to examine on how children sustain national identification in society: „Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes. Rather, they are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live“ (Carter, 2011: 875).

It was in children's accounts that I encountered how nationalism becomes internalized, how the official discourse becomes a part of the personal perspective. Therefore, I argue for the perception of Sahrawi nationalism as a process of learning, practicing and ultimately representation. As Stephens puts it, „How have children themselves variously understood, experienced, identified with, sometimes resisted and partially reshaped nationalist projects (...)?“ (Stephens, 1997: 7). Instead of perceiving children in contexts of nationalist struggles as victims of social instability (Stephens, 1997: 10) I suggest that amongst Sahrawi children – and likewise adults – national identification is a part of their social stability in exile.

5. Analysis: Practicing Nation and Homeland

The major part of empirical data that will be used for the analysis is based on the exchange with few main film participants of the „young“ generations – referring to all Sahrawis who were born in the camps – hence being in the age between eight and thirty. As it was stated in the introduction, I sought to focus in particular on Sahrawis who already spent time abroad for studying or working and returned to the camps. It is

important to mention this aspect because the opportunity for a proper education outside of the camps can be interpreted as a moral duty imposed by the Polisario government: „returning graduates are expected to volunteer to work in committees and institutions that underpin the organization and maintenance of Sahrawi camp society” (Chatty et al., 2010: 75). By sending children abroad, it is expected that they can later apply the knowledge they gained from their education in the camps and ultimately play a central part in building the new state of Western Sahara (Muñoz-Mallén, 2014: 23).

Growing up in exile – following national agenda



Figure 2: Scouts singing the national anthem at the conference.

In late November, I attended a conference on the occasion of celebrating the anniversary of a scouts-organization which is part of the youth branch of Polisario (UJSARIO). This event made me in particular aware of the embodiment of nationalism or the implicitness of including Sahrawi national agenda through demonstrating unity in daily life.

It took place in one of the central buildings where „cultural“ events normally happen and many different people were invited, amongst them members of NGOs. What surprised me most in the beginning was the attendance of many high-level Polisario politicians because I expected it to be an event for children. In the beginning, all of these politicians had been welcomed outside in the yard with the scouts standing in formation and dressed in military clothes, one of them holding the obligatory flag of SADR. After everyone entered the decorated hall, the national anthem was jointly sung alongside the children's choir. As it turned out, the whole event served as a platform for the politicians to hold speeches in which they addressed the unity of all Sahrawis and the importance of including the youth for „the struggle“. Before or after many of the

speeches, the spokesperson shouted different slogans that were loudly repeated by the audience. One of them was for example: „No other option than the choice for self-determination“ (own translation). Later a man explained to me that with new elections every four years the Polisario publishes a new „slogan“ which is typically used in events as such.

I was surprised by the implicitness of these actions – also for the children in their military clothes – that later also included a joint prayer for a „martyr“ (*shahyd*) and the awarding of honors for politicians and NGO workers. It became a *demonstration* of unity and the absolute determination of reaching independence, on the one hand for the Sahrawis themselves and on the other hand for the audience of foreigners.

What appeared striking to me about this event was not the almost alike speeches which were mostly performed very emotionally, but the reaction of the audience: in the beginning it seemed as if they would absorb every word, but with the repetitions and passing of time they became increasingly restless. In the end many listeners seemed almost bored and ready to leave while people on stage still had blazing speeches about independence and resistance. In my view, it illustrated the absolute ordinariness of how national agenda and its performance is interwoven to daily life.

Furthermore, narratives expressing national identity are also reinforced in much more subtle ways, being neatly interwoven with daily routine in the camps, because identity „is to be found in the embodied habits of social life“ (Billig, 1995: Ch. 1, 7). I argue that it is precisely the ordinary that carries much power of public discourses because it accompanies daily life in the camps from early childhood on. Be it by slogans that are painted on the walls of the kindergarten and that show for example „the liberation war is ensured through the masses“. Or by the daily flag ceremony – in which children sing the anthem and do morning exercises that are inspired by military training – and that take place in every school yard in the camps (08:00 – 08:59). Or also by the everyday conversations of adults about politics or media reporting.

In the film I aim to show how the nationalist agenda is maintained, for example through the character of Mahssen, one of the main participants. His interaction with the children moreover illustrates the important paradox of perceiving the camps on the one hand as the normal, familiar surrounding while at the other hand beginning to understand that there exists another place that Sahrawis *should* call home instead. The film aims to address this inner conflict of preserving a strong connection to the camps but at the same time knowing and learning that it is not the place where Sahrawis are

supposed to be: in my view this conflict does not only occur in young age when being taught about it but is maintained also amongst adults, who in many cases spent the majority of their lives in the camps.

When I asked Mahssen about his view on the camps before he learned about the geopolitical situation in school, he responded: „I saw just a life of any children: we played together and we participated in many things“ (04:56). Also as I asked if he would like to be in that age again, he stressed: „Of course, because it is a beautiful time. You can observe many things, you don't have any responsibility in life. You are just living in the moment“ (05:10).

This conversation clearly illustrates that there was a time in early childhood in which he did not realize the situation of the Sahrawi society as being refugees in exile. Generally speaking, in my perception the children in the camps *know* of the situation already in young age – they have been told about it several times – but they do not *understand* it. As an example, this proposition gets clarified by looking at the last sentences of the ten-year-old: „Soon, so God will, there will be a war against the Moroccan occupation“ (33:05). Here she is using phrases that she heard several times before, but without considering what these words actually mean and which consequences a war would have. In the film I put it in context with the prior statement of Mahjouba on war (32:50) because it is my intention to demonstrate narrations being transmitted across generations. Related to this, Carter points to the study of Benei who conducted research on nationalist discourses in Indian primary schools. Benei argues to examine the phenomenological experience by children of nationalism, which seems appropriate here: she states that although children may not understand the text of the anthem they are singing, they experience it however with their own bodies, they „feel the nation“, so to speak (Carter, 2011: 873).

Although Mahssen mentions the „beautiful time“ of not having any responsibility, at the same time he also puts the children under responsibility himself. This becomes clear for example in the scene in which we gathered on a dune for watching the sunset. It shows that he considers the children as communicators of a certain narrative, by letting them repeat his words: „I want to live in a big house in Western Sahara and also that the other families are having houses. I also want Western Sahara to be independent and to live there in my house, far from war and fleeing and the Moroccan occupation“ (17:40).

The scene also shows how I repeatedly address the children with the question „How is it like in Western Sahara?“ My intention was to explore the picture that they personally

developed on their homeland. However in my view it becomes clear that all their responds are – in this particular scene – either directly influenced or „dictated“ by Mahssen or in other scenes reflect what they learned through dominant discourses. The film tries to demonstrate this internalization of patterns by *repetition*, for example when one girl repeats in similar words „Western Sahara is one of the most beautiful countries“ (11:45) or „Western Sahara was a very beautiful country“ (11:59).

As outlined, the understanding of „the cause“ is actively learned, paradoxically also being influenced to a great extent by visits to other countries. Several interlocutors affirmed in this context that it was through their first stay outside of the camps that they fully understood what it means to live in a refugee camp and to be seen as refugees. One described it as „big shock“ when remembering her arrival in Spain with the „vacation in peace“ (Chatty et al., 2010: 44) program. Before, even though her grandmother told her about the miserable life they have in the camps, for her it seemed as if all the world was in the refugee camps, as if „all the world existed in the neighborhood“. With arriving in Spain and seeing all the differences – green landscape, clean roads – she started thinking about why Sahrawis live such a different life and also about the „other land“, their homeland Western Sahara. The ordinariness and naturalness of the life in the camps gets increasingly questioned the more that people learn about the distinction to „the world outside“. Therefore I argue that the relation to Western Sahara by young Sahrawis needs to be seen as a process of realization. It does not only concern the relation to the *watan* but also the perception of the refugee camps and ultimately to view oneself as part of the Sahrawi nation.

The „becoming“ of the homeland and the use of traditions

Several authors compared Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees in regards to the construction of national identities because of the obvious similarities in the historical contexts of being exiled – in particular concerning the long-lasting periods (Farah, 2009: 77) of both conflicts. Before this chapter will elaborate on parallels in terms of the construction of the relation towards the homeland amongst the youth in exile, I first want to point to major differences that need to be kept in mind.

Of greatest importance is in this context, that young Sahrawis who grow up in the camps live within the Polisario state-in-exile that functions separately from Algeria and includes *all* Sahrawis, whilst Palestinians in diaspora are situated within the spaces of other nation-states: some Palestinians live in Israel, the Palestinian and the occupied

territories, while at the same time many reside in diaspora countries since decades. Hence, future generations live scattered across the globe in the absence of a unifying state apparatus. Bowman argues that the realization of a nation however requires the formation of this state apparatus (Bowman, 1994: 164). The Palestinian claim to statehood is hence often contested because of the fragmentation of the *Palestine Liberation Organization* (PLO) (Farah, 2009: 79) and consequently societal fragmentation. This has implications on different levels and inevitably results in the attempt to „fit in“ the host country in order to live the best life possible there (Mason, 2007: 272), while at the same time often being subject to discrimination (Farah, 2009: 79). Also, through living separately in very heterogeneous situations it is argued that each Palestinian community has an own cultivation of images of the Palestinian past, present, and future (Bowman, 1994: 151).

Moreover, even though the PLO supports the rhetoric of the camps being key symbols for the struggle for return and restitution (Hart, 2002: 38), a societal unity was already contested generations earlier: Palestinian camp inhabitants perceived themselves as heterogenized with the establishment of different classes (Sayigh, 1977: 4; Soukarieh, 2009: 15), let alone issues of unity depending on lives in various „host countries“. With referring to Rosemary Sayigh, Soukarieh argues that diasporic Palestinians do not primarily face the problem of a loss of identity, but of a lack of a national unifying strategy: „If Palestinians are indeed losing their national identity, it is because the national leadership is not working against fragmentation. If there were a national strategy, the sense of Palestinian identity would immediately become more unified“ (Soukarieh, 2009: 25).

Even though in the beginning of its foundation, the Polisario was inspired by the Palestinian resistance (Farah, 2009: 77), it is evident that the premises of national identity and unity have been widely implemented only under Polisario governance. As outlined already, the national strategy of the Polisario to keep the societal Sahrawi unity towards „the cause“ has the highest priority, which is reflected in the collective mobilization in the camps (Farah, 2009: 79) and imperturbable solidarity across geographical borders.

Moreover, whilst Palestinians in diaspora countries are constantly in contact and exchange with the society in their host country, Sahrawis in the camps remain amongst each other. Even concerning young Sahrawis who are temporarily living in diaspora countries as Spain or Cuba for their education (Muñoz-Mallén, 2014: 9), it is reassured

that they are permanently informed about the cause in order to counter concerns that transnational youth get detached to „culture and traditions“ (Chatty et al., 2010: 73). This is for example provided in the form of additional classes by Sahrawi „teachers“ who educate the children about the history, politics, and religion as long as they stay abroad. The effort underlines the significance that is accredited on the education of the following generations because, in Malkki's words, education and knowledge become an „almost sacralized resource“ amongst refugees in exile (Malkki, 1995: 135). The described teaching is also an example of a process in which collective histories (and „cultures“) are nurtured and produced by actors when it is in need for their case (Malkki, 1995: 241).

Nevertheless there are obviously many parallels in both cases regarding the remembrance and performance of the homeland from an exilic position and also the political purposes this active construction intends. Bowman conceives „homeland“ in this respect as „the place where the nationalist imagines his or her identity becoming fully realized“ (Bowman, 1994: 139), but also points to elaborate on the reasons for the aspiration of a national identity. Perceiving this not as „given“ but as actively constructed (Mavroudi, 2007: 395), the reason for its construction lies in both contexts in the political conflict – in particular referring to younger generations growing up outside of their homeland. What I call here the „becoming“ of the homeland describes this active process that is for example reflected in the education of children in exile as described before: “(...) the politicization of children in diaspora is significant, for, as the next generation, they are responsible for keeping the Palestinian cause alive” (Mavroudi, 2007: 402).

Furthermore it is argued that societies in diasporas that are potentially fragmented need to have a collective image of home because the historic homeland is seen as „the symbolic and political glue“ (Mavroudi, 2007: 398). Hence, the practicing of history and nostalgia referring to the homeland contributes to the perception of unity amongst Palestinians and also Sahrawis in exile. Because Western Sahara is associated as the place in which their „culture“ roots, the romanticized descriptions of the land – especially of the older people who still experienced it themselves – commonly come along with melancholia. One scene in which I spoke with Mahjouba about traditions and the nomadic life in Western Sahara underlines that this melancholic connotation of the homeland is passed on to the next generations, as she describes:

„Our fathers, they still like the past, like the traditions so much...since I was

small I liked the traditions (...) I like the life also when they are speaking about it because also it was far from gaining money, far from hatred, far from politics... just living in peace... (27:15). We are just running, running to be modern in our thinking but with denying or omitting all the kinds of traditions. And for me this is bad because the traditions are the custom, it is the style of the nation, the symbol of that you are a nation.“ (28:00)

Quoting Thompson, Mavroudi stated that „The nation is objectified: people learn their nation’s history, they can forget and then again, remember their national identity and they can express this national identity”“ (Mavroudi, 2007: 395). As Mahjouba's statement underlines, it is however not only the nation but also the homeland that gets objectified when following aspirations for national unity.

In contributing to this unity, Mavroudi argues – and what likewise became evident during my fieldwork – that shared narratives also refer to certain historical events in the past, in the case of Palestinian population for example to *al-nakba* (Mavroudi, 2007: 398; Lindholm Schulz, 2007: 2) that serves as continuously memorized key event in the Palestinian struggle for independence. The term describes the dispossession from their land with the proclamation of the state Israel in 1948 (Mason, 2007: 272). *Al-nakba* developed to a symbol of their oppression by Israel and also by host states. Thus it is a perceived shared part of their common identity in exile because „perceptions of injustice and suffering often form part of what it means to be Palestinian” (Mavroudi, 2007: 398). Following this argument, Bowman states that for the young generations of Palestinians it is not the „homeland nostalgia“ alone that is the basis for the perception of a national unity but rather the experience of injustice and maltreatment, in this particular case by the host country Lebanon. As stated in the introduction, this supports my perception of the importance of political injustice and also a shared opponent (Bowman, 1994: 146) being a major impetus for the construction of national identity and the attachment to the homeland.

Although it is then not the remembrance and nostalgia connected to the lost homeland alone on which national identification is based, it was already indicated that the awareness of traditions or a „cultural uniqueness“ is of great importance. Mahssen explained me: „Traditions...for us they are very important. Because they are our identity, our history. Our past, the present and the future. We have to take care of it because when we don't have the culture, we can't continue.“ When I asked him which part of the traditions are of particular importance for him he mentioned firstly clothes and secondly the „way of life“ together in a united collective showing solidarity. He explained that

also the native population in Western Sahara was closely living together and he believes that they have to take care about this cultural attribute because, without it, they could not be successful against the Moroccan occupation. Hence, traditions become a precondition for the persistence of the nation.

In many conversations, different interlocutors stressed on the one hand the cultural uniqueness of Sahrawi society and on the other hand the great differences to the Moroccan, for example in terms of language and clothing. Surprisingly, they pointed out that their society however is sharing some attributes with the Mauritanian „because we have the same culture“, even though Mauritania was at first also an occupant of Western Sahara (Farah, 2007:77). Still it seemed of greatest importance to stress a „categorical difference“ (Malkki, 1995: 66) to Moroccans and to keep the traditions, which serve to distinct „us“ from „them“.

Amongst others, the political way of how „traditions“ are used illustrates the idea of community as an imagined unity (Anderson, 1991) that is defined by thinking about others who are „like us“. And vice versa – as the example of a demarcation to Moroccan society showed – the definition also includes how „the others“ are perceived. “People create communities rhetorically through thinking that some people are ‘like’ themselves while others are ‘unlike’ them” (Bowman, 1994: 140). Hence, viewing this demarcation being part of dominant narratives, I argue that they follow the purpose of ordering society and of constructing an own national identity which ultimately stands in opposition to the „other“ (Malkki, 1995: 244).

The premise of solidarity – perspectives on and from diaspora

The chapter „Sahrawi roots of nationalism“ highlighted the important intention to demonstrate societal unity that is closely related to the concept of solidarity (*taḍāmun*), which was often mentioned by interlocutors.

Because it was a multisited fieldwork – with the second part taking place amongst Sahrawis living in diaspora – I was able to experience and also compare relations towards the „cause“ and *waṭan* under the condition of greater geographical distance. Also many interlocutors I met in the camps stayed at some point (for a longer period) abroad and therefore knew the experience of living separated from the family and the camp's structures. Moreover it allowed approaching the topic of how Sahrawis living inside and outside the camps imagine and relate to the „other“ group.

I argue that the strong sense of solidarity is based on the feeling of being *personally*

responsible for the cause and that every individual needs to contribute to the struggle for independence. Living far away does not reduce this responsibility or duty. Rather, it asks for taking a very personal part in the struggle, as it is expected that Sahrawis in diaspora try to positively influence the political situation from abroad. In my view this sense of personal responsibility roots amongst other reasons in the belief in the following generations to continue the struggle. It was argued – indeed of members of all generations – that even though independence was not achieved yet, the societal hopes rest on the shoulders of the next generations. Hart (2002: 38) describes an equal observation amongst Palestinians in a refugee camp in Jordan: „(...) the young are construed as the agents of redemption by their parents and grandparents, whose own efforts have so far failed to secure the return to former homes within the Palestinian waṭan“. A personal dedication to be politically active becomes in the film particularly present with the position of Najem, who is a volunteer worker for the student branch of Polisario. His explanations clarify that his main motivation is to give something in return for the achievements of the Polisario and that what he is able to give is his personal commitment of „working for the others, not working just for myself“ (29:35).

In several accounts, it became clear to me that future generations are equally responsible for reaching independence. In the national anthem it is stated: „The uprising (...) will produce unity forever in the hearts and will establish justice and democracy. Every century, every generation, every century, every generation“ (10:16). Also I observed the glorification of „martyrs“, whose stories are already taught in primary school and who remain central figures of the struggle for independence. Especially in songs, poetry, and art, their stories are being brought into society as also the excerpt of the second poem illustrates: „We will follow the path that our martyrs have promised“ (31:42).



Figure 3: Wall painting showing „martyrs“ as central figures.

I was told that martyrs are sometimes also named *wakhīrd*, which describes a person that is contributing to personal well-being because they fought both politically and militarily for the Sahrawi people.

The respect or responsibility – and the resulting solidarity – towards the older ones in society is also of importance for public discourses, which in turn mostly demonstrates unity. There do exist a variety of opinions about different themes, especially contrasting views from Sahrawis who already lived abroad for a longer time and those who stayed in the camps. These concern for example the equality and emancipation of Sahrawi women. However, a discussion about contrasting opinions does not take place in public, as the participant Hamdi argued, out of respect for the rather conservative opinions of older generations. Public discussions would promote the picture of a heterogeneous society, which is in fact at issue because of Sahrawis being spread all over the world, living in different „cultures“. However, this would contest and exacerbate the picture of a unified society.

Solidarity and moral duty are also influencing the decision to return to the camps after being abroad, an act that I found particularly interesting. Especially Mahjouba – who lived herself first in Algeria and then in Spain – stressed the notion of selfishness here, by saying that she does not want to live a better life somewhere, distanced from her family. Others emphasized a responsibility towards the ancestors and thus the ancestor's land because they fought and even died for Western Sahara. In her research, Liisa Malkki states that the ways in which members of a (refugee) society living in two different sites – the refugee camps and countries abroad – imagine each other informs also how they imagine and identify themselves (Malkki, 1995: 197). In this context, the way that Mahjouba underlines her resentment about Sahrawis staying and working abroad (23:50) also defines how she in opposition perceives herself as actively struggling for the cause amongst the remaining Sahrawis in the camps. Solidarity is hence a moral value that requires in her view to „share the struggle“ while living in the camps.

I had the opportunity to meet a Sahrawi diaspora group in Mallorca together with Hamdi who spent thirteen years there and is meanwhile living in Germany. It was one Friday night that we have been invited for dinner to a friend's place and as it turned out, more or less fifteen other Sahrawis – I estimated them to be about the same age of 24-27 – were invited and came together that night. For me it was an odd situation which

immediately threw me back into „fieldwork status“ because it seemed as if all would be exactly the same in terms of behavior and procedures as in the camps, only taking place in a house in Palma de Mallorca. Men were sitting and talking separately from the women in another room, with me as a „neutral“ person once again being positioned in between. We were dining – even equal dishes – sitting on the carpet and eating with hands even though there have been chairs and cutlery. We listened to traditional Sahrawi music and the sweet tea was served in the same procedures that I got used to during fieldwork in the camps. Later in the evening most men discussed political issues and exchanged news about friends and families in the camps.

However „unified“ it seemed, I knew that there are different „groups“ of Sahrawis on Mallorca, even though being in the same age. Some, like Hamdi, spent many years on the island while living in Mallorquin host families and thus growing into a „European“ lifestyle. Others just arrived recently and it was obvious to tell the difference only in terms of behavior, for example that some men did not shake hands to greet the women. Still, it appeared to me as if this meeting and dinner served as a space in which the familiar camp patterns were reproduced and thus in which unwritten rules of „proper Sahrawi behavior“ exist, part of it being to rehearse and ultimately *demonstrate* unity.

In addition, it illustrated that when it comes down to questions of solidarity and unity, it is clear that all Sahrawis share the same idea of independence, however diverse their lives and opinions usually are. As Smith puts it: „The nationalist does not require that individual members should *be* alike, only that they should *feel* an intense bond of solidarity and therefore *act* in unison on all matters of national importance“ (Smith, 2010: 29). Hence, following the national aim of independence means fundamentally to show solidarity by stressing national connectedness irrespective of borders.

Solidarity through fieldwork

Anthropologist Gable regards fieldwork as an intrinsically guilty act, based on a sense of otherness (Gable, 2014: 239, 250) and the intention to give „something“ in return for the researched society. Of course this perception is also of importance when the fieldwork is conducted amongst refugees who have been victims of colonial claims. As an anthropologist, it is argued that feeling the own wealth compared to „their“ poverty (Gable, 2014: 248) intensifies this sentiment of guilt, going along with the wish to act ethically responsible. This paragraph addresses solidarity based on fieldwork complicity or rapport and also how activism became a motivation for fieldwork when facing

expectations of Sahrawis.

Most Sahrawis are explicitly aware of the potential of film or media representations, contributing to their struggle for independence. Hence my aspirations to make a film project were broadly welcomed. More than that, people even told me that I would be a part of the family now and one participant kept calling me his „sister“. This leads to the aspect of comradeship that was outlined in the ethnographic context because the representation of fraternity bonds immediately made me into an agent of suppressed Sahrawis. In the general context of national belonging and connectedness, „the metaphors of kinship and intimacy provide frameworks for thought and hence create intense feelings of love and hate, fidelity and betrayal“ (Das, 1998: 111).

Because of the awareness on media representation many interlocutors and participants had clear ideas and expectations of what could be of interest for me to film, classifying me as the kinds of journalists who usually visit the camps to document „Sahrawi suffering“. Also, media representations that are shared amongst Sahrawis follow the same patterns of either demonstrating military strength, political activity or injustices under which they suffer. Because it was my motivation to approach different facets of representation and daily life with the film, in the beginning I became increasingly impatient when people suggested filming for example a hospital, damages by the recent flooding or addressed the camera with standard statements of national suffering. However, after a while I understood that these patterns are an important theme in itself because they reveal much about the functioning of dominant discourses.

At the same time I realized that my presence as filmmaker represented a position that is connected with the constant hope that the film product might support the political situation because Sahrawis are convinced that a peaceful solution is only possible with attracting international attention. Facing these hopes, I realized how I became increasingly personally committed to support the cause by showing solidarity.

In the abstract on my personal fieldwork motivation, I briefly described the changing impetus to actively support the Sahrawi cause politically. During editing I spent many thoughts on how to inform the viewer about the conflict, thus how to present "historical facts", so to speak. Finally, I decided for short introductory sentences: „Since 1975, generations of Sahrawis grow up in exile under Polisario governance, due to the Moroccan occupation of their homeland Western Sahara. In international public their situation appears to have been forgotten." Though these words might appear striking and simplifying, I decided to use them: firstly, because they reflect my personal opinion

but also – and what is more important – because it inevitably leads to questions about the subjectivity of the filmmaker and activism as motivation for research. Consequently it is also related to the notion of representing "truth" that is for example discussed in Llewelyn's review on the concept of „situated knowledge“ by Donna Haraway. The term describes the critique on the „scientific ideal of an objective, value-neutral observer“, who has no further personal interest in the researched society. Instead, Haraway proposes to underline a subjective, partial perspective that rejects a „single vision of truth“ (Llewelyn, 2007: 300).

In the desire to create rapport, Gable mentions that by wearing native clothes, anthropologists attempt to „join in“, which sometimes makes us forget that the people we study know that we are only wearing a costume (Gable, 2014: 251). In addition Marcus argued that even though most anthropologists „understand well that they always remain marginal, fictive natives“ (Marcus, 1997: 97), they still believe in the faith that they could be more „insiders“ than „outsiders“.

Although I agree with criticizing the naive self-perception of „going native“, I want to add another aspect to the discussion. During my stay in the camps, I constantly wore the traditional clothes of women (*milhafa*) and was covering my hair most times. I decided to wear it rather out of practical reasons, for example to shield against the sun and in the attempt to avoid attracting even more attention. By the Sahrawis this was however broadly interpreted as a sign that I showed solidarity with them through sharing their traditions and showing it in public. Thus wearing native clothes as a foreigner also deepened relations through serving as a *political* symbol of solidarity in the social setting.



Figure 4: Young girl shot a photo of her sister and me posing in front of a „memorial“.

Instead of only referring to „rapport“ in anthropological fieldwork, George Marcus also describes the concept of complicity. He states that „it is only in an anthropologist-informant situation in which the outsideness is never elided and is indeed the basis of an affinity between ethnographer and subject (...)“ (Marcus, 1997: 97). Hence I suggest that my fieldwork relations being based on affinity were established *because* of my „outsideness“. Wearing the *milhafa* became the symbol for being in an outsider position, however aspire to show solidarity with „their“ cause.

(Self-) Stigmatization and public narratives

A frequently discussed question with and amongst the interlocutors was whether a „return to the weapons“ – and consequently war – might remain the only possible way to independence. Different recent media reportings on Sahrawi refugees suggested that the majority of Sahrawi youth would promote this idea after forty years of standstill, being convinced that only conflicts fought with weapons get international attention.

However in the conversations I participated in, interlocutors expressed very different personal opinions when I asked *explicitly* for them. During these conversations, one important paradox became for the first time evident to me. Interlocutors developed personal opinions on certain topics and might also express them when it was explicitly asked for. But apart from that, they would mention a set of dominant – at times with their personal opinion conflicting – narratives that reflect societal conventions. In this context, Mahmood describes conventions as socially prescribed and repeated performances (Mahmood, 2001: 845). Also it is important to mention that following conventional behavior does not only mean that individual's „real“ desires are subordinate to social control and oppression: „Rather, formal behavior (...) is a condition for the emergence of the self as such and integral to its realization“ (Mahmood, 2001: 845). In this light, dominant narratives are first rehearsed, practiced, internalized and finally performed since childhood, based on societal conventions.

The range of narratives comes along with models of (self-) stigmatization that serve political purposes when facing a certain „audience“, as it will be argued in the next paragraph. Here, I want to summarize and analyze the most influential narratives – whose quality is the „sense of a collective voice“ (Malkki, 1995: 56) – by pointing to excerpts from film scenes. In general, all of the narratives addressed the past, present and also future, however the most common being „we are suffering here since more than forty years“. For instance, other narrations that I heard numerous times have been

the following:

- On the way from Western Sahara to exile, people have been bombed and attacked by Moroccan forces.
- Stigmatizing „the others“: Morocco is spreading lies about Sahrawis in international platforms and regards Sahrawis as being part of Moroccans.
- In an independent Western Sahara, the future will be bright because „we are rich in resources and just a few people“.
- In the past the Sahrawis have been *free*, peaceful nomads who had a simple but happy life; everyone was equal.
- A growing number of young Sahrawis perceive war as the only solution to gain independence.
- Sahrawis continue to believe in international justice but their patience is at stake.

As Malkki argues, narratives are the expressions for collective discursive practice, being in itself a social action, „configuring and morally weighting virtually all domains of everyday life in the refugee camp, and giving form to the social imagination of exile“ (Malkki, 1995: 105). Hence, the power of discourses in this context lies in defining what is perceived as the „régime of truth“ (Foucault, 1979: 119). Dominant discourses form a connected body of specific meanings, concepts, and images that are socially produced facing a specific audience and purpose (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 10).

In addition to their function as supporter of collective discourses, narratives also became the internalization of many contradictions I observed amongst interlocutors. For example, one contradiction was the emphasis on the hard living conditions in the camps („we are suffering here“), but on the other hand demonstrating the well-working structures that the Polisario established. For instance, Mahssen stated that the government of Polisario has developed a good organization of the camps and that they are different than any other refugee camp in the world. However it was of recurrent importance for him to state that „we are suffering, more than other refugees. We have passed more than forty years in this conflict.“ Thus, the generalizing representation as refugee comes along with the performance and emphasis of „suffering“ related to both camps and occupied area.

It is important to note that I do not deny the rightfulness of Sahrawi „suffering“ by putting it in the context of performance: a great number of Sahrawis face difficult living

conditions and the psychological effects of being in a state of waiting are noticeable every day in the camps. Also, I argue that „Sahrawi suffering“ is commonly characterized with this psychological factor that is of great importance in the self-perception of society: interlocutors repeatedly stressed different well-working structures – as democratic elections or gender equality – but emphasized to a great extent the difficult situation of a conflict in stagnation. Drawing on the concept of „suffering“ then rather intends to analyze it as part of a certain representation that is adapted by young generations and that also functions as a political strategy.

As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh describes, the Polisario is using the status of an „ideal“ refugee government and camps as part of the „politics of survival“ to receive the attention of academics and international networks (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 2). In my view it is in contrast also the status of a „suffering“ refugee that functions as a strategy for drawing attention to the cause in international media. Moreover, it illustrates the power of discourses that allow Sahrawis in the camps to create and sustain „truth“ or knowledge that gives meaning to their situation (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 125), which is otherwise broadly characterized by standstill.

One question that I asked many interlocutors was „When did you become conscious about the situation of 'being a refugee'?“ I perceived it as an important question to understand which events in their lives changed the view on the camps as „home-space“ and also the self-consciousness about 'being a refugee' nowadays. As mentioned earlier, most of their views changed when facing the „world out there“ within the context of visiting other countries. However, other than the above citation of Mahssen that follows a public discourse would suggest, not everyone I talked to perceives themselves as „refugee“, as they grew up in the situation. Even in contrast, Mahjouba pointed to the banality of the camps:

„We have our government, we have our ministries, we rule all the camps! So for us it is like the second house.. so really I feel that I'm not a refugee. I just feel that I have a rest until I come back to my land (...) we are born like refugees, so it is a normal thing to us. But the majority would call ourselves that we are Sahrawis!“

Still, as Mahjouba asked her nephew about his opinion, he responded – in the most bored intonation and annoyed that we interrupted him in his computer game – that they are refugees, because „we are not in our land“ (23:13). I argue that it becomes clear that this answer reflects what he has been taught to him and hence what he internalized.

Summing up, I got the impression that the perception and performance of „suffering

refugees“ is not solely regarded as stigmatization with a negative connotation but also as a strategy to mediate an own picture of society. Moreover, just as „homeland“ and „nation“ are undisputed principles to fight for, also the notion of suffering is incorporated and associated with Sahrawi society. The statement of Mahjouba that she does not want to have a selfish life somewhere else and that living in the camps means „even to suffer together“ (24:37), supports this perception.

Camera witness: the role of the „audience“

“(…) it is precisely the changing identity of the audience that allows, or in fact demands, the creation and presentation of different “selves” and the adoption of different “voices” in local, national, and international contexts” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 15).

As this citation suggests, when examining certain public discourses it is necessary to elaborate on the relation between those who sustain these „selves“ – Sahrawis who represent a societal image in public – and those to whom they are addressed because both actors encounter in a recurring setting, for instance in communication with NGO-workers.

Thus the following part deals with what has already been addressed in the methodological background: the effects and consequences of conducting a film-based fieldwork in a refugee camp, in which the researched society constantly follows own political aims. In particular, it examines my experiences and perceptions about the correlation between self-stigmatization and the conscious use of the camera's and researcher's presence. Hence it is connected to the (power of) dominant narratives, but especially elaborating on effects of staying in the camps with the purpose of filming – the camera representing a certain „audience“ in the fieldwork situation.

Because of the Polisario's – and thus the people in the camps – dependence on international aid support, they are also highly subordinate to the public representation of Sahrawi society. Especially with the purpose of filming, I argue that I represented a potential, yet anonymous, audience „out there“ to which the film could be shown. When elaborating on the notion of „complicity“, Marcus also reflects on the awareness of the „outsideness“ or the elsewhere in the anthropologist-informant relation and concludes that: „The ethnographer on the scene in this sense makes the elsewhere *present*“ (Marcus, 1997: 97). Many informants have been very conscious about their behavior in front of the camera in order to create a certain representation that ultimately supports the cause.

During fieldwork it was noticeable that dominant narratives were mostly recounted in „formal“ situations as interviews or while filming. This became especially clear when comparing the interaction with the camera by children and by adults: I observed that the children I was in contact with mentioned themes as „suffering“ or „longing for the homeland“ only when I was the agent behind it. The film also tries to show this by explicitly including my role as an agent whenever they talk for example about the camps, Western Sahara or martyrs. In contrast, adult interlocutors talked about these topics always in relation to the mentioned narratives without myself asking for it, because – as I argue – adults have a better understanding of the importance to address foreigners with certain messages.

The representative power that the film camera contains in this particular political context became once again clear in the process of editing. Being in constant exchange with the main participants of the film – through sending them parts of the rough cut and getting their feedback on it – opened ground for another reflexive level that I want to illustrate with an example here.

After showing Mahssen the rough cut of the „dune scene“ (13:10 – 18:09) in which he first describes the situation of the *wilaya* and later tells the girls what to respond to the camera, he mentioned a point of criticism. Instead of commenting his *own* representation, he said that the youngest girl in the video behaved in a wrong way and did not say „good things“. Moreover, he criticized that the girl was having her hands in her mouth and not behaving „serious enough“. I was baffled that he condemned the children's behavior, who in my eyes did not act disrespectfully at all.

However it became clear that he wants the children to take „the cause“ serious when they talk about it and represent Sahrawi society *in front of the camera*. By recommending to cut that part out of the scene, for him it seems to be an absolute necessity to only include a serious and „true“ narrative, as the older sister does. In my view it was the camera's and my presence as filmmaker that led him to initially prompt what the children should say (in the dune scene) and later criticizing behavior that did not fit his demands – and the public demands of „serious“ accounts. When facing certain (international) audiences, there seems to be only a limited range of permitted representations in public.

Later, Mahssen gave me equal feedback on the scene in which two female members of his family are singing a traditional song after demanding in a short speech independence and freedom. Here, the words they use and their body language clearly signify that they

are addressing an audience „out there“: „We don't want to be any longer in the *hammāda*. We want our independence. Give us the independence first! We are in very bad conditions! (...) Did you hear me?“ (05:53). The situation has a very staged character, it almost seems like they are using empty phrases or phrases that they repeated numerous times before, to themselves and others. This impression is underlined by their following laughter and obvious amusement of the scene. While I interpreted it as the banality of dominant discourses, Mahssen pointed to equal arguments as in the previous scene: it would be better not to include the scene – the singing maybe, but not the rest – because the women had in his eyes not been „prepared enough“. Both points of criticism – that only refer to the behavior of *others* and not of himself – interestingly illustrate Mahssen's expectations on a onesided „true“ portrayal of Sahrawis, their living conditions, and the conflict.

6. Conclusion

This thesis that reflects on the ethnographic film „Unity in Exile. Becoming Sahrawi“ examines different ways of the construction and practice of homeland and nation amongst young, politicized Sahrawis in exile. The Sahrawi nation being perceived as unattached of geographical borders, whereas based on comradeship and solidarity comes along with the perception of the refugee camps in Algeria being at the core of policy-making and defining contemporary Sahrawi society.

As Malkki in her study, that influenced many of the previous argumentations, states: „Far from 'losing' their collective identity – and far from living in an absence of culture or history – the Hutu refugees in the camps located their identities within their very displacement (...). Instead of losing their collective identity, this is where and how they made it“ (Malkki, 1995: 16). Hence I argue that instead of „losing identity“ by living in the camps, the place of exile itself becomes the source of national identification and the cause of a society that is united in a common conflict. In addition, it becomes clear that the camps are spaces of shared remembrance about the glorified homeland, which is an act equally being practiced by the young generations.

The introductory citation of Mahjouba underlines many of the main arguments because she describes Western Sahara as being a *principle* to love. This statement reflects the view that for generations growing up outside of their homeland it remains a moral duty to long for the return and independence. Also, it points to a fundamental inner conflict that is a consequence of growing up in the camps: perceiving them as

familiar space while simultaneously learning that it is not meant to be „home“. This general dichotomy is in the film for example reflected in Mahjouba's personal conviction that the camps are her home while she is at the same time convinced that it would be legitimate to fight and die in a war for the cause (32:50). Perceiving the relation to the homeland as a „principle“ understands it as a process of learning. It is predefined by dominant national discourses that are based on conventions as demonstrating unity.

Film and thesis analyze how Sahrawi conventions of nationalism and homeland are demonstrated in particular when encountering a non-Sahrawi audience, in order to follow the political aim of reaching independence. It becomes clear that interlocutors made use of a set of recurring dominant narratives – even though at times conflicting with their personal opinion – because supporting the struggle for independence has the highest priority to them. Due to the dependence on international media coverage, it is expected that narratives which underline for example „Sahrawi suffering“ are potentially supportive to raise awareness about their situation. At the same time, dominant narratives serve to sustain unity for the common cause – an urgent premise of Polisario policy. Fundamentally, it is hence necessary to examine how conventionalized behavior defines identification and its representation in contexts of truth, power, and authority (Mahmood, 2001: 845).

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<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0By22z3NerBCDWEJ5QnNmMi1ndTA/view?usp=sharing>