



Gender, Nationalism and Revolution in Western Sahara: Women's Participation in the Polisario State-Movement

Género, nacionalismo y revolución en Sáhara Occidental: la participación de las mujeres en el Estado-movimiento del Frente Polisario

Ewa K. STRZELECKA

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

e.strzelecka@vu.nl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7357-3959>

Received 8/6/2023. Accepted 6/11/2023

Para citar este artículo: Ewa K. STRZELECKA (2023): "Gender, Nationalism and Revolution in Western Sahara: Women's Participation in the Polisario State-Movement" en *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*, 35, pp. 116-138.

Para acceder a este artículo: <https://doi.org/10.15366/reim2023.35.005>

Abstract

This paper explores the intersections of gender, nationalism and revolution by analysing the Polisario Front's ideology, gender dynamics, women's legal and constitutional rights, political engagement, sexual division of labour and the women's rights movement. The analysis presented in this article is grounded in ethnographic and archival research conducted in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf between 2017 and 2018. It argues that the emerging Saharawi feminism is an unintended consequence of the social revolution and conflict-induced migration.

Keywords: women, Western Sahara, Polisario Front, political participation, revolution



Resumen:

Este artículo analiza las dinámicas de género, revolución y nacionalismo a través de un estudio de caso del Frente Polisario en el Sahara Occidental. Basándose en los resultados de un trabajo de campo en los campamentos saharauis en Tindouf entre 2017-2018, la investigación responde a las preguntas sobre el rol de las mujeres en la lucha por la liberación nacional, construcción de una agenda feminista, la representación de las mujeres en la política y su poder de negociación en las estructuras de un Estado-movimiento.

Palabras clave: mujeres, Sahara Occidental, Frente Polisario, participación política, revolución.

Introduction

Women as a signifier of nationalism have been documented worldwide (Kandiyoti, 1991; Badran, 1995; Baron, 2004; McClintock, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Moghadam, 1994; O'Keefe, 2013; Solana, 2021). Indeed, a recurrent theme in the literature is the extensive role women have played in national liberation movements across the globe (Moghadam, 1997; Foran, 1997; Taylor, 1999; Goldstone, 2009; Strzelecka, 2017 and 2018). However, their significant participation did not translate into equality with men once victory was achieved and a new state established (Molyneux, 1979; Moghadam, 1997; Bernal, 2001; Shayne, 1999). Most studies done on the topic are based on a retrospective review of records and rely on cases where a nation-state was formed as an outcome of a linear progression following a successful national liberation revolution. Little attention has been given to gender dynamics in partially recognized states where national liberation movements and state-making coexist as a complex mosaic of convergent and parallel processes. This paper bridges this gap by focusing on the Polisario state-movement.

The Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Río de Oro) was established on 10 May 1973, with the primary goal of launching an armed struggle against the Spanish occupation, which continued until 1975. In that year, Spanish colonial forces withdrew from the Western Sahara territory. While the Polisario Front did not manage to establish control over the entire Western Sahara region, which was annexed by Morocco in 1975, it took a significant step by declaring the formation of a new state – the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) – on 27 February 1976. This declaration marked a pivotal moment in their quest for independence. The SADR represents an independence project with a government in exile, primarily located in the refugee camps of Tindouf in Algeria. However, while the SADR asserts sovereignty over the entire Western Sahara, its actual territorial control is confined to a region called the Free Zone or Liberated Territories.

The coexistence of the Polisario national liberation movement and the SADR proto-state for more than 47 years provides a particularly compelling opportunity to reconstruct and document long-term gender dynamics in the simultaneous development of a national liberation movement and state-building. This article examines whether this extraordinary situation has made any difference in the gender-related outcomes of the Saharawi revolution (*thawra saharawiya*), one of the world's longest ongoing struggles for self-determination. The argument presented throughout this paper underscores the complex relationship between gender and the Polisario state-movement within the context of a multifaceted understanding of Saharawi nationalism. Particular attention is given to power relations and the dialectical interactions between social structures and women's agency. The analysis addresses the Polisario political ideology, gender dynamics, the constitutional and legal framework, women's political participation, the sexual division of labour, women's organizations and *feminist action*.

Theoretical and methodological framework: women, nationalism and revolution

Valentine Moghadam (1997) presents a gender analysis of revolutionary struggles that distinguishes between the 'women's emancipation model of revolution' and the 'woman-in-the-family model of revolution'. The women's emancipation model views women's emancipation as an integral component of the revolutionary project for social transformation and modernity (Moghadam, 1997: 137). In contrast, the woman-in-the-family model does not challenge the prevailing social structure and perpetuates traditional gender roles. Moghadam associates the women's emancipation model with socialist revolutions founded on leftist principles of gender equality and women's rights. She also notes that a gender analysis after socialist revolutions reveals a disparity between rhetoric and practice. While leftist regimes have often endorsed women's advancement at a legal and political level, minimal progress has been made in dismantling patriarchal structures in family and society (Goldman, 1993; Sargent, 1981). Under socialist regimes, women frequently enter political life, the labour market and new professions, but gender disparities have endured in the allocation of power and decision-making positions (Moghadam, 1997; Goldstone, 2009: 332).

Revolutions led by national liberation movements are especially contentious in terms of gender equality outcomes. Since these movements prioritize national liberation above all else, women's rights and needs often take a backseat to the national cause. Many feminist scholars argue that such prioritization has negatively impacted the autonomy of women's rights movements and hindered women's empowerment within state-building (Moghadam, 1994). For instance, studies of Palestinian activists frequently make assertions such as 'women in the nationalist movement did not develop feminist consciousness or ideology, and hence did not achieve significant changes in patriarchal gender structures and relations' (Nasser et al. 2010). Conversely, postcolonial feminist scholars like Kumari Jayawardena (1986) view women's participation in national liberation movements as an opportunity that fosters feminist activism in non-Western contexts. In her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Jayawardena argues

that 'feminism did not originate as an ideology of the West to be adopted by women in the Third World, but instead erupted from the specific needs and struggles of women fighting against colonial power, for the vote, for safety, and against poverty and inequality' (Jayawardena, 1986).

Within the theoretical context outlined above, this study examines the ways in which the Polisario state-movement relies on its nationalism to perpetuate, upgrade or challenge patriarchal power structures, and either promote or hinder women's resilience, empowerment and participation. As a liberation movement, the Polisario Front expects the Saharawi people to prioritize contributions to national independence and self-determination before addressing other demands (García, 2001; Sana Martin, 2005; Caratini, 2006; Gimeno, 2007; Mundy, 2007; Omar, 2008; Correale and Gimeno, 2015; Wilson, 2016; Medina, 2016; Bareñada and Ojeda, 2016; Bengochea, 2016; Ojeda et al., 2017). Given this hierarchy of priorities, this paper explores what sets Saharawi nationalism apart and what makes it similar to other nationalisms regarding substantial changes in women's participation and empowerment. How have Saharawi women's roles been influenced by and shaped the Polisario state-movement over nearly 50 years? How have gender dynamics been conceptualized, constructed, resisted, negotiated and experienced in the context of state-building and socio-political change within the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf? How have Saharawi women actively engaged in resisting and opposing patriarchal structures of power?

The findings are based on a 6-month fieldwork conducted in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf in Algeria, spanning three visits between October 2017 and November 2018. During this period, I conducted 83 interviews with Saharawi activists and SADR leaders (50 women and 33 men), all of whom wholeheartedly supported and participated in the Polisario's pursuit of the right to self-determination and an independent state. I also engaged in participant observation, focus group discussions and archival research within the Ministry of Information, the SADR Presidency, and the Saharawi Parliament. Additionally, various visual materials related to women's roles in the Polisario state-movement were consulted in private collections.

The Polisario state-movement: general considerations

As noted above, the Polisario Front was established on 10 May 1973, when the territory of Western Sahara was a Spanish colony known as the Overseas Province of the Spanish Sahara. Its revolutionary struggle targeted 'not a local dictator but a foreign, colonial power occupying the country' (Foran, 2009: 88). It drew on pre-existing political cultures of opposition, such as the anti-colonial movement led by Muhammad Bassiri, who called for an end to the Spanish occupation of Western Sahara. The Polisario took the struggle one step further, intending to reshape Saharawi Bedouin society, its tribal modus operandi and its political management. Its political project aimed to create a modern nation-state, understood as 'an independent state with a written constitution, ruled in the name of a nation of equal citizens' (Wimmer and Feinstein, 2010: 764).

On 14 November 1975, Spain signed the Madrid Accords, transferring the administration of Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania. Mauritania relinquished its claims and withdrew from the contested territory in 1979. Morocco, on the other hand, annexed the territory of Western Sahara in 1975, initiating a long-standing dispute with the Polisario Front. This conflict escalated, giving rise to the first Western Sahara war, which lasted from 1975 to 1991, and the ongoing clashes, known as the Guerguerat crisis, which began in 2020. Since the initial armed conflict in 1975, thousands of Saharawis have fled their homes to the refugee camps of Tindouf in Algeria. These camps represent a unique phenomenon in the world of forced migration. Although they depend on international aid, especially for food and humanitarian assistance, they are entirely self-administered by the Polisario Front through the SADR authorities (Mundy, 2007: 275).

The SADR, created in 1976, has been recognized by approximately 45 United Nations member states. It became a founding member of the African Union, but has never been recognized as a sovereign state by the European Union and many other countries. The SADR government-in-exile is based in the Tindouf refugee camps. Alice Wilson characterizes it as a 'state-movement' that resembles and differs from conventional notions of statehood (Wilson, 2015: 76). It stands out because the Polisario 'has conceived of its leadership of a civilian population in exile as a social revolution' (Wilson, 2012: 24). The revolutionary goal is to reconfigure social and political relations among the largely nomadic and tribal people in support of the Polisario vision of a nation and state. This vision is rooted in nationalism based on social equality, popular sovereignty and the self-determination of the people (Hodges, 1983; Gimeno, 2007). Thus, the refugee camps of Tindouf become a social and political laboratory for the SADR government-in-exile to promote its vision of a modern nation-state.

Scholars like Vivian Solana (2017) argue that the Polisario drew inspiration from socialist movements and anti-imperialist intellectuals of the time, such as Gamal Abdel Nasser, Che Guevara, Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon. Although the movement is often associated with a Marxist ideology, its leaders steer clear of labelling the Polisario Front as a leftist group.¹ They emphasize the importance of their indigenous political thought and an inclusive strategy aimed at mobilizing people of different backgrounds in support of the Saharawi national liberation project. Pablo San Martín (2010: 101), an expert on Western Sahara, observed that the Polisario 'in less than two years had passed from being a small Guevara-style guerrilla foco in the desert to lead a wide national mobilization encompassing all sectors of Saharawi society. This rapid growth of the Polisario (...) required a re-articulation of discourses and strategies, gaining some distance from the Marxist rhetoric developed until then'.

This transformation was accentuated after 1975 when the Polisario suddenly found itself responsible for the thousands of people from diverse backgrounds who were fleeing to the refugee camps in Algeria. To successfully wage war against two countries, Morocco and Mauritania, the Polisario had to build national unity against the enemy by overcoming Saharawi tribal, social, racial and gender divisions. In 1991, it signed a UN-sponsored ceasefire agreement with Morocco, and since then, its priority has been to maintain national unity in preparation for a referendum on the self-determination of

¹ Personal interviews with Polisario leaders in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf in 2017.

the Saharawi people, which the UN has been calling for since 1966 (UN 1966). Clearly, these three factors – managing the refugee camps, war and the referendum – have shaped the Polisario strategy regarding women's mobilization and gender equality over the last nearly five decades.

The question of gender in Polisario ideology

Almost immediately women's emancipation became a central issue of the Polisario national liberation movement and a significant symbol of modernity (Lippert, 1992; Caratini, 2006; Allan, 2010; Wilson, 2012; Medina, 2016; Bengochea, 2016; Solana, 2017). Anne Lippert (1992: 640) noted during her fieldwork in the 1970s and 80s that 'the male founders of the Polisario Front apparently saw equality for women as a key strategy – along with abolishing slavery and erasing caste differences – for revolutionizing the population, transforming Saharawi society, and guaranteeing the success of the liberation struggle and an independent state'. According to the Polisario political discourse, the reconfiguration of gender relations and women's emancipation was key to a successful project of civilization and modernity within Saharawi society.

The Second Polisario Congress, held from 25-31 August 1974, produced a long-term programme outlining the Saharawi state ideology. The 1974 National Action Plan envisions a state that guarantees fundamental citizenship rights and freedoms to all, equitable wealth distribution, decent living conditions and housing for everyone, universal free education and healthcare, the eradication of all types of exploitation, the elimination of causes of social and moral degradation, family protection, the preservation of cultural and religious heritage and the expansion of women's opportunities and the re-establishment of their political and social rights (Balaguer and Wirth, 1976: 127-128). In 1974, El Ouali Mustafa Sayed, the Polisario's first Secretary General, announced the creation of the National Union of Saharawi Women (NUSW) (Lippert, 1992: 642; Medina, 2016: 266). The NUSW's role has been to promote women's development and their political, social and military participation in the Polisario state-movement (Lippert, 1992: 642).

In my interviews with the Polisario leaders in 2017 and 2018, they highlighted the success of women's emancipation and gender equality as an important accomplishment of the Saharawi revolution. A representation of the new woman emerged in the 1970s that had a profound impact on society. Since then, the idealized female archetype has been represented in the national cultural production as a *munaḍila* (female militant), a figure closely related to a *mukafiḥa* (female fighter) and *thawria* (revolutionary woman) (Solana, 2007). These three notions have been used almost interchangeably to encourage Saharawi women to play a new role in society. The new woman is a reformer, a productive and educated citizen willing to take a public political stand for the national cause.

According to Joanna Allan (2019, 101-103), the Polisario idealization of women served to accomplish four goals. Firstly, the representation of Saharawi women as a successful

revolutionary story allowed them to embody the egalitarian, progressive and modern spirit attributed to Saharawi society and national identity. Secondly, it helped in the construction of nationhood that involves specific ideas about womanhood and manhood. For example, the allegorical personification of the nation as a woman served to mobilize men to fight and defend their country. Thirdly, the Polisario discourse on women's emancipation and gender equality sparked the interest and support of the international community because it differed from Western stereotypes about Muslim women. Finally, the Polisario discourse on the Saharawi exceptionality of gender relationships played a role in the social construction of Saharawi identity. In the established dialectical relationship, Morocco became the other who perpetuates gender discrimination and violence.

Many scholars showing solidarity with the Saharawi case have contributed to the idealization of the Polisario's achievements concerning gender equality. They have portrayed Saharawi gender relations as exceptional in the region, depicting Saharawi women as 'equal', 'active', and 'empowered' leaders who have 'always been so free' (Hamdi, 1993; Juliano, 1998; Hamoudi, 2016; Higgs and Ryan, 2015). However, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013) and Joanna Allan (2019) warn against such an idealization of Saharawi refugees. The representation of the Saharawi society as secular, democratic and gender-equal can lead to bias in research and the evaluation of gender outcomes (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010 and 2013; Allan, 2019).

Gender dynamics in the Saharawi refugee camps

The promotion of the new women is confined to the Polisario definition of national interests, representing the ideal nation and fostering an icon of changing gender norms that encourage women to break cultural taboos and take up new social roles. According to Solana (2016), it entails the transgression of certain cultural norms and behaviours related to the Saharawi code of modesty (*hishma*). The reformulation of traditional *hishma* was a necessary step for the emergence of the *munadila*, a figure prized for occupying public spaces and expressing her political opinions through nationalist discourse, poetry, songs and dance. In addition, education played a vital role in Saharawi social transformation. Mass political education and literacy programmes were an integral part of the Polisario undertaking. According to the 1974 Spanish census, almost seventy per cent of the Western Sahara population was illiterate, and of these, almost eighty-four per cent were women (Rossetti, 2014: 3). Today, almost ninety per cent of Saharawi refugees know how to read and write (Rossetti, 2014: 3). Schooling for women became a priority and a key strategy to expand the social and political base of the Polisario nationalist social transformation project. It also aimed at preparing a new generation of skilled workers and state officers capable of developing the country. Many of today's Polisario female leaders were among the first students who graduated from the February 27 School, established in 1978 in the Saharawi refugee camps. Women received professional, technical, literacy, military and political training. Many were sent to Cuba, Libya and Algeria for schooling and university education. As mothers and

educators, women were expected to advance family modernization and raise their children within the Polisario ideology and its vision of the Saharawi nation-state.

When the Saharawi war broke out in 1975, women became the main organizers of the refugee camps of Tindouf, taking up the responsibilities left by the enlisted men. In the early revolutionary period, the refugee camps were seen by many foreigners as an idyllic community, demographically and socially dominated by women, and managed through a mix of representative and participatory democracy (Mundy, 2007: 276). Between 1975 and 1991, Saharawi women were directly involved in sustaining the war efforts and in running most of the administration of the camps (Lippert, 1992; Caratini, 2006; Allan, 2010). The nearly total absence of men in the refugee camps facilitated women's rapid integration into typically male-dominated occupations (Wilson, 2012; Medina, 2016; Bengochea, 2016; Solana, 2017). During wartime, the 'popular committees for women, and the army for men, conscripted the labour of anyone not already working for the state-movement in a ministry or public services' (Wilson 2016, 132). Between 1976 and 1978, nine popular committees for women were established to deal with kindergartens, education, industry, judiciary, development, health, security, transportation issues and humanitarian aid (Red Crescent Society). The number of popular committees decreased from 1978 to 1989 to five, specializing in health, supply, education, economic development, judiciary and social affairs.

Women played prominent roles as community leaders, teachers, health professionals, humanitarian assistants, supply distributors, national poetesses, singers, factory workers, adobe builders, mediators and security keepers. Similarly to other state-building in fragile contexts (Molyneux, 1979 and 1985), Saharawi women's mobilization in the period of war, and the social transformation between 1975 and 1991, was important to accomplish at least four goals: to support the war; to expand the base of the national liberation movement; to provide an active unpaid labour force in the absence of men; and to help modernize the family and harness it more directly to the Saharawi revolutionary goals. Women were directly involved in the reproduction, construction and transformation of the nation. They promoted national culture through the Hassaniya language, *melhfa* clothing, poetry, music, handicrafts, *twiza* activities (reciprocal or collective work), the construction of *khaymas* (Saharawi tents) and other practices that supported the Polisario narrative of a modern nation-state.

In 1991, when the armed conflict ended and men returned home from the war, new gender dynamics were observed in the refugee camps of Tindouf (Mundy, 2007: 276; Wilson, 2017; Allan, 2019). With the demobilization of male fighters and the proliferation of neoliberalism after the fall of communism in 1989, social expectations towards women changed. They were expected to prioritize their duty to manage household chores rather than competing with men for jobs and senior political positions. The idea of women returning to their traditional place in the family caused friction in the refugee camps, and introduced a complexity in gender relations with which Saharawi society still grapples. Above all, women leaders had to reflect on gender dynamics and articulate more feminist-like interests in reaction to the return of patriarchal patterns. Consequently, after the 1990s, many Saharawi women became

more vocal about the importance of gender equality and the protection of women's rights in the refugee camps and beyond.

Women's legal and constitutional rights

The first SADR Constitution of 1976, approved during the Third Polisario National Congress held from 26-30 August 1976, states that all Saharawi citizens 'are equal before the law and are entitled to the same rights and duties' (art. 60). This congress bolstered the women's emancipation programme in its commitment to 'foster women's political and social rights, favour their access to all domains, and enable them to assume responsibilities in national construction, according to the Saharawi national reality'.

The SADR Constitution has been amended several times to expand citizens' rights. The current SADR Constitution of 2015 guarantees all citizens equality before the law in terms of both protection and sanctions (art. 26), as well as the exercise of rights and freedoms without any discrimination, including gender-based discrimination (art. 25). Regarding gender equality, the Saharawi state 'shall promote women and ensure their political, economic, social, and cultural participation in the construction of society and the development of the country' (art. 42). Special attention is paid to the protection of women as mothers (art. 39) and as martyr widows (art. 41).

Women's rights and freedoms are constitutionally guaranteed as long as they do not conflict with national and Islamic values. This is because 'the family shall be based on religious, ethical, and national values and the historical heritage' (art. 7), and 'Islam is the state religion and a main source of law' (art. 2). These constitutional statements allow room for a conservative interpretation of Islamic law and tradition that could be unfavourable to women. The Saharawi population is ruled by Islamic Sharia law following the Maliki school of *fiqh*. This acknowledges gender differences that often lead to discrimination against women on matters of marriage, divorce, child custody, testimony and inheritance.

The ambivalence of the Saharawi Constitution concerning women's rights is deepened by the fact that the SADR is the only Muslim-majority country, along with Saudi Arabia, that has never codified family law. Family issues are usually arbitrated by traditional Sharia and customary law rather than by modern legislation. Lately, the NUSW has been urging the Saharawi National Council (SNC) to enact family law to strengthen the legal protection of women's rights. The proposed draft law, inspired by other Muslim family laws, did not receive sufficient support from the members of Parliament (MPs) in the SNC to be brought to a vote.

NUSW activists have advocated for securing a more supportive legal system for women for years, especially calling for clear divorce regulations. This is to address the issue of *al-mu'allaqat*, women who are abandoned by their husbands but not divorced and are trapped in that situation for years (Solana, 2022). *Al-mu'allaqat* cannot get divorced without obtaining consent from their missing husbands. Another sensitive gender-

related topic concerns child maintenance payments. According to the NUSW, most men in the Saharawi refugee camps do not provide financial support for their children after divorce.² Some of these men have married several times, which means that they were able to save the money to pay the mandatory *mahr* (dowry) to their new wives, but refuse to pay alimony to their previous partners.

NUSW activists have regularly reported this issue to the Polisario leaders. In response, they have been told to be more understanding about the difficult economic situation of the men, especially because almost all Saharawi men in the camps are underpaid soldiers of the Saharawi Liberation Army.³ A lack of other job opportunities and very low income are considered the main challenges to enforcing alimony and child maintenance payments from ex-husbands. The Polisario leaders often use the excuse of the need for male soldiers and the belief that national liberation depends on their motivation to fight for the country to justify the delay in enacting the SADR family law. Women are expected to temporarily forgo their economic rights for the sake of the nation and the Saharawi cause, while men are allowed to maintain their privileges at the expense of women's rights as compensation for their sacrifice as soldiers to uphold their morale on the front lines.

Women's political participation

The anticolonial struggle and national liberation revolution have accelerated the recruitment of women into political life. Polisario began clandestine schools for women just after its founding in 1973 to promote their political awareness (Lippert, 1992: 650). It also drew women into political activity through political cells. Since 1976, the refugee camps have been administratively divided into *wilayas* (provinces) and *dairas* (municipalities), whose numbers varied over time. Each *daira* is internally organized into political cells of 10 people (*al-khaliyah*), headed by an elected leader (*'arifah*). Significantly, the adult women living in one *khayma* (tent) are not recruited to the same cell, thus decreasing the likelihood that the cell would reproduce kin groups (Wilson, 2016: 67). In the early revolutionary period, cell members within the Polisario political organization were simultaneously recruited to different popular committees at the SADR administrative level. Between 1978 and 1989, cells were made up of 10 women, meaning two from each of the five popular committees (Polisario, 1982: 23). For this reason, the Polisario and SADR functionaries often overlapped, and their political and other activities became intertwined. Their division of power has not always been easy to ascertain, even though the Polisario and the SADR adapted two different, albeit complementary, organizational structures. The cell membership entitled refugee women to vote, but also be a part of the Polisario system to receive humanitarian assistance and supplies.

² Personal interview with Aichatu Burqui in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf, 9 April 2018.

³ Personal interviews in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf with: Seida Said on 12 March 2018, and Aziza Muhamed Lami on 12 March 2018.

Contrary to the official Polisario narrative, women's active participation in the state-movement and their important role in organizing the refugee camps in Tindouf did not result in significant female representation in the senior positions within the Polisario-SADR power structures. This started to change in the 1990s when the NUSW leaders took specific actions to articulate feminist demands with the Polisario state-movement.

Between 1976 and 1991, the Revolutionary Command Council, the SADR's supreme institution, was made up of male members only. A woman never chaired the Revolutionary Command Council or became President of the SADR or Secretary-General of the Polisario. They were never elected to the Polisario Executive Committee, composed of nine members between 1973 and 1982, and 7 members between 1982 and 1991. The Political Bureau, which represented the political power in the Polisario structure between 1973 and 1991, was originally composed of 21 members. That number increased to 25 in 1982 and to 27 in 1985. The only woman who was a permanent member of the Political Bureau was the NUSW Secretary-General. She was automatically included in the Political Bureau due to being elected to a position of responsibility by the NUSW Congress. Women were represented by more than one person in the Political Bureau on only three occasions. There were two women in 1976-78 (9%) and in 1982-85 (8%), and three female members in 1985-91 (11%). Beside the NUSW Secretary-General, these women were elected by the Polisario National Congress.

After the 1991 ceasefire, the 8th National Congress decided to unite the Political Bureau and the Executive Committee into the National Secretariat of the Polisario Front. Between 1991 and 2007, the NUSW Secretary-General was the only female representative in the National Secretariat, which had 29 members (3.4%). In 2007, Khadija Hamdi, the wife of President Mohamed Abdelaziz, became the first woman elected to the National Secretariat by the Polisario National Congress. With her participation, women's representation in the National Secretariat increased to 6.89 per cent. Ultimately, a gender quota was applied in the 2011 and the 2015 elections of the National Congress, and women's representation in the National Secretariat increased to five members (14.7%). In both elections, only one woman obtained a seat because of the quota. The other four female candidates won enough votes cast in the competitive indirect elections of the National Congress to become members of the National Secretariat on their own merits. Women have never been part of the Permanent Office of the Polisario National Secretariat, which is made of eleven members, chosen based on their strategic power positions and historical importance within the Polisario-SADR structures.⁴

Despite the fact that women were the primary inhabitants and organizers of the refugee camps between 1975 and 1991, the heads of the *dairas* and *wilayas* were all men. The one exception was the wilaya of Smara, which was created as the fourth wilaya in 1985; Senía Ahmed was elected as the first female *wali* of Smara at the Polisario National

⁴ The Permanent Office of the Polisario National Secretariat includes the SADR President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Security, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Occupied Territories and Diaspora, the National Council President and the Saharawi Coordinator with MINURSO.

Congress (25%). In 2011, Aziza Ibrahim Babia, the director of the February 27 School for women, proposed a transformation of that camp into the fifth *wilaya*: Bujador. In 2012, she was nominated *wali* of Bujador by President Mohamed Abdelaziz and became the second female governor in SADR history. The use of a gender quota within the Polisario National Secretary in December 2015 boosted the number of women nominated as *walis*. In 2016, two women were appointed as governors out of 5 *wilayas*, reaching a record number of 40 per cent representation (Maryam Salek Ahmadah was the *wali* of Ausert and Fatma Bella the *wali* of Bujador).

In 1999, the first woman became the head of the *dairas*, Aziza Ibrahim Babia, who won the local elections in the *daira* of Tifariti, in the *wilaya* of Smara. She made history in 1990 as the first female candidate who ran in the local elections for the heads of the *dairas*.⁵ At that time, she lost the election, with only three people casting their ballot for her.⁶ In the following elections in 1993, she received 30 per cent of the vote, and in 1999, she emerged victorious with 77 per cent of the voters' support.⁷ When the *wilaya* of Bujador was founded in 2012, Aziza Ibrahim advised the SADR president to nominate three women as the heads of the *dairas* in the *wilaya* of Bujador. The nominated women ran in and won the local elections later on, in 2014, and continued to be in charge of these three *dairas*. In 2015, the 14th Polisario National Congress decided to modify the system by replacing direct elections for the chiefs of the *dairas* with a nomination from the Polisario National Congress. In 2018, eleven out of 29 *daira* heads were women (38 %).

The majority of women in the Saharawi refugee camps work for administrative and community mobilization sectors at the grassroots level and hold positions that are often unpaid. In general, the employers in the public sector do not receive regular salaries, but they have been granted monetary incentives and subsidies since the 1990s. Even though women's representation in senior positions is low, they have been able to influence state policies by participating in the Polisario national conferences and popular congresses. Women are considered responsible for implementing national plans and policies through their engagement in popular committees and councils. These organizations were transformed into different departments within the SADR administrative system in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Anne Lippert (1992: 645) observed that Saharawi women 'made up 90 per cent of the congresses of the base, 70-80 per cent of the popular council of each *daira*, 45-70 per cent of the popular council of each *wilaya*, and over 50 per cent of each national popular congress. As each national congress has met, changes have occurred in political direction, in military strategies, and the organizational patterns and structures of the refugee camps and of the state'. At the beginning of the Saharawi revolution, the popular congresses decided that all women should receive military training (3rd National Popular Congress), that the February 27 School should be established to offer vocational training to women (3rd National Popular Congress), that women should be included on a judicial committee to settle family differences jointly with a *cadi* (judge) (4th National Popular Congress) and that

⁵ Personal interview with Aziza Ibrahim Babia in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf, 20 October 2018.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

they should participate in supporting services in a modernized war structure (5th National Popular Congress) (Lippert, 1992: 645).

Between 1976 and 1999, the SADR government was made up of only men, but the number of women in leadership positions in the Polisario-SADR power structures increased in the 1990s, with the first female minister being appointed in 1999. This was Maryam Al-Salik Ahamadeh, the Minister of Culture and Sports, the only woman out of the 17 government ministers (5.8%). In 2003, the State Secretary for Women's Empowerment was created, and Mahfuda Rahal became the second woman minister out of 23 government ministers (8.6%). In 2007, the number of women in government rose to three women, out of 28 (10.7%): Maryam Al-Salik Ahamadeh, Minister of Education; Khadija Hamdi, Minister of Culture and Sport, and Mahfuda Rahal, Secretary for Women's Empowerment.

At the 14th National Congress in 2011, the State Secretary for Women's Empowerment was transformed into the Ministry for Social Welfare and Women's Promotion. The above-mentioned women ministers, along with Jira Balahi Abad, Minister of Vocational Training, Personnel and Public Service, were appointed for the new term in 2012. In the 2016 government, the number of female ministers dropped from four out of 35 (11.4%) to two out of 34 (5.8%). In reality, only Mahfuda Mohammed Rahal, Minister of Social Welfare and Promotion of Women, served in office, as Khadija Hamdi, Minister of Culture, was absent from the camps most of the time due to an illness. Following the practice of the 'recyclable nature of power' that has been identified in the Polisario-SADR, the same elite women were always appointed to different positions (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014: 117). Thus, when the ministers' term expired in 2016, Maryam Salik Ahmada became the governor of the Auserd *wilaya*, and Jira Balahi Abad became the Polisario representative in Spain.

The increase in women's representation in Polisario-SADR leadership positions in recent years can be explained by the NUSW's efforts to convince voters to cast their ballots for female candidates; changes in electoral system design; the application of the gender quota; and the impact of gender awareness-raising activities. The gender quota remains shrouded in controversy among the Saharawis, as many prefer to advocate for merit-based female appointments. Nevertheless, pro-quota activists received support from President Abdelaziz to introduce the quota system in the elections for the Polisario National Secretary in 2011 and 2015. A quota was also applied from 2008 to 2014 in the elections for the Saharawi National Council (SNC), founded in 1995. The parliamentary elections to the SNC combine a majoritarian voting system in the *dairas* with an element of proportional representation. Some SNC seats are reserved for representatives elected by mass organizations (Women's, Workers', Students' and Youth Unions), state administration (ministries), the army and the Consultative Council.⁸

The number of female MPs has varied over time depending on the rules employed in the mixed electoral system. In the first two parliaments of 1995 and 1997, women were represented by five MPs out of 101 members of the SNC (4.95%), of which four were

⁸ Personal interview with Ahmudi Lepsir, refugee camps of Tindouf, 20 April 2018 and 9 November 2018. See also Wilson, 2016: 209.

appointed by the NUSW and one by the February 27 School. The number of seats reserved for women decreased from five to one in 2012, following the new electoral design when the February 27 School became the Bujador wilaya. Earlier, the 2008 election reform boosted the number of female MPs, as a quota system and new voting area (*dairas* were merged in *wilayas* to form five parliamentary constituencies) were applied. That electoral system was in place between 2008 and 2014. This allowed Saharawi women to reach almost 34 per cent representation in the 53-member SNC in 2008-2012; 24 per cent in 2012-2014 and 30 per cent in 2014-2015. The number of female MPs dropped from 16 to 10 out of 53 SNC members (18.86%) in the last 2015 parliamentary elections when the *daira* voting districts replaced wilaya-based constituencies and the gender quota was no longer applied.

Women remain excluded from the Consultative Council (*Al-Majlis Al-Istishari*), a body established in 2000 that contains 128 *shuyukh* (tribal chiefs).⁹ Women cannot be sheikhs, as this leadership succession is always traced through the male line. However, there is room for women's political expression in the traditional structures of Saharawi society. Konstantina Isidoros (2017a; 2018: 11) argues that the Saharawi tents (*khaymas*) are headed by women and that they are more than just a domestic space. Rather, they are a customary domain of politics where the Saharawi anticolonialism sentiments began and developed. The matri-focused *khaymas* were used to discuss and make decisions about the first ideas regarding anticolonial struggles, state-building, radio transmissions and political subscriptions to self-determination and war (Isidoros, 2017b: 306). To this day, *khaymas* are used as political spaces where the consanguineous nature of national coalescence is enabled (Isidoros, 2017b: 306).

The sexual division of labour

The Polisario revolution has brought about numerous changes in traditional Saharawi life. Nevertheless, most feminist scholars (Becker, 1999; Crompton, 2007) argue that the hierarchical division of labour between men and women, particularly within the household, is widely perceived as the primary impediment to challenging the patriarchal power structure in society. This perspective is also reflected in the opinions expressed by my female interviewees, most of whom hold the view that women should have the opportunity to pursue employment outside the home. However, a prevailing belief in Saharawi society that women's primary responsibility lies in domestic caregiving restricts their job prospects.

The number of kindergartens and other childcare services organized by women during the construction of the refugee camps in the 1970s and 80s dramatically decreased in the 1990s after the 1991 ceasefire, which coincided with men returning to the camps. Caring for children, the elderly and the sick became the principal reason why women felt compelled to interrupt their professional careers, influenced by family and societal

⁹ Personal interview with Sheihani Muhammed Abdel Rani in the refugee camps of Tindouf, 14 December 2017.

pressures. Additional factors discouraging women from pursuing formal employment include low wages and transportation challenges. Rabuni, the administrative center of the Tindouf refugee camps, where most government-level positions and public sector jobs are located, remains a predominantly male-dominated location. Moreover, the patriarchal culture, with its emphasis on female morality and honour which is mainly equated to chastity, dissuades many women from seeking employment within male-dominated institutions and organizations.

Gender gaps persist in public and private sector employment. Men usually occupy higher public positions at the ministerial level, while women hold lower administrative and political positions in the *wilayas*, *dairas*, and *barrios* (neighbourhoods). Women who occupy senior leadership positions within the Polisario-SADR system often come from elite political families and specific tribes. Female-dominated professions include healthcare and social workers, teachers, the national arts (e.g. singers, poetesses), librarians, secretaries and administrative assistants. A few women work in male-dominated fields as bomb disposal technicians, journalists and police officers.

Since the proliferation of capitalism in the refugee camps in the 1990s, women have engaged in revenue-generating activities related to *khayma*-based businesses. They run home-based hammams, beauty salons and traditional healing practices. Most female entrepreneurs trade *melhfes* and homemade products (couscous, cheese, cakes, herbal medicines, jewellery, etc.) from home and at the weekly street market in Tindouf. They also contribute to the household economy by providing homestay accommodations to foreign delegations visiting the refugee camps and herding goats and camels.

While the Polisario revolution has made efforts to challenge the labour division rooted in traditional social stratification, certain occupations continue to be handed down through generations. As a result, women from traditional artisan families (known as *malemin*) frequently specialize in jewellery production and providing wedding-related services, such as hairdressing, makeup, and henna application. Conversely, women from griot families (musicians and singers referred to as *iggawen* in Hassani Arabic) are more inclined to devote themselves to the performance of music and poetry. This illustrates how, despite attempts at transformation, some aspects of traditional occupational roles still persist within the Polisario context.

Along with potential income-generating activities, women do most of the additional unpaid work for the Polisario state-movement. For instance, they are expected to play a triple role as reproductive, productive and community managers. They are in charge of preparing special events such as cultural festivals, national commemorations and other Polisario-SADR celebrations. Since the early revolutionary period, as Alice Wilson noted (2016: 192), women's circulation and work outside the circle of natal and marital spheres has become legitimate, particularly because it concentrates on activities for the state-movement. Women often play similar roles to those they had undertaken in the *frig* (group families or a camp) before the Saharawi revolution. The difference is that in exile, they perform them not only for their families but also for the state-movement (Wilson, 2016: 192). Raised as beings for others, women accept their triple burden of

work, taking care of their husbands, families and the state-movement. It has become their way of being for the nation.

Women's organizations and the complexity of Saharawi feminism

The participation of women in the Saharawi nationalist movement has both shaped and been shaped by gender dynamics in a contradictory manner. One pivotal force in mobilizing women has been the National Union of Saharawi Women (NUSW), established in 1974 as a mass organization under Polisario leadership. State feminism as advocated by the NUSW initially left little room for the development of an independent women's rights movement. However, this has evolved over time, as more complex forms of women's mobilization have emerged. Saharawi women have gained new experiences, skills and ambitions through education, access to employment, freedom of movement and migration to different countries.

The current relationship between the Saharawi women's agenda and the nationalist cause has become more intricate and contested. Particularly in the diaspora, female activists, such as Lehdía Mohamed Dafa, employ social media and blogs to engage in critical debates on the situation of Saharawi women, democracy, freedom and social justice. Simultaneously, younger, highly educated activists, both inside and outside the refugee camps, vocally criticize the lack of transparency and generational renewal within the Polisario leadership. They actively demand the democratization of Saharawi politics and the genuine implementation of the revolutionary goals of justice and equality, calling for profound change and gender equality. These dynamics reflect the intricate interplay of cultural realities from various contexts, the emotional ramifications of intimate social relationships and the complex positioning of women within varying interpretations of gender roles shaped by their country of settlement and their country of origin (Almenara-Niebla, 2023: 221).

Kumari Jayawardena (1986: 10) argues that women's movements do not take place in a vacuum but correspond to, and to some extent are determined by, the wider social movements of which they are a part. The Saharawi women's rights movement did not emerge independently from a wider national liberation movement, but it has expanded beyond the confines of the 'new woman' construction defined by the Polisario's national interests. NUSW leaders, drawing on their own gender experience and knowledge, began articulating more feminist interests in the 1990s to address patriarchal power relations within Saharawi society.¹⁰ The challenge posed by the return of men from the war in 1991 heightened awareness of gender inequalities and the importance of women's political representation in decision-making positions. Additionally, NUSW delegates adopted new approaches to gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment as a result of the women's international conferences and forums they

¹⁰ Personal interviews in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf with: Senia Ahmed on 30 March 2018, and Fatma al Mehdi on 9 December 2017.

attended in the 1990s. Around that time, Saharawi feminist political praxis was consolidated, shaping women's actions against sexism and patriarchal power relations within the Polisario state-movement in the refugee camps.¹¹ The NUSW upgraded their policy of gender equality and social justice, demanding more representation for women in the Polisario leadership and the SADR government. They also engage in various gender development projects and debates that go beyond merely reacting to sexism.

The new feminist trends in Saharawi communities are characterized by transnationality and intersectionality. Many efforts focus on building alliances with men and promoting international solidarity in gender justice and women's empowerment. Women have exercised their agency in diverse ways in the Tindouf refugee camps. For instance, in the Al Ayun *wilaya*, women organized to learn how to drive, in order to fully exercise their autonomy and right to freedom of movement. Another young Saharawi woman based in the Western Europe decided to open a 'Women's Library' (*Librería de Mujeres*) in her parents' house in that same *wilaya*. She shares her private collection of feminist books, aiming to raise feminist consciousness and foster public debates on gender equality and women's rights among refugee women.

Efforts have also been made to establish an independent civil society. The Freedom and Progress Association, a civil society group founded in 2008 by predominantly dark-skin Saharawis, became the first independent organization in the refugee camps of Tindouf to promote both the Polisario national liberation struggle and social justice and opportunities for Black people in Saharawi society. Black female leaders have called for more meaningful changes to the daily lives of women, challenging both gender and racial discrimination. The association has actively addressed issues such as slavery and racial discrimination in the public sector, documented cases of alleged slavery in Liberated Territories and lobbied SADR authorities to combat it (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 64). In recent years, they have achieved significant progress in both the rescue of slaves and in advancing the decision-making positions of dark-skin Saharawis within the Polisario state-movement. In the 2020 Saharawi parliamentary elections, two Black men and two Black women from the Freedom and Progress Association were elected as MPs, reflecting their effective campaign efforts.¹² Furthermore, Engie Salem, a female member of the same association, earned a place in the Polisario leadership. This development marks a vital shift in the pursuit of social justice and equality for Black people in Saharawi society, making the Freedom and Progress Association a pioneering force in this endeavour.

Conclusions

The relationship between gender, revolution and nationalism is complex and multifaceted. Feminist interrogations of nationalism shed light on how hierarchical gender orders have been adopted and perpetuated in the construction and definition of

¹¹ Personal interview with Senia Ahmed in the Saharawi refugee camps of Tindouf, 30 March 2018.

¹² Personal correspondence with a member of the Freedom and Progress Association, 12 October 2023.

the nation and national projects. Saharawi women have been portrayed in the national discourse as the primary nation-builders due to the significance of their reproductive and productive activities. Nevertheless, a significant gap between rhetoric and practice has persisted on both levels: within the SADR proto-state and the Polisario national liberation movement.

The promotion of women's emancipation has been confined to the Polisario's definition of national interests, which does not necessarily represent a radical challenge to the patriarchal system of power. Issues such as the sexual division of labour, the insufficient legal protection of women's rights and other power imbalances continue to pose challenges to women's empowerment and gender equality. However, the Saharawi social revolution has significantly contributed to the reconfiguration of traditional gender roles. It has pushed women into education, politics, new professions and leadership positions across various fields. As educated professionals and skilled organizers, women have become more critical of the Polisario's political discourse whenever it is not accompanied by concrete actions for effective change.

The emergence of Saharawi feminism could be seen as an unintentional by-product of the social revolution and conflict-induced migration. The experiences of Saharawi women living in the diaspora, particularly in Spain, have made them more aware of the importance of embracing critical feminist perspectives on gender relationships within their community. Today, many Saharawi activists advocate for an independent Saharawi state while also demanding the further implementation of the Saharawi social and cultural revolution. Female leaders have invested substantial efforts in promoting a new culture of equality, justice and human rights in Western Sahara, despite the disempowering context of refugee living conditions. With regards to gender equality, only time will tell the extent to which they have been able to draw on previous experiences and effectively employ a feminist platform and cultural resources to prioritize their gender interests, not in opposition to, but within their national liberation struggle.

References

ALMENARA-NIEBLA, Silvia (2023): "'You have raised me between two worlds': Mothers, daughters, and emotions in the Sahrawi digital diaspora in Spain," *Feminismo/s*, nº 41, pp. 215-239. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2023.41.09>

ALLAN, Joanna (2019): *Silenced Resistance: Women, Dictatorship, and Genderwashing in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea*, Madison-Wisconsin, University Wisconsin Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjcxm4>

ALLAN, Joanna (2010): "Imagining Saharawi Women: the Question of Gender in Polisario Discourse," *Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 15, nº 2, pp. 189-202. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629380902861103>

ANDERSON, Benedict (1991): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso.

BADRAN, Margot (1995): *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400821433>

BALAGUER, Soledad, and Rafael Wirth (1976): *Frente Polisario: la Última Guerrilla*, Barcelona, Laia.

BARON, Beth (2004): *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520940819>

BARREÑADA, Isaías and OJEDA, Raquel (eds.) (2016): *Sahara Occidental: 40 años después*, Madrid, Catarata.

BECKER, Mary (1999): "Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1999 (1), <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1999/iss1/3> [Consulted: October 13, 2023].

BENGOCHEA TIRADO, Enrique (2016): *Políticas Imperiales y Género: La Sección Femenina en la Provincia de Sahara (1961-1975)*, PhD diss., Valencia, Universitat de València.

BERNAL, Victoria (2001): "From Warriors to Wives: Contradictions of Liberation and Development in Eritrea," *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 8, nº 3, pp. 129–54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nas.2006.0001>

CARATINI, Sophie (2006): "La Prisión del Tiempo: los cambios sociales en los campamentos de refugiados saharauis," *Cuadernos Bakeaz*, nº 77, pp. 2-15.

CORREALE, Francesco and GIMENO, Juan Carlos (2015): "Sahara Occidental: memorias coloniales, miradas postcoloniales," *Les Cahiers d'EMAM, Sahara Occidental: mémoires, culture, histoires*, nº 24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/emam.760>

CROMPTON, Rosemary (2007): "Gender inequality and the gendered division of labour," in J. Browne (ed.), *The Future of Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://10.1017/CBO9780511619205.011>

FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, Elena (2010): "Ideal Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming in the Sahrawi Refugee Camps: good practice for whom?," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol. 29, nº 2, pp. 64–84. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdq023>

FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH, Elena (2013): *The Ideal Refugees: Gender, Islam, and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival*, New York, Syracuse University Press.

FORAN, John, ed. (1997): *Theorizing revolutions*, London, Routledge. DOI: <https://doi-org.vu-nl.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780203206638>

GOLDMAN, Wendy (1993): *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511665158>

GOLDSTONE, Jack (2009): "Revolution", in *Todd Landman and Neil Robinson (ed.): The Sage Handbook of Comparative Politics*, London, SAGE Publications, pp. 319-347. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857021083.n18>

GIMENO, Juan Carlos (2007): *Transformaciones Socioculturales de un Proyecto Revolucionario: la lucha del pueblo saharaui por la liberación*, Caracas, Universidad Central de Venezuela.

HAMDI, Khadija (1993): "Saharawi women looking to the future", in *Today's Refugees, Tomorrow's Leaders: Report of the Saharawi Women Refugees Conference on 28th October 1993*, London, One World Action.

HAMOUDI, Embarka (2016): *La Participación de las Mujeres Saharauis en la Construcción de un Estado saharaui en el Exilio*, PhD diss., Castellón de la Plana, Jaume I University.

HIGGS, Johanna and RYAN Christine (2015): "Leaders in the Desert: the Sahrawi Women of Western Sahara," *International Journal for Intersectional Feminist Studies*, nº 1, pp. 29-39.

HODGES, Tony (1983): "The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 5, nº 1, pp. 28–57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436598308419678>

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2014): *Off the Radar. Human Rights in the Tindouf Refugee Camps*, [https://www.policinglaw.info/assets/downloads/Human_Rights_Watch_Report_on_Human_Rights_in_the_Tindouf_Refugee_Camps_\(2014\).pdf](https://www.policinglaw.info/assets/downloads/Human_Rights_Watch_Report_on_Human_Rights_in_the_Tindouf_Refugee_Camps_(2014).pdf) [Consulted: 13 October 2023].

ISIDOROS, Konstantina (2018): *Nomads and Nation-building in Western Sahara, Gender, Politics, and the Sahrawi*, London, I.D. Tauris.

ISIDOROS, Konstantina (2017a): "Unveiling the Colonial Gaze: Sahrāwī Women in Nascent Nation-state Formation in the Western Sahara," *Interventions*, vol. 19, nº 4, pp. 487-506. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2016.1277152>

ISIDOROS, Konstantina (2017b): "The View from Tindouf: Western Saharan Women and the Calculation of Autochthony", in OJEDA, Raquel, FERNÁNDEZ-MOLINA Irene and VEGUILLA, Victoria (eds.): *Global, Regional and Local Dimensions of Western Sahara's Protracted Decolonization*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95035-5_14

JAYAWARDENA, Kumari (1986): *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London, Zed Books.

JULIANO, Dolores (1998): *La Causa Saharaui y las Mujeres: siempre fuimos tan libres*, Barcelona, Icaria.

KANDIYOTI, Deniz (1991): "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *Millennium*, vol. 20, nº 3, pp. 429–43. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298910200031501>

LIPPERT, Anne (1992): "Sahrawi Women in the Liberation: Struggle of the Sahrawi People," *Signs*, vol. 17, nº 3, pp. 636–51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/494752>

McCLINTOCK, Anne (1991): "'No Longer in a Future Heaven:' Women and Nationalism in South Africa," *Transition*, nº 51, pp. 104–23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935081>

MEDINA MARTÍN, Rocío (2016): *Mujeres Saharauias: experiencias de resistencias y agencias en un devenir feminista descolonial*, PhD diss., Seville, Pablo Olavide University.

MOGHADAM, Valentine (1997): "Gender and Revolutions," in John Foran (ed.): *Theorizing Revolutions*, London, Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203206638-16>

MOGHADAM, Valentine, ed. (1994): *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, London, Zed Books.

MOLYNEUX, Maxine (1985): "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 11, nº 2, pp. 227–54. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177922>

MOLYNEUX, Maxine (1979): "Women and Revolution in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen," *Feminist Review*, vol. 1, nº 1, pp. 4–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1979.2>

MUNDY, Jacob (2007): "Performing the Nation, Prefiguring the State: the Western Saharan Refugees, Thirty Years Later," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 45, nº 2, pp. 275–297.

NASSER, Randa, BARGHOUTI, Fidaa and Mousa, Janan (2010): "Feminist Attitudes and Praxis Among Palestinian Women Activists," *Feminist Formations*, vol. 22, nº 3, pp. 146–75. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2010.0021>

UN, General Assembly (1966): *Question of Ifni and Spanish Sahara*, A/RES/2229, 20 December, [https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2229\(XXI\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/2229(XXI)) [Consulted: 7 June 2023].

OJEDA GARCÍA, Raquel, FERNÁNDEZ-MOLINA, Irene and VEGUILLA DEL MORAL, Victoria (eds.) (2017): *Global, Regional and Local Dimensions of Western Sahara's*

Protracted Decolonization, New York, Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95035-5_17

O'KEEFE, Theresa (2013): *Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

OMAR, Sidi M. (2008): "The Right to Self-determination and the Indigenous People of Western Sahara", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 21, nº 1, pp. 41-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570701828584>.

PAPANEK, Hanna (1994): "The Ideal Woman and the Ideal Society: Control and Autonomy in the Construction of Identity," in Valentine M Moghadam (ed.): *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*, Boulder, Westview Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429041051-3>

ROSSETTI, Sonia (2014, August 18): *Empowerment of Women through Education. Gender Symposium, University of Queensland*, Brisbane, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284295873> [Consulted: 7 June 2023].

SADR Constitution of 1976, http://www.usc.es/export9/sites/webinstitucional/gl/institutos/ceso/descargas/Constitucion-RASD_1976b_es.pdf [Consulted: 7 June 2023].

SADR Constitution of 2015, http://www.usc.es/export9/sites/webinstitucional/gl/institutos/ceso/descargas/RASD_Constitution-of-SADR-2015_en.pdf [Consulted: 7 June 2023].

SAN MARTIN, Pablo (2010): *Western Sahara: the Refugee Nation*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press.

SARGENT, Lydia (ed.) (1981): *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, Montreal, Black Rose Books.

SHAYNE, Julia Denise (1999): "Gendered Revolutionary Bridges: Women in the Salvadoran Resistance Movement (1979-1992)," *Latin American Perspectives*, 26 (3), pp. 85-102. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x9902600305>

SOLANA, Vivian (2017): "Cementing Nationalism: The Role of the Sahrawi Female Revolutionary in her Struggle for Decolonization," in Francisco Freire and Sebastian Boulay (ed.): *Culture et politique dans l'Ouest Saharien: Arts, Activisme et Etat dans un Espace de Conflits*, Igé, Éditions l'Étrave, pp. 423-444.

SOLANA, Vivian (2016): "No Somos Costosas, Somos Valiosas: La Lucha de las Mujeres Saharauis Cuarenta Años Después," in Isaías Barrañeda and Raquel Ojeda (ed.): *Sahara Occidental Cuarenta Años Después*, Madrid, Catarata, pp. 81-91.

SOLANA, Vivian (2021): "Halted narratives: The combative futurity of Sahrawi female

militant's public memory," *History and Anthropology*, vol. 34, nº 4, pp. 559-577. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1983560>

SOLANA, Vivian (2022): "Household Militancy: Beyond the Hypervisible Gendered Publics of a Sahrawi Revolutionary Nationalism", *L'Ouest Saharien*, nº 16, pp. 53-71. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3917/ousa.221.0053>

STRZELECKA, Ewa (2018): "A Political Culture of Feminist Resistance: Exploring Women's Agency and Gender Dynamics in Yemen's Uprising (2011-2015)," in Marie-Christine Heinze (ed.): *Yemen and the Search for Stability: Power, Politics and Society After the Arab Spring*, New York, I.B. Tauris, pp. 47-70. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350989887.ch-002>

STRZELECKA, Ewa (2017): *Mujeres en la Primavera Árabe: Construcción de una Cultura Política de Resistencia Feminista en Yemen*, Madrid, CSIC.

TAYLOR, Verta (1999): "Gender and Social Movements," *Gender & Society*, vol. 13, nº 1, pp. 8-33.

THIRD POLISARIO NATIONAL CONGRESS (1976, September 20): "The 1976 National Action Plan," *Sahara Libre*.

WIMMER, Andreas, and Yuval Feinstein (2010): "The Rise of the Nation-State across the World, 1816 to 2001," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 75, nº 5, pp. 764-90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410382639>

WILSON, Alice (2016): *Sovereignty in Exile: a Saharan Liberation Movement Governs*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press. DOI: <https://doi-org.vu-nl.idm.oclc.org/10.9783/9780812293159>

WILSON, Alice (2015): "Refracting Custom in Western Sahara's Quest for Statehood," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, vol. 38, nº 1, pp. 72-90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/plar.12087>

WILSON, Alice (2012): "Households and the Production of Public and Private Domains: Revolutionary Changes in Western Sahara's Liberation Movement," *Paideuma*, nº 58, pp. 19-43.

YVAL-DAVIS, Nira (1997): *Gender and Nation*, London, Sage Publications. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446222201>