Voices of Sahrawi Women in the Diaspora: Building Bridges and Tearing Down Walls to Reach Every Corner of the Globe.

Their Contribution to Peacebuilding in the Digital Era.

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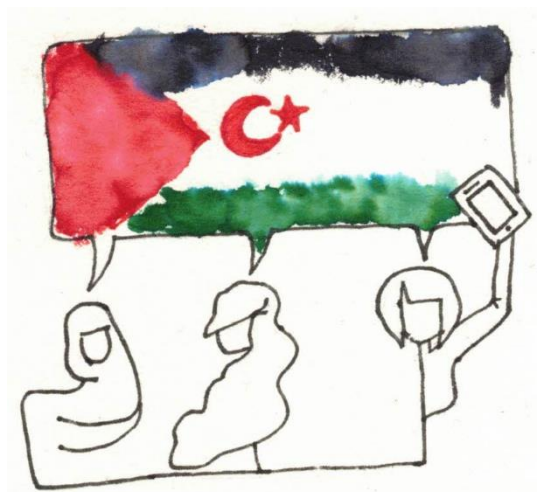
ABSTRACT

The struggle for independence of Western Sahara has been silenced for decades and making it visible is an arduous endeavour that involves overcoming many hurdles. In this scenario, Sahrawi women have been active participants in the liberation movement through different strategies. However, their involvement has gone through leaps-ahead and setbacks throughout history, and, today, their role appears to be gaining momentum. Therefore, it is particularly relevant to analyse the role played by Sahrawi women in the diaspora and to what extent they contribute to peacebuilding through online activism.

The methodology used to analyse the case has relied on primary and secondary data, mainly interviews to key informants and posts on social media. Besides, the literature review and a combination of theoretical approaches further support the interpretation and discussion of the data. Consequently, the analysis and discussion of the data collected shows that: first, there is an explicit feminist discourse, where women use strong argumentations and theoretical basis to support their claims. Second, Sahrawi women in the diaspora prove their commitment to the cause by spreading information in their country of settlement. This is particularly relevant in the era of misinformation, where their role in breaking the information blockade in digital social media is paramount. Third, they also contribute to creating a common imagined community based on gender equality, even though they face harsh criticism for raising debates on structural systems of oppression. In this regard, female activism not only has to face a considerable amount of internal criticism, but also confront "external agents". Both internal and external agents pose a type of hostility that has so far been confronted by Sahrawi women in the diaspora through strategies such as mutual support.

To sum up, the study delves into how Sahrawi women in the diaspora in Spain are taking part in debates in public spaces through online activism, analysing how they perceive the relevance of several topics that are frequent within their discourses. These actions allow them to contribute to political advocacy in different ways, and to build an equal society, which is the breeding ground for sustainable peace. The comprehensive approach to topics such as intersectionality, sisterhood, colonialism and identity is essential to build a common understanding of gender equality within the Sahrawi community, obtain support from the international community and achieve sustainable peace in Western Sahara.

Keywords: Western Sahara, women, diaspora, peacebuilding, gender equality, online activism

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

13n20 = *Trece de noviembre 2020* [Thirteenth of November 2020]

CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis

COVID-19 = Coronavirus Disease 2019

FS = *Feminismos Saharauis* [Sahrawi Feminisms]

HdS = *Hijas el Sahara* [Daughters of the Sahara]

INGO = International Non-Governmental Organisation

LEJSEE = *Liga de Estudiantes y Jóvenes Saharauis en el Estado Español* [League of Sahrawi Students and Youth in the Spanish State]

MENA = Middle East and North Africa

MINURSO = *Misión de Naciones Unidas para el Referéndum en el Sáhara Occidental* [United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara]

N.N = No Name

NUSW = National Union of Sahrawi Women

POLISARIO Front = Popular Front for the Liberation of *Saguia el-Hamra* and *Río de Oro*

SADR = Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

SC = *Sahara Cultura* [Sahara Culture]

UN = United Nations

UNSCR = United Nations Security Council Resolution

USA = United States of America

WPS = Women, Peace and Security

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Structure of the project

This research project delves into the role played by Sahrawi women in the diaspora to reach a resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara, stemming from the substantial contribution of women to peacebuilding and the increasing influence of online activism.

In the following pages, the project will be organised into chapters, sections, and subsections. First, this introductory chapter presents historical milestones in the conflict of Western Sahara and reviews the existent literature related to Sahrawi women from the point of view of the discourse on gender and nation, their strategies for political participation, resistance and peacebuilding, their contribution from different locations and the studies about their online activism, to identify the potential gaps in the current literature and how the project may contribute to the field. At the end of the chapter, the *raison d'être*[1] of the project is presented through an introduction to the research question and the problematisation of the case. Secondly, in a different chapter, the methodology will describe the research process. Thirdly, the theoretical framework will be introduced, setting the basis for the analysis and discussion. Fourthly, the empirical chapter will analyse and discuss the data looking further into different themes such as intersectionality, sisterhood[2], colonialism, identity and symbolism, peacebuilding and online activism. Lastly, a conclusion chapter will be introduced, followed by a number of Appendixes to broaden the methodological information.

1.2 Summary of the history of Western Sahara

Based on the assumption that the history of Sahrawi women cannot be understood in isolation from the history of Western Sahara and vice versa, this section introduces a series of milestones that have conditioned the participation of women in the peacebuilding process in Western Sahara in order to provide some contextual framework into the relevance of this research.

The Sahrawi population has always been traditionally nomadic, a condition that produced a gender- specific labour division: men specialised in nomadic herding, while women maintained a semi-sedentary lifestyle, dedicated to family care (Juliano, 1998, p.

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[1] The French concept "*raison d'être*" means "reason for existence" (Cambridge University Press, 2021a)

[2] Sisterhood means solidarity among women as political alliance. It is also refered as sorority, as its latin etimology is the prefix "*soror*", which means "sister", being an equivalent of the masculine word "fraternity".

84). This structure led to several traditions within family dynamics that are seen as a source of power. For instance, the newlyweds could stay with the bride's family during the early years of marriage, providing protection against gender-based violence (ibid, pp. 60-61). It is also relevant how Sahrawi women frequently expose the exceptionality that in case of divorce, the children stay with the mother as an example of their power (ibid, p. 62).

The situation suffered a dramatic transformation as a consequence of the Berlin Conference in 1884, which allowed Spain to colonise the territory (Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 186), ultimately affecting Sahrawi population way of life. Specifically, it meant a change in the traditional lifestyle of the Sahrawi peoples and affected the gender roles. In 1958, Western Sahara became province number 53 of Spain as a result, among other reasons, of the finding of phosphate mines (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 23, Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 116). The colonisation also affected the gender roles, for instance, through implementing the "Women's Section"[3], a tool used to change the precolonial gender system and define how a woman should behave according to the metropolitan gender stereotype (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 23; Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 122).

Even though Spain signed the XV General Assembly Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples in 1960, the process, to this day, has not yet concluded in Western Sahara (Diego, 1987, p. 74 as cited in Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 116). In this regard, the events that took place after the declaration were of utmost importance to understand the today's international political arena and the recent history and current situation of the Sahrawi population, its political project, and the participation of women in it.

In 1975, the king of Morocco, Hassan II, promoted the so-called "Green March", where over 300.000 Moroccans moved in the territories of Western Sahara in a strategy to annex the territory (Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 121). Some weeks later, Spain, Morocco and Mauritania signed "the Madrid Agreement", where Spain intended to transfer its power over the Western Sahara territories to the other two (UN Security Council, 2002, p. 2). Nevertheless, this agreement was not recognised by the international

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[3] In Spanish: *Sección femenina*. It was the female branch of the political structure during the Francoist dictatorship, which reclaimed the traditional values associated with women, highlighting their role as mothers and wives, pillars of the family, relegating them to the private sphere and strongly sustained on catholic principles (Los ojos de Hipatia, 2014, March 13). Through education it defined the national ideas of feminity and masculinity that are implicitily present nowadays (ibid).

community, which nowadays considers Spain as the administering power over the territory and claims that the agreement "did not affect the international status of Western Sahara as a Non-Self-Governing Territory[4]" (UN Security Council, 2002, p. 2). In 1976, Spain officially left the territories, and their administration was taken over by Morocco and Mauritania. Four years later, in 1979, Morocco became the sole administrator of the territory, after the withdrawal of Mauritania, although Morocco was not legitimate to have that role (ibid).

Amidst the abovementioned episodes, the Sahrawi community founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of *Saguia el-Hamra* and *Río de Oro* (POLISARIO Front) as the National Liberation Movement in 1973 and proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 27 February 1976 (Medina Martín, 2014a, p.16; Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 112). It is important to highlight that the National Union of Sahrawi Women (NUSW) was founded in 1974, to make visible the role of women within society and guarantee their participation in decision-making at all levels: political, socio-cultural, and professional (Una mirada al Sahara Occidental, 2020, 30 March). The NUSW was created with a national and international scope, fighting for two causes at the same time: the liberation of Western Sahara and their rights as women (ibid).

Following these events and because of the Madrid Agreement, an armed conflict took place in the territories, which forced part of the population to move to refugee camps in Algeria (Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 186). This situation affected, once again, the gender roles within the Sahrawi community, where men took the role of soldiers fighting on the battlefield, whereas women built and organised the camps in exile[5] (Juliano, 1998, p. 85; Medina Martín, 2016, p. 25).

During the conflict, France, and the USA supported Morocco, whereas Algeria (USSR ally) supported the POLISARIO (Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020, p. 769). Under these circumstances, throughout the decade of 1980s, Morocco built a wall (Berm) to divide the Occupied Western Sahara Territories and the free territories, governed by the POLISARIO Front, it is named "The Wall of Shame" by Human Rights Organisations (Padilla Santiago & Pàfila Domenech, 2012, pp. 194-195; BBC Mundo,

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[4] The UN defines the Non-Self-Governing Territories as "territories whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government" (United Nations, 2020, September 22). The Western Sahara is in the list since 1963 (ibid).

[5] This situation is of utmost importance to understand the participation of women in the Sahrawi community and its role in peacebuilding so it will be further developed in the following chapter on the literature review.

2009, November 2). The wall is over 2.720 kilometres long, being the second longest wall in the world, only after the Great Wall of China (BBC Mundo, 2009, November 2). According to some estimates, there are "around ten million landmines and cluster bombs" surrounding the wall, being "the biggest minefield of the world" (Padilla Santiago & Pàfila Domenech, 2012, pp. 194-195, own translation).

Figure 1. *Map of Western Sahara*
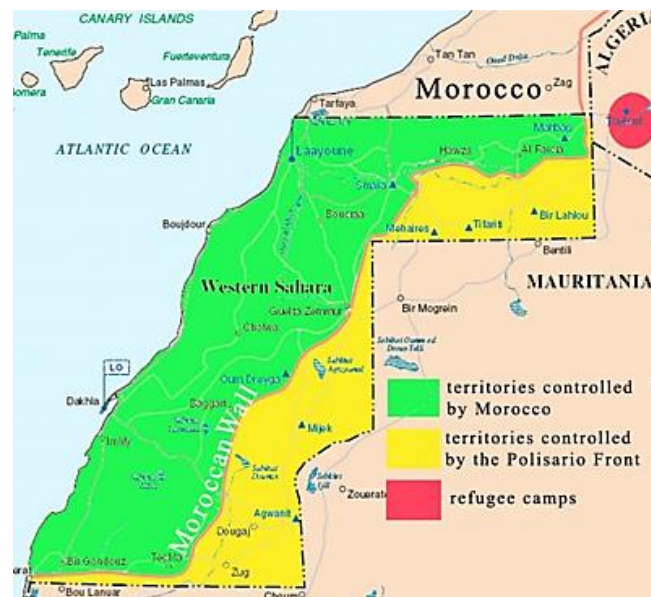
Source: Cartographic Section Department of Field Support, 2002 as cited in Dessie, 2013.

After more than a decade of armed conflict, Morocco and the POLISARIO Front accepted the settlement plan of the UN Security Council in 1988, which led to the creation of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO[6]) in 1991 (United Nations, n.d.). It established the ceasefire and "provided for a transitional period for the preparation of a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco" (ibid). The next steps were the Baker Plan I[7] in 2001 and the Baker Plan II in 2003, which provided provisional autonomy under the governance of Morocco (Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 186). However, those Plans did not lead to any significant progress in the resolution of the conflict (ibid).

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[6] For its Spanish translation as *Misión de Naciones Unidas para el Referéndum en el Sáhara Occidental*.
[7] Called after James Baker who was the U.N. Secretary-General's envoy for Western Sahara at that time (Shelley, 2003, January 8).

It is important to keep in mind that the SADR is a Member State of the African Union (The African Union Commission, n.d.). Moreover, eighty-four countries have recognised the SADR hitherto, however, it is worth stressing that none of them belongs to the so-called Global North. At present, only forty-five countries keep the recognition, thirty-one cancelled it and eight suspended it (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, n.d.).

Since this ceasefire, the Sahrawi population is waiting for a solution in refugee camps, as well as within the Occupied Territories, the free territories, and the diaspora. In terms of gender relations, the return of men to the camps was an important moment for the negotiation of roles between women and men, with different authors agreeing that the event meant the relegation of women to their *khaymas*[8] (Juliano, 1998, p. 86; Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020, p. 770). Meanwhile, Human Rights Organisations and Sahrawi activists are denouncing the continuous violations of Human Rights suffered by the civil society in the territories occupied by Morocco (Amnesty International, n.d.). In this sense, one important milestone in the recent history of the territory was the peaceful manifestation that took place in 2010 in Gdeim Izik, which has been described as the starting point of the Arab Spring (Vuorikuru, 2012, May 10; Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 188). The protest[9] took place in the outskirts of the city of Laayoune, located in the Sahrawi territories occupied by Morocco, where more than 28.000 people opposed the political, economic and social conditions they live in under the occupation (Herrero, 2020, November 8). The uprising participants suffered from repression and violent attacks by the Moroccan military and police, and nowadays, some are still being held prisoners for their political positioning (ibid). On the other hand, the beginning of 2021, saw a widespread condemnation by the international community towards Moroccan authorities for their harassment tactics against Human Rights defenders, namely "physical surveillance on prominent [H]uman [R]ights defenders, the use [of] excessive force to disperse peaceful protests […]" (Front Line Defenders, 2021, 17 February). It includes the house arrest of Sultana Khaya, a well-known Human Rights defender, and the physical violence against her and her family (ibid).

During 2020 and 2021 a series of events have taken place that may lead to a new turning point in the history of Western Sahara. In November 2020, the POLISARIO Front

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[8] *Khayma* refers to the houses or tents in *Hassaniya* dialect.
[9] Uprisings like Gdeim Izik are also known as "Sahrawi intifada", which are "periodic and peaceful protests" (Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 188, own translation)

informed that Morocco had broken the ceasefire in the Guerguerat region, against pro-POLISARIO protesters who had been blocking the road that connected to Mauritania, although Morocco denies the aggression (Reuters, 2020, 13 November). Moreover, a month after this incident, the then-President of the USA, Donald Trump, recognised the sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara (Kasraoui, 2020, 10 December).

Concerning the latter, it is of relevance for understanding the current international political arena to briefly mention the latest news on the diplomatic conflict between Morocco and Germany. The recognition of Moroccan sovereignty and the strength of ties between Morocco and Israel that included the claims from Washington led Germany to call for a United Nations Security Council meeting to further discuss on the issue, which has been interpreted by Morocco as an offense and a "destructive attitude towards Rabat's position on the Western Sahara issue" (Al Jazeera, 2021, May 6). Apart from this diplomatic tension, Moroccan and Spanish relations are increasingly sensitive. The hosting of the leader of the POLISARIO Front, Brahim Ghali, to treat his COVID-19 infection in Spain was interpreted by Morocco as treason, claiming it was not being informed beforehand; several Moroccan politicians consider this to be a violation of the environment of "mutual confidence", hinting at the possible consequences Spain may face in light of this event (Europa Press, 2021, May 8). A week after these statements, more than 6.000 migrants crossed the border between Morocco and the Spanish city of Ceuta (Kassam, 2021, May 18). This evidences the surging diplomatic tensions between both countries and their extensive humanitarian consequences.

To summarise, this section has briefly described the history of Western Sahara up to the present, highlighting the milestones and their importance for women's participation in the social and political spheres. The next section will provide an overview of some literature that has been published on the Sahrawi women and their strategies to actively take part in the political project of Western Sahara, along with the defence of their rights.

1.3 Literature review

The literature review provides an insight into the State-of-the-Art in the study of the role of Sahrawi women throughout the conflict and the process of peacebuilding.

One of the primary authors we need to observe if we want to ascertain the literature regarding Sahrawi women is Dolores Juliano; Juliano (1998) describes the women under study pinpointing their "high level of organisation", "social responsibilities", "autonomy", "self-confidence", and "gender awareness" (p. 17, own translation). These

characteristics oppose the stereotype of Global-South women, frequently seen as victims of their context (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 15). Moreover, Juliano (1998) criticises the study of the "Arab world" done from the Global North, as it is usually focused on men, who provide a stereotypical discourse that is accepted by Global-North researchers because it meets their expectations (p. 14).

The structure of the section is divided into four subsections delving into questions regarding the narratives of gender and nation, the political participation of Sahrawi women, their role from different locations and, finally, their online activism.

1.3.1 Gender and Nation

The gender discourse is a key element of the Sahrawi nation, not only symbolically but also in practice, partly due to the active contribution of women in the liberation movement (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 26; Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 115). In fact, a Spanish official document from the "Women's section" published in the 1970s highlights their "political strength" (Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 122, own translation). In this regard, the Sahrawi peoples defend that their "gender vindications" are part of their tradition and the future society they expect to build, therefore being a distinguishing feature in contrast to the Moroccan tradition and other countries where Islam is the main religion (Juliano, 1998, p. 22, Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 110; Padilla Santiago & Pàfila Domenech, 2012, p. 189). Bengochea Tirado (2013) delves into the relationship between gender and nation in the case of Western Sahara, as "the Sahrawi woman [is] a defining element of the nationalist identity" (p. 113, own translation). However, some authors claim that this discourse may have been instrumentalised in the POLISARIO Front to get support from the Global North (Juliana, 1999, p. 24; Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 30). In this respect, it is relevant to note that some Sahrawi activists do not identify with the term "feminism", as it is seen as "Eurocentric". This is especially relevant if we consider that the "cultural identity" is key in the discourse of the liberation movement (Medina Martín, 2014b, p. 175, p. 178).

From my point of view, considering women as a "defining element of the nationalist identity" is a source of empowerment but may risk the freedom of women at the same time, as they will be forced to meet some expectations according to the political project,

for example, the use of the *melhfa*[10] seen as part of the "identity". Therefore, this "gender and nation" discourse is a sensitive subject of study because it could be perceived as a questioning of core characteristics of the Sahrawi identity. The debates surrounding identity and gender and nation will be analysed after collecting data in the empirical chapter 4.

1.3.2 Strategies for political participation, resistance and peacebuilding

As it has been outlined in the contextual section, the different stages of Sahrawi history conditioned gender roles: the nomadic tradition, the colonisation by Spain and the years spent in the camps or the territories occupied by Morocco have meant differences in power. Among the strategies used by women to balance their position in society, Juliano (1998) mentions two: 1) invisibility, which consists of implicitly questioning systems of oppression, influencing the global frameworks from solidarity networks of women in the shade, through subtle changes, such as autonomy or sexual freedom, while apparently following social norms; and 2) self-affirmation, explicitly opposing discrimination, which is only possible once women have achieved a certain amount of power to openly challenge systems of oppression (pp. 31-33). There is another strategy particularly interesting, as it refers to motherhood, presenting pregnancy as active participation in the cause by itself since having "a large number of children is the only way to ensure the survival of their community" (ibid, p. 95, own translation).

Concerning its political activism, on the one hand, Sahrawi women politicised the "public space", where women took part in demonstrations and even in the front (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 28). On the other hand, the "private space", where women were in the frontline against colonialism, meeting militants at their homes and encouraging the participation of men in the revolution (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 28; Juliano, 1998, p. 84; Medina Martín, 2016, p. 24; Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 124).

Regarding the strategies of resistance of women, they "emerge from and with vulnerabilities and not against or in spite of them." (Judith Butler in Medina Martín, 2014b, p. 167, own translation). In the case of Sahrawi women, those vulnerabilities have arisen from the context of colonialism, nationalism, armed resistance, prolonged refuge or islamophobia (Medina Martín, 2014a, p. 16). Thus, the vulnerabilities are seen as

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[10] Cloth used by Sahrawi women covering her body from head to feet which protects from heat, wind and sand, defined as a "sophisticated cultural response to the hostile environment of the desert." (Hamoudi Hamdi & Jiménez Adelantado, 2020, p. 104, own translation)

opportunities for women's empowerment and agency (ibid, p. 31). That is also mentioned by Grande Gascón and Ruiz Seisdedos (2016), considering that those situations allow women to do activities different from the traditional activities attributed to their gender (p. 186). Likewise, Bengochea Tirado (2013) identifies repression as an opportunity for the participation of women (p. 119).

Finally, concerning the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, the UNSCR 1325[11] has not been implemented in Western Sahara yet (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 110). Nevertheless, Sahrawi women have been key "in the history of resistance" and peacebuilding (ibid, own translation). Likewise, a recent Internet post by the Secretary-General of the NUSW, claims that "the preparation and establishment of a National Action Plan on WPS is yet another ambitious goal for [NUSW]", although it will need recognition by United Nations (UN) agencies (Larabas Sueidat, 2020, December 4). In this context, the role of the NUSW is crucial to promote the political participation of women, hence their contribution to peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Medina Martín, 2014b, p. 174). In fact, there is an increasing presence of women in the political representation of the SADR (Medina Martín, 2014b, p. 117). Moreover, their role in peacebuilding is also visible through the creation of networks beyond borders, as they get support and solidarity from other institutions and organisations (Poyato Barona, 2016, pp. 119-122). Consequently, according to several authors, Sahrawi women are not only victims of oppression but also active actors in the political arena (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 122; Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 188). As an indication of the abovementioned, the High Commissioner of United Nations recognised the Sahrawi as an example in terms of women's participation (UNHCR, 2001 as cited in Dauden & Seini Brahim, 2020, August 7).

1.3.3 Participation of women from different locations

The participation of Sahrawi women in the struggle throughout Sahrawi history has received academic attention, especially their role from the refugee camps and the Occupied Territories. Consequently, it is relevant to highlight how several generations of women understand their "subjectivities and individual political identities" differently

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[11] The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was adopted in 2000 (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.). It was a milestone for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding, recognising their meaningful contribution (ibid). However, some authors consider it as part of the liberal peacebuilding agenda, focused on international ideas of peace, rather than focusing on local frames, which may perpetuate inequality (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2016, p. 188).

(Medina Martín, 2014b, p. 174, own translation). Nevertheless, despite the relevance of the generation as an analytical category to understand the active participation of women nowadays, there are not many studies on the case of Sahrawi women. However, to approach the differences in the engagement and strategies of resistance, the following paragraphs will introduce their role from different locations.

First, there are three stages in the history of women in the refugee camps (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 111; Hamoudi Hamdi, 2006 as cited in Bengochea Tirado, 2013, p. 127):

- Exile and the construction of the camps (1976-1979): where the survival strategy was a priority over women's affairs. Nevertheless, it meant a key moment in the history of women towards its "collective empowerment" as the main actors in decision-making (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 112). It defines the resistance strategy of "development in the settlement", as the creation of the camps allows the community to thrive (Medina Martín, 2014b, p. 166, own translation). Fatma El-Mehdi, Secretary-General of the NUSW, mentioned the role of women in this context, where "they began to build the foundations of society: schools, hospitals and ministries, and took part in the setting up of all state institutions [...]" (Medina Martín, 2016, p. 24, own translation).

- Female vindications and linkage to the political cause (1979-1990). Their role was mainly ensuring literacy among women, the promotion of their political participation and the participation in international events, doing a "diplomatic campaign" (Martínez y Mesa, 2008 as cited in Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 113). In this regard, they have been political leaders, being part of the Secretariat of the POLISARIO Front since 1974 (Medina Martín, 2016, p. 25).

- From the Peace agreements to present time (1991-currently). The major goal is to ensure that the institutionalisation of the norms developed during the previous years and the consolidation of their empowerment within political institutions and laws to avoid a loss of power in a future Sahrawi Nation-state (Juliano, 1998, p. 87; Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 114). Thus, the basic law and the Constitution consider equality between the genders (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 115). In this sense, Juliano (1998) refers to the frequent revolutionary discourse that brings the national and the women's vindications together, however, one concern is that once the revolution has ended, the global interests are prioritised and women's issues may not be considered (p. 100). Nevertheless, the situation of Sahrawi women appears to be different, for

instance, in the XIII Congress of the POLISARIO Front in 2011, they established a quota for the participation of women in politics (Medina Martín, 2016, p. 25). Moreover, in 2003 the SADR Government created a "Secretariat of State for Social Affairs and Women's Emancipation", which later became a Ministry (ibid, p. 26). In conclusion, apart from the NUSW, different organisations discuss women's participation policies in the camps, which may be understood as an inclusive environment (ibid, p. 27).

Second, in the case of the Occupied Territories, the women´s contribution to peacebuilding materialises in resistance through peaceful activism, which is answered by Morocco with "kidnapping, arbitrary detentions, rape, and marginalisation" (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 116, own translation). As it is known for cases such as the activist Sultana Khaya and her family, previously presented under the context section. The activists who live under occupation suffer repression from the Moroccan police for even hoisting a Sahrawi flag in their house (Equipe Media, 2021, February 16). In this context, it is relevant to pinpoint that Sahrawi peoples are a minority in the Occupied Territories against a majority of Moroccan settlers, which increases the vulnerability of Sahrawi (Grande Gascón & Ruiz Seisdedos, 2016, p. 187).

Finally, the contribution to peacebuilding by women in the diaspora is spreading the cause of the Sahrawi peoples to an international community, while they are in exile (Poyato Barona, 2016, p. 117). Their contribution to peacebuilding in this context takes the form of diplomatic actions, either formally, through official channels such as participating in institutions, or informally through other fora in their countries of settlement. However, the field of study of the political participation and contribution to peacebuilding of Sahrawi women in the diaspora is barely developed.

1.3.4 Online activism and violence

Allan (2014) argues that Sahrawi women are "as present in the online Sahrawi nationalist struggle as they are on the frontline in the Occupied Territories and in the reaguard of diaspora activism" (pp. 704-705). However, Allan (2014) underlines the privilege of some women's voices over others, depending on the extent to which they echo the POLISARIO discourse or not (p. 706). According to Allan (2014), the Internet has been a source of empowerment for Sahrawi women and there are different strategies followed by feminist cyberactivists to face harassment in social media: one being self-censorship, closing their accounts on social media (p. 706). Another strategy is the

collaboration among online feminists, reporting to the police on behalf of the victims and investigating the identities of the perpetrators (ibid). Finally, Allan (2014) refers to the importance of finding diverse voices online, and "work in solidarity across borders" (p. 707).

On a different note, Almenara-Niebla and Ascanio-Sánchez (2020) studied the gendered mechanisms of control that Sahrawi women in the diaspora face online, such as digital transnational gossip, and how they confront them (p. 768). The displacement of the Sahrawi community as refugees to different countries leads to a change of social codes that clashes with the mindset that prevails in the camps. Those changes and behaviours are conflictive on their return or at the time of establishing communications online (ibid, pp. 770-775). Moreover, Almenara-Niebla and Ascanio-Sánchez underline that those who migrated were seen as traitors because those who stayed thought that they would forget about the Sahrawi cause, but it has been proved that they keep their commitment "lobbying for the resolution of the conflict" (ibid). However, Sahrawi women may be discredited due to their personal behaviour through transnational gossip, thus not being respected as representatives, and suspected of intending to weaken their sense of belonging and identity as part of the Sahrawi collective. In this regard, apart from the strategy of self-censorship mentioned above by Allan (2014), they create two different accounts on social media, to keep connected with those in the camps and with people in their country of settlement, sharing different contents on each of them (Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020, p. 775). Sahrawi women have created online channels to vindicate for a change in gender norms and achieve equality, such as the blogs *Wurud Asahra*[12] and *Desmaquillando Tabúes*[13], where they highlighted that they are "not less Sahrawi" for differing in their behaviour from what is expected from them and that they have their own agency (ibid, pp. 778-779).

In conclusion, the information provided by the literature review's section leads to the research question that is defined in the next section.

1.4 Research question

After introducing the background of the conflict and the State-of-the-Art, there is evidence that the approaches to studying the role of Sahrawi women are mainly focused

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[12] Translated from Arabic as "Flowers of the Desert"
[13] Translated from Spanish as "Undressing Taboos"

on the refugee camps and the Occupied Territories. Thus, the research has defined several stages in the history of Western Sahara that determined the power of women, and their strategies of resistance. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the contribution of women in the diaspora. Consequently, based on the idea that is worth studying the lived experiences of women and how they contribute from different locations and realities, the research will answer the question: *How do Sahrawi women in the diaspora contribute to the process of peacebuilding through online activism?*

The research will explore questions such as the ties between the discourses on gender and nation, the intersection of systems of oppression, the power of sisterhood and the influence of the sense of identity. The aim is to highlight the role played by diaspora women through online activism, which does not seem well covered in existing research, and the potentialities and weaknesses of their narratives and actions towards achieving peace and an equal society. Specifically, this means investigating what are the strategies of resistance of Sahrawi women and how they spread their messages according to their discourse on a series of themes. Furthermore, such women and their contributions may be key nowadays, especially considering the growing use of digital social networks and resources as means for activism and a way to reach a larger audience than in the past and accomplish tasks of formal and informal diplomacy.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter gives an overview of the steps taken to acquire the suitable data and knowledge for answering the research question. First, the ontological and epistemological stances; second, the theories and approaches and their operationalisation; third, the choice of data, followed by the method of analysis, a presentation of the bias and own positionality that affects the analysis and, finally, the limitations and delimitations of the project.

2.1 Ontology and epistemology

This research project takes the ontological stance of constructivism to approach reality, which considers that "social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman, 2015, p. 29). In this context, social interactions are key and knowledge is "unfinished", thus reality is constructed by discourse and there are no "absolute truths" because it depends on social actors.

Concerning epistemology, this project takes an interpretivist approach, which means that the methods to approach knowledge in social science are different to those of natural science (Bryman, 2015, p. 26-27). In this sense, the project acknowledges that each individual has different lived experiences and interpretations of reality. Accordingly, the project considers the standpoint theory, building on the idea that the knowledge is always situated and depends on individual experiences (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 236 as cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 129). These stances are inherently related to the gap found in the literature review, as research has not paid enough attention to the contribution made by Sahrawi women situated in the diaspora. Consequently, it is relevant to capture the interpretation of the data by the researcher and the voice of the women under study, as far as the intention of the research is to understand the meaningful contribution of a collective to a social and political cause.

Finally, these two stances became apparent in the way I analysed the data collected.

2.2 Choice of theories and approaches

The theories support the understanding and relevance of the themes under analysis. Thus, the theoretical choices taken within this project are interrelated and directed to answer the research question. It is relevant to bear in mind that some of the theories employed in this research project are contentious and may present opposition. However, although I may agree only partially with their claims as a researcher, I consider them an appropriate framework to analyse the issue at hand.

First, the approach of intersectionality is chosen to include as many perspectives as possible at the time of analysing and reduce the impact of biases. Currently, Arab feminism focuses on the situation of women within the Arab region, and this project takes the stance defended by part of the scholars within such school of thought, who identify religion as a system of oppression. Moreover, transversal politics explores the heterogeneity of groups and their capacity to dialogue to work together towards a common goal, thus being closely aligned with the abovementioned choice of taking an intersectional approach.

The theory of Gender and Nation brings us closer to the knowledge of gender relations in the discourse about the nation, defining the roles of women and expectations in the reproduction of the nation biologically, culturally and regarding citizenship. However, as mentioned before, the positions presented by Yuval-Davis (1997) may be seen as strongly normative and contentious.

The goal of achieving sustainable peace in Western Sahara leads to the use of theories on peacebuilding, especially focusing on the role of women and diaspora. First, women face specific violence at the time of conflict and the achievement of sustainable peace depends on gender equality, and second, the diaspora can play a role as diplomats in their country of settlement.

Finally, the specific actions that can be taken through the use of digital social networks and their potential for social mobilisation in the last decades, especially considering the extensive use by the Sahrawi community in recent months, leads to the ineluctable use of this theoretical framework. Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of Internet-based actions is key, as the possibilities of doing physical events and demonstrations are limited in many parts of the world, including Spain, which is the country of settlement of the subjects under study.

Figure 2. *Choice of theories and approaches*
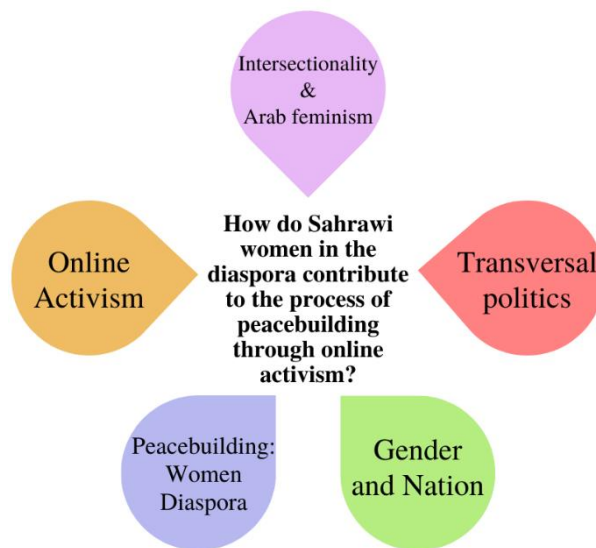
Source: Own elaboration

2.2.1 Operationalisation of the theories

The operationalisation of the theories intends to portray how they are utilised to analyse the role of Sahrawi women in the diaspora as peacebuilders through their activism in digital social networks. The research process has drawn on elements of several theories to grasp the complexity of the case.

One key concept at the time of analysing is "women", hence, the intersectional approach is essential to include the voices of diverse women instead of homogenising a group under that category. On the same note, Arab feminism offers an approach to other

considerations of systems of oppression that may be left behind if we do not reflect on them through a specific theoretical framework.

The concept of "Transversal politics" considers that knowledge is always situated and the importance of dialogue to advance towards a common goal despite differences. Thus, it is of relevance to analyse the heterogeneity within Sahrawi women in the diaspora, and their potentially different views on how to achieve a free and peaceful Western Sahara.

At the time of analysing the relationship between gender and nation-building, we find that the role of women is inherent to the national discourse (Allan, 2010), which may define the spaces where women are expected to act and create a structure of power relations.

The concept of "peacebuilding" is paramount in the research as the contribution of Sahrawi women to it is central. Thus, the project uses two different approaches to peacebuilding: as women and as diaspora. First, the study of women has been of special interest within Peace studies, and it deserves a special focus that is made obvious throughout the literature review and the analysis. Second, the diaspora may play a crucial role in peacebuilding that has not been deeply studied, and it is therefore of interest to analyse the strategies that may define the specific role of diaspora women in the peace process in Western Sahara.

The framework set by an analysis of the social mobilisation in digital social networks allows delving into the specific strategies of resistance that contribute to peace and were not common a few decades ago, thus not being studied in depth in the case of the Sahrawi community.

2.3 Choice of data

The process of data gathering to answer the research question was mainly based on qualitative data from primary and secondary sources.

First, the secondary data comes from the review of existing literature about the history of Western Sahara and the study of the role of women. These data allowed reviewing the State-of-the-Art and deciding the research question.

Alternatively, to answer the research question, the project took primary data from digital social networks such as *Facebook*, posts on blogs and *Twitter*. To comply with this data collection process, I created a *Twitter* personal account in January 2021 with the only aim of keeping up-to-date about the situation in Western Sahara and the

contributions made by women within that platform. However, most of the posts under analysis come from *Instagram* as it is the platform with a higher rate of followers per account. To be able to do an in-depth analysis, the research process consisted of checking every publication on their social media and the reactions included in the comment's section of those publications. Moreover, the research process included a continuous review of newspapers, both national and international, as well as specific sources to contextualise the case. Some examples are the recently launched newspaper named "*Voz Saharaui[14]*" and other social media such as *Telegram* channels about the Sahrawi cause, as well as the listening of podcasts and screening of documentaries. In this regard, the method of data gathering can be described as observational data based on online networks.

Further concerning primary data, the project was supported by attending events at *Google Meets* organised by Sahrawi women. It is relevant to underline here that those meetings are not recorded anywhere, thus, the in-text citations are referred to as "fieldnotes" followed by the reference to the post where they published the event. Other sources of data were personal communications through social media, attendance to face-to-face informal meetings, webinars and film series. In this regard, the method of data collection can be considered participant observation as I interacted with the subjects of the research.

Additionally, I conducted e-mail and face-to-face online interviews, which allowed for deeper knowledge on how Sahrawi women themselves perceive their contribution and feasible solutions to the conflict. The questions were open in a semi-structured interview that followed an interview guide[15]. This format allowed the participants in the face-to-face interview to provide broader answers in a dialogue with the researcher (Bryman, 2015, p. 468). More details will be provided below about interview format, however, it is interesting to add here that the strategy for the selection of interviewees was information-oriented, as the aim was "to maximize the utility of information from small samples and single cases. Cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 307). Finally, to have a comprehensive view of the

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[14] Translated as "Sahrawi Voice"
[15] Appendix 1 includes the interview guide of the face-to-face online interview, organised according to different themes.
Appendix 2 includes the interview guide of the e-mail interview, , organised according to different themes.

contributions of Sahrawi women the analysis combines info from online sources with interviews evidence.

2.3.1 An introduction to Sahrawi women activists

The choice of accounts of Sahrawi women in the diaspora that has been used for the analysis and the potential interviewees that were considered deserve a specific subsection. First, Table 1 presents the active accounts that were considered for data collection. The process to elaborate it consisted of analysing some basic features related to the types of diaspora contributions to peacebuilding and development described by Horst et al. (2010, p. 9), which are presented under chapter 3.4.2, and considering the gender of most of their components or spokespersons, ensuring that they had uploaded post concerning gender equality, and considering the number of followers on *Instagram* by the 8th of April of 2021.

Table 1. *Active online accounts considered for data collection.*

Name	Actors	Method	Kind	Compensation	Location	No. Followers
Násara @sahrawifeminist	Individual	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	12,3k
***Feminismos Saharauis[16]* @Feminismos_Saharauis**	Collective	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	1.883
***Hijas del Sahara[17]* @HijasdelSahara**	Collective	Indirect &Direct	Social &Material	Voluntary	Country of settlement & of origin	1.897
***Trece de Noviembre 2020[18]* @TreceDeNoviembre20**	Collective	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	853
***Sahara Cultura[19]* @SaharaCulturaes**	Collective	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	3.735
***Sahara no se vende[20]* @Sahara.no.se.vende**	Collective	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	1.713
***Hijos de las nubes[21]* @HijosDeLasNubes**	Collective	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	1.255
***Alimentando sonrisas saharauis[22]* @Alimentando.sonrisas12**	Collective	Indirect &Direct	Social &Material	Voluntary	Country of settlement	831
LEJSEE[23] @Lejsee	Collective	Indirect	Social	Voluntary	Country of settlement	3.305

Source: Own elaboration

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[16] Translated as "Sahrawi feminisms"
[17] Translated as "Daughters of the Sahara"
[18] Translated as "Thirteenth of November 2020"
[19] Translated as "Sahara Culture"
[20] Translated as "Sahara is not for sale"
[21] Translated as "Sons of the clouds"
[22] Translated as "Feeding Sahrawi smiles"
[23] Translated as "League of Sahrawi Students and Youth in the Spanish State"

Finally, interviews were conducted and limited to six of these accounts. This choice was made according to the content of their publications and the characteristics of their members, which was aligned with the research question of this project. However, this study only managed to hear back from three of these sources: *Feminismos saharauis* (FS), *Hijas del Sahara* (HdS) and *Trece de noviembre 2020* (13n20). The fact that the remaining three accounts did not answer to the proposal of participating in the research may be a consequence of a series of reasons: first, that my approach to them as a researcher was not appropriate and they did not find it interesting; second, that academic projects may not be their target and they prefer to lead their activism towards another kind of audience.

Thereupon, I elaborated the interview guide[24] from questions that arose at the time of reading the literature review, the theories and the textual discourse on social media. Finally, informed consent is crucial, and I asked for it prior to the interviews, especially in the case of the face-to-face meeting, to get permission to record it.

Therefore, this research project analysed the contribution of different Sahrawi women activists, and this section introduces the main accounts under analysis to understand their relevance. Even though the introduction presented below includes some analytical considerations, it intends to describe the profiles to understand their relevance in the chapter of analysis.

The description of *Feminismos saharauis'* profile says "Community of feminist and diverse Sahrawi women. Decolonial[25] and anti-racist. Sahrawi solidarity in the face of patriarchal violence!" (Feminismos Saharauis [FS], n.d.a[26], own translation). They defined their objectives in a post, demonstrating that they are inherently political and contribute to the basis of gender equality within Sahrawi institutions and culture (FS, 2018, December 31). *Feminismos Saharauis* say that they aim to "[…] [strengthen] civil society with intersectional claims […]" and add that "[they] don't want to make them (women's rights) subordinate to the struggle for independence" (ibid, own translation). Finally, among their claims there are:

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[24] Appendix 1 and 2

[25] The term *decolonial* refers to a school of thought based on intersectionality, making visible the privileges of Global North feminists and scholars and the image they portray of Global South women's agency (Medina Martín, 2014a, p.14). Relevant authors are María Lugones and Ochy Curiel (ibid, pp. 15-17).

[26] "n.d.a" refers to the reference (no date) and the letter indicates the specific reference as there is another one by the same author identified as "n.d.b".

a) working for legal quality; b) participation of women in peace negotiations in compliance with the UNSCR 1325; c) acknowledgement of women that took place in the POLISARIO Front; d) dedicating a space to women in the War Museum; e) creating a Gender Department in all public administration institutions; f) addressing women's sexual and reproductive health in several areas (ibid, own translation).

Consequently, the presentation of those clear objectives shows their commitment to positive peace, defining the changes that must take place to build an equal society, especially considering their demand for the participation of women in peace processes.

Besides, *Feminismos Saharauis* "recognise [themselves] as political subjects [and] create a space to analyse their situation from a feminist approach" (FS, n.d.b, own translation). Their principles are "plurality, decoloniality, the right to Rights and sisterhood" (ibid, own translation). Moreover, among their objectives there is "feminising politics: we want Sahrawi women to be active players in the independence process" (ibid, own translation).

Another relevant account is *Hijas Del Sahara* (HdS), whose profile claims: "Willing to fight for a free Sahara" and "on behalf of all Sahrawi women" (Hijas del Sahara [HdS], n.d., own translation). Most of the women who are part of the group are Sahrawi and live in the diaspora, although some live in the refugee camps (HdS, 2021, February 14; interview HdS). They aim to make visible the struggle of women in the camps and the Occupied Territories through interviews and posts about women activists and provide menstrual products for women in the refugee camps (HdS, 2021, February 14). Concerning their perception of what is needed to create a feminist Sahrawi nation they define: *"a) Quality education for all; b) Promoting women's participation as agents of social change; c) Strengthening social protection; d) Facilitating equal access to the world of work"* (HdS, interview, own translation).

The *Instagram* account named *Sahara Cultura* (SC) is also relevant as it explicitly includes "feminisms" as part of the content of their profile (Sahara Cultura [SC], 2020, June 12). This profile is particularly interesting for the analysis because of the section "*El rincón de Boni*", where a Sahrawi woman in the diaspora interviews other Sahrawi women and men.

Trece de noviembre 2020 is called after the date when the second war of Western Sahara started. It is formed by two men and two women in the diaspora, and at the time of doing the analysis, there is only a woman running the *Instagram* account, who answered the online interview (13n20, personal communication, 2021, May 4).

In conclusion, different accounts problematise the approach to peacebuilding in a different manner and present commonalities and differences in their composition and narratives. It is worth mentioning that *Feminismos Saharauis* and *Hijas del Sahara* define their aims clearly, which are closely related to contributing to peacebuilding on their homeland. That clarity on their objectives may be key to structure their activism along on different topics, as presented in the analysis chapter below.

2.4 Method of analysis

The project may be considered applied research as it is informed by several existing theories and organised thematically by what the Sahrawi women who are online activists in the diaspora, as subjects of the study, consider relevant on their social media. The project does discourse analysis, understanding how the Sahrawi women in the diaspora depict relevant issues which define their contribution to peacebuilding in their narratives. In this sense, it is relevant to highlight that even though the inductive method is mostly used by social scientist when they conduct qualitative research, this project uses a deductive method, as its point of departure is the theoretical framework that supports the analysis of the findings (Bryman, 2015, p. 32). The theories used would not be sufficient in isolation, but their combination is useful for the interpretation of the issue at hand.

The research is designed as a case study where the analysis is focused on several groups of women activists to include their own interests, concerns and perceptions of their contribution to peacebuilding from the diaspora. The project intends to illustrate the points of view of Sahrawi women in the diaspora as accurate as possible, hence the use of direct quotations within the chapter of analysis is paramount. Besides, the research includes an analysis of the publications in social media and other resources to identify their contribution to peacebuilding from the "external" point of view of the researcher, as my interpretation aims to understand why they use different strategies to communicate their struggle and the potentialities and weaknesses of their narratives for peacebuilding.

It is a dynamic process, as it has been continuously adjusted to better answer the problem formulation. Moreover, the interpretation of the data is characterised by gender and intersectional analysis of discourse. In conclusion, the chapter of analysis will be divided into sections corresponding to several topics that arouse during the process of collecting data, linking their interrelations between topics and their connections with the theories and bringing about the conclusions and answer to the research question.

Bryman (2015) defines discourse as "much more than language as such: it is constitutive of the social world" (p. 531). Thus, discourse creates meaning and a key commitment of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to unveil "why some discourses are privileged over others and the role of power in relation to them", considering the context where they take place (ibid, pp. 540-541). This understanding helps to analyse how women contribute to peacebuilding through social mobilisation and how they frame it.

Concerning the interviews, as mentioned before, they were conducted online. In this sense, it is worth pointing out that the interviews were held in Spanish and translated to English through in-text direct quotations, however, the transcript[27] and the e-mail responses[28] were included in several appendixes in their original in Spanish. One of the interviews consisted of dialogue with three representatives of *Feminismos saharauis*, whereas the interviews to *Hijas del Sahara* and *Trece de noviembre 2020* consisted of an exchange of e-mails. Both types of interviews followed an interview guide on several themes, organised by theories, aiming to be answered with flexibility. At the time of referring to their answers to the interviews, I will use *italics* in the chapter of analysis, both for the contributions of face-to-face online interviews and for e-mail responses. The rest of the written data is not presented in *italics*.

In the case of *Feminismos Saharauis*, I refer to the representatives who participate as FS1, FS2 and FS3 to respect their anonymity. I also refer as "No Name" (N. N.) to women who participate in online interviews and webinars held by other actors, to respect their privacy. The decision to maintain their anonymity is held for ethical reasons, as I acknowledge that their active role in support of the cause may be problematic because of the politically charged nature of the issue and the reprisals some women face for their statements, as will be discussed in the analysis, under subsection 4.7.2.

The project aims to share knowledge with the participants as a two-way process, where the power is shared and avoid "using" them in the only interest of the project itself. In this context, I conceive myself as a "learner, rather than an expert, and the participants as 'theorists of their own everyday lives'" (Sefa Dei, 2005 as cited in McLean & Zapata, 2015, p. 291).

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[27] Appendix 3
[28] Appendix 4

2.5 Own positionality

I am aware that my worldview, biases and assumptions shape my work and may influence the lives of the collective under study. The project takes the stance of standpoint theory; thus, I consider that knowledge is situated (Haraway 1988), including my knowledge as a researcher, which is unfinished and entails a continuous learning process.

Moreover, I recognise that I may have a position of certain power as a consequence of being a Spanish citizen, and a student of Gender studies at a University that is located in the Global North. This may affect my interviewees' perception of my person, and therefore potentially affect the quality and trust-building within the interview situation. Consequently, I intend to stay away from colonialist narratives and the white saviour complex[29], recognising the agency and capabilities of the subjects under study to generate strategies of resistance and peacebuilding in their continuous fight against several systems of oppression. Thus, the aim of this project is not to teach how to build peace, but to analyse how women in the diaspora build peace and how they perceive the effectiveness of their strategies towards their endeavour to have a free state.

The aim of the project is not only to make visible the role of women in the diaspora in peacebuilding, but also to make visible the long-term resistance of the entire community. Thus, the project intends to amplify the voice of Sahrawi women in the diaspora and at the same time avoid speaking on behalf of them. Although I am aware I may be unsuccessful in my purpose as far as it is not a completely participative research process, I intend to tackle this through the introduction of direct quotations in the analysis chapter.

Another important consideration is that the research process must not and should not put the interviewees at risk, including ethical considerations at the time of coding the interviews and choosing the questions, as previously mentioned. Especially considering that it is a very politically charged topic, thus making it extremely controversial.

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[29] The white saviour complex refers to the belief by people from the Global North that they have to "save" those in the Global South, disregarding the systems of oppression that they created and still contribute to (Aronson, 2017, pp. 36-37). Moreover, this position assumes that those from the Global South need to be "led" by those from the Global North, undervaluing their power to transform their own reality (ibid). Although these behaviours are usually "well-intentioned", they implicitly imply a colonial and white supremacy mindset (ibid).

2.6 Limitations and delimitations

Concerning the limitations, my access to bibliography and interviews was constrained due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions to travel within Spain and abroad. Moreover, I am unable to speak *Hassaniya*, a dialect derived from Arabic, which is spoken by Sahrawi peoples, which limited my communications to Spanish or English speakers, data and literature only. Likewise, online interviews reduce the confidential environment and then the possibilities of getting deeper answers from the interviewees. Two additional considerations concerning the format of the interviews are: on the one hand, the interview conducted to three representatives of an organisation influenced their answers as they were influencing one another during the discussion. Concerning the interviews conducted through e-mail, the answers were more deliberated, because there was no space for improvisation and spontaneity (Bryman, 2015, p. 490). On the other hand, the answers to the different interviews may not represent the point of view of every member of the collective as some of their opinions are personal and the number of interviews has not been large. Moreover, as I contacted the collective accounts, they may have chosen the members that are more powerful and represent a more privileged position, which then affects the answers. As a result of those limitations, we should bear in mind that the project will analyse a sample that is considered representative to the extent that they are key informants and are relevant for the research, but it may exclude some perspectives.

Another important constraint was the limited number of previous research on the role of Sahrawi women who live in the diaspora in the process of peacebuilding and the reduced literature on online activism on platforms such as *Instagram*. Nevertheless, the theoretical approach used to analyse online activism, even though it is rather old, it is relevant as it emphasises the risks associated to activism, which is particularly appropriate in the case of Sahrawi women and the sensitive context that surrounds the issue. Finally, as it is a silenced conflict, it was difficult to find objective information about some events in diversified sources of information.

Concerning the delimitations, I first wanted to do a comparison between the resistance of Palestinian women and Sahrawi women, but I rejected it due to time and space constraints as it would take long contextual research. Then I decided to do a comparison between Sahrawi women in different locations, but considering the limitations, it would have been difficult to access informants. Finally, due to time and

space constraints and considering accessibility and the relevance of the topic and the gap in the literature, I decided to take that limitation as an opportunity and focus on the specific role of Sahrawi women in the diaspora in Spain.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter identifies the theoretical framework that will support the analysis of the topic at hand. The different approaches are interrelated and provide adequate tools to critically read the findings in the empirical chapter. First, the current chapter introduces a section on intersectionality and Arab feminism, as they consider several systems of oppression. Second, transversal politics presents a comprehensive view on social debates and highlights the importance of dialogue to find the common nexus that benefits the collective. Third, the role played by gender discourse in narratives about the nation is crucial in the study of the topic because of its presence in Sahrawi claims, as has already been identified in the literature review. Fourth, the role that women and diaspora play in peacebuilding have been studied separately, however, this research project intends to leverage the potentialities of both fields to analyse their relevance when they intervene together. Finally, the role of activism and mobilisation in digital social networks will be cross-cutting in the analysis and relates to the previously mentioned approaches.

3.1 Intersectionality and Arab feminism

3.1.1 Intersectionality

Analysing power relations and systems of oppression is essential within feminist research. Consequently, the approach of intersectionality is key for this research project, as it acknowledges that:

> gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, and similar phenomena cannot be analytically understood in isolation from one another, instead, these constructs signal an intersecting constellation of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups positioned within them. (Hill Collins & Chepp, 2013, p. 3)

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) was the first to coin the concept, and she claimed that the experiences of discrimination tend to be defined from the perspective of the privileged within each group (p. 140). Thus, this approach does not intend to prioritise one system

of oppression over another, but to consider the specific discrimination that faces different individuals at the intersection of their different identities. Equally important are those considerations to claim that the category "woman" is not homogeneous since there are many differences among women (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 10). In this context, the approach is relevant for the research because Sahrawi women in the diaspora may find themselves in an intersection of different identities such as women, Sahrawi, African, Arab, Muslim, migrant, refugee, black and so on. Besides, these identities and the resulting social experiences will most likely vary between Sahrawi women living in the refugee camps or the Occupied Territories or the diaspora

Finally, concerning the differences between feminist women from the Global North and South, Yuval-Davis (1997) refers to their different objectives. The former "would call for women's liberation", whereas the latter "would respond that as long as their people are not free there is no sense for them in speaking about women's liberation" since their menfolk are also oppressed (p. 117). Thus, it is crucial to avoid the patronising discourse as if women from the Global South were "politically immature" and needed to discover their oppressions (that, supposedly, have to be the same as oppressions against women of the Global North). In contrast, there has to be a consideration of the context and not some practices in isolation (ibid, p. 118). Thus, cooperation and solidarity are needed among feminists in different positions within the same or different social contexts to surpass those discourses (ibid, p. 125).

3.1.2   *Arab feminism*

Building on the analysis of systems of oppression suggested by the intersectional approach, this research project considers relevant the approach defined as "Arab feminism" in contrast to the "Islamic feminism", considering that framing feminism within the religious discourse is seen by many authors as an oxymoron. Islamic feminism is theoretically a vindication of identity against white and colonial feminism (El Hachmi, 2019, p. 37). Nevertheless, some authors who have roots in Arab contexts claim that there is "structural misogyny" in Islam since religion plays an important role in the social construction of womanhood and the rights they hold (ibid). Thus, according to El Hachmi (2019), Islamic feminism is against neither the "religious patriarchy" nor the "political patriarchy" (p. 20, own translation). However, there are other authors who disagree with those claims and defend that it is possible to do a feminist interpretation of the *Qur'an*, which empowers women (Khankan, 2018; Ahmed, 1992). Finally, this research chooses

the expression "Arab Feminism", considering the patriarchal interpretation that prevails today, its power within the political, legal and private spheres of life, and that religion can be experienced as oppression for women. This means that the research takes this stance out of respect for any religious beliefs on a personal level, but that it acknowledges the complexity of the presence of religion in the public spheres.

Among the major debates between the different positions regarding religion, there have been two especially relevant: first, the existence of *sharia* or family law in many countries where most of the population follows the Muslim religion, and, second, the use of the headscarf. Concerning *sharia*, it regulates issues such as "inheritance, marriage, divorce [and] custody of children", and the debate centres around considerations of *sharia* as being incompatible with legal equality (Paradela, 2015, p. 23). Concerning the use of the headscarf, it is seen by many as a source of identity or as a protection against the sexual harassment perpetrated by men (ibid, pp. 25-26). In contrast, Arab feminists describe the headscarf as a patriarchal strategy to control women (Mernissi as cited in Paradela, 2015, p. 28). The relation between religion and identity is broadly studied by many authors, who insist that considering the use of the headscarf as a free choice is not acceptable, since there are many interests behind it and they are not particularly feminist (El Hachmi, 2019, p. 89).

To sum up, assuming that the issues related to religion are contentious, the inclusion of this theoretical approach becomes necessary within this project as it leads to the understanding of the power of identity and symbolism in the role that Sahrawi women in the diaspora play in peacebuilding, which will be further discussed under section 4.5 in the analysis chapter.

3.2 Transversal politics

Related to the concept of intersectionality and considering that the subject matter of this research is inherently political, it is of relevance for this research to consider the idea of transversal politics, which builds on the deconstructionist theories that argue that every person is different (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 125). It challenges the ideas of universalism, relativism and identity politics, which homogenise groups (ibid, pp. 130-131). For instance, it questions the "universalist" concept of "sisterhood" as it considers that it is "based on the idea of common oppression", when the reality of women is more complex (bell hook, 1991, p. 29 as cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 125). Moreover, the deconstructionist stance recognises the relevance of "mobilising unities", noting the

differences between groups and their inner heterogeneity (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 126). As
a result,

> all feminist […] politics should be viewed as a form of coalition politics in
> which the differences among women are recognized and given a voice, […]
> and the boundaries of this coalition should be set not in terms of 'who' we are
> but in terms of what we want to achieve. (ibid)

It is in this context that the "standpoint theory" defines the situated knowledge, as
each person has had different experiences, thus dialogue between women in different
positions is essential (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 236 as cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 129).
This form of dialogue is called "*transversalism*" as far as

> each participant in the dialogue brings with her the *rooting* in her own
> membership and identity, but at the same time tries to *shift* in order to put
> herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different
> membership and identity. (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 130)

Concerning this idea of *transversalism*, it is relevant to underline how the dialogue
between opposed groups, such as occupier and occupied collectivities may create a
"coalition and solidarity politics" according to Yuval-Davis (1997, pp. 130-131).
However, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that sometimes the opposite postures
might be irreconcilable, but dialogue offers an opportunity to work on the common values
and goals and not the different identities (ibid). According to Yuval-Davis (2012), it is
this dialogue which leads to "the truth" (p. 51). In conclusion, the idea of transversal
politics is not to be ambiguous or superficial, but to search for collective interests rather
than individual ones using dialogue as means to focus on what unites the opposed groups
and not on what separates them.

The approach of transversal politics is key to avoid falling into what Hancock
defined as the "Oppression Olympics", where different groups compete for being
considered "the most oppressed to get attention and resources from dominant groups" (as
cited in Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p. 332).

3.3 Gender and Nation

The joint analysis of the discourse on gender and nation is crucial in any
revolutionary movement to understand the power relations between the defined genders
within a given society and the expectations about their roles within the liberation
movement.

According to Connell (1987), "[g]ender is a contextual, socially constructed means of assigning roles and norms to given sex categories" (p. 280). Yuval-Davis (1997) adds that both "gender" and "sex" are modes of discourse (p. 9). Thus, "gender" "relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference", whereas the category "sex" includes "groups of social subjects […] defined as having different sexual/biological constitutions" (ibid). Moreover, Connell (1987) identifies that the context where gender relations take place is usually patriarchal, intending to subordinate women under men's domination (p. 281).

In this context, it applies to consider gender relations when analysing nationalism, since the idea of the nation usually implies a conception of masculinity and femininity, and the theories of "the social contract" relegate each of them to specific spaces (public/private and civilized/natural), excluding women from the public, hence, the discussion about the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp. 1-2). Nevertheless, "it is women – and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia – who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically" (ibid, p. 2). Considering these statements, the construction of the discourses on gender relations and the nation are interrelated.

At the time of searching for the origin of the subordination of women, one may fall into the trap of forgetting about the historical context of the specific place under analysis, hence the specificities in the creation and reproduction of the gender relations (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 6). Yuval-Davis argues that each society may give different social relevance to specific actions, and it is desirable not to generalise (ibid). For instance, in western societies, the values associated with nature are considered inferior to those related to culture, but they are not universal values (ibid). In this regard, the considerations of gender as constructed by culture means that the discourse defines the roles of each of the genders and their power positions in a given society, thus, "the self is always situated" (ibid, pp. 8-10).

When defining the "nation-state" it is vital to remember that it is an ideal model, because in reality there are members of a nation that may live in a different state or even nations without states, as Sahrawi or Palestinian (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 11). The nation can be understood as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983, as cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 15). Thus, the state is the institution that intends to comprise those that are part of that community. In this regard, "the nationalist project and discourse is the claim for a separate political representation for the collective" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 16).

Yuval-Davis (1997) distinguishes between three dimensions of nationalist projects, considering the role of gender relations within each of them:

1. *Volksnation.* It relates to the origin or race of the people, where the role of women in the "biological reproduction of the nation" is vital (ibid, pp. 21-22). The reproductive role of women to bear children, hence the collective, defines their social position (ibid, p. 26). Moreover, it relates to the idea of "purity" and the definition of the identity of those that are part of a collective (ibid, p .28).

2. *Kulturnation.* The cultural characteristics define the collective, for instance, the customs and traditions, codes of style of dress, language, etc. It identifies women as "symbolic border guards and as embodiments of the collectivity" (ibid, p. 23)

3. *Staatnation.* It pays attention to the concept of "citizenship" and the characteristics that define it, which is more related to the idea of state (ibid, p. 21).

The idea of *Kulturnation* is of special interest for this research as it relates to ideas of identity and symbolism, which connect to Arab feminism and debates within the Sahrawi community surrounding the wearing of *melhfa* that are presented under the chapter of analysis. The relation between *Kulturnation* and gender relations identifies that women usually carry the "burden of representation" of the collectivity, being tied to a certain set of behaviours, dressing codes, etc. (ibid, p. 45). Nevertheless, they are often excluded from the political arenas, thus being the object and not the subject of political decision-making (ibid, p. 47). In this context, Yuval-Davis argues, there are definitions of "what/who is a proper man or a proper woman" which become important for the identity of the members of the collective (ibid, p. 67). Thus, it is highlighted how culture may be stricter in diasporic communities to pinpoint the difference with "others" (ibid, p. 46). In this context, it applies to relate to the Arab feminism mentioned in the previous section and its debate around the use of the headscarf.

Finally, to link with the social mobilisation of women, it is relevant to highlight that the fight for national liberation does not mean that women do not fight for their rights within that society (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 118). Nevertheless, Yuval-Davis argues that women who make visible the internal weaknesses of the collective to build better social relations may face some opposition from the inside (ibid, p. 123). For instance, when women's organisations are debating some problems that take place within their

communities, such as gender-based violence, some men deny it to, theoretically, avoid feeding racism (ibid). Indeed, those organisations are sometimes seen as "a betrayal of the community's customs and traditions" (ibid). However, at the time of analysing the online social mobilisation, it applies to consider the heterogeneity of individuals and experiences within each society, and the role of activists "as advocates rather than as representatives of their constituencies" (ibid, p. 120).

3.4 Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding comprises "activities aimed at the sustainable transformation of structural conflict factors and patterns. It presupposes a long-term commitment, on the part of both local and external actors, to a process that simultaneously addresses the material and the attitudinal level of conflict" (Horst & Gaas, 2009, p. 2 as cited in Horst et al., 2010, p. 7). To analyse the case of Sahrawi women, this research will delve into the theoretical developments about women in peacebuilding and diaspora in peacebuilding.

3.4.1 Women in peacebuilding

McLean and Zapata (2015) introduce three different approaches to the matter of women in development (pp. 282-285). First, the essentialist approach, which claims that women are naturally inclined to peace, whereas men are to violence (ibid, p. 282). This approach may allow the participation of women for being seen as non-threatening, but they may not "be taken as seriously as political actors" (ibid). Hence, this approach is simplistic and based on a homogenising binary that is not sustainable and that relegates women to the private spheres of society (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2016, p. 184). The second approach is based on standpoint feminism, considering the different lived experiences of individuals and "the roles assigned to men and women", however, according to McLean and Zapata (2015), it does not challenge the stereotypes "of masculinity and femininity" as it continues justifying the different standpoint positions from the roles assigned to each gender (p. 283). The third approach presented by the authors is based on post-structuralist ideas and argue that the identities of women are "both self and socially constructed within their context and cannot be reduced to a single truth or ideal" (ibid, p. 285). Thus, the last one is a more comprehensive approach, according to McLean and Zapata, and might be appropriate for the analysis of women in the diaspora, who have different vital experiences, which may also depend on the context

where they have grown up, etc. and leads to the complex construction of "the truth" as shown under the transversal politics section.

To value the crucial role of women in peacebuilding, it is important to see them not as "passive recipients of oppression and violence", but as subjects that "actively resist oppression and engage in peacebuilding" (McLean & Zapata, 2015, p. 290).

This research considers that peace is more than the absence of war: it is the absence of any kind of violence. Thus, it relates to the concept of "positive peace", which intends to achieve social justice not only addressing the physical violence of conflict and war, but also "the structural inequalities and injustices resulting from unequal access to resources and power" (Galtung, 1969 as cited in McLean & Zapata, 2015, p. 286). This concept connects to the intersectional approach as it considers the structural and hidden systems of power. Moreover, it relates to the ideas presented under the gender and nation theoretical approach as far as "gendered power dynamics and expectations related to behaviour and ways of being contribute to the direct and structural violence women experience during and after conflict" (McLean & Zapata, 2015, p. 287). Thus, positive peace removes the potential for future conflict.

In the same vein, Björkdahl and Selimovic (2016) make visible a set of spaces where peace takes place (formal/informal, public/private, everyday), and how it is built from below and not only from formal institutions (p. 182). It is of utmost importance to bear in mind that inequality (including gender inequality) is the breeding ground for conflict, and it rests in the structural violence of patriarchy (ibid, p. 183-185), Björkdahl and Selimomic argue. Thus, indirect and structural violence has to be overthrown to achieve sustainable peace.

3.4.2 *Diaspora in peacebuilding*

The concept of diaspora relates to migration but includes a series of specific characteristics (Shuval, 2000, and Safran, 1991 as cited in Sahoo & Pattanaik, 2014, p.3):
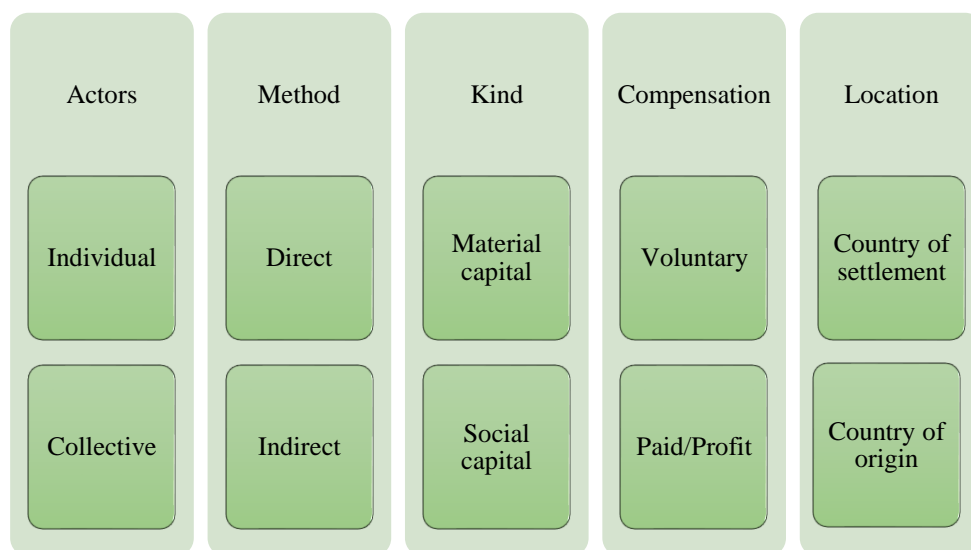
1. "Dispersal from the original homeland to a foreign land"
2. "Retention of collective memory, vision or myth about the original homeland"
3. "Partial (never complete) assimilation in host society"
4. "Idealized wish to return to original homeland—if and when conditions are appropriate"
5. "Desirable commitment to maintenance or restoration of homeland and to its independence and prosperity"

6. "Continuous renewal of linkages—cultural, religious, economic and political—with homeland"

Cohen (2008) identifies five different types of diaspora: victim, labour, imperial, trade and deterritorialised. The Sahrawi may be considered as "victim diaspora" since it is defined as "the idea of dispersal following a traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations" (p. 2), which also includes cases as the Palestinian. Equally relevant for Cohen (2008) at the time of defining diaspora is that "restoring the homeland or even returning there becomes an important focus for social mobilisation" (p. 4). In this sense, Yuval-Davis (1997) mentions the concept of "committed diasporas" as those migrants that are "culturally and politically committed to continuing to 'belong' to the 'mother country'" (p. 17). Here, technological advances have been crucial to maintaining the links with the country of origin (ibid).

In this context, there could be two different types of transnational engagement in peacebuilding by diasporas: direct –"send money, goods or ideas"- and indirect –"urge others […] to undertake activities of benefit to the country of origin" (Horst et al., 2010, p. 9). Moreover, at the time of informing development projects, the diaspora members may be more up-to-date about the situation of the country of origin because they can access information that is not covered in the media (Horst et al., 2010, p. 12). Nevertheless, not every member of the diasporic community maintains connections with the country of origin, so the information they provide may be out-of-date (ibid).

Figure 3. *Diaspora contributions to peacebuilding and development*

Actors	Method	Kind	Compensation	Location
Individual	Direct	Material capital	Voluntary	Country of settlement
Collective	Indirect	Social capital	Paid/Profit	Country of origin

Source: Horst et al. (2010, p. 9)

According to the figure, diaspora members can play many roles in building peace in the country of origin. Nordien (2017) describes specifically their roles in "bridge-building, transmission of values, lobbying and advocacy, networking and partnership, dialogue and awareness, and experts and advisors" (p. 10). Thus, it is of relevance for this research to consider their role as bridge-builders, especially considering their power to draw the attention of the public in the country of settlement to the situation in the country of origin (Horst et al., 2010, p. 12).

Nevertheless, Horst et al. (2010) highlight the existence of fragmentation and politicisation (p. 25). These inconveniences may be important to remember at the time of studying the internal relationships within the Sahrawi community, but also between the Sahrawi and Moroccan diaspora within Spain. Consequently, related to the abovementioned idea of *transversalism*, among the solutions proposed is the facilitation of dialogue under umbrella organisations that may be external to the conflict (ibid). In fact, there are indicators that dialogue between members of the diaspora can offer "an opportunity […] to 'mirror' back and 'model' another way to resolve the conflict in the home country" (Nordien, 2017, p. 11). In this sense, the soft power of diaspora is defined as "the ability to affect others through co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye, 2004 as cited in Nordien, 2017, p. 7). In this context, media and social media are key (ibid). It facilitates networking and partnership, which are relevant because of their role in raising awareness and building solidarity (Nordien, 2017, p. 13). Thus, the active use of social networks plays a double function: promote their causes and keep in touch with other members (ibid).

3.5   Online activism

Social mobilisation on the Internet has been studied by several authors, nevertheless, the outbreak of new platforms of social media in the last years, such as *Instagram*, and the possibilities of their specific features to influence social and political causes has not produced enough research yet.

First, it is relevant to define the concept of social movements. Diani (1992) referred to them as "networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared 'collective identity'" (p. 13 as cited in Van-Laer & Van Aelst, 2009, p. 231).

Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009) referred to the use of the Internet as a tool that shapes "the collective action repertoire of social movements pursuing social and political change" (ibid, p. 231). They consider two dimensions: on the one hand, if the actions are Internet-based, shaping new forms of collective action, or Internet-supported, facilitating traditional strategies; on the other hand, the risk and commitment they entail, thus the level of threshold for people to participate (ibid, pp. 233-235). Concerning the level of commitment and risk, Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009) follow several authors to distinguish between actions which are persuasive (for example e-mail petitions) or confrontational (for example virtual sit-ins[30]), and the costs they entail (time, money or risk to getting arrested) (p. 235).

The following list presents the possibilities of digital action repertoire identified by Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009), although it is important to remember that the article is more than a decade old and the possibilities have grown during this time.

- Internet supported action with low thresholds: includes the donation of money; influence consumer behaviour; attend legal demonstrations (ibid, pp. 236-238).

- Internet supported action with high thresholds: attend transnational demonstrations/meetings; sit-ins/occupations; more violent actions (ibid, pp. 238-240).

- Internet-based action with low thresholds: online petitions, being members of a Facebook group, share and "like" posts on social media; e-mail bomb[31] or virtual sit-ins (ibid, pp. 240-242).

- Internet-based action with high thresholds: protest websites, alternative media sites, culture jamming[32], hacktivism (ibid, pp. 242-244).

Finally, Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009) pinpoint that the Internet has potentialities and limitations because it allows to connect with a large number of people and attract them to join actions, but it creates low ties, and the support easily declines, thus it is not sustainable over time unless supported through other means (p. 247).

Joyce (2010) highlights that digital activism needs to develop its own strategic knowledge and frameworks for better implementation and effectiveness, rather than being understood as an extension of pre-digital activism or what Van Laer and Van Aelst

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[30] In virtual sit-in, people "ask for information from a website but in such numbers that the server cannot deal with the amount of requests and eventually crashes" (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2009, p. 241)

[31] To send large number of e-mails to relevant e-mails accounts

[32] "[A]rtistic techniques that alter corporate logos visually and by giving marketing slogans new meaning" (Stolle & Micheletti, 2005, p. 10 as cited in Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2009, p. 243)

understand as offline activism (pp. 212-213). In conclusion, Joyce understands that if digital activism is to be a game-changer for social mobilisation, it needs to build a specific body of knowledge to systematise practice.

3.6 Summary

First, the intersectional approach considers the heterogeneity of every society and the importance of taking into consideration different systems of oppression. Second, the inclusion of the Arab feminism perspective sheds light on some important considerations about symbolism and identity and the position of women within Arab contexts. Third, transversal politics embrace diversity and pinpoints the role of dialogue for achieving common interests. Fourth, the theory about the importance of the gender narratives within national discourses offers several understandings of the social position of women. Fifth, the role that women and diaspora play in peacebuilding is key to understand the potentialities of the subjects under study. Finally, the contribution of online activism to achieve social and political changes is paramount to analyse the data and answer the problem formulation of the research project.

4. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This research project aims to shed light on the understudied role of Sahrawi women in the diaspora, especially in the current digital era, which provides specific opportunities and limitations to building peace in Western Sahara through online activism. Nowadays, the Internet provides a space to discuss and exchange impressions and opinions, the information travels faster than ever and the connection between different realities is easily possible.

There are multiple ways that Sahrawi women in the diaspora may contribute to peacebuilding, especially if we consider it from the basic assumption that gender equality is necessary to build sustainable peace. Many women are fighting to achieve actual equality between the genders and some examples are blogs like *Wurud Asahra*, where anonymous Sahrawi women published pieces of news and analysis of current affairs (Wurud, n. d.). However, the publications by *Wurud Asahra* are rather old, although their content is still topical. In recent years, platforms such as *Instagram* have been used to actively speak up about the Sahrawi struggle.

At the time of analysing different *Instagram* accounts where women play a key mobilising role, it is relevant to pay attention to the topics that appear on their posts and interviews, which will be the base to create the sections and subsections that constitute this chapter and understand their interrelation. The sections will include how the different accounts approach the issues, delving into the commonalities and the differences in the narratives, and on the strengths and weaknesses of their discourses concerning their effectiveness for peacebuilding.

Overall, the chapter is structured as follows: First, it analyses the narratives considering an intersectional approach, which relates to the next sections on intergenerational perspectives and sisterhood. After those sections, there is a section on colonialism for its relevance in the struggling, which relates to the next on identity and symbolism. Finally, to identify specific strategies for peacebuilding, a section analyses the role of diaspora women in peacebuilding, including a subsection about internal and external cooperation and another one about dialogue between Sahrawi and Moroccans, and finally, it presents a section on online activism, which includes a subsection on the relevance of digital spaces and the violence against women that raises at them.

4.1 Intersectionality

The complexity of finding an intersectional feminist discourse that includes the vital experiences of every woman is a heated debate within the feminist movement worldwide, and a Sahrawi woman expressed the feeling of misrepresentation:

> I don't consider myself a feminist, I don't agree with a lot of things in Western or Islamic feminism. If there were a Sahrawi feminism that fits our problems, maybe I would define myself as a feminist. But I am in favour of women's rights, and for that, no label is needed (HdS, 2021, April 22).

On the same note, Jadiyetu El Mohtar[33] defined that "[Sahrawi women] have laid the foundations of a neutral feminism", disassociating herself from labelling feminism as Islamic, African, European, or White (as cited in HdS, 2021, April 25, own translation). The publication of this quote aroused opposition from some people, highlighting one comment by an account called Feminist Consciousness, who argued that "there is no such thing as neutral feminism" and pointed out the necessity of a theoretical framework to

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[33] Jadiyetu El Mohtar is a member of the NUSW and represents the POLISARIO Front in Madrid (HdS, 2021, April 26). El Mohtar is a relevant actor for diplomacy, working to get political and humanitarian support internationally (ibid).

analyse the realities and the intersections crossed by Sahrawi women (ibid, own translation).

Diversity is a defining characteristic of any society, but in the case of the Sahrawi population, it is even more exacerbated as a result of their condition of being most of them migrants, thus the influence by different contexts. One of the interviewed women explained it as follows:

> *[...] one of the problems in the diaspora is that we have an incredible diversity of situations: there are people who came on "Holidays in Peace"[34] and stayed, people who arrived at the age of 25 through a migration process, people who were born here [...]. So, it is very difficult to find a common point, we only have in common that we are Sahrawis, but we have completely different lives, and we live isolated from each other, we are scattered all over Spain and all over the world [...].* (FS1[35], interview, own translation)

This diversity emphasizes the idea of *transversalism*, where each person brings with her/him the rooting (understood as experiences that define identity) and shift to put her/himself in the place of the other person, making respect and tolerance vital to dialogue (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 130). Apart from the inherent diversity, the intersection between different systems of oppression leads to specific situations of discrimination. In the case of Sahrawi women, *Trece de noviembre 2020* identifies the main axes of oppression: cultural patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism (Trece de noviembre 2020 [13n20], 2021, March 4, own translation). Concerning other intersections, the analysis reveals that tribal origin is still present as a sign of belonging to the community (Násara in SC, 2021, March 11). The importance of the "purity" speech may be the consequence of the experiences of colonisation, the continuous persecution of the community and the conflict surrounding the holding of a referendum, where there is a debate on how to ensure that those who vote are Sahrawis and not Moroccans who moved to the territories after the Green March. Those discourses about belonging relate to the idea of *volksnation* argued by Yuval-David (1997), where women play a key role as biological reproducers of the nation (p. 28). Similarly, *Sahara Cultura*, published a post to make visible the racism within Sahrawi society and the possible solutions to end the structures that support it (SC, 2020, June 28).

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[34] A cooperation programme organised by Spanish civil society that consist of Sahrawi children coming to Spain to spend the summer season with a family.

[35] Women representatives of *Feminismos Saharauis* who participated in the interview are referred as FS1, FS2 and FS3.

The post received widespread support as a stepping stone to discuss this problematic, nevertheless, it was also criticised for being perceived as an attack on the community (ibid). In this regard, Tfarrah Mohamed Yeslem, founder of *Feminismos Saharauis*, states:

> The fear of Morocco and the possible delegitimisation of the cause makes people hide certain things. [For example] making [misogyny] visible [...] And we end up saying that Sahrawi women are liberated. They are not liberated [...] Criticism reinforces [the cause], it does not destroy [it]. (Liba, 2020, February 19, own translation)

In the same vein, despite what the literature review showed about their active role in the political arena, *Feminismos Saharauis* expose the silences around the role of women in decision-making writing "Socially and politically, Sahrawi women's capacities are relegated to care [work]. We make decisions without being visible" (FS, 2020, May 17, own translation). Besides, an interviewee adds that they find limitations on their contribution to the political situation since:

> *[...] Depending on what things, you can't analyse them, because the enemy (Morocco, and many media outlets) are on the lookout for any mistake or failure in society, to de-legitimise the political struggle, which makes us look at everything with a magnifying glass before 'externalising' it (here, for example, talking about how political management could be improved, about aid, or the notable inequality between genders.* (13n20, interview, own translation)

Those fears reflect the complexity of internal criticism, as any questioning of the internal systems of oppression may be perceived as a sign of weakness. To work on the insecurities and resistance to criticism to build a stronger movement towards an equal society, an interviewee said:

> *[...] I think that in Feminismos Saharauis, one of the objectives and differences with the other Sahrawi women's groups is that it is not "for the outside", [...] we do [some actions] to spread the Sahrawi cause, but it is more "for the inside", to work among ourselves and that's it, that's why they are non-mixed spaces [...].* (FS1, interview, own translation)

To sum up, the specific intersection of systems of oppression that cross the lived experiences of women in the diaspora is diverse and depends on their specific situation. Some of them are women and migrants, Muslim, Arab, African, black and belong to different generations, whose characteristics lead to specific discrimination within the

Spanish society, especially in the context of hate speech against migrants, growing Islamophobia and lack of tolerance, led by the growth of the far-right in the political landscape. Moreover, as a Sahrawi woman explained in a webinar, there is institutional racism against the Sahrawi peoples as a result of their country not being recognised by Spain, thus their birth certificates are not considered valid, hence they cannot get legal documents and, in the end, many of them have an Algerian passport even though they do not live there (N. N. in Rethinking Refugees, 2021, February 7).

Apart from this discrimination by the Spanish community, they may face discrimination by the Sahrawi community if they do not meet the expectations, hence they face problems "here as racialised and there as westernised". (FS, 2020, October 9, own translation). In this regard, the analysis will elaborate on the considerations of symbolism in section 4.5.

Finally, the review of several social media accounts reveals that there are excluded groups within the Sahrawi struggle, whose voices are not usually present in the demands, for instance, people with disabilities. It also proves the necessity of challenging several systems of oppression that cross their lived experiences and work internally and externally on the knowledge on feminism and gender equality to overthrow indirect and structural violence and achieve sustainable peace. However, the analysis identifies the problematisation of the silences by the Sahrawi women and clarity in how to approach them, which is a positive sign towards changing norms and beliefs.

4.2 Intergenerational perspectives

Section 1.3.3 of the Introduction presented the development of previous research regarding the contribution of Sahrawi women towards the cause from different locations along the time. Those studies lead to the understanding of the different perspectives of several generations, as they have had impacting and varied lived experiences in a short time frame. Nevertheless, those perspectives may be complementary to elaborate today's discourse. This assumption is confirmed at the time of analysing the findings, as the interviewees are aware of it and raise the conversation about this fact. One interviewee started the conversation by declaring:

> *[...] Obviously, the point of view that I have of the conflict and my father's are probably [different]. My father lived under the Spanish colony and then lived through the war, [...] we have a lot in common, but it is not the same to be born in Spain and to have lived here all my life [...].* (FS1, interview, own translation)

The commitment of younger generations is paramount to build a future Sahrawi nation, nevertheless, the situation of migration and the silences that surrounds the conflict, especially from 1990, when the first war ended, may have led to the lack of knowledge among a large part of the youngsters. The women interviewed were concerned by the difficulty to get support from those who were born in the 2000s, because they were born in Europe and many of them *"do not know anything about the cause"* (FS1 & FS2, interview, own translation). Nevertheless, activism on social media may be a means to reach them and draw their attention since most *Instagram* users worldwide are between 18 and 34 years old (Tankovska, 2021, February 10).

On another note, there is concern for the actual achievement of gender equality within the community, and how the role of women in the past impacts positively on the narratives but not on the current situation:

> *You have often heard Sahrawi people who say 'there is a matriarchy here', 'Sahrawi women are not like Moroccan women'. I find that very funny because I think it is pure marketing to sell our cause, [...] I think it has to do with the logic that 'Sahrawi women are the ones who have built the refugee camps', well, yes, our grandmothers, our mothers have built the refugee camps, but what is the real power of Sahrawi women in the refugee camps now?* (FS1, interview, own translation)

Regarding the idealisation of Sahrawi women, another interviewee defines it as a burden and adds that the space for women has been reduced in comparison to their predecessors *"they (men) gave us a space, [...] but now that they have returned, they have taken it back, so it is not ours anymore..."* (FS2, interview, own translation).

In conclusion, the literature review showed that the situation of displacement was a source of agency for Sahrawi women and gave them power in the community, but the findings of the analysis show how that power has apparently been faded and needs to be strengthened, according to their perceptions.

4.3 Sisterhood

Feminismos Saharauis pinpoint that Sahrawi women are diverse and that the way to achieve equality from the diaspora is through mutual support and awareness-raising, creating networks and internal debate (SC, 2021, March 11; FS, 2021, May 9). To create safe spaces of exchange, they convened several online and offline meetings, and one of the participants concluded that "[after the meetings] we came out strengthened to join our voices, to organise ourselves and to fight so that all Sahrawi women have our own voice

and no longer belong to anyone but ourselves […]" (FS, 2020, October 9, own translation). Jadiyetu El Mohtar adds that "it was the Sahrawi women who really gave meaning and dimension to the word 'sisterhood'" (as cited in HdS, 2021, April 26 own translation). Thus, Sahrawi women do not understand sisterhood as a universalist concept as defined by bell hook (1991, p. 29 as cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 125), since they are not intending to homogenise women but to find the points of synergy between them. This is also an example of transversal politics, where the dialogue for a common objective makes possible the collaboration of different people regardless of their differences. In fact, they highlight the diversity within Sahrawi women as a strength. Other organisations are less direct on their narratives about sisterhood; however, the idea is implicit in the posts published by the accounts under analysis, and it is reinforced by most of the comments they receive. For instance, accounts like *Sahara Cultura* and *Hijas del Sahara* share photos of women to support them, as is the case with Sultana Khaya, they also interview other women, however, the explicit mention of sisterhood is not as crucial within their narratives as it is for *Feminismos Saharauis*.

4.4 Colonialism

The discourse of decoloniality is strong in the narratives of most of the activists, as it is a fundamental pillar of the struggle of the Sahrawi community. *Feminismos Saharauis* claimed that "The text written by women from the hegemonic white feminism do not reflect the complexity and specificity of a history like ours, crossed by colonialism" (FS, 2021, April 23, own translation). *Feminismos Saharauis* indirectly refer to the interests of States and corporations on the Sahrawi peoples and territories and claim that "[…] Neither Sahrawi women nor Western Sahara are territories of conquest. We continue and will continue to resist, building bridges in our community, denouncing the patriarchal and colonial system that forbids us to live in our territory" (FS, 2019, November 18, own translation). This links to the definition of diaspora as bridge-builders, and the importance of alliances between different groups (Nordien, 2017, p. 10).

Another representative of *Feminismos Saharauis* adds that the solution to the still-present colonial discourse lies in education as knowledge is power, and the international community must know that "*many Spanish corporations exploit Sahrawi raw materials*" such as sand, fish, and phosphates (FS3, interview, own translation). Moreover, her colleague complements the idea as follows:

[...] I think that this vision that the Spanish population has, and this little information is always from a colonial perspective, and they see us as 'those people, that territory that belonged to us, but now we don't know what has happened to it', it is very important to have a decolonial perspective of the Sahrawi conflict because without that we can't advance in anything. (FS2, interview, own translation)

The women interviewed are particularly critical not only of the lack of knowledge of the international community but also of the INGOs that implement cooperation projects and use co-optive strategies. One of them explains that:

I am afraid that the West is [appropriating] our struggle and setting the agenda on what we should fight for. "We have to liberate Sahrawi women", well what is it to liberate Sahrawi women? Do Sahrawi women need to be liberated? Do Sahrawi women want to liberate themselves like you want to liberate them? [...]. (FS1, interview, own translation).

According to her perception, the Spanish discourse on the liberation of women relates to the definition of Yuval-Davis, who distinguishes between priorities of women from the Global North and South (1997, p. 117). Regarding the collaboration with other organisations, another interviewee added *"I have always been a bit against all the projects that are carried out from here (in Spain) [...], which do not take into account the real problems of the Sahrawi women or the Sahrawi [peoples] in general [...]"* (FS2, interview, own translation). The patronising approach of INGOs and states results in this reluctance to partake in cooperation projects, which is linked to the reluctance to be part of official bodies, as will be analysed in a subsection about peacebuilding from the diaspora. This therefore reduces the space for dialogue from a decolonial, intersectional and transversal approach to politics. It became apparent that there is a need of finding safe spaces to build from within the community without the interference of external actors, as it is the only way to discuss their concerns and find solutions that grow from the union of Sahrawi women. To sum up, Sahrawi women do not want external actors to decide on how to build peace and development, and their discourse shows a reaction against the white saviour complex that defines international cooperation from their point of view.

Concerning the narratives against colonialism, it is of utmost importance to mention the discourse on gender equality of the POLISARIO Front as the representative of the Sahrawi peoples (Allan, 2010). Its narratives are rarely questioned, because it may seem

like an offence against the credibility of the Sahrawi cause. However, these silences may influence the role that women play in peacebuilding as an interviewee explains:

> *The fact that we have been (and continue to be) waiting for so many years for a just solution for the Sahrawi people, has meant that the main focus has been on political actions, so that although our objective and desire is to contribute to the peace process, we have unintentionally forgotten or at least left in the background other essential struggles for peace, such as social struggles (feminism, etc.).* (13n20, interview, own translation)

That understanding shows the traditional distinction between political issues and "women's" issues as if they had to be achieved through different paths. Consequently, a publication by *Wurud Ashra* reflected on the role of Sahrawi women in the diaspora, where they explained that they missed the emergence of voices more critical of the official discourse that claims that Sahrawi women live in a privileged situation in terms of rights and equality, adding "The struggle for our social, civil and political rights as citizens in a society in transformation [...] should not be subordinated to the achievement of independence [...]" (Wurud, 2008, January 13, own translation). Given the age of the publication and considering the contributions of current activists, it becomes apparent that the situation is changing, and there are critical voices nowadays. For instance, as previously mentioned, when *Hijas del Sahara* posted a quote by Jadiyetu El Mohtar calling for "neutral feminism", an account named Feminist consciousness reacted defending that "the narrative of the women of the political front about the reality of Sahrawi women does not represent the reality of what we are living" (HdS, 2021, April 25, own translation). Moreover, the interview conducted with *Hijas del Sahara* revealed that they miss *"renewal, more youth and women in government"* (HdS, interview, own translation). These reactions show that the discourse of the POLISARIO Front and older generations of Sahrawi women are starting to be confronted by younger generations, who have an interest in breaking the taboos surrounding feminism and structures of oppression, aware of the necessity to discuss the inequality to build a positive peace and an equal country, even though it may be interpreted as a threat by others who hold positions of privilege or who believe that it jeopardises the people's struggle for self-determination.

Besides, elaborating on the discourse on gender and nation, the interviewees consider that the struggle for gender equality and national liberation cannot be dissociated:

[...] We should avoid the mistakes made by neighbouring countries, the 'putting feminism aside' until the political conflict is solved, this is something that Algerian and Moroccan feminists have been told during their struggle against French colonialism, and once decolonised, all promises have been left up in the air. We do not consider that some struggles should be superimposed on others, and above all that they do not delegitimise them. They must go hand in hand, otherwise what freedom do we want to lead to? (13n20, interview, own translation).

Furthermore, this debate raises questions about the extent to which this is a genuine concern among Sahrawi women:

We are always talking about [...] problems that do not concern Sahrawi women, it is impossible to have a free Sahara without free women. I wonder where we are going to fight for our liberation, in the diaspora, in refugee camps? (FS2, interview, own translation).

The contributions of the interviewees oppose the stance taken by some activists who claim that the liberation of women comes after the liberation of the collective (Yuval-David, 1997, p. 117). Moreover, some voices challenge the discourse of *volksnation*, where women are responsible for the biological reproduction of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp. 21-22). *Wurud Ashra* criticised the childbirth policies of the POLISARIO, who encourage women "to give birth more, in an environment where fertility rates are at least 7 children per woman [...] and in extremely poor and unhealthy conditions [...]" (Wurud, 2007, December 24, own translation).

Finally, regarding the reason why the international community is not interested in finding a solution for Western Sahara, women activists consider that it is a result of economic interests and because "Spain does not want to acknowledge her responsibility" and "Morocco is supported by [economic] lobbies", thus those corporations do not want Morocco to unveil their business (SC, 2021, March 2). They perceive that those conditions hinder their progress, as *Hijas del Sahara* explain:

Our biggest obstacle is the blockade of silence, the manipulations made by the Moroccan regime and some countries that support it, knowing that they are fallacies, and the attempt by some powers to make the Sahrawi cause fall into oblivion after the abandonment and violation of all the rights [...]. The silence, the complicity of the UN and the guilt of Spain and France after the Moroccan regime. (HdS, interview, own translation)

The interview conducted with a representative of *Trece de noviembre 2020* referred that the solution to the political conflict may lie in the need for a revolution in the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, *"although the West is careful to avoid it altogether, and here I support myself in how Islam is welcomed and embraced. This maximum tolerance of the Muslim religion is only aimed at preventing the necessary revolution"* (13n20, interview, own translation). That claim opens the discussion about an issue that is out of the scope of this research project, which is the fear of institutions and citizens from the Global North to look racists, which leads them to embrace cultural relativism avoiding being critical about the oppressions.

To sum up, the contributions of the Sahrawi women that have been analysed highlight the need for external actors to take action from a decolonial perspective, in which justice and Human Rights lead the process, as well as they denounce the necessary shift in the discourse of their political representatives, being critical with the internal norms and dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality.

4.5 Identity and Symbolism

The situation of colonialism that is crossing the lives of the Sahrawi peoples for more than a century relates to the important role played by identity and symbolism[36], which is analysed under this section.

Symbolism is relevant to understand the discourse of *kulturnation*, the narratives of women as representatives of the nation and its relation to identity. Especially in the context of diaspora women, where some may not be considered eligible to represent the collective if they do not meet the expectations (No Name [N. N.] in SC, 2021, March 2). An interviewee whose parents were Sahrawi but died when she was younger added:

> *I cannot speak Hassaniya because I was in a child protection centre and then with a family. I am Mallorcan, and when I travel, I miss Mallorca, but I am also Sahrawi. I didn't have anyone to show me my country, I had to get interested, no one explained to me where I was from... [...]When you go to some associations and tell these things they say "you are not Sahrawi". Why? Because I've never been to the camps, because I don't know how to speak Hassaniya, because I grew up with a*

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[36] The Cambridge Dictionary considers that "[a]n object can be described as a symbol of something else if it seems to represent it because it is connected with it in a lot of people's minds" (Cambridge University Press, 2021b).
Symbolism refers to "the use of symbols in art, literature, films, etc. to represent ideas" (Cambridge University Press, 2021c).

Mallorcan family... there are these difficulties and that's why I'm always [insisting] on the subject of education, repeating and making an impact. (FS3, interview, own translation).

Cultural symbolism is part of the definition of identity and an organisation chaired by a woman stresses that "The Sahrawi culture is one of the pillars, which is why the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that the Sahrawi people are not Moroccan. The Sahrawi people have their own language, dress, culture and tradition." (Asaharauicm, 2021, January 21, own translation). Concerning culture and strategies to get support, an interviewee adds:

[...] I always emphasise what my customs are [...] it is very important to differentiate these cultural aspects [...]. If now we start telling the history of the Sahara, people get bored and don't want to listen to us [...]. However, if we manage to attribute that [we] have [our] own gastronomy, [our] own clothes, [our] own language [...]. It is educating, attributing various characteristics to our country [...]. (FS3, interview, own translation).

There is an interrelation between the feeling of identity and the discussion of relevant issues in safe spaces. Those spaces are scarce and that is related to the fear of internal criticism that has been discussed previously, which hinder the efforts to build a stronger movement. In this regard, another interviewee added:

[...] Here it is worth mentioning, for example, the weight of identity. Being Sahrawi [...] is not something that is linked to protocols that must be followed to fit in. If you notice, very few of us talk about religion, especially those of us who don't believe. There are no spaces where we feel safe, and it's a subject that we end up discussing with our smaller circles. [We need] spaces of freedom and tolerance. (13n20, interview, own translation)

The sensitivity of discussing certain issues relates to the consideration of women as representatives of the collective, which is at the same time a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, they are respected for representing the nation, and in parallel, they have the burden of being criticised for it. In this regard, *Feminismos Saharauis* say "we are not the voice of Sahrawi women, but Sahrawi women with voice" (2020, May 29). This relates to the idea that the activists are not representatives of the collective but advocates for it (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 120).

One of the main symbols of Sahrawi women is the *melhfa*, and the contribution by activists about it brings about interesting reflections on intersectionality, Arab feminism and *kulturnation*.

One of the interviewees define the *melhfa* as follows:

[…] I think it is very important because it is the identity of the Sahrawi woman, apart from religion, it is part of the Sahrawi culture and I think it represents all of us. Some of us wear it when we want to, I like to wear it and I don't wear it every day […]. (FS2, interview, own translation).

Figure 4. *A group of women wearing the melhfa*

Source: mujeressaharauisunms.org (2018, January 17)

In the same vein, Soukaina Ndiaye[37] claims "the *melhfa* is the best flag we can have, as it is our sign of identity, a way of remembering the struggle of the Sahrawi people and, especially that of the women" (as cited in HdS, 2021, February 24, own translation). This statement triggered a discussion on the comments section about cultural and religious symbols, when another Sahrawi woman concluded "Everyone can dress as they please and believe in whatever they like, the important thing here is to be united for this cause […]" (ibid, own translation). The decision of wearing it "when [they] want to" may be seen as a privilege if it implies religious meanings. In this sense, the analysis follows the contributions of Arab feminism scholars, who determine that there is no free choice in wearing the headscarf or taking it off because there are social values attached to it that

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[37] Soukaina Ndiaye is Sahrawi woman living in Spain, where represents the NUSW and the Sahrawi League of Women (LMSE)

pressure women towards wearing it and criticised them if they choose not to wear it (El Hachmi, 2019, p. 89; Eltahawy, 2015). Nevertheless, the interviewees deny the existence of any religious connotations and insist: *[...] it is often given patriarchal, sexual and religious meanings [...] I personally believe that it has nothing to do with religion at all, I think it is an identity of the Sahrawi woman [...].* (FS3, interview, own translation)

Differently, Násara, a Sahrawi activist who is very critical of the use of headscarf and what she defines as "the Islamic patriarchy", problematises the symbolism of the *melhfa,* according to the idea of *kulturnation*, as she considers that:

[…] we women can never be free of these Islamic garments, these Islamic societies have adopted Islamic veils into their culture, making the reason for the existence of these garments something beyond the religious, because only in this way will it be perpetuated for eternity. (Násara, 2021, February 22).

At the time of discussing the contribution of activist, such as Násara, who keep insisting on the religious connotations of the *melhfa*, and gives speeches in several spaces about the issue, another interviewee adds:

For me, the problem is when there are debates that are falsely created for the outside world [...] or a debate that we can have healthily (within the Sahrawi community) becomes a show [...]. I am the daughter of a Sahrawi father and a Catalan mother, so when I saw the melhfa for me it was something very distant, but as I have grown up, I like it because it is also part of me, it is identity, it is the struggle against colonialism, it is what my grandmother wore and I want to wear it whenever I want to. I think that one thing is the debates that we can have within the community and another thing is what is externalised to gain social capital and publish books [...]. (FS1, interview, own translation).

An interpretation of the origin of this debate is described by Tfarrah Mohamed Yeslem, who considers that:

The context is very important. When you grow up in a completely Islamophobic environment you want to make your veil or your *melhfa* a symbol of identity […]. When you do it in a mostly veiled society and you don't feel that it respects your body and that it's the way you want to be in the world, I share and advocate that you fight against it. (Liba, 2020, February 19)

From the point of view of intersectionality, the debate about the *melhfa* reflects the diversity among Sahrawi women and how the use of symbols may have an impact on the possibilities of contributing to the cause, so it is a vital axis for a complete analysis. One

of the interviewees shows her concern regarding its relation to women's political role and agrees with the opinion of Násara:

> *I [...] was the only woman who was not wearing melhfa and nobody appreciated my speech, I was even interrupted [...] sometimes if we want to be heard, unfortunately [...] we have to try to adapt, it's a shame and for me, it generates great impotence. [...] For me, that is one of the serious consequences [patriarchy] generates.* (FS3, interview, own translation)

As the contributions reflect, identity symbols represent a very sensitive issue, and the criticism may come from inside and outside the collective, either women or men. This criticism is a consequence of the assumption that women are the transmitters of the culture (*kulturnation*), and diversity of decisions and behaviours can be seen as symptoms of "Western influence", which has negative connotations as it becomes apparent through the comments that appear in some posts where those issues are discussed (for instance, in SC, 2021, March 11). However, women activists insist that the influence of other countries help to advance faster towards development, and that is why people living in the diaspora have a key role (N. N. in SC, 2021, March 2). This assumption relates to the following chapter about the role of diaspora women in peacebuilding.

4.6 Diaspora women in peacebuilding

Gender equality and the role of women in peacebuilding represent cross-cutting themes in this research project and they are somehow analysed throughout the whole chapter as a prelude to positive peace. This section delves into some considerations that arose during the research process, which are paramount to build a feminist Sahrawi nation.

4.6.1 Internal and external cooperation

The activism of diaspora women in Spain is of interest because of the necessity of political commitment from Spanish and European institutions to end the conflict. Nevertheless, at the time of considering the active participation of Sahrawi women within formal institutions to be heard by official bodies or INGOs, the analysis reveals different perspectives, most of them refusing to participate through official channels:

> *The fact of being able to analyse only what can be 'analysed' makes some of us flee [from being part of institutionalised spaces]. [Carrying out] the struggle from individuality is the only way not to feel tied down or questioned, otherwise you have*

to abide by the rules and follow the concerns of the [same people] as always, leaving aside those of minority 'collectives'. (13n20, interview, own translation)

That contribution relates to the importance of an intersectional approach and the criticism that internal and external institutions are currently receiving, as was previously mentioned in the section about colonialism. The refusal to partake in institutional spaces is a symptom of the misguided approach of those spaces. Additionally, some activists feel that they cannot speak on behalf of the reality they do not live in on a day-to-day basis:

I have participated in the LEJSEE, not as a very active member because I have always been very much against cooperation issues, [...] I am Sahrawi, I have a Sahrawi father but I do not know the reality of the camps, so I have decided not to get involved in certain issues [...], [I prefer] to participate from the diaspora and speak on the subject that I know about. (FS1, interview, own translation)

These claims make visible the low incentives of institutions and even informal groups to create "mesomobilisation"[38]. Additionally, it relates to the idea presented by Horst et al. (2010) that part of the diasporic communities may not be up to date about the reality in the homeland and it is worth being cautious (p. 12). Besides, the discussion on the contributions from people abroad leads to questioning development projects, where one of the interviewees says:

[...] here in Euskadi[39] there are thousands of projects to help the Sahrawi people, but they are always designed and presented to a public entity to finance them and they are always designed by the same [people], they don't let the people who do know or the Sahrawi people (because there is nobody who knows more than the Sahrawi people), design these projects [...]. (FS2, interview, own translation)

Elaborating on the lack of spaces for their participation, one of them adds:

no, we don't have the possibility to enter these spaces because they are always for very qualified and white people." (FS2, interview, own translation). On the contrary, *Hijas del Sahara* explained that they *"collaborate with associations and humanitarian projects and work with movements for the Sahrawi Just Cause* (HdS, interview, own translation).

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[38] "[M]esomobilisation" relates to "the efforts of groups and organisations to coordinate and integrate other groups, organisations and networks for protests activities" (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992, p. 558 in Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2009, p. 238)

[39] Also known as the Basque Country, it is a region located in northern Spain.

On a different note, when analysing their internal coordination as important to generate a greater impact, *Hijas del Sahara* claim that:

Thanks to today's technologies we can be more connected, collaborating together at some point and supporting each other, spreading the word, and making everyone visible. As far as possible, it is a good opportunity to unite not only Sahrawi but also the whole pro-Sahrawi world to put pressure on the governments about our Sahrawi cause. (HdS, interview, own translation)

However, the representatives of *Feminismos Saharauis* explained that Sahrawi peoples are so geographically spread out that they do not organise their activism properly and justifies it because *"[…] we do not have a physical meeting place and I think it is essential that we find a space, albeit a virtual one, for Sahrawi youth to meet […]"* (FS1, interview, own translation).

In conclusion, the analysis reveals the diversity of opinions about the participation in formal spaces, calling once more to decolonise them, which leads activists to keep playing a role as informal diplomats. Concerning the lack of coordination, it may be problematic from the point of view of the high value of synchronised actions, which may provide visibility, especially in view of the ease of organising coordinated actions online (Van Laer &Van Aelst, 2009, p. 238).

4.6.2 Dialogue between Sahrawi and Moroccan diaspora

The necessity of finding spaces of debate between Sahrawi and Moroccan women, is present in the discourse of some activists, as Tfarrah Mohamed Yeslem:

[…] There is a need to give space to different perspectives and dialogue with Moroccan women. [...] We want discussion tables where Sahrawi and Moroccan women can tell each other about the daily life of the conflict, what it has meant for them in their lives [...] We talk about economic treaties all the time, but no one talks about the insecurity suffered by people [both Sahrawi and Moroccan] in the occupied areas. (Liba, 2020, February 19)

And Tfarrah M. Y. justifies the necessity of finding those spaces because:

These are people with whom we want to live together in independence. Based on practices that have already been carried out, such as in the peace process in Colombia or Guatemala, where women's circles were held exclusively for women […], we want the same for Sahrawi and Moroccan women, and we want concrete demands to emerge from them. (Liba, 2020, February 19)

Even though Tfarrah M. Y. is not explicitly referring to diaspora women, her statements evidence the active role that women play through their political agency and strategic capacity. In this regard, transversal politics delves into the heterogeneity of groups and their capacity of dialogue to work together towards a common goal, in the case of Western Sahara the aim is to build peace and be a free Nation-state. To analyse if there are strategies directed towards a dialogue between Sahrawi and Moroccan population in the diaspora, the interviews included a question about their points of view on those spaces. On the premise that the creation of spaces of discussion in the country of settlement between groups that are politically opposed may represent an example for those in the homeland, revealing that it is possible to negotiate and find an agreement between the parts (Nordien, 2017, p. 11).

Several interviewees agree that they have found few Moroccans willing to talk about the Sahrawi cause, and those that support it are mainly from the Rif[40] (13n20, interview; FS1, interview). One of them shows scepticism about the possibility of debating with them:

[…] It also generates a lot of conflict for me because of the Moroccans' view of us. Here in Spain, I have yet to meet a pro-Sahrawi Moroccan. […] I wouldn't even create spaces to debate with them because I think they see us as a colony, and I see them as my settlers. (FS2, interview, own translation)

The fact that they do not want to debate is a symptom of how much tension there is, even though they are aware of the fact that the contribution by women in the diaspora may be key for the resolution of the conflict. The same interviewee added:

[I have been with Moroccans] who only know me, who have not been to [Western] Sahara, have nothing to do with [Western] Sahara, in fact, have had to flee Morocco and hate Morocco, the Moroccan state, and would not go back, and yet they tell me that the Sahara is Moroccan! I can't understand it. (FS2, own translation)

Concerning those claims, it is worth remembering the quotation by Simone de Beauvoir: "the oppressor would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among

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[40] The origin of their support to the Sahrawi cause is a result of several historical milestones. On the one hand, the Rif War or War of Melilla, which took place between 1921-1926 after many years of confrontation between the Berber peoples (indigenous group) of the region and Spain, which occupied the territory after France "granted Spain a protectorate "sublease" along Morocco's Mediterranean coast." (Fleming, 2019, December 5). On the other hand, historical confrontations between the population of the region and the Moroccan regime may explain their support to the Sahrawi struggle (Kahlaui, 2017, October 13).

the oppressed themselves." (in The Ethics of Ambiguity…, n.d.). However, other interviewees explain why some Moroccans take the oppressive stance and add *"I think that we have to understand them [...], they are told that the Sahara is Moroccan and there is no debate about that."* (FS1, interview, own translation), while *Hijas del Sahara* claim:

> *The problem is that unfortunately the Moroccan people are also oppressed by their regime and their king. So, they are not free to debate and have no arguments based on reality to defend [...].* (HdS, interview, own translation).

Another interviewee suggests that the solution is to educate on the different cultural symbols to understand that they are different countries, which relates to the idea of *kulturnation* (FS3, interview). Additionally, she claims that not only Sahrawi and Moroccans should take part in those spaces but also Spanish citizens (ibid). Concerning the participation of Spanish people, and even though the number of initiatives run by the Spanish civil society in support of the Sahrawi cause is larger than that of the Moroccan, it is crucial to be critical about it and consider to what extent it is influenced by a hidden colonial and racist thought, as one of the interviewees puts it:

> *I think the Spanish state is deeply anti-Moroccan and they hide behind the Sahrawi cause to say: 'we are anti-Moroccan, but because we are pro-Sahrawi', no, you are racists, don't use our cause [...]. I think this has created a complex for us [...], the fact that we were a Spanish colony has done us a lot of harm, in the sense that we have adopted the same discourse as the Spanish [...].* (FS1, interview, own translation).

In fact, another interviewee explains that people assume that Sahrawi peoples hate Moroccans because of the conflict, and she adds that *"[...] I have no problem with the Moroccan people [...], I have problems with the Moroccan government, with the patriarchy, with the Moroccan military force that kills us [...]"* (FS3, interview, own translation).

Finally, concerning the public positions of the Moroccan population, the interviewees brought about the issue of the risks faced by the Moroccan if they support the Sahrawi cause because of the shrinking democratic space in the Alawite kingdom:

> *[...] My own friends are living in Morocco and they write [about Western Sahara] on their Facebook wall and they [are harshly criticised] and I say 'you are brave' because they get into these messes and then go to Morocco and maybe they won't*

let them in, so I think we have to recognise the bravery of some of the Moroccan people [...]. (FS1, interview, own translation)

Those high risks may justify low levels of participation in the cause. This assumption comes after identifying that there are spaces created around other themes where women from both communities work together, for instance, the organisation *Neswia*[41], where North African women discuss common concerns around feminism (13n20, interview). The role of bridge-builders from different spaces that are not directly linked to the subject at hand is a strategy to deal with fragmentation (Horst et al., 2010, p. 23). Feminist spaces are not depoliticised; they are not directly linked to the conflict.

To sum up, the Sahrawi women interviewed are open to engaging in dialogue and playing a role as informal diplomats, contributing to peace through debates with Moroccan and other communities. They understand the systems of oppression that influence the possibilities of having a fruitful debate among the parts, and they find other common interests from where to build on their relations, which may offer an opportunity to create stronger ties among them.

4.7 Online activism

Online activism is a cross-cutting topic in the analysis, which is inherently included in the rest of the research project, as it is a strategy used by Sahrawi women to contribute to peacebuilding from the diaspora.

First, the recent increase in the use of social media presents an opportunity in terms of impact in the political arena and the ways to inform about the situations taking place around the world and gain support from virtually anywhere. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic that started at the end of 2019 and spread around the world during 2020 has promoted a stronger presence of social movements in social networks and highlighted the relevance of online presence as never before. Sahrawi women have identified this opportunity flowering from the vulnerability of the context and are creating networks of mutual support to make visible the situation in Western Sahara and the claims of the movements. Apart from the somewhat favourable online context described, the emergence of war in the region in November 2020 has been a turning point for Sahrawi activism, resulting in a massive presence in social media (HdS in SC, 2021, March 11; N. N. in SC, 2021, March 2).

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[41] *Neswia* means "feminism" in Arabic.

A key characteristic of social media is that the different platforms work as loudspeakers for social causes. They can encourage people to participate in different ways, with different levels of commitment, but gradually driving to the final goal, in this case, the acknowledgement of the Sahrawi cause and the support to the community. The use of audio-visual content may attract the attention of people who would probably not attend a public demonstration and listen to their claims, so the use of digital platforms helps to disseminate information and include other potential members to contribute to the cause, although it may imply low key engagement such as "liking" a picture in social media and then, proceeding to forget about the conflict (Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2009, p. 247). A representative of *Hijas del Sahara* defends that Sahrawi women who are on social networks may accomplish great achievements if they continue working as hard as nowadays and recognises that she was unaware that there were so many Sahrawi women fighting for the cause, and that the Internet is helping them to get to know each other and claim their rights together (HdS in 2021, March 11). Regarding gender equality, the representative of *Hijas del Sahara* reflects that there are two key issues to consider: first, the protection of the Internet, to defend freedom of expression and information; second, she considers that sustainable development goes hand in hand with equality, anti-racism, and self-determination of peoples, thus it should be important to focus on clean energy in Western Sahara (ibid).

Sahara Cultura interviewed Sahrawi people who are activists in the diaspora, where one of the women interviewed called on the youth in the diaspora to use social media to be activists and make the cause visible, recognising that they are increasingly using technology to "reach every corner of the globe" (N. N. in SC, 2021, March 2). Another female activist who participated in an online event titled "born to be free, born to be Sahrawi" in the context of the International Women's Day 2021, added, "we have to fight in the army, in the war and in [social media] in the diaspora" and "we have to give a voice to women who cannot raise their voice" (N. N. in Asaharauicm Madrid, 2021, March 9).

In the same vein, *Hijas del Sahara* uploaded a video titled "now or never", where women and men appeared calling to other Sahrawis in the diaspora to mobilise for Western Sahara (HdS, 2021, January 17). In this video, they claim that it is their "mediatic war […] here in social media, events and demonstrations […]" while the military war is taking place in the territory, and add that the diaspora is "the voice of those that do not have it", adding that "we will return home" (ibid, own translation). Following Van Laer and Van Aelst's (2009) analysis of tactics to act collectively and the risk associated, this

action entails fewer risks if it is taken from the diaspora than from the Occupied Territories, where the threats and the aggressions are more severe.

Moreover, in comparison with the activism from the refugee camps, an interviewee identifies that *"[…] Sometimes we generate more impact from the diaspora because there is more power [than] in the camps, [because] they are very isolated. There is a lot of struggle there, but there is very little dissemination of information"* (FS3, interview, own translation).

Through that quote, the interview acknowledges the position of certain privilege that arises from being in the diaspora in terms of possibilities of access to the Internet and lower risk of imprisonment if they take part in offline activism. Besides, in the context of a webinar about the role of Sahrawi women in the diaspora, a female activist who participates in several organisations such as *Hijas del Sahara*, explains that "youth in the diaspora try to raise awareness and visibility of the current situation through initiatives in which they have united in social networks and demonstrations" (N. N. in Asaharauicm Madrid, 2021, March 9). The woman speaks up about the *raison d'être* of their activism "we exist because we resist, only our resistance is saving us" (ibid). Moreover, *Hijas del Sahara* explain through the interview that their actions contribute to peace as follows:

> *[…] we fight with demonstrations in the streets, we denounce injustice through the networks, we give a voice to all oppressed people, […] we work to raise awareness and visibility of the Sahrawi Just cause"* (HdS, interview, own translation). And perceive that their activism is impacting *"in the social sphere, although it may eventually be reflected in the political sphere in a very favourable way* (ibid).

Finally, at the time of acknowledging online activism as key for peacebuilding, it is also relevant to bear in mind that it presents limitations because the use of digital platforms may not be completely inclusive if it creates a gap among those that have restricted access to the Internet for any reason (absence of skills, lack of technology, age, restrictions by the adults responsible for their education, etc.) Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009) already mentioned several limitations that reduce the potential of the Internet (p. 245).

To sum up, Sahrawi women in the diaspora are aware of the key role they can play through social media and are taking advantage of it, disseminating information in several languages (for instance, 13n20 shares posts in Spanish and Arabic) and through different spaces. The following subsections present the necessity of finding digital spaces and the exposure to violence in those spaces.

4.7.1 Digital spaces

Women activists underline the importance of creating spaces where Sahrawi people feel safe and not subjected to judgmental treatment (N. N. in SC, 2021, March 2). These spaces are key, as they offer the possibility of exchanging opinions and discussing different topics that are relevant for the issue, not only with other Sahrawis living in the diaspora in Spain but also worldwide. As one post by *Feminismos Saharauis* claims, they deserve "a space where [they] can turn all [their] vulnerabilities into strength" (FS, 2019, December 17, own translation).

Many of the organisations arrange digital meetings to get to know each other, for instance, the League of Sahrawi Students and Youth in the Spanish State (LEJSEE) organised a meeting for Sahrawi women in the diaspora titled "Sahrawi woman: fighting, combative and diverse" (fieldnotes from the meeting published on LEJSEE, 2021, March 4). During the meeting, women expressed their sorrow because there is at least one person that has been tortured or forcibly disappeared within every family, and they feel that they must keep resisting and fighting for justice (ibid). They also delve into the difficulties on finding a sense of identity and belonging both within the Sahrawi context and the Spanish, which relates to the concerns on intersectionality and identity already analysed (ibid). Concerning the discourse on gender and nation, they brought about the need for a legislative framework to advance toward gender equality, but some women objected to justifying the lack of sisterhood and the weight of patriarchy because of not having a state, which relates to the discussion on gender and nation (ibid). Consequently, they pinpointed the necessity of weaving networks from the diaspora based on sorority, where women support one another and tolerate the diversity among them, especially referring to the criticism they receive on their social media profiles, which is analysed in a subsection below (ibid).

Additionally, *Feminismos Saharauis* organised physical meetings, but due to the pandemic, they created a virtual space called "a tea with us", as a safe space where women located in different places (diaspora, refugee camps and Occupied Territories) shared what they considered the parameters they should put into question and their objectives (FS, 2020, April 20; FS, 2020, April 28a). The first virtual meeting was on "Decolonial Feminism" and the second one was on "Women, Politics and Religion" (FS, 2020, May 9). Finally, the third virtual tea was on sexuality, and among their inputs, they discussed the necessity of making sexual abuses visible and that "the control of [their] sexuality and/or body is more related to [their] endogamous and ethnocentric practices than to the

policies of genocide towards the Sahrawi people" (FS, 2020, June 12, own translation). Those are relevant topics to discuss to achieve gender equality, as they are pillars of the political strategies and social constructions that are hidden behind discourses and need to be addressed to adapt the narratives to the needs and concerns of women. They also indirectly refer to intersectionality, calling for inclusive feminism and sorority once again (FS, 2020, April 28b).

A different strategy towards the creation of digital spaces is presented by *Hijas del Sahara*, who innovate through a space called "*Radio melhfa*". First, the name of the space evidences the relevance of the *melhfa* for the community as a symbol of identity. The space consists of interviews with Sahrawi women and men to get to know each other and spread information about the culture of Western Sahara through anecdotes and dynamic quizzes (2021, April 7).

In conclusion, each of those spaces offers the possibility to build a stronger movement, strengthening their internal network and making their culture visible to other people that may support the cause. The discussions and processes that are being generated through its events and publications have an impact on the peace process and are a way of contributing to the mobilisation of the Sahrawi and Spanish communities.

4.7.2 Violence in digital spaces

Social media have the risk of exposure to violence that is hardly controlled because of several reasons, for instance, it is a rather new space where the legislation is very weak, especially when the relationship between victims and perpetrators maybe cross borders, and because it may be covered by the anonymity of the perpetrators.

One of the workshops in the frame of the second face-to-face meeting of *Feminismos saharauis* was titled "us on the [social] networks". They delved into the complexity of being a Sahrawi woman in the digital space and "how to create links between [them] to protect [them]selves from the harassment and harm [they] receive today on social media." (FS, 2020, September 28, own translation). This recognition of the particularities of situations that take place on social media is of interest for this research, as it documents the existence of particular types of violence that must be approached.

Trece de noviembre 20 (13n20) claimed that they have received attacks on both *Instagram* and *Facebook* and referred to it as *"violence by [their] own people"* at the time of posting about women or equity, attributing the attack because of *Trece de noviembre*

2020 alleged *"wrong perspective"* (13n20, interview, own translation). Similarly, *Hijas del Sahara* identified misogynist violence on social media and recognised that *"Women face harsher attacks, always with attacks on religion and physical [aspect] [...]"* (HdS, interview, own translation). In fact, the misogyny becomes apparent at the time of reviewing the comments on their *Instagram* posts (for instance, in HdS, 2020, November 30).

Almenara-Niebla and Ascanio-Sánchez (2020) studied the strategies of Sahrawi women to confront gossip, harassment, and violence at the individual level, such as creating a second account and restricting access to their profiles. Regarding the former, one interviewee explained:

> *[...] [There are] many girls, and I think there are some boys too, [...] who have double social networks. To a certain extent, it's like you know how to handle it when you're born like that and you know the codes of behaviour in one place and another, but there comes a point when you go crazy and say who am I? What's going on? [...].* (FS1, interview, own translation)

And she continues explaining the second strategy *"[...] all girls have a private account, so you don't get in trouble, I accept [to access to my account to] whoever I want and that's it"* (FS1, interview, own translation)

They distinguish the behaviour of women and men in this regard, considering that most men do not need to duplicate their identity (FS1, interview). These situations also explain why the current analysis relies on group profiles, since personal accounts of women activist are mostly private or those that are public may represent only restricted content that does not correspond to their real beliefs. Another interviewee elaborates on the reason why those strategies take place:

> *[...] I can say that I do whatever I want because, unfortunately, my parents died, so I have no one to feel sorry for. Sahrawi women often limit our actions and limit our freedom because of what they might say to our parents, often we feel so bad that we prefer to limit our freedom because we feel bad. For example, [@sahrawifeminist][42] comments on this a lot in several of her posts. It's very conflictive for a person, it's not healthy and it ends up affecting you in many aspects.* (FS3, interview, own translation)

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[42] @*sahrawifeminist* is the personal account of Násara, a Sahrawi activist already mentioned under section 4.5.

The rest of the representatives of *Feminismos Saharauis* supported the argumentation by their colleague and added that it was a result of the *"logics of honour"*, that they do not want their family to receive any comments that may affect them (FS1, interview). Almenara-Niebla and Ascanio-Sánchez (2020) referred to the fact that "refugee daughters bear the honour of their families", which relates to the expectations of their role as "protectors of community", which relates to the idea of *kulturnation* (pp. 775-776). This point is relevant to understand the necessity of freedom of expression and gender equality, especially considering their perception of how those experiences limit their contributions on social media and how it affects their activism and social relations.

In the same vein, a Sahrawi woman activist who lives in the diaspora explained in an interview on social media that she refused to fight with Sahrawi men who harass women, and that she "does not want a Free Sahara with men that behave like that" (N. N. in HdS, 2021, April 8, own translation). To which the interviewer added her concerns on "gossip", as mentioned above, which limits the freedom of women to publish on social media and believes that "these men hold back women who could develop great projects but don't do so because they are afraid of criticism" (HdS, 2021, April 8, own translation). Additionally, the interviewer identifies the necessity of weaving networks between men and women "now that we have time, because then when we are thrown into a [political] project, we have to be ready as a collective", based on the idea that if the Sahrawi nation is not built on tolerance, it will be a failure (ibid). Additionally, both the interviewee and the interviewer defended the role of the diaspora to influence and change misogynist ideas influencing those who live in the camps or the Occupied Territories through social media (ibid).

Finally, it is of interest to the topic to add that a comment published on the post by a supposed[43] Sahrawi man makes evident the necessity of feminism within the community and that many men use insults to deny that gender inequality exists when in their attempt to prove it, they actually perpetrate it:

> […] I ask you to stop inserting feminist ideologies to our people because we don't need them, we know how to treat and love our women […], we are fighting for the Sahrawi people to regain freedom and not to insert cheap and useless feminisms to our homeland […] (ibid).

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[43] The use of the word "supposed" is used on the assumption that there may be fake profiles and impersonation on social networks.

In conclusion, the aforementioned concerns make visible the risks that women assume at the time of being activists on social networks, the necessity of gender equality to achieve positive peace and the key role that women play at the time of calling on men to be allies rather than enemies within the Sahrawi community.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings provided by the analysis shows that Sahrawi women in the diaspora do contribute to peacebuilding through different strategies of resistance, and actively promoting social and political changes through social media. The strategies depend on how they frame different issues within their discourse and the actions they take to spread information and create a gender-equal society. The conclusions drawn from the analysis are presented below and lead to answer the problem formulation: "*How do Sahrawi women in the diaspora contribute to the process of peacebuilding through online activism?*".

First, concerning intersectionality, the analysis concludes that diversity is one of the characteristics that is more remarkable among diaspora women, which defines their positioning on several topics. In this context, they face several systems of oppression that make it difficult to raise their voices and be heard. One of them being patriarchy, which conditions their position in society and the relevance given to their claims. Women are making these oppressions visible in their discourse and are creating spaces to weaving networks among them. This system intersects with others such as the strong religious discourse, which ties with questions related to identity and symbolism, and is especially contentious. Moreover, the burden of colonialisms is crucial in the discourses as it is still topical because of how it impacts their identity and self-determination. Sahrawi women are clear on this problem and they aim to ensure that they lead the construction of their nation and the definition of gender equality using their own strategies and frames, building on their knowledge and power, without the external interference of Global North's definitions of how those goals have to be achieved.

Second, the intergenerational perspectives imply a different positioning toward the conflict, the discourse and the strategies. The research shows how traditional discourses focus on the role that women had decades ago when they built the refugee camps. Nevertheless, younger generations are highlighting that nowadays the situation has changed as men have taken their spaces. It is time for women to institutionalise the

progress made by older generations and update the discourse to be inclusive, although this process may entail internal opposition as some Sahrawis consider that the oppressors may see internal debates as a sign of weaknesses.

Third, sisterhood is essential to embrace the diversity of experiences and perspectives. Sahrawi women in the diaspora are creating spaces to confront the different systems of oppression, making the importance of gender equality to thrive as a nation a visible issue. Those spaces generate stronger commitment among women, offering an opportunity for them to discover their common interests and concerns that may not be present in the official political discourse. Therefore, some spaces, such as the meetings organised by *Feminismos Saharauis*, contribute to the construction of common imaginaries that lay the foundations for equality.

Fourth, colonialism as a system of oppression also conditions the commitment of Global North countries with the Sahrawi cause. This situation has influenced the traditional discourses of the POLISARIO Front, as the nationalist discourse directly relates to women's power in society, laying on questions related to their biological reproduction of the nation (*volksnation*) or their role as representatives of the culture (*kulturnation*). The literature review showed the Sahrawi society as highly egalitarian, which eases support by the Global North. However, the process of analysing data for this research has shown that there is still room for improvement. Consequently, there are raising women's voices more critical with the traditional political discourse of the POLISARIO Front and the NUSW. The new generations aim to build peace from below and pay special attention to building bridges within the community and change gender norms, as they know that the lack of gender equality will hinder positive peace, as inequality is a structural cause of conflict.

Fifth, the cross-cutting theme of diaspora women in peacebuilding has shown the necessity of working towards receiving support from local and external actors. Concerning the international community, Sahrawi women face several obstacles. First, permanent members of the UN Security Council such as France and the USA openly support Morocco, which impedes the resolution of the conflict. It also affects the role of women in the process because the UNSCR 1325 must be recognised and be a key part of the peace negotiations, considering not only economic agreements but also the social sphere. Moreover, the hidden power of corporate lobbies, who are plundering the resources of Western Sahara doing business with Morocco is a huge limitation. All these examples of the oppressive power of capitalism and white supremacy support why an

intersectional and decolonial approach is necessary to understand the difficulties that Sahrawi women face at the time of defending their cause and why it is necessary to look at the roots of the problem, which are structural.

Apart from those spaces, the role of Sahrawi women in the diaspora as experts and advisors may be key in cooperation projects of INGOs. Nevertheless, the interviewees express their discomfort because there are no available channels that allow their participation. This consideration is key, as institutions and INGOs must reconsider the participation of these collectives to implement projects that listen to the voice of the local community and are focused on their interests and needs. This mutual trust is essential to encourage the participation of women in the formal process of peacebuilding because, even though, Sahrawi women already do commendable advocacy work, they could do even more if they entered other spaces.

Concerning the possibilities of dialogue with Moroccan citizens, the analysis shows that most Sahrawi women who participate in the interviews believe in the power of transversal politics to find a common interest and reach an agreement. However, the tension is evident and the risk of retaliation that may face Moroccans if they support the Sahrawi cause appears to be a shortcoming.

Finally, online platforms work as loudspeakers for their actions, allowing them to raise awareness and transmit the values of the Sahrawi peoples. However, most of the actions of the organisations analysed imply low key commitment, as they are supported by "likes" and shares of their posts but may limit further commitment unless they systematise their practices, combining actions that entail stronger ties. Moreover, the analysis showed that they may need a better organisation of their actions, coordinating them with others in their countries of settlement and with the homeland to have a bigger impact.

Concerning the risks that online activism entails, diaspora women present the advantage of not facing the high risks that women who defend the self-determination of Western Sahara face in the Occupied Territories, as in the latter they may be imprisoned or suffer physical aggressions. However, online activism from the diaspora leads to specific types of violence. Specifically, most of the comments they receive are related to their appearance, for instance, not being veiled is a common trigger, as some men see it as a betrayal to their culture. Situations like this differentiate the violence they face and what the male counterparts may face under the same conditions.

Nevertheless, women can be criticised but not silenced in social networks, thus they are building spaces and creating networks where they support each other and are applying different strategies of resistance, such as creating second personal accounts, restricting access and directly oppose those behaviours calling for men to be allies and not enemies within the movement to build a stronger community.

To sum up, this research project aims to be useful for political advocacy, showing the potentialities of the active participation of Sahrawi women and their contribution to peace processes through different strategies such as online activism. It may be an example for other socio-political movements around the world as it shows how the vulnerabilities that surround the situation of the Sahrawi community in general, and specifically of women in the diaspora in Spain, does not limit their power to advocate for their cause and claim peace.

Moreover, this project could feed a baseline study that allows organisations and institutions to implement interventions that promote the political dialogue between the Sahrawi community and the international community, focusing on the experiences of diaspora women and the crucial role they may play to build peace in their homeland.

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[44] The list of references includes the English translation after references to books and articles whose title is originally in Spanish.

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7. APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Face-to-face interview guide

GENERAL

1. Who is part of *Feminismos Saharauis*? (composition by gender and location)

2. Do you consider that there is sufficient space for women's participation at the political level within the Sahrawi context?

3. How would you define your contribution to the peace process?

INTERSECTIONALITY

4. Have you ever felt that something important to you was not represented in the movement's proclamations? What have you missed?

5. Do you think that within the Saharawi struggle there are groups that are not represented in the demands?

6. Regarding your virtual meetings and teas, what topics do you see as the most recurrent, the ones that most concern those of you who live here in Spain?

7. About the second meeting, where there was a workshop entitled "we in the networks", did you draw any interesting conclusions?

8. Do you identify any specific type of violence on social media that is not common in other spaces? If so, do you think that women and men face the same attacks? How would you define the profile of the aggressors?

9. When you participate in mixed spaces (where there are women and men) where the self-determination of Western Sahara is discussed, do you feel that your interventions are taken into account in the same way?

GENDER AND NATION

10. Do you think there is any pressure on women to be "the flag of the country" within the nationalist discourse? What do you think about this?

11. How do you position yourselves with the statement that there can be no liberation of women until men are also liberated and that the first thing is to achieve self-determination, as if they were separate struggles?

DIASPORA IN PEACEBUILDING & TRANSVERSAL POLITICS

12. Have you ever shared spaces for debate on Western Sahara with people of Moroccan and/or Spanish origin? And spaces on other common issues/concerns (feminism, professional issues, organisations that bring together North African issues...)? Do you think this can be a way to create

dialogue and build peace from the diaspora? What other ways of dialogue do you consider possible from the diaspora?

13. Do you formally collaborate with any institution/agency for peacebuilding (in Spain, Europe or SADR)? Do you identify any obstacle to being heard by official bodies? How do you think it can be solved?

14. Do you coordinate in any way to carry out actions with Sahrawis living in other countries? For example, at the European level, to lobby EU institutions or organise coordinated events of some kind.

15. What do you think is necessary to create a feminist Sahrawi nation, based on equality between people and sustainable peace? (Priority issues for the Sahrawi feminist agenda, to be worked on internally).

ONLINE ACTIVISM

16. Regarding social networks, do you identify any specific type of violence in social networks that is not common in other spaces? If so, do you think women and men face the same attacks or do they have different characteristics?

17. Do you think your work on social media is valued in any way?

18. Do you think your activism has impacted the political situation in any way (positively, negatively, or both)?

CONCLUSION

19. How would you summarise your struggle for peace as Sahrawi women in the diaspora in one sentence?

20. Is there anything you would like to add?

21. Are there any other female activists you know whom you think I should talk to?

Appendix 2. E-mail interview guide

GENERAL

1. Who is part of *[the organisation]*? (composition by gender and location)

2. How would you define your contribution to the peace process?

INTERSECTIONALITY

3. Have you ever felt that something important to you was not represented in the movement's proclamations (by official bodies or other activists)? What have you missed?

DIASPORA WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

4. Have you ever shared spaces for debate on Western Sahara with people of Moroccan and/or Spanish origin? And spaces on other common issues/concerns (feminism, professional issues, North African issues...)? Do you think this can be a way to create dialogue and build peace from the diaspora? What other ways of dialogue do you consider possible from the diaspora?

5. Do you formally collaborate with any institution/agency for peacebuilding (in Spain, Europe or SADR)? Do you identify any obstacle to being heard by official bodies? How do you think this can be solved?

6. Do you coordinate in any way to carry out actions with Sahrawis living in other countries? For example, at the European level, to lobby EU institutions or organise coordinated events of some kind.

7. What do you think is necessary to create a feminist Sahrawi nation, based on equality between people and sustainable peace? (Priority issues for the Sahrawi feminist agenda, to be worked on internally).

ONLINE ACTIVISM

8. Regarding social networks, do you identify any specific type of violence in social networks that is not common in other spaces? If so, do you think women and men face the same attacks or do they have different characteristics?

9. Do you think your activism has impacted the political situation in any way (positively, negatively, or both)?

CONCLUSION

10. How would you summarise your struggle for peace as Sahrawi women in the diaspora in one sentence?

11. Is there anything you would like to add?

12. Are there any other female activists you know whom you think I should talk to?

Appendix 3. Transcript of the face-to-face interview

The interview to *Feminismos Saharauis* was held in Spanish and the transcript is included in the same language. However, in-text citations appear in English. Besides, the recording is available upon request.

First, I asked them for informed consent on the recording of the interview. Second, I introduced myself, the structure of the interview.

Researcher (R): ¿Cómo está compuesto Feminismos Saharauis?

Feminismos Saharauis, **interviewee 3 (FS3):** todas mujeres y todas saharauis. Luchamos contra el patriarcado, a través de RRSS damos mucha visibilidad a temas que consideramos relevantes. La mujer saharaui ha sido muy reivindicativa siempre. Las mujeres en los campamentos siempre han tenido su papel reivindicando y luchado por los DDHH y también porque tengamos leyes, es decir, que los derechos, libertad, igualdad estén establecidos formalmente, a nivel laboral, social… Lo que viene a ser todas las diferencias entre mujeres y hombres.

R: Si queréis añadir algo también las demás…

Feminismos Saharauis, **interviewee 1 (FS1):** Ninguna de nosotras somos fundadoras, las creadoras creo que fueron dos chicas, la idea creo que era crear un espacio para mujeres saharauis un poco diferente de lo que nos encontrábamos normalmente, porque en casi todas las organizaciones vas a ver que hay un espacio para mujeres, pero el discurso de FS es bastante diferente, está muy relacionado con el antirracismo, con el feminismo decolonial. Quería ser un espacio seguro para mujeres saharauis, solo para mujeres saharauis.

Feminismos Saharauis, **interviewee 2 (FS2):** para mujeres que residen principalmente en el estado español. Han intentado muchas veces crear un espacio donde puedan participar mujeres de campamentos y del Sahara ocupado, pero no ha sido posible, aunque creo que es uno de sus objetivos.

FS3: lo que hacemos a través del activismo en RRSS es contribuir a crear la paz y una alianza entre los saharauis y siempre dar visibilidad y contribuir a esa paz. Y también analizamos la situación desde una perspectiva feminista porque a veces nosotras hemos tenido dificultades porque reivindicamos, pero por nuestra forma de vestir o de nuestra forma de vida, pues muchas personas se fijan más en eso que en nuestro discurso, entonces de ahí viene que intentamos usar esa perspectiva feminista, de apoyo y empoderamiento de la mujer saharaui, y la libertad de la mujer saharaui y de que "tú puedes" y facilitar la educación porque básicamente es educación y visibilidad.

R: En ese sentido, quería preguntaros, porque a veces se dice que la mujer es el icono de la nación, pero a veces se olvida esa realidad ¿vosotras percibís esa presión de que la mujer debe cumplir unos estándares y ser de un cierto modo? ¿Habéis percibido cierta violencia por parte de otras mujeres saharauis u otros hombres, que digan que si no

cumples con X características no les representas? Particularidades, que si fuerais hombres no se pondrían en cuestión.

FS1: muchas veces habrás escuchado a los saharauis decir "aquí hay un matriarcado", "las mujeres saharauis no son como las mujeres marroquíes". A mí eso me hace mucha gracia porque creo que es marketing puro para vender nuestra causa, aunque nosotros nos lo creemos ¿eh?, pero para mí tiene que ver con… bueno, tú has estudiado cooperación al desarrollo pues creo que tiene que ver con esas lógicas de que "las mujeres saharauis son las que han levantado los campamentos de refugiados", bueno, sí, nuestras abuelas, nuestras madres han levantado los campamentos de refugiados, pero ¿cuál es el poder real ahora de las mujeres saharauis en los campamentos de refugiados?

FS2: ¿te refieres a la idealización de las mujeres saharauis? Creo que lo percibimos todas, todas las generaciones y pesa un poco, creo que nos pesa a todas, ni somos heroínas… somos personas normales. Si que tenemos esa obligación de luchar por la liberación de nuestro país. En cuanto a lo que dice FS1, es verdad que nuestras madres y abuelas han levantado unos campamentos, pero cuando no estaban los hombres, nos han cedido un espacio, pero cuando no estaban, pero ahora que han vuelto lo han recuperado, o sea no es nuestro ya…

FS3: Yo creo también que con todos los conflictos que está habiendo, creo que la estructura de la mujer saharaui en los campamentos está cambiando. También, bueno, habréis visto los conflictos que ha habido en El Aaiún, todas las violaciones hacia mujeres que se han publicado, por eso es que la mujer saharaui siempre está nombrada y siempre es como que está ahí en primera persona y siempre se habla de ella. Y por ejemplo aquí desde la diáspora yo creo que nuestro mayor poder es dar esa visibilidad, dar esa información y creo que la educación y la información son un poder. Cuando decimos que hay que compartir, cuando publicamos algo desde un punto de vista que nosotras lo hemos vivido o compañeras nuestras que llevan años luchando por esto, saben muchísimo, lo han vivido. Entonces es dar esa visibilidad desde el punto de vista ya sea feminista, ya sea saharaui, ya sea desde los campamentos, desde el punto de vista como mujeres saharauis en la diáspora, entonces es ir educando. Yo me encuentro cada día con personas [españolas] que no saben nada de la RASD y les dices algo y te dicen ¿esto qué es? ¿dónde es? ¿existe? Y siempre intentamos ya al menos, no solo incluir la parte feminista, que es la principal de FS, sino también educar con la información, que yo al menos personalmente considero que es un gran poder y que con el tiempo va generando un

impacto, que esperemos que sea positivo y que permita a las demás personas abrir su mente e interesarse más.

R: ¿cómo definiríais vosotras vuestra contribución al proceso de paz? En relación con esos procesos que se están generando a través de vuestras publicaciones y creo que está totalmente relacionado con lo que dices de educar, que es una forma de contribuir a que haya movilización desde la población española Para saber lo que está pasando porque hay un absoluto desconocimiento y ese altavoz que te dan las RRSS de decir lo que está pasando, hay cuestiones históricas que se están silenciando… ¿qué pensáis vosotras de vuestra contribución?

FS3: Sí, también educar es que la información se obtiene de muchos medios y hay que hablar con propiedad. Por ejemplo, hay muy pocas personas que saben que muchas empresas españolas explotan la materia prima saharaui, por ejemplo, la arena tan bonita de canarias, pues hay muy pocas personas que saben que esa arena se obtiene del Sahara, el pescado, que hacen creer que es de Marruecos, y bueno, la historia de los fosfatos creo que ya la conoce todo el mundo, entonces, bueno… es ir trabajando esos aspectos…

FS2: Respondiendo desde FS, creo que esa visión que tiene la población española y esa poca información es siempre desde una perspectiva colonial, y nos ven como "esa gente, ese territorio que nos pertenecía, pero ahora ya no sabemos que ha pasado con él", es muy importante tener una perspectiva decolonial del conflicto saharaui porque sin eso no podemos avanzar en nada.

FS3: iba a comentar una cosa que has dicho tú que creo que es muy importante y porque decías que siempre se refieren a nosotros como si fuéramos una colonia, entonces, por ejemplo, a mí cuando me comparan con Marruecos, yo siempre destaco cuales son mis costumbres, por ejemplo, yo siempre destaco la vestimenta saharaui, las bodas tan destacadas que tenemos, entonces es muy importante diferenciar estos aspectos culturales, porque desgraciadamente la gente solo sabe diferenciar así. Si ahora nos ponemos a contar la historia del Sáhara, la gente se aburre y no nos quiere escuchar, yo personalmente lo he comprobado. Sin embargo, si conseguimos atribuir "oye que yo tengo mi propia gastronomía", mi propia vestimenta, mi propio idioma, muy importante el idioma, hay muchas personas que lo desconocen, entonces es ir educando, atribuir varias características a nuestro país.

R: Me quería preguntar por vuestros encuentros y tés virtuales, ¿qué temas habéis visto como más recurrentes? De "esto es lo que de verdad nos preocupa y es una prioridad de la agenda feminista y lo tenemos que abordar"

FS1: FS ahora mismo está en una fase de reconstrucción porque desde noviembre han pasado cosas que hacen cambiar todas las dinámicas y que hacen que nos replanteemos todo y que bueno… ha entrado gente nueva, ha salido… entonces, creo que FS, uno de los objetivos y diferencias con los demás grupos de mujeres saharauis es que no es "para afuera", o sea sí tenemos algo de divulgación de la causa saharaui pero es más "para adentro", para trabajar entre nosotras y ya está, entonces por eso son espacios no mixtos. Sobre los encuentros […], una característica interesante que tiene feminismos es que se hablaba abiertamente de sexualidad, que es una de las cosas que más sorprende, y seguramente una por la que más se critica al grupo, pero no sé… hay muchos temas que nos preocupan, supongo que cada una tiene sus inquietudes, para mí a lo mejor son otros…

FS3: […] cuando intentamos dar esa perspectiva feminista como mujeres saharauis, es intentar empoderar a nuestras compañeras y también evitar muchos prejuicios hacia nosotras. Por ejemplo, yo porque vivo sola, porque no llevo *melhfa*, etc. Yo incluso he llegado a tener conflictos con otras compañeras saharauis que incluso son mucho más mayores que yo, que ellas bueno, sí llevan *melhfa* y tal, y entonces bueno ellas pues… a mi lo que no me gusta es cuando no se trata mi discurso por mi forma de vestir o por cualquier otra cosa y desgraciadamente por mis redes sociales. Si te siguen pues luego te critican mucho, entonces muchas veces si quieres hacer un impacto en tu población, ya no hablamos de transmitir esa información a las personas que no sean saharauis, sino dentro de la población saharaui, a veces es difícil porque tienes que intentar acoplarte a ellos, porque dependiendo de cómo seas pues no se va a valorar tu discurso y ahí viene el intentar ir trabajando eso poco a poco, que soy igual de respetable si me quiero teñir el pelo, si quiero llevar pintauñas, cualquier cosa… entonces es ir visibilizando, educando tanto a mujeres como a hombres.

FS1: creo que uno de los problemas que hay en la diáspora es que tenemos una diversidad de situaciones increíble: está la gente que vino en "Vacaciones en Paz" y se quedó, la gente que ha llegado con 25 años, solo, haciendo un proceso migratorio, la gente que ha nacido aquí de padres saharauis. Entonces, es muy difícil encontrar un punto común, solo tenemos en común que somos saharauis, pero tenemos vidas completamente diferentes y vivimos aisladas las unas de las otras, que estamos dispersas por todo el estado español y por todo el mundo en realidad. Entonces es muy difícil. Entonces, por ejemplo, el tema de las RRSS que decía FS3 sale mucho, el tema de la "libertad" o no de publicar ciertas cosas en RRSS entonces lo que pasa mucho y esto lo veíamos en el encuentro y cuanto

más te fijas más cuenta te das de que muchas chicas, creo que algún chico también hay, pero hablo de chicas que tienen dobles redes sociales. En cierta medida, es como que lo sabes llevar cuando has nacido así y sabes los códigos de comportamiento en un sitio y en otro, pero llega un punto en que te vuelves loca y dices ¿quién soy yo? ¿qué está pasando?

R: con respecto a los encuentros, que estuvisteis en las RRSS: ¿los chicos este tipo de cosas (tener doble identidad en redes) también lo hacen?

FS2: A ellos no les hace falta

FS1: Algunos hay, pero obviamente no es igual, no es comparable.

FS2: A ellos no les hace falta duplicar su identidad ni mucho menos y si lo hacen es por alguna estrategia.

FS1: Sí, solo nos pasa a nosotras. Es muy normal ver a un chico saharaui colgar una foto bebiendo y nadie se sorprende o si se sorprende no creo que ninguna chica se lo haga llegar y le diga por mensaje privado "oye tú, que haces bebiendo", no sé si las chicas nos sentimos tan libres en ese sentido. Y también, todas las chicas tenemos la cuenta privada, así no te metes en problemas, yo acepto a quien quiera y ya está.

FS3: A mi me gustaría recalcar que eso depende de la persona. Por ejemplo, yo puedo decir que hago lo que me da la gana porque desgraciadamente mis padres murieron, entonces yo no tengo a nadie por el que yo sentir pena. Muchas veces las mujeres saharauis limitamos nuestros actos y limitamos nuestra libertad por lo que les puedan decir a nuestros padres, muchas veces nos sabe tan mal que preferimos limitar nuestra libertad porque nos sentimos mal. Esto por ejemplo @sahrawifeminist lo comenta mucho en varias publicaciones suyas. Yo nunca lo he vivido porque mis padres murieron cuando yo tenía 11 años, entonces yo he crecido con una familia de Mallorca, entonces a mi si un saharaui me dice "eres una guarra por publicar fotos en bikini" pues le digo pues vale, no me preocupa que se lo vaya a decir a mi tío, a mi primo, entonces no me preocupa porque no tengo ese problema, pero sé que muchas compañeras sí tienen ese problema, entonces muchas veces limitan su libertad por sus familiares. Es muy conflictivo para una persona, no es sano y te acaba afectando en muchos aspectos.

FS1: el tema de las lógicas del honor… yo creo que casi todas las chicas que estamos en la diáspora nuestra mayor preocupación es que les llegue a nuestros padres estando donde estén, aunque no esté en los campamentos ni en los TTOO, el mayor miedo es que les lleguen cosas de nosotras que les pueda afectar, no porque hagamos nada malo porque no es nada malo, pero que sean cosas que a ellos les pueda doler o afectar de alguna forma.

FS2: yo creo que la raíz de todos nuestros problemas es un sistema patriarcal, todo viene de ahí. En todas las sociedades y culturas pasa, creo que deberíamos señalarlo.

FS1: Sí, digo esto entendiendo que todas somos conscientes de que no es una cosa solo de nuestra sociedad ni mucho menos.

FS2: es muy importante señalar la raíz del problema

FS3: una cosa que me produce mucha impotencia es que soy una persona muy reivindicativa y con muchas ganas de aprender y con muchas ganas de ayudar en lo que pueda y lo pasé mal, me afectó mucho lo que me pasó, que fue que no se valore mi discurso por la forma de vestir. Yo iba todo de negro, pero era la única mujer que no llevaba *melhfa* y nadie valoró mi discurso, incluso se me interrumpió y claro, es que es una cosa que he vivido y estoy segura que más compañeras han vivido, ¿vas a juzgarme solo por mi forma de vestir y no vas a querer escucharme y no vas a valorar mi discurso? Entonces a veces si queremos que nos escuchen, desgraciadamente y yo lo tuve que hacer, tienes que intentar acoplarte un poco, es una pena y a mí me genera una gran impotencia, entonces de ahí viene para mi esa es una de las graves consecuencias que genera [el patriarcado].

R: ¿veis la *melhfa* como una cuestión cultural o creéis que hay una fuerte asociación con la religión y con el sistema patriarcal y que se tapa con el discurso de que es cultural?

FS2: el tema de la *melhfa* a mi es que me parece algo muy importante porque es la identidad de la mujer saharaui, quitando ya la religión, es parte de la cultura saharaui y me parece que nos representa a todas. Algunas nos la ponemos cuando queremos, a mí me gusta ponérmela y no me la pongo a diario y creo que es parte de nuestra identidad, de la identidad de las mujeres saharauis, ya sean musulmanas o no, es parte de nuestra identidad. Y que la gente hable de la *melhfa* como un trapo o algo me parece fatal.

FS3: yo estoy muy de acuerdo con ella, está claro que es una identidad, yo a veces me la he puesto, pero creo que debe ser libre elección porque muchas veces con una identidad que es tan bonita y que tiene tanta simbología y tanto valor detrás, muchas veces se ensucia de forma sexual, se sexualiza a la mujer en ese sentido, es como que se ensucia toda esa identidad nuestra y toda esa simbología y toda la historia que tiene detrás. Entonces muchas veces se le dan significados o justificaciones patriarcales, sexuales y religiones, yo personalmente considero que no tiene que ver con la religión para nada, creo que es una identidad de la mujer saharaui, yo tengo una valoración que con otras personas no comparto… hay personas que le dan un significado totalmente religioso y yo no lo comparto. Y también es dar esos diferentes puntos de vista y escuchar también lo

que dicen otras personas al respecto, por eso el tema de *melhfa* es un poco complicado, pero yo siempre he pensado que es más que motivo religioso, creo que tiene una gran simbología detrás y un gran valor que es más que un significado religioso.

FS1: para mí el problema es cuando hay debates que se crean falsamente de cara al exterior. Para mí hay gente que crea debates que pueden existir dentro del pueblo saharaui pero cuando los exteriorizas y lo utilizas, entonces creo que se desvirtúa y entonces un problema, si quieres llamarlo así o un debate que podamos tener nosotros sanamente, se convierte en un espectáculo entonces estoy en desacuerdo total con la visión de @sahrawifeminist, mi posición es la contraria. Yo soy hija de padre saharaui y madre catalana, entonces yo cuando veía la *melhfa* para mí era como algo muy lejano, pero a medida que he ido creciendo me gusta porque también es parte de mí, es identidad, es lucha contra el colonialismo, es lo que llevaba mi abuela y quiero llevarla cuando me dé la gana. Creo que una cosa son los debates que podemos tener intracomunitarios y otra lo que se exterioriza para ganar capital social y sacar libros.

FS2: y para generar debates islamófobos, racistas… que no deberían debatirse esas cuestiones.

FS1: sí podemos tener este debate, pero creo que debería ser internamente, para mí el problema es crear un espectáculo para los otros. Si hay chicas que realmente manifiestan que lo sienten como un problema creo que sí debemos escucharlo, el problema es cuando se da como un espectáculo para los demás. Mi aproximación es totalmente contraria a eso y a mí la *melhfa* me gusta, me gusta llevarla.

R: a veces se afirma que no puede haber liberación de la mujer saharaui hasta que no se consiga la liberación del pueblo y los hombres sean libres… como si fueran luchas separadas ¿lo veis como una lucha conjunta para lograr paz sostenible o hasta que una cosa no se resuelva no podemos hablar de la otra?

FS1: es una pregunta compleja, forma parte de lo que te decía de esa imagen que se ha creado, idealizado de la mujer saharaui, de pensar que la posición de la mujer saharaui es privilegiada con respecto a la mujer marroquí o la mujer argelina… tópicos que se repiten mucho dentro de nuestra sociedad que para mí son mitos… entonces es como una manera de tenernos ahí… aunque es cierto que son falsos debates de "no se puede conseguir la independencia si vosotros os manifestáis", pero es no tiene nada que ver ¿vas a conseguir un Sahara libre sin mujeres libres? Es que no creo que se pueda…

FS2: siempre estamos hablando de problemas no reales de las mujeres, de problemas que no nos preocupan a las mujeres saharauis, es imposible tener un Sahara libre sin mujeres

libres. A mi me surge la duda de donde vamos a luchar por nuestra liberación ¿en la diáspora? ¿en unos campamentos de refugiados?

FS1: y también la duda de ¿qué es la liberación?

FS3: yo he tenido la misma duda, muchas veces te sientes impotente, ¿estamos avanzando o no? Desde los campamentos no se les escucha. A veces generamos más impacto desde la diáspora porque hay más poder, al menos desde lo que yo he experimentado. Hay que seguir fortaleciendo… porque en los campamentos están muy aislados, allí se hace mucha lucha, pero la divulgación de información es muy poca, sin embargo, aquí a lo mejor se hace menos pero la divulgación es más grande por los medios que tenemos, también es una cosa que hay que aprovechar, también porque estamos en occidente y eso es algo que hay que aprovechar esa ventaja. Es como el tema del referéndum ¿pero eso cuando se va a hacer? Estamos esperando y esperando y como persona individual dices ¿qué puedo hacer yo para ayudar? Pues yo, por ejemplo, ofrecer dinero desgraciadamente no puedo, pero lo que podemos hacer es dar visibilidad, educación, crear impacto para que las personas empiecen a tener un poco una idea, por ejemplo ahora hay muchos prejuicios, hablo con personas que me dicen pero ¿eso dónde está? Hay mucho que hacer, ¿sabes esto de que cada vez que sabes más, sientes que sabes menos? Pues es lo mismo, cuanto más luchas parece que tienes que luchar cada vez más porque se malinterpretan cosas, la información se usa mal… ahora creo que se genera mayor impacto desde la diáspora pero porque tenemos medios, porque desde los campamentos se lucha y mucho pero no tienen esos medios de divulgación.

FS1: me da miedo que occidente se coma nuestra lucha y marque la agenda sobre lo que debemos luchar. "tenemos que liberar a las mujeres saharauis", bueno ¿qué es liberar a las mujeres saharauis? ¿las mujeres saharauis necesitan ser liberadas? ¿las mujeres saharauis quieren liberarse como tú quieres liberarlas? Me preocupa cuando desde aquí se llevan iniciativas a los campamentos o TTOO, ¿por qué estamos haciendo esto? ¿realmente es útil?

FS2: yo siempre he estado un poco en contra de todos los proyectos que se llevan a cabo desde aquí, con una perspectiva de gente de aquí, que no sabe, que no tiene en cuenta los problemas reales de las mujeres saharauis o los saharauis en general. Yo trabajo en este ámbito social y nunca participo, siempre me suelen decir "estamos haciendo un proyecto…" y yo digo "mejor no te digo lo que pienso de tu proyecto" y siempre desde un paternalismo y desde una visión colonial a más no poder.

R: ¿colaboráis formalmente con alguna institución para que se escuche en organismos oficiales o en ONGD? ¿sabéis si se puede colaborar de alguna forma? ¿cómo pensáis que se podría resolver que hubiera esa participación oficial por vuestra parte desde la diáspora?

FS1: yo he participado en la LEJSEE, no como miembro muy activo porque siempre me ha tirado muy para atrás todo lo que son temas de cooperación, me chirría y me molestan y me parecen que no van a la raíz del problema. Yo soy saharaui, soy de padre saharaui, pero desconozco la realidad de los campamentos, entonces he tomado la decisión de no meterme en según qué temas que simplemente desconozco y desconozco esa realidad. Participar desde la diáspora y hablar del tema que yo sé. Antes he participado en iniciativas de enviar dinero o tal, pero la verdad que intento ser crítica con eso porque al final lo de la ayuda humanitaria está haciendo que 46 años se tapen con ayuda humanitaria, pero no sirve.

FS2: Estoy de acuerdo. Yo desde mi posición, aquí en Euskadi hay miles de proyectos de ayuda al pueblo saharaui, pero siempre se diseñan y se presentan a una entidad pública para financiarlos y siempre los diseñan los mismos, no dejan que las personas que sí saben o las personas saharauis, porque no hay nadie que sepa más que las personas saharauis, diseñen esos proyectos. De hecho, mis amigas y yo siempre hemos dicho que vamos a hacer un proyecto nosotras y vamos a conseguir que nos financien, que yo he visto financiar proyectos muy malos, imagínate un proyecto bien hecho y con una perspectiva… de hecho nosotras siempre hemos pensado en un proyecto para mujeres, para mujeres en los campamentos.

R: no hay espacios de participación ¿no?

FS2: no, no tenemos posibilidad de entrar en esos espacios porque siempre son para gente muy cualificada y blanca.

R: ¿entre organizaciones de personas saharauis coordináis acciones a nivel europeo por ejemplo para hacer acciones conjuntas al mismo tiempo?

FS1: mi trabajo final va sobre esto, pero la conclusión es que no.

FS2: aquí en Euskadi si

FS1: ya, el problema es que estamos tan repartidos geográficamente, que en Euskadi si os organizáis, en Cataluña no estamos nada organizados, conozco a un saharaui que vive en Cataluña y le conocí en Madrid o sea que imagínate…

FS2: sí, en general nos organizamos fatal

FS1: sí, y yo creo que responde un poco a lo que te decía antes, a la diversidad de situaciones. Yo soy hija de una pareja mixta, el otro vino con vacaciones en paz y se quedó en un pueblo, el otro no se qué… no tenemos un espacio físico de encuentros y a mí me parecería fundamental que encontráramos un espacio, aunque sea virtual de encuentro de la juventud saharaui. Y luego lo que pasa también es que la diversidad de situaciones nos ha hecho muy diferentes y cuesta encontrar el nexo común.

R: Cuando es una discusión entre generaciones entiendo que es más difícil encontrar puntos de discusión en temas comunes

FS1: creo que sí, es lo mismo que pasa aquí con los padres. Evidentemente el punto de vista que yo pueda tener del conflicto y el que tiene mi padre seguramente… mi padre vivió bajo la colonia española y luego vivió la guerra, entonces evidentemente son visiones muy diferentes, tenemos muchísimos puntos en común, pero no es lo mismo haber nacido en España y haber vivido toda la vida aquí, como por ejemplo FS2, que creo que ha nacido en los campamentos. Tenemos visiones muy diferentes y es totalmente normal.

FS2: Y ya ni te cuento la generación del 2000, yo me pierdo ahí y veo un poco difícil su lucha por la causa.

FS1: a esos hay que recuperarlos, están un poco perdidos…

FS2: bastante perdidos, mi hermana y mi hermano yo no sé qué hacen con su vida, pero no participan en nada.

FS1: en parte puedo entenderlo, yo pienso en esta gente que ha nacido aquí… por ejemplo, mis hermanos han nacido en Bélgica y es como que no saben ni de qué les hablamos, nos ven como abuelos hablando de batallitas que no entienden y nuestros hermanos nos llevamos 11-15 años, pero son vivencias diferentes.

FS3: yo no sé hablar hasanía porque estuve en un centro de protección de menores y luego con una familia. Yo soy mallorquina, yo cuando me voy de viaje echo de menos Mallorca, pero también soy saharaui. Yo no tuve a nadie que me enseñara mi país, yo me tuve que interesar, nadie me explicaba de donde yo era… descubrí luego cuando fui haciéndome más mayor que mis padres eran saharauis, y me empecé a interesar sobre el tema a través de diferentes asociaciones que tenemos en Mallorca, por algunos compañeros… entonces yo siempre estuve un poco perdida. Ahí es donde yo hablo de la importancia de la educación, yo empecé a descubrir sobre mi país por la educación, porque escuchaba cosas y decía ¿pero mis padres dónde están? ¿yo de dónde soy? Y que si dices que eres saharaui pero no sabes hablar hassanía pues te miran un poco mal, ojalá

pudiera hablar, pero no he tenido la oportunidad de aprender, nunca he estado en los campamentos. Pero aquí cuando vas a algunas asociaciones y cuentas esas cosas te dicen "tú no eres saharaui". ¿por qué? Porque nunca he estado en los campamentos, porque no sé hablar hassanía, porque he crecido con una familia mallorquina… hay esas dificultades y por eso siempre soy tan pesada con el tema de la educación, repitiendo y de ir generando impacto.

R: ¿creéis que desde la diáspora se puede trabajar la construcción de la paz con intercambio con marroquíes?

FS3: en Mallorca tenemos una pequeña asociación contra el racismo y cuando pasó lo del alto al fuego éramos brasileños, saharauis, marroquíes… y tú vas allí por una lucha y yo por ejemplo para mi eso lo agradezco mucho porque es cuando quieres generar impacto. Dos amigas brasileñas eran quienes crearon STOP racismo, ellas no son saharauis y aun así contactaron con la radio, hicieron entrevistas. Entonces yo creo que sí se puede crear, no solo entre marroquíes y saharauis, sino marroquíes, saharauis, españoles… es que parece que odiamos a los marroquíes, es una pregunta que siempre se nos hace "es una persona marroquí, lo siento", pero yo no tengo ningún problema con la gente marroquí, yo adoro marruecos, yo tengo problemas con el gobierno marroquí, con el patriarcado, con la fuerza militar marroquí que nos matan. Yo tengo amigas marroquíes y las quiero más que a nadie, incluso más que a personas saharauis que a mí me han hecho daño, y ellas me han tratado muchísimo mejor y me han ofrecido todas las ayudas y han luchado conmigo y no se han perdido ninguna manifestación y han estado en todas. Entonces, siempre hay esa pregunta de "es que es marroquí, pero no te llevas bien, pero ¿vas a ir de viaje a marruecos? ¿pero no estáis en guerra? Hay que educar en ese aspecto, me ha pasado un montón de veces.

FS1: yo en Cataluña convivo con muchísimos compañeros y compañeras marroquíes, evidentemente algunos son mis amigos y yo creo que eso es algo diferente de nuestra generación que vivimos aquí, convivimos con personas marroquíes y realmente tenemos claro, lo que decía FS3, cuál es el foco de nuestro problema, que es el estado marroquí, no es el pueblo, que está igual de mal, que por eso tienen que venir todos los chavales. De hecho, tenía un amigo marroquí que me decía "a ver, si tanto os gusta vuestro rey ¿por qué vuestros padres vinieron aquí?", pues toda la razón. Yo creo que tenemos que generar espacios entre saharauis y marroquíes que estemos dispuestos a dialogar que podamos nosotros encontrar espacios entre saharauis y marroquíes, creo que es importante que haya diálogo. Creo que el estado español es profundamente anti-marroquí y se escudan mucho

con la causa saharaui para decir "nosotros somos anti-marroquíes, pero porque somos prosaharauis", no, vosotros sois racistas, no utilicéis nuestra causa y es una cosa que me molesta profundamente, cuando vienen españoles a criticarte marroquíes, "no es que yo soy prosaharaui", no mira, a mí no me hace falta criticar marroquíes para defender mi causa. Creo que eso nos ha creado un complejo como pueblo, el hecho de ser una colonia española nos ha perjudicado muchísimo, en el sentido de que hemos adoptado el mismo discurso que tienen los españoles. Y si, evidentemente me encantaría que se dieran esos espacios ni si quiera de debate, pero sí de compartir, de crear alianzas. Yo conozco a muchísimos rifeños aquí en Cataluña y creo que tenemos que escucharnos y no hacer lo que quieren que hagamos que es pelearnos entre nosotros y matarnos entre nosotros.

FS2: Estoy de acuerdo con ellas en que nuestro enemigo es el estado español, no la población marroquí, o sea el estado marroquí, aunque también el español. A mí me genera también muchos conflictos por la visión que tienen los marroquíes de nosotros. Yo aquí en España no me he encontrado todavía con un marroquí pro-saharaui. Trabajo con marroquíes y población migrante en general y tengo esa visión, como ellos de mi… son mis colonos y conozco a muchos que me dicen "¿eres del Sáhara? Ah sí, del Sáhara marroquí", así que me genera mucho debate esto y yo no crearía ni espacios para debatir con ellos porque creo que nos ven como una colonia y yo los veo como mis colonos.

FS1: sí, yo me refiero a gente que entiende el conflicto saharaui, no con cualquier persona que te pueda decir cualquier barbaridad. Mis propias amigas están viviendo en Marruecos y escriben en su muro de Facebook y se les tiran encima y yo digo "sois valientes" porque se meten en estos líos y luego vete a Marruecos que a lo mejor no te dejan entrar, así que creo que hay que reconocer la valentía a parte de la población marroquí, hablo sobre todo de rifeños porque mis amigos casi todos lo son, pero evidentemente partiendo de la base de que es gente que entiende el conflicto y que se han parado a pensarlo, no de cualquier persona que te dice cualquier cosa, que también me los he encontrado.

FS2: es la mayoría, yo creo que estamos de acuerdo, por lo menos aquí (en Euskadi), yo he tenido a gente que solo me conoce a mí, que no ha estado en el Sahara, no tiene nada que ver con el Sahara, de hecho, ha tenido que huir y odia marruecos, al estado marroquí, ni volvería y, aun así, me dice que el Sahara es marroquí. No lo entiendo.

FS1: tenemos que entenderlo, la gente que se ha criado allí es que se lo meten dentro, en la educación, el estado se les mete dentro.

FS2: y les adoctrina

FS1: me decía una chica española que estuvo en los campamentos que conocía a marroquíes "de izquierdas" que te van a defender cualquier cosa, pero diles tú que el Sáhara no es marroquí…

FS3: en mi caso sí he conocido

FS2: yo conozco a una mujer marroquí que ha creado una organización para apoyar a la población migrante en Vitoria y ayuda a todo el mundo, pero sobre la causa saharaui no.

FS1: creo que tenemos que entenderles en ese sentido, les meten a fuego que el Sahara es marroquí y no hay debates con eso, podemos debatir sobre cualquier otra cosa pero eso no.

FS2: habrá esperanza en que estas generaciones igual sí, pero yo no podría ni sentarme a debatir con ellos.

FS3: yo creo que para que estas generaciones empiecen a valorar que el Sahara no es de Marruecos, muchas veces se lucha mucho pero no se dice el por qué, entonces la gente pierde el hilo de por qué se está luchando, entonces siempre hay que ir adquiriendo simbologías, significados y de ahí la importancia de divulgar la información, de activismo en RRSS que estamos haciendo ahora, de contactar con un diario si se hace una mala información, etc. Explicar siempre el por qué, por qué estamos haciendo esto, por qué estamos haciendo estas manifestaciones, por qué estamos publicando esto, quién hay detrás. Todo tiene un significado, de la importancia del idioma, de la importancia de nuestra gastronomía… que hay tantas cosas que diferencian a un país del otro que aunque en algunos aspectos parezca una tontería va haciendo que se diferencie una cultura de otra y un país de otro. Si se pudieran hacer esos encuentros yo creo que estaría muy bien, tanto con generaciones más mayores, que cuesta más explicar el por qué estamos luchando, el por qué estamos tan pesados con cuando va a salir el referéndum, entonces es siempre ir inculcando esas ideas del por qué y explicar esos significados, yo creo que dando argumentos, porque muchas veces cuando pregunto yo creo que una opinión o una respuesta debe ir apoyada por unos argumentos porque si yo digo pues estoy luchando y ya está, no tiene mucho sentido. Si alguien me hace una pregunta yo estoy encantada de responderla, ¿Por qué estáis haciendo esto? ¿por qué estás publicando esto? Y yo se lo explico, no pasa nada, quien es ignorante es ignorante durante 1 minuto, luego ya se lo explicas y ya deja de ser ignorante, así que pregúntame cualquier tontería. Y a mí me encanta cuando me preguntan porque generas ese interés, no te preocupes que yo te explico cualquier pregunta "¿dónde está el Sáhara? Pero en *Google Maps* no sale esto ¿qué busco?" y le enseñas el mapa, le explicas la RASD, le explicas donde están los

campamentos, Argelia, etc. Y siempre hay que explicar la misma historia entonces ese interés, aunque sea un poco pesado y sean cosas tan básicas para nosotros, vas generando impactos porque él se lo comenta a este, él se lo comenta al otro, etc. Y poco a poco se van haciendo cosas.

R: ¿Queréis añadir algo más? Algún tema que me haya dejado o algo que deba enfocar de otro modo.

FS1: [me sugiere una entrevista de una fundadora de FS que su idea era construir el proceso de paz con encuentros con mujeres marroquíes]

R: ¿Creéis que podría hablar con otras mujeres?

FS2: [recomienda a la misma chica, que tiene un blog, un libro de poesía…]
Agradezco y digo que compartiré con ellas el proyecto por si quieren revisarlo y decirme lo que piensen del proyecto y de las conclusiones y de todo el tema.

FS2: hay otra chica, la hermana de Tfarra, ha hecho cooperación internacional y su proyecto es sobre "las mujeres saharauis como sujeto político activo en el conflicto". [sugiere enviarme su contacto]

Appendix 4. Answers to the e-mail interview

The e-mail interviews to *Trece de noviembre 2020* and *Hijas del Sahara* were held in Spanish and the original answers are included in the same language. However, in-text citations appear in English.

4.1 Trece de noviembre 2020

Researcher (R): ¿Cómo creéis que vuestras acciones contribuyen al proceso de paz?

Trece de noviembre 2020 (**13n20**): El hecho de a ver estado (y seguir) tantos años a la espera de una solución justa al pueblo saharaui, ha hecho que el enfoque principal se centre en acciones políticas, por lo que aunque nuestro objetivo y deseo sea contribuir a un proceso de paz, involuntariamente nos hemos olvidado o al menos hemos dejado en segundo plano otras luchas esenciales para la paz, como son las luchas sociales (feminismo, etc.)

R: ¿Creéis que vuestro activismo ha impactado en la situación política de algún modo (positiva, negativamente o ambas)?

13n20: Obviamente sí, y de manera positiva, pero no en la medida que nos hubiera gustado. Al final, nos vemos con bastantes limitaciones. Depende de qué cosas, no puedes

analizarlas, pues el enemigo (Marruecos, y muchos medios de comunicación) están al acecho de encontrar cualquier error, fallo en la sociedad, para deslegitimizar la lucha política, cosa que nos hace mirar con lupa cada cosa antes de ''exteriorizarla'' (aquí, por ejemplo, el hablar de como ''podría mejorar'' la gestión política, de las ayudas, o la notable desigualdad entre géneros)

R: ¿Qué creéis que es necesario para crear una nación saharaui feminista, basada en la igualdad entre las personas y en la que haya una paz sostenible?

13n20: Totalmente necesario, de hecho, deberíamos evitar los errores cometidos por los países vecinos, el ''dejar el feminismo'' de lado hasta solucionar el conflicto político, esto es algo que se le ha dicho a las feministas argelinas y marroquíes durante su lucha contra el colonialismo francés, y una vez descolonizados, se han quedado todas las promesas en el aire. No consideramos que unas luchas han de sobreponerse sobre otras, y sobre todo que no las deslegitimizan. Han de ir de la mano, si no, ¿a qué libertad nos queremos dirigir?

R: ¿Alguna vez habéis sentido que no estaba representado algo importante para vosotras en las proclamas del movimiento (por parte de organismos oficiales u otras personas activistas)?

13n20: Muchas, de hecho, consideramos que a la mujer saharaui se le ha encasillado en esa clásica frase de ''sois y habéis sido el pilar de la sociedad''. Se nos recalca constantemente en ese insuficiente empoderamiento, y lo que queremos es poseerlo. No que se nos cuelgue una medalla, que no es la que anhelamos y nos merecemos.

R: ¿Qué os gustaría que tuviera más presencia?

13n20: Unas políticas igualitarias en todos los formatos. Desde la igualdad entre hombre y mujeres, hasta la igualdad de inclusión, y aquí cabe mencionar por ejemplo el peso de la identidad. Ser saharaui no es algo único y exclusivo, no es algo que está ligado a unos protocolos que hay que cumplir para encajar. Si te fijas, a muy pocos nos da por hablar del tema religioso, sobre todo los que no creemos. No hay unos espacios donde nos sintamos seguros, y es un tema que acabamos teniendo con nuestros círculos más pequeños.

Espacios de libertad y tolerancia.

R: ¿Colaboráis formalmente con alguna institución/organismo para la construcción de la paz (de España, Europa o la RASD)? ¿Identificáis algún obstáculo para que se os escuche desde organismos oficiales? ¿Cómo creéis que se puede resolver?

13n20: Complicada cuestión, y aquí doy un punto de vista quizás más personal… el hecho de poder analizar solo lo ''analizable'' hace que huyamos algunos. Que llevemos la lucha desde la individualidad, es la única manera para no sentirte atada ni cuestionada, sino te toca acatar las normas y seguir las preocupaciones de los de siempre, dejando de lado las de ''colectivos'' minoritarios.

R: ¿Os coordináis de alguna manera para hacer acciones con saharauis que viven en otros países? Por ejemplo, a nivel europeo, para hacer incidencia política ante las instituciones de la UE u organizar eventos coordinados de algún tipo.

13n20: Hace unos años sí, a nivel personal me acabó consumiendo lo que cité con anterioridad, las limitaciones.

R: ¿Habéis compartido alguna vez espacios de debate sobre el Sáhara Occidental con personas de origen marroquí y/o española?

13n20: Sí, aunque se nota la tensión. Sólo he encontrado dos marroquíes comprometidos con la causa saharaui y que lo dicen donde haga falta, obviamente del Rif.

R: ¿Y espacios sobre otros temas/preocupaciones comunes (feminismo, temas profesionales, temas sobre el Norte de África...)?

13n20: Está el colectivo de Neswia por ejemplo, colectivo de mujeres del norte de África, y se analizan las preocupaciones de todas.

R: ¿Crees que puede ser una forma de crear diálogo y construir la paz desde la diáspora? ¿Qué otras vías de diálogo consideráis posible desde la diáspora?

13n20: Desde luego que podría ser muy interesante, a la par de necesario. Una revolución intelectual le urge a toda la zona, aunque en Occidente se vele por evitarlo totalmente, y aquí me respaldo en cómo se acoge y se abraza el islam, esa tolerancia máxima a la religión musulmana, solo tiene como objetivo el evitar que haya esa necesaria revolución.

R: En lo que respecta a las redes sociales, ¿Identificáis algún tipo de violencia específica en las redes sociales que no sea común en otros espacios? En caso afirmativo, ¿Creéis que mujeres y hombres enfrentan los mismos ataques o tienen características diferentes?

13n20: Como saharauis, desde nuestro reciente espacio, @trecedenoviembre20, hemos experimentado varios ataques, en Facebook 3 veces…Por otro lado también están las violencias por parte de los nuestros, en algunos posts que hicimos sobre la mujer o la igualdad en general, hemos sido atacados por tener esa ''errónea'' perspectiva.

R: ¿Cómo resumiríais vuestra lucha por la paz como mujeres saharauis en la diáspora en una frase?

13n20: Lo que no se nombra, deja de existir, por lo que es necesario señalizar aquellas muchas opresiones que se ejercen sobre nosotras.

R: ¿Os gustaría añadir algo?

13n20: Gracias por tu labor. Si hay alguna cuestión que no se ha respondido de manera específica, o crees que se ha entendido mal su planteamiento, me comentas.

4.2 Hijas del Sahara

Researcher (R): ¿Quiénes formáis Hijas del Sahara?

Hijas del Sahara **(HdS):** Hijas de Sahara lo formamos 13 mujeres, con varias nacionalidades, ya que cuenta con mujeres en los campamentos de refugiados de Tinduf, mujeres en la diáspora y concretamente una española. Es un comienzo con muy buena aceptación pero nuestra puertas están abiertas a toda mujer, ya qué estamos en proceso de crecimiento.

R: ¿Cómo creéis que vuestras acciones contribuyen al proceso de paz?

HdS: Contribuyen de una forma constante e ingeniosa, luchamos con manifestaciones en las calles, denunciamos la injusticia por las redes, damos voz a toda persona oprimida, con un apoyo rotundo a nuestro pueblo Saharaui, trabajamos en concienciar y visibilizar la causa Justa Saharaui, hacer conocer nuestro Pueblo su dignidad y nobleza para no caer en el olvido, ya que es una lucha injusta pero cruelmente larga Ya.

R: ¿Creéis que vuestro activismo ha impactado en la situación política de algún modo (positiva, negativamente o ambas)?

HdS: Nuestro activismo está impactando más en el ámbito social, aunque puede acabar reflejándose en el político de forma muy favorable.

R: ¿Qué creéis que es necesario para crear una nación saharaui feminista, basada en la igualdad entre las personas y en la que haya una paz sostenible?

HdS: Una educación de calidad para todos es la herramienta clave para construir una sociedad igualitaria; Impulsar la participación femenina como agentes de cambio social; Fortalecer la protección social; Facilitar el acceso al mundo laboral de forma igualitaria.

R: ¿Alguna vez habéis sentido que no estaba representado algo importante para vosotras en las proclamaciones del movimiento (por parte de organismos oficiales u otras personas activistas)?

HdS: Como toda sociedad no es perfecta, sin embargo, estamos trabajando en ello. Todo la R.A.S.D reconoce el pilar fundamental qué es la mujer, cada día tiene más presencia

en el ámbito político, pero tenemos que seguir luchando para una mejora y reconocimiento en todos los ámbitos, ya que la revolución Saharaui es mujer

R: ¿Qué os gustaría que tuviera más presencia?

HdS: Un poco de renovación, más presencia joven y de mujeres en el gobierno.

R: ¿Colaboráis formalmente con alguna institución /organismo para la construcción de paz (de España, Europa o la RASD)?

HdS: Somos un movimiento qué está empezando con mucho ímpetu, colaboramos con asociación y proyectos humanitarios y trabajamos con movimientos por la causa Justa Saharaui. Sin embargo, nuestro diplomáticos y representantes si colaboran y trabajan en la construcción de Paz, pero es una ardua tarea

R: ¿Identificáis algún obstáculo para que se escuche desde organismos oficiales?

HdS: Nuestro mayor obstáculo es el bloqueo de silencio, las manipulaciones que hace el régimen marroquí y algunos países lo respaldan sabiendo que son falacias, y el intento que tienen algunas potencias de qué la causa Saharaui caiga en el olvido después del abandono y violación de todos los derechos habidos y por haber. El silencio, la complicidad de la ONU y la culpabilidad de España y Francia después del régimen marroquí.

R: ¿cómo crees que se puede resolver?

HdS: se puede resolver siendo íntegros, empáticos y defensores de los derechos humanos, respetando al Pueblo del Sahara Occidental y no siendo cómplice de Expolio, opresión, violación de derechos humanos, etc.

R: ¿Os coordináis de alguna manera para hacer acciones con Saharauis qué viven en otros países? Por ejemplo, a nivel europeo, para hacer incidencia política ante las instituciones de la UE u organizar eventos coordinados de algún tipo.

HdS: sí, gracias a las tecnologías de hoy podemos estar más conectados, colaborando juntos en algún momento y apoyándonos, dando difusión y visibilizar a todos. Dentro de lo posible es una oportunidad buena para hacer unión y no solo Saharaui sino de todo el mundo pro saharaui para hacer presión en los gobiernos a referencia de nuestra causa Saharaui.

R: ¿Habéis compartido alguna vez espacios de debate sobre el Sahara Occidental con personas de origen marroquí y/o espacios sobre otros temas?

HdS: Si, los saharauis no tenemos ninguna objeción a debatir con una persona de origen marroquí, los saharauis tenemos nuestras razones, tenemos la verdad y con eso podemos argumentar con cualquier persona de este mundo del [por qué] defender y luchar por la

causa Saharaui, nosotros hablamos con todo el mundo exponiendo la verdad siempre. El problema es que desgraciadamente el Pueblo marroquí también está oprimido por su régimen y su rey. Entonces no es Libre de debatir y tampoco tienen argumentos basados en la realidad que defender. Los debates son pocos ya que Marruecos es cobarde hasta para esto.

R: ¿Crees que puede ser una forma de crear diálogo y construir la paz desde la diáspora?

HdS: los saharauis somos pacíficos y nos gusta el diálogo por la búsqueda de paz. Pero como comprenderás después de 45 años de la impunidad del régimen, después de 30años esperando pacíficamente una solución prometida y justa pero que nunca ha llegado, después de aniquilar a medio pueblo y levantando un su gran muro de la Humillación y Vergüenza de la humanidad, ¿qué diálogo queda?

R: ¿qué otras vías de diálogo consideráis posible desde la diáspora?

HdS: Un diálogo que cumpla los Derechos humanos del Pueblo Saharaui y la Legalidad Internacional siempre es bienvenido por parte de los saharauis, nos tienen que reconocer y respetar eso es esencial.

R: En lo que respecta a las redes sociales, ¿identificáis algún tipo de violencia específica en las redes qué no sea común en otros espacios? ¿Creéis que mujeres y hombres enfrentan los mismos ataques o tienen características diferentes?

HdS: Violencia machista si la identificamos en las redes mucho. Las mujeres se enfrentan a ataques más duros, ya que siempre con ataques hacia la religión, al físico y en general que no saben de lo que hablan.

R: ¿Como resumiríais vuestra lucha por la paz como mujeres saharauis en la diáspora en una frase?

HdS: Constancia de hierro por la Libertad de nuestra Tierra. Resistencia y lucha.

R: ¿Os gustaría añadir algo?

HdS: Gracias por el interés por nuestro Pueblo Saharaui y su causa Justa. Nuestras puertas abiertas siempre a quien quiera conocernos.

Solo decir qué todo un Pueblo reclama y lucha por su Libertad y Justicia. Los Saharaui son pacíficos pero con su dignidad luchará por sus Derechos Legítimos y el regreso a su Tierra Libre y en Paz. No se vende el Sahara, Sahara Saharaui.