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SEPARATED BY A WALL –
Narratives of Sahrawi Nationalism and Nation-Building

ABSTRACT

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The Western Sahara conflict is one of the most prolonged ones of our time. Finding a resolution to the frozen conflict, which made the news headlines close to 50 years ago, has recently gotten new hope with the ongoing United Nations led peace talks. The Special Envoy for Western Sahara, the former President of Germany, Horst Köhler, has met with all the conflict parties several times and opened the table for a potential new peace agreement in the December of 2018.

Similar to other prolonged tragedies of the humankind, the Western Sahara conflict has as many different storytellers as there are people speaking about the conflict. The situation, which is often being framed as a power rivalry between Algeria and Morocco, two neighboring regional powers in North Africa, proves itself to be another story from the perspective of the so-called Polisario Front "refugee citizens", the Sahrawis. The Sahrawis, an indigenous nation of the former Spain governed area of the Western Sahara, was given a promise from the UN in 1991 about a referendum, where they would have a say in the destiny of their own land and the independence of the nation.

Unfortunately, the UN was not able to keep that promise. Questions of who are the "real Sahrawis" and who has the right to vote in the referendum became bigger issues than that of the rights of the Sahrawis to decide about their independence. Understandably, the false promises from the international community caused frustration, feelings of defeat and even anger among the Sahrawis. Shared memories, history and traumas of the refugees in the Algerian desert, that are difficult, even impossible, to forget. With a history of prolonged conflict and a profound sense of displacement as an indigenous nation, fundamental questions of identity, independence and views on the future prospects of the Sahrawis seem to be all overcast with sentiments of not having their rights respected or story listened.

This multilayered situation was the framework of the close to existential research puzzle: How has the Sahrawi "refugee nation" survived all these years and how do they recreate themselves via different story forms? The aim of this research was to examine different views and to develop an understanding of the conceptualization of the self-understanding of the Sahrawis – at least the part of it, which is presented to the international audience outside from the community. All in all, in order to formulate some kind of picture of the narrations of the identity understanding and the distant nation-building processes of the Sahrawis, the research material was collected using a combination of several methods. The research material in use included Sahrawi activist interviews in article forms, spoken interviews in documentaries and news and one face to face interview with the Polisario Front official representative in Finland.

Narrative analysis as the methodological choice and the versatile material basis of the research made it possible to elaborate different fractions of the self-understanding of the Sahrawi "citizens", who have already declared to have their own state, the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic of the Western Sahara. Different fractions of the narrations form a totality, which is in here named as the "*story of the nation*". The theoretical framework of the research combined elements of nationalism, state – and nation-building research.

The results showed many shades and colors in the self-formed "*story of the Sahrawi nation*", depending on the viewpoint of the storyteller. In the basis of this research, it is safe to state that from the Sahrawi point of view the conflict is not about regional power rivalry. Moreover, it is about the rights and the self-determination of a nation wish-to-be, whose one way of existing is to get their story told and heard. This piece of work added to the contribution to peak behind the curtains of silence about the conflict and to elaborate on, what is going on in the region and why, after all these years, there is no endpoint for the conflict close in sight.

Keywords: *Western Sahara conflict, Sahrawis, Nationalism, Identity, Nation-building, Narratives*

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1. Introduction

One crucial reason why you are reading this research on the Western Sahara conflict and the Sahrawi nationalism is that many are not; there is a great lack of general attention and awareness of these subjects, especially in western media. To have the status of one of the most prolonged, unresolved conflicts of our time, not far from the border of the European Union, with this significantly little attention worldwide is surprising and even slightly shocking. Why is it so that very few of us, even in the field of Peace and Conflict Research know about the conflict, when it has all the signs a conflict usually needs in order to be heard and seen in international media and among the researchers in the field: geopolitical and economic interests mixed with regional power rivalry, unclear borders between two countries and the despair and exile of an indigenous Sahrawi people, which has continued dozens of years.

Even though the overall numbers of the Sahrawis living in exile are debatable[1], to state that over 100 000 Sahrawis live currently in the refugee camps of the Algerian desert, near a city called Tindouf is a rather safe estimate. Despite this, the conflict rarely makes the news today. In Finland, for example, only the politically left-oriented news agencies, organizations working for global solidarity and the most "radical" anti-war peace organizations give voice to the situation of the Sahrawis[2].

The start of my own research path on the journey of the Western Sahara conflict was originally no different when it comes to the state of awareness about the status of the Sahrawi nation – or rather, the lack of it. As a starting researcher on the Peace and Conflict Research field and as an active member of both national and international societies, I had read something about the conflict, of course. My earliest memories of the conflict date back to 2016, when I saw pictures of people who had colored the tips of their forefingers dark blue on Facebook. They did this to show solidarity with the Sahrawis, while

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[1] Due to the nomadic lifestyle of some of the Sahrawi refugees, the exact number of the Sahrawis in the camps is hard to discover. Even the UNCHR and the WFP estimations have varied widely in different documents from 90 000 up to 165 000.
[2] For example the Finnish Peace Committee, Maailma.net and the International Solidarity Work follow the Western Sahara conflict in the long term and report about it regularly.

simultaneously demanding self-determination through a referendum. One of my activist friends participated in the 'Blue Finger' campaign, if I recall correctly.[3] However, news of the campaign was quickly submerged in the feed of other news, other campaigns and other events.

In the autumn of 2017, I was working in the Embassy of Finland in Rabat, Morocco. Even before my internship at the Embassy in Rabat, I knew I wanted to write my master's thesis from a conflict I somehow knew. "Conflict shopping" for a topic without any deeper knowledge of the conflict, choosing one of the many ongoing tragedies on the world map without any connection to it whatsoever, would have felt both shallow and unjustified. What right would I have, as a western researcher to claim I have knowledge of something I had only read from books, images and articles produced by others, while living safely at a distance of 5 357 kilometers[4] from the people most affected by the conflict? How would have I been able to divide the cultural from the historical, individual identity from the collective one or the economic interests from the nationalist ethos if I had never set my foot in that particular area of the world? To me the answer was clear and simple: I could not.

The original plan was to collect research material while I was working in Morocco or stay in the country after finishing the internship to conduct interviews. However, I was advised from several directions not to do research on the Western Sahara conflict while I would be still physically in Morocco, *if* I wanted to stay in the country for the entire planned six months and not to endanger any diplomatic relations between Morocco and Finland. Therefore, I needed to think of a different approach. Both in Finland and in Morocco, I had heard of a saying that there are three red flags in Morocco you should not question: 1) The power of the king Mohammed VI and his institutional authority; 2) Islam and the religious norms as the moral and cultural basis of the Moroccan society and last but not least; 3) The legal status of the Western Sahara to be something else than owned and ruled by the Kingdom of Morocco.

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[3] Pictures from around the world in the social media can be found with using hashtags #referendumnow #westernsahara.
[4] The distance between Tindouf, Algeria and Tampere, Finland on foot according to Google Maps ("Use caution – walking directions may not always reflect real-world conditions"). By car the travelling distance would be 6 008 kilometers, which would take 71 hours without a traffic.

According to the Moroccan side of the story, the Western Sahara region is part of Morocco historically, culturally and economically - without any question about something else. For the Kingdom of Morocco, the current status of the conflict clearly serves its interests, as it can freely use the phosphate resources of the region, build solar panels as a national investment for renewable energy and sell fish from the Western Sahara coastline without strong international objections. The European Union signed a free trade agreement with Morocco already in 2012, which the European Court of Justice later ruled to should not include products which are produced, fished or found in the area of Western Sahara.[5] The point of argumentation is clear and easy to accept: The trade agreement cannot be implemented in Western Sahara, because it falls outside of the international borders of Morocco.[6]

However, despite the ruling of the European Court of Justice in 2016, the EU has continued to trade with Morocco without putting any significant pressure in solving the situation of Western Sahara once and for all. Indeed, there seems to be fears that the European Union does not genuinely support the peace process by continuing to work with Morocco as if it is business as usual. Erik Hagen, the Executive Director of the Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW), a watchdog organization scrutinizing the actions of international companies in the region, has thus commented on the position of the European Union in the conflict: "As long as Morocco is scoring political points and can attract the EU in dealing with EU products, it's useless to conduct peace talks with Morocco". [7]

Nevertheless, at the end of 2018, the United Nations brokered peace talks started again. The ongoing peace talks are directed by the former German president Horst Köhler, the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Western Sahara. Two days roundtable discussions in Geneva where told to have ended on a positive note, with the next talks planned for the first quarter of 2019. Delegations from Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania where present, which means that all the conflict parties have had their say in the beginning of the new round of peace negotiations. According to the United

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[5] The Court of Justice of the European Union (2016).
[6] Ibid.
[7] Bagnetto (2018).

Nations Security Council, the goal of the process is to find "a just, lasting and mutually acceptable solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara."[8]

What follows from all this is the conclusion that the Western Sahara conflict is as current as it is important in the field of Peace and Conflict Research. However, most of the knowledge about the conflict is far from up to date. Most of the in-depth research literature is published as far as in the 1970's and 80's when the war was on the news radar of the whole world. Because the conflict is stagnated by nature and no significant outbursts of anger in the form of a direct violence have happened in many years, the situation is barely news-worthy. Peaceful resistance of the people is more silent and easily close to being invisible in the media compared to direct violence – despite it being practiced by hundreds of thousands of Sahrawis around the world from the refugee camps of Algeria to the Moroccan controlled area of Western Sahara. Even though the diaspora of the Sahrawis is presumably active, it is very hard to get trustworthy proof from that: most of the Sahrawi refugees abroad are falsely categorized as either Moroccans, Algerians or Spanish, since the status of the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic is only partly recognized by the international law terms.

In order to provide a fresher view on the stagnated conflict situation from the viewpoint of the Sahrawis, versatile material as the basis of the research was used. Dozens of interview articles, documentaries, video interviews and shorter publications where scrutinized and from them 10 material sources where chosen. These combined the views and aspirations of tens of Sahrawi activists, civil society representatives, Polisario soldiers and normal refugee citizens in the side of Algeria about themselves, about the Sahrawi nation and the history and future of the people that someday wish to live in a country called the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic (SADR) of the Western Sahara. In addition, I conducted one-hour long interview myself with Menna Lehbib, the official Polisario Front information office representative in February 2019 in Helsinki. The aim was to obtain a wide view of the different fractions of the "story of the nation", narrations that the Sahrawis present to the outside audience from the indigenous people of the Western Sahara.

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[8] UN News (2018).

Using nationalism studies, nation- and state-building and identity research as the theoretical framework and constructivist worldview as the ontological basis of the research, two different research questions will be scrutinized. The first question concerns the Sahrawi nationalism and the representation of the fragmented *story of the Sahrawi nation* and asks that 1) *What kind of narrative lines can be identified in the story of the Sahrawi nation directed to the outside audience?* The second research question is more concerned about the structural elements of the wish-to-be state of the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic and asks that 2) *How the prerequisites for state-building and the nation-building of the SADR is described in the nationalistic narratives of the Sahrawis?*

The structure of the thesis follows the traditional categorization of a research paper. First, the background of the Western Sahara conflict will be introduced. In here, a historical chronological classification is used, emphasizing the origin and historical context of the frozen conflict. The background chapter then moves on to the many peacebuilding efforts in history, most of which have been directed by the United Nations. The last part of the chapter focusses on the political structure of the Polisario Front as a political movement and the living circumstances of the so-called "refugee-citizens" of the country, wishing to be more widely recognized in the eyes of the international community.

The third chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the research thriving from the many theories regarding the processes of nation-building, nationalism and identity formation. A special emphasis is directed to the questions of the different aspects of nation-building and state-building, how the national identity is built and formed and how these processes are visible in the context of the Western Sahara conflict. Closer to the end of the chapter, a framework of different options for the traditional nation-state will be discussed and models, which provide a further degree of cultural autonomy are briefly presented. After drawing the theoretical framework for the research, the research questions, the material and methodological decisions are presented through careful reflection on the most significant considerations and limitations of the thesis.

After that, the research findings are introduced through seven dominant narrative lines, which rose from the research material. These main narrative lines are titled as the following: 1) *We, the good Sahrawis: determinant and forgiving,* 2) *Unique Sahrawi culture*

– *nomadic lifestyle and tea ceremonies,* 3) *Life of struggles, suffering and war,* and 4) *Our destiny, history and future* in the first section, describing the narratives on the experienced and reproduced Sahrawi story of the nation. In the second section, which problematizes the more structural processes of state- and nation-building, the main narrative lines found and classified are divided into three different headlines: 1) *The sea, the breeze and the oppression of the homeland*, 2) *Our communication exceeds their walls* and third, (3) *State of freedom, democracy and strong women*. After the analytical classification the concept of "*story of the nation*" is discussed and conclusions from the research drawn.

2. Background of the Western Sahara Conflict

The conflict of Western Sahara is often pictured as a stalemate, which aptly reflects the stagnated nature of the situation. Other repeatedly used terms are 'frozen' and 'forgotten'. To give an example of the many levels and the longitude of the conflict, we can use the words of Boukhars and Roussellier, who describe the conflict as "one of the most complex and stubborn disputes in the modern era."[9] Furthermore, Western Sahara is frequently cited to be 'the last colony of Africa'.[10] While examining the existing literature, one quickly comes to the same conclusion as many[11] before: studies of the conflict are often colored with activist connotations due to the lack of an ideal of impartiality.

What further challenges the search for information, is the fact that the western scholar researchers often face some level of hostility from the Moroccan authorities in Western Sahara territory, varying from arrest to deportation from the country.[12] It is possible to claim that it is not easy to get reliable data about the Western Sahara region, partly because it is not in Morocco's interests to allow the information to move freely in and out of the area. Regardless of the many difficulties mentioned, a historical overview of the conflict and its background can be established. In here, the background of the conflict serves first and foremost as a basis and context for understanding the current state of the conflict and, as such, is necessarily a simplified presentation of a complex conflict with a long historical trajectory.

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[9] Boukhars and Roussellier 2013, p. 4.
[10] Zunes and Mundy 2010, p. 21.
[11] For example Porges and Leuprecht 2016, p. 66 and Boukhars and Amar 2011, p. 12.
[12] Boukhars and Amar 2011, p. 12.

The conflict in Western Sahara, geographically situated from the south of Morocco, boils down to the diverging views on the territory control between the Kingdom of Morocco and the independence movement called the Polisario Front[13]. The Polisario Front, a Sahrawi nationalist independence movement, was founded in 1973 and is based in Algeria.[14] As often is the case in territorial conflicts, the right to control the region in question originates from different reasoning and historical framing between the conflicting parties. The Polisario Front uses the argument of the right of self-determination of the Sahrawi nation, while Morocco sees itself having historical claims over the region.[15]

The historical roots of the conflict date back to the era of the decolonization of Africa.[16] From the year 1884 till 1975, the disputed territory was called the Spanish Sahara as one of the colonies of Spain.[17] In 1960, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) appealed to Spain to leave the territory in a resolution, which grants independence to colonial countries and peoples.[18] It was followed by another resolution in 1965, repeating the demand. In the new resolution, the international community advised Spain to take all necessary measures to liberate the area from colonial domination and to enter into negotiations concerning the future of the territory through a process of self-determination.[19] Between 1966 and 1973, seven more UNGA resolutions followed, repeating the need for a referendum on the self-determination of the region.[20]

Morocco was at first favorable to the process of self-determination, positive that it would result in the integration of the territory to Morocco. The King of Morocco Hassan II called for the opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the following rules of conduct in 1975.[21] The International Court of Justice ruled in its advisory opinion that neither

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[13] Comes from the words *Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia al Hamra and Rio de Oro.*
[14] Boukhars and Roussellier 2013, p. 12.
[15] Daadoui 2008, p. 144.
[16] On broader historical background, take Abi-Mershed and Farrar 2013 chapter 'A History of the Conflict in Western Sahara' in Boukhars and Roussellier 2013 as an example.
[17] Bergh 2007, p. 662.
[18] UNGA resolution 1514 (1960).
[19] UNGA resolution 2072 (1965).
[20] Miyet 2013, p. 9.
[21] Zoubir 2007, p. 162.

Mauritania nor Morocco had legal claims to the territory which prevented the holding of a referendum on self-determination.[22] Regardless of (or due to) the ICJ ruling, King Hassan II orchestrated the 'Green March', resulting in around 350,000 Moroccans crossing the borders of Western Sahara on the 6th of November in 1975.[23] Before the ICJ declared its ruling, Spain had already announced its own plan to organize a referendum on the self-determination of the region. The ruling packing the plan of Spain and the previous UNGA resolutions against the interests of Morocco gave it the last push to try to block any progress towards the potential independence of what Morocco saw as its 'southern territories'.[24] The Green March was a way to secure the *de facto* control of the region to be in the hands of Morocco.

The mass movement of Moroccan civilians and soldiers pressured Spain to relinquish the Western Sahara region to Morocco and Mauritania only few days after the march. The administrative power Spain held was transferred to the two countries via Madrid Accords. On 27th February 1976, the same day Spain had left Western Sahara, the foundation of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) was declared, positioning Polisario Front as the government of the newly created country.[25] The armed conflict between Polisario, Morocco and Mauritania escalated from the end of 1975 onwards, concluding in the refugee movement of masses of Sahrawis, first being internally displaced inside of the territory and moving later to the growing refugee settlements in neighboring Algeria.[26] Mauritania withdrew from the region in 1979 due to pressure from Polisario, Morocco immediately annexing the territory. Guerilla warfare against Morocco followed. Polisario fought against the army of Mauritania from 1975 to 1979 and the army of Morocco until 1991, which meant a continuous war for a period of sixteen years.[27] Regardless of the Moroccan upper hand in military power, Polisario was able to resist with the support coming from Algeria and their knowhow to use geography better to their advantage.[28] In the early phases of the conflict, the Polisario Front was supported by Libya as well.[29]

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[22] International Court of Justice 1975: 12.
[23] Bergh, 2007, p. 662.
[24] Boukhars and Roussellier 2013, p. 9.
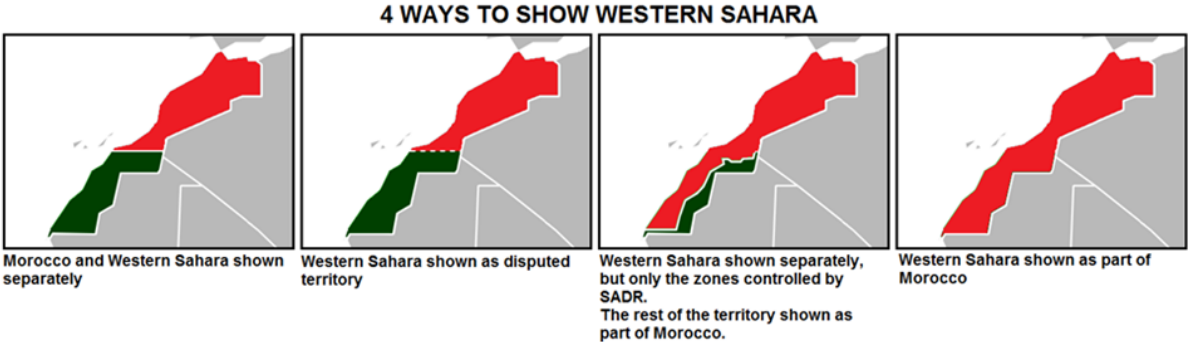[25] Zoubir 2007, p. 162.
[26] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 6.
[27] Martin 2017, p. 32.
[28] Jensen 2013, p. 342.
[29] Mohsen-Finan 2002, p. 3.

The administrative control over the territory today, around 80-85 percent of it, lies with Morocco, protected by defensive walls called 'the Berm', built in the 1980s.[30] The rest of the area remains in the control of the Polisario Front, which is referred to as the 'liberated territories'.[31] Even though the Berm mitigated the aggressiveness of the conflict, armed clashes continued until 1988, when OAU and UN brokered a ceasefire.[32] Several years later in 1991, conflicting parties accepted more detailed terms of a UN-supported referendum and signed an agreement of a further cease-fire.[33] Over ten years of war had driven both sides to the conclusion that definitive victory with military means was not possible.[34]

4 WAYS TO SHOW WESTERN SAHARA

| Morocco and Western Sahara shown separately | Western Sahara shown as disputed territory | Western Sahara shown separately, but only the zones controlled by SADR. The rest of the territory shown as part of Morocco. | Western Sahara shown as part of Morocco |

Picture 1. Four ways to show Western Sahara.[35]

The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) started in September 1991 to monitor the success of the ceasefire and to support the organization of the referendum. The mandate of MINURSO has been repeatedly extended.[36] The ceasefire has generally held in the region, but the transitional period before the agreement entered into force has not begun due to the divergent views of some elements of the plan. The first agreement to hold a referendum in January 1992 was postponed due to a fundamental disagreement on who should be eligible to vote in it. Military confrontation worsened into a dispute on the composition of the electorate, as both sides had their own view on who should be counted as a Sahrawi. Power over the definition

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[30] Boukhars and Roussellier 2013, p. 12, Jensen 2013, p. 342.
[31] Martin 2017, p. 32.
[32] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 7.
[33] Daadaoui 2008, p. 144.
[34] Jensen 2013, p. 342.
[35] Image retrieved from: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/de/Maps_of_Western_Sahara.png/750px-Maps_of_Western_Sahara.png
[36] MINURSO 2017.

would bring power over the result of voting.[37] No process with the referendum took place between 1992 and 1997, arguably for three reasons from the Moroccan side: the uncertainty of the result, the unstable local political situation in Algeria and the lack of pressure from France and the United States in the fear of the possible destabilization of Morocco.[38] The identification process of the potential voters was completed in 2000, but the referendum remains a part of an unfulfilled plan.[39]

The question continues to form the very core of the Moroccan foreign politics and it also has plenty of homeland policy connotations. The south is on the list of continuous ambitious investment plans in order to develop the region, but all the universities and higher educational possibilities are situated in the bigger cities in the north. Natural resources, such as offshore oil reserves and rich fishing possibilities at the coast, have increased geopolitical interests in the region, which does not increase the likelihood of the referendum taking place anytime soon. In addition to making the lives of the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria difficult, the frozen conflict has multiple regional and international political consequences. Some examples of these are the frozen Morocco-Algeria relations, the debates on the legality of the European Union's fishing agreements with Morocco and the fact that Morocco was long an outsider from the continental body of the African Union.[40]

2.1. Peacebuilding Efforts

The peacebuilding efforts between Morocco and the Polisario Front have involved many stages, directed mostly by the United Nations. In this section the phases of the negotiation processes after the ceasefire agreement of 1991 are briefly examined. First of all, keeping the talk about the referendum alive without further action was beneficial to Morocco, winning time for straightening policy lines in the domestic arena while continuing dominance inside the territory. However, the Polisario also had its own interests at stake with the delay, since the demand for a referendum gave it political space, but the loss in

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[37] Mohsen-Finan 2002, p. 6.
[38] Zoubir 2007, p. 163.
[39] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 7.
[40] Ibid.

the vote risked Polisario being "swept in the dustbin of history."[41] Likewise, with Algeria's interests at stake, the conflict can be described as "major political football" between North African countries and beyond, all countries involved or interested having their own interests in the situation.[42]

After years of a considerable lack of action, the UN special envoy to Western Sahara, the former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, relaunched the peace process and presented the Houston Agreement in 1997, which was rejected by Morocco.[43] After negations had failed to reach a mutually acceptable agreement, Baker suggested that the possible way out of the conflict would be to accept the region as a semi-autonomous part of Morocco in the form of Baker Plan I in 2000. This proposition was backed up by the United States, France and Morocco but opposed by the Polisario Front and Algeria.[44] The proposal painted a future of great deal of autonomy for the Sahrawis, with Sahrawis themselves voting for an assembly with powers on taxation, law, education and culture. However, the foreign affairs and national security would stay up with Morocco to take care of. After five years, the future of the territory would have been decided through a referendum, with all living in the region having the right to vote. Due to the shift from initiating for a referendum to finding a political solution, the Polisario Front and Algeria criticized the UN system as favoring Morocco.[45]

In 2003, a revised plan called Baker II was presented with a more detailed vision on the referendum process, making it more difficult to subvert the result. The second draft of the plan was welcomed by the Polisario but rejected by Morocco.[46] The rejection of Baker II and the declaration by Morocco to not accept any solution endangering its sovereignty caused Baker to resign from his position in 2004.[47] Morocco suggested a version of self-government through the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs in 2007, which led to bilateral meetings with the Polisario Front in 2007-2008, with no conclusive result in the end.[48] The meetings led by a new special envoy Peter van Walsum in New York seemed

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[41] Mohsen-Finan 2002, p. 7.
[42] Ibid, p. 3.
[43] Martin 2017, pp. 33–34.
[44] Mohsen-Finan 2002, p. 1.
[45] Ibid, pp. 7–8.
[46] Bergh 2007, p. 663.
[47] Martin 2017, p. 34.
[48] Bergh 2007, p. 663.

only to prove the impossibility to find common ground between the Polisario and the Moroccan government. Frustrated with the lack of consensus, Van Walsum, the second representative left in 2008 and was replaced by the U.S. diplomat Christopher Ross the next year. Ross was able to rebalance the UN position, leading multiple negotiation rounds from 2011 to 2013, not surprisingly, without an agreed conclusion in the end.[49]

The mandate of the MINURSO operation was in danger in 2016, due to the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon making references to the 'occupation' of Western Sahara, while visiting Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria. What was later explained as his personal, spontaneous reaction stirred up strong Moroccan protests in the capital Rabat and beyond, questioning the neutrality of the UN in the dispute. As a consequence to the statement, Morocco expelled the majority of the civilian experts of the operation and closed its military office temporarily.[50] The status of the operation has since normalized after, but the incidence presents an example on what kind of reactions the use of the word 'occupation' can evoke in the Moroccan side. Today, MINURSO is the only modern peacekeeping operation without the mandate to monitor and report about human rights abuses. France has objected the amendment of the human rights element to the mission in the Security Council repeatedly.[51] By the UN definition, Western Sahara has been listed as a non-self-governing territory already since 1963.[52]

Morocco rejoined the African Union[53] in January 2017, which it had originally left in 1984, when the continental body recognized the independence of the Western Sahara (SADR). SADR welcomed Morocco's readmission, which brought hope in the search of new peaceful solutions for the fate of the territory.[54] Even though the membership of both actors in the continental organization can form a positive basis for a further dialogue, the international arenas are also naturally clear positions for Morocco to further its foreign policy objectives and to get more support for its viewpoint on the conflict. Diplomatic efforts in order to end the frozen conflict in the international arenas were long on a standstill, due to the obstinacy of Morocco and the strong support of the United States and

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[49] Martin 2017, p. 34.
[50] Wiley and Sons 2016, pp. 20917–20918.
[51] Bolopion 2010.
[52] Smith 2005, p. 545.
[53] Former Organization of African Unity.
[54] Quinn 2017.

France to their close ally.[55] However, many signs show that the international interest is once again growing towards the conflict. The latest UNSCR 2351 from April 2017 wishes for the parties "to show political will and work in an atmosphere propitious for dialogue in order to resume negotiations".[56]

The previous German president Horst Köhler was appointed to serve the UN Secretary General António Guterres as his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara in the autumn of 2017 and he has been visiting the actors of the conflict ever since.[57] When the Polisario Front delegation met with Köhler in January 2018, Polisario's foreign minister Mohamed Salem Ould Salek soon declared to be "ready for direct negotiations with the Kingdom of Morocco to make peace".[58] As pointed out already previously, it does seem that the international community is slowly rekindling efforts to improve the situation.

2.2. Polisario Front and the Refugee-Citizens

The Polisario Front is simultaneously representing the government of the SADR and pro-Western Sahara independence movement activism, which makes it a multilevel actor politically; it is both a political movement and a representative of a government institution. It goes without saying that as the leader of the SADR and the Sahrawi nation, Polisario does not represent a homogenous group of people who agree on the terms and the means of the independence process. However, it is possible to try to grasp some of the most definitive features of the movement and the state of the Sahrawi refugee-citizens in the protracted refugee situation.

Between the years of 1970 and 1975, the Polisario Front started to gain wide support as an answer to the growth of anti-colonial activism in Western Sahara against the Spanish military.[59] The leader of the Western Saharan nationalist movement had its founding congress on May 10 in 1973, claiming in his first manifestation to be a "unique expression of the masses, opting for revolutionary violence and the armed struggle as the means by

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[55] Porges and Leuprecht 2016, p. 66.
[56] UNSCR 2351, 2017.
[57] DW 2017.
[58] Daily Mail 2018.
[59] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 6.

which the Saharawi Arab African people can recover total liberty and foil the maneuvers of Spanish colonialism."[60] The name "Western Sahara" after the end of the period of "Spanish Sahara" was first used by the international community in the early 1970s, rather than the native inhabitants.[61]

The UN Mission of Inquiry in Spanish Sahara declared in 1975, after witnessing major pro-Polisario demonstrations, that there was an "overwhelming consensus among Saharans within the Territory in favor of independence" and "support for one movement, the Frente Polisario".[62] Since the 1970s, Polisario has legitimized its control over the Sahrawi 'refugee-citizens' in Algeria through establishing a constitution, a police force and prisons, an army, legal framework and many 'national' institutions, such as the National Parliament and the National Hospital.[63] The SADR defines itself as a sovereign, independent and free state, governed by a democratic system.[64] However, the democracy of the wannabe state is contestable: the Polisario Front is the only political party that governs the region. However, the political movement claims that the objective is to transform the SADR into a multi-party system first thing after gaining independence.[65]

As a full fledge member of the African Union, the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic has signed and ratified many continental agreements, such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. In contrast, it has neither an observer status nor any other form of official status in the United Nations, which prevents it to participate to the structuring and implementation processes of the international law in the framework of all the UN institutions.[66] In the course of history, 84 states have recognized the SADR, from which 27 states have then later retracted their recognition and eight states have frozen theirs. In 2018, 49 states continued to recognize the Polisario run country, which is around one fourth of the countries worldwide.[67]

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[60] Quoted in Hodges and Pazzanita 1994, p. 162, from Zunes & Mundy 2010, p. 149.
[61] Zunes & Mundy 2010, p. 111.
[62] UNGA 1975: 59.
[63] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 8.
[64] Rossetti 2008, p. 14.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 10.
[67] USC 2018.

The Sahrawis have lived as a divided nation for decades, some in the territory under Moroccan control, some in the west side controlled by Polisario and the rest as refugees in Algeria, other in neighboring countries and around Europe.[68] The conflict and the protracted refugee situation linked to it has remained as a marginal concern in the western world.[69] According to some estimations, approximately 20,000 Sahrawi refugees live in the open desert in the Polisario Front governed area between the Berm and the borders.[70] Moreover, the UNCHR registration documented in 1999 that there are over 26,000 Sahrawis who lived in Mauritania and would have had the right to vote in the referendum for self-determination. In the same year the estimation of Sahrawi refugees living in Algeria was 165, 000 by the Algerian government.[71] Estimations from the number of refugees who have continued to further than Algeria vary, due to the difficulty in definition: most states do not recognize SADR as a country of origin, which makes the Sahrawis mostly 'Moroccan' in the statistics of refugees and immigrants.

The UNHCR has called the Sahrawi refugee situation in Algeria as "one of the most protracted refugee situations worldwide"[72] and it remains as the organization's second oldest refugee situation still existing today. With varying estimations[73], around 155,000[74] Sahrawi refugees live in the five major camps named after the main cities in Western Sahara[75]. These village camps are governed by a Sahrawi governor (wālī) and divided into smaller districts and neighborhoods. A high level of self-management and the Polisario control over the camps and its citizens distinguishes the Sahrawi refugee camps from the majority of the refugee situations worldwide, where the camps are usually administered by an organization such as the UNHCR.[76] Over the years, the refugee camps have been transformed into more structured entities, close to a state structure with political and administrative institutions. The politico-administrative structure and the central

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[68] Bergh 2007, p. 663.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 7.
[71] UNHCR 2000.
[72] UNHCR 2010.
[73] Due to the nomadic lifestyle of the refugees, the exact number of refugees is hard to discover. Even UNCHR and WFP estimations have varied widely in different documents from 90 000 to 165 000.
[74] The total camp population, including 'non-voters' in the possible referendum, was calculated by UNHCR and WFP in 1999-2000 as being 155,430. In 2004, the estimated total of the refugee population was 158,800 people. UNHCR/WFP 2004: 1, p. 13
[75] The cities camps are called El Aaiun, Ausserd, Boujdour, Smara and Dakhla and the sixth, smaller camp is called the 27 February Camp.
[76] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 9.

governing of villages in the refugee settlements makes them comparable to the Palestinian case.[77] The Sahrawi camps have been praised over the years due to the democratic political structures, high level of female participation in the society and the self-sufficiency of its citizens. Even though the camps are highly dependent on the international humanitarian aid, it is generally distributed by the Sahrawi refugees themselves. However, at worst, these praises have the risk of making the protracted refugee situation and the status quo as the new normal.[78]

The refugee camps have been subjected to many changes over the years, such as increased migration to Spain, the introduction of a market economy and a recent change in the leadership of the movement. President Mohamed Abdelaziz, the historic leader of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic since its founding in 1976, passed away in 2016. His successor, Brahim Ghali, has adopted a more aggressive approach by stirring up old tensions and moving military troops to the Moroccan separation wall.[79] Since the establishment of the camps in 1975, a 'solidarity movement' for the Sahrawi independence cause starting by the Spanish and French civil society has helped to secure the political and physical survival of the camps.[80] Some humanitarian supplies like tents and medical items were provided by the ICRC[81] and the Algerian government with some 'friendly states', such as Spain[82], Cuba, Libya, Syria and South Africa, offering financial and political support.[83] Opportunities in the camps are rare, despite the few employment places in the administration and many in the army, which result in most of the educated youth moving to study abroad. However, in addition to basic primary and secondary schooling, some professional training is available on computer, vocational and technical training courses and a nursing college.[84]

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[77] Martin 2017, p. 35.
[78] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 14.
[79] Martin 2017, p. 35.
[80] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 8.
[81] The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
[82] Over 300 groups of 'Friends of the Sahrawi People' (Amigos del Pueblo Saharaui) exist in Spain. In addition, the annual 'Holidays in Peace project' (Vacaciones en Paz) transports up to 10,000 Sahrawi children to Spain during the summer months, allowing them to avoid the hottest period in the camps and making contacts with the Spanish society. More on the cooperation and the effects of it in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011.
[83] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 8.
[84] Ibid, pp. 17–22.

Due to the current political circumstances and the refusal of both Polisario and Algeria to support the local integration of the Sahrawi refugees into the Algerian military town of Tindouf, the general popular opinion of the international community is that the refugee situation will be prolonged in the upcoming years as well.[85] In addition to the larger political forces, many individual refugees themselves reject the propositions of local integration or resettlement to another country as possible durable solutions. For them, obtaining voluntary repatriation after the declaration of Western Sahara as an independent country is seen as the only solution to the situation at hand.[86]

There is a slight tendency of people moving away from the administrative core of the camps to enforce their independence and privacy from Polisario and international agencies. Moreover, Polisario has proposed to shift the administration from Algerian Rabouni to Tifariti, a small settlement of camps on the Polisario govern side of Western Sahara. The resettlement would mean the Sahrawi people's status being transformed from refugees to internally displaced people, which would have both legal and political consequences. Morocco sees movement close to the Berm as 'provocation', which renders the international and local reactions to the possible permanent resettlement of the Sahrawi refugees unpredictable.[87]

The nonviolent resistance of the Sahrawis has a long history in the conflict. Some describe the nonviolent protests as intifada-type movements, which have some similar features to the uprisings in Palestinian territories.[88] Multiple nonviolent demonstrations in 1999, 2005 and 2009 provided a basis for the largest demonstration in decades, for the Gdeim Izik protest camp in 2010.[89] Gdeim Izik demonstrations started to get a more organized structure when a group of Saharawi activists set up tents on 9th October in 2010, around 12 kilometers from Western Sahara's capital Laayoune, protesting against the economic and social discrimination they suffer from in the region.[90] Even though the original reason for the emergence of the protests was the dissatisfaction to the situations of housing and employment, protests got nationalist connotations when the mobilization widened and

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[85]Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 1.
[86] Ibid, p. 4.
[87] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 28.
[88] Jensen 2013, p. 343.
[89] Dan 2014, p. 47.
[90] Ibid.

developed.[91] [92] The United Nations estimates the protest to have expanded to around 6,610 tent settlements with the number of protesters going beyond 15,000.[93] As a collective mobilization of resistance, the protest settlements of Gdeim Izik reinforced the Sahrawi national identity.[94] The demonstration started to grow uncontrollably after a Sahrawi boy was killed by the Moroccan police.[95] Following to the non-transparent line of the country, Morocco limited the media and outside observers coverage on the protests and objected to MINURSO's monitors having an access to the protest camps.[96] In the early hours of the 8th of November, the confrontation escalated, leading up to 11 Moroccans and 4 Sahrawis dead.[97]

Even though the resistance of the Sahrawis has been mostly non-violent, the long-continued frustration of the youth and the lack of opportunities are in danger to add up to violence and radicalization. The UNHCR estimates, that overall from all the Sahrawi refugee population even 60 % are youth.[98] Following the frustration felt from the prolonged lack of progress and the authoritarian way of leadership, multiple accusations against the Polisario Front have been presented concerning corruption, elitism, favoritism and the attempts to silence disagreeing voices within the movement.[99]

Recently, the refugee camps have witnessed an increasing unrest, especially among the young members of the Sahrawi society. Some Sahrawis would be ready to take up arms against Morocco, some would be happy with a bigger role in the inner decision-making processes of the community, while others would, first and foremost, hope to improve their poor living conditions.[100] Kidnappings and arrests indicate that criminal organizations and radical groups are attempting to get a foothold in the Western Sahara and in the refugee camps in Algeria, even though it seems that the Polisario leaders are trying to

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[91] Veguilla 2017, p. 362.
[92] Some writers argue that the Gdeim Izik protests were in fact the start of the wide 'Arab Spring' movement, instead of the self-immolation of Tunisian man few weeks later, on 17 December 2010. See Wilson 2013, 81.
[93] UN Security Council 2011, p. 1.
[94] Murphy & Omar 2013, p. 354.
[95] Veguilla 2017, p. 375.
[96] Wilson 2013, p. 85.
[97] Ibid, pp. 85–86.
[98] Al Achi 2014.
[99] Boukhars and Amar 2011, p. 222.
[100] Martin 2017, p. 34.

prevent this.[101] Furthermore, there are challenges such as interstate smuggling, drug trafficking, socioeconomic unrest and poverty, waiting to be tackled in the Polisario Front governed refugee camps of the Sahrawis. [102]

3. Nation-Building, Nationalism and Identity

In this next theory-driven chapter, the interplay of nation-building, nationalism and identity research will be examined – first separately and then combined, through examples of the distant nation-building concept, the Sahrawi nationalism history and their national identity forming process. These three core concepts of nation-building, nationalism and identity, form together the theoretical framework, which serve as the basis for further Western Sahara conflict context specific arguments made. To understand these concepts, each of them needs to be defined and then elaborated in the context of the complex, close to frozen conflict situation.

In the world of nation-states, nation-building is often understood as a process that every nation-state is implicitly or explicitly subjected to, because without a nation there can be no nation-state to do the 'building' in. However, this nation-state-bounded understanding of the concept can be easily challenged. We should not take nation-states for granted as the only valid form of a state, regardless of whether it is the current norm in the world politics of today or not. As Mann[103] puts it: "The nation-state is not hegemonic, nor is it obsolete, either as a reality or as an ideal." The belief that every nation should have their own state dates all the way back to the rise of nationalism.

Historically wise, nationalism needs to be understood as something peculiarly modern.[104] The principle of nationalism guided the change of the traditional state system in the nineteenth century towards the models of current nation-states. There are two main principles in nation and nationalities. First, the demand for self-government and freedom from foreign rule, meaning that each nation should have their own state and second, the objective of national unity and the demand for the whole nation to form a state.[105]

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[101] Jensen 2013, p. 343.
[102] Boukhars and Amar 2011, p. 221.
[103] Mann 1996, p. 316.
[104] Breuilly 1996, p. 170.
[105] Bauer 1996, pp. 70–71.

Nationalism is a product of the political history of Europe, which makes the autobiography of nationalism biased.[106] It is important for the limits of this understanding to be recognized, but the consequences of the West-centered biases will be left to another time, place and writer to dwell into deeper.[107]

Nation-states can be understood as political units or polities, which link sovereignty to the culture.[108] In the liberal nation-states of today, the culture of the dominant nation, the major ethnic group of the state, is predominantly derived from the experiences and understandings of the dominant national community inside of the state.[109] This means that there is often only little room for *de facto* multiethnic mix of people inside of nation-states. This again raises several issues from exclusion inside of the state to the independence efforts in many parts of the world: Catalonia in Spain, Kurdistan in Turkey and the Kashmir region in India, to name a few examples in addition to the case example of this research, the Western Sahara conflict.

In order to dissect the concept of a nation-state itself into smaller parts, the concept of a *nation* can be scrutinized for example through the concept of national character. National character is the complex of physical and mental characteristics that distinguish one nation from another and change and evolve with time.[110] A state, on the other hand, can be classified in here as a geopolitical entity, where membership is based on shared civic values and gained through citizenship.[111] Nations, similar to individuals, are thought to have identities, usually based on the national characters, either mythical or really somehow at least partly observable in the physical and in the social reality.

Thus, a national identity exists simultaneously on two different levels: (1) in the individuals understanding of themselves as national actors, and (2) in the collective identity in relation to others of the same kind, of the same nation.[112] Ulrike and Kloke-Lesch[113] crystallize the purpose of the national identity well: "The development of a

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[106] Chatterjee, 1996, pp. 215–217.
[107] Look for example Chatterjee, 1996.
[108] Gellner 1996, p. 98.
[109] Nimni 2007, p. 348.
[110] Bauer 1996, p. 40.
[111] Verdugo and Milne 2016, p. 3.
[112] Verdery 1996, p. 229.
[113] Ulrike & Kloke-Lesch 2005, p. 139.

national identity helps the population to grow together into a collective community of will." Whoever then belongs to this 'community of will' can be determined on the basis of origin, citizenship, language or other determinants. Whatever the case is, national identity and development of common political will are frequently negotiated through the institutional shaping of nation and conflicts of social and political life.[114] A community of will can gain or lose members via immigration, demographic shifts or in the worst case, in the battlefield of violent conflicts. Demographic changes in states raise questions about national identity and belonging and often lead to concerns among the "native population" about the future of their society.[115] Naturally, a community or state can be more or less inclusive towards its new members, as is proved from the example of the differences between different European countries regarding their current refugee and migration policies.

3.1. Nation-Building and State-Building

Nation-building processes can be directed either from the inside or the outside of a state. However, it is easy to draw conclusions on which one of these directions is more efficient, ethical and sustainable. Some of the examples in modern history, such as the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, show us, what kind of situation an outside manufactured nation- or state-building process efforts with rapid regime changes and power vacuums can create. In the case of the Western Sahara conflict, the concept of nation-building could be discussed from various point of views. Nevertheless, what is most interesting regarding he scope of this research, is the Polisario Front led nation-building processes of the Sahrawi people. In order to highlight the differences between nation-building processes and the more structural toolkit of state-building, also the concept of state-building will be briefly introduced.

The term 'nation-building' was already an important concept in the 1950s and 1960s, but it only got more wind under its wings after the end of the Cold War, when the increase of regional and intrastate conflicts followed the shattered power order of 1991. In the international arenas, nation-building is often discussed as a preventive political option to

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[114] Ulrike and Kloke-Lesch 2005, p. 140.
[115] Verdugo and Milne 2016, p. 11.

avoid social fragmentation, as an alternative for military intervention or as an element of constructing policies after a conflict.[116] However, this understanding, close to the concept of state-building, will not be the focus of this thesis. In the reality of states, nation-building is *a part of what states do internally.* The 'doing' of nation-building is concretized both in the institutional and the cultural level of human interaction, such as in the constitution, state institutions and national songs and holidays. On the level of international politics, nation-building is something more strategical. *It is a tool that can be used externally*. In addition to this internal and international differentiation, developing the writings of Hippler, nation-building can be defined in at least two ways: 1) Nation-building as a process of political and social development, which together form a common society within the structure of a nation-state (*analytical nation-building*) or 2) nation-building as a political strategy or objective, strived from either within a state or from outside its borders (*normative nation-building*).[117]

The nation-building process involves creation of new structures and replacement of both old social and political ones. As a result, it is always inseparably connected with the redistribution of power.[118] Those in power will surely resist the transformation – the ones having power are never too keen to give it to a new pair of hands. According to Pfaff-Czarnecka[119], countries go through three stages in their process of nation-building. The desirable, but not necessarily realistic, linear process develops from (1) ethnically complex and hierarchically organized societies inside of states to (2) nations valuing cultural similarity in nation-states to (3) the pluralistic-egalitarian models, which form national unity, but nevertheless recognizes and values diversity. Like many other countries with problems of cultural and minority exclusion, Morocco and the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic seem both to be on the "level 2" of the process, with the SADR closer to the transition from the phase one to the phase two. However, it is hard to find examples from countries that would perfectly fit in to the third category of the pluralistic-egalitarian model, if there even are any.

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[116] Hippler 2005, pp. 3–4.
[117] Ibid, pp. 6–7.
[118] Ibid, p. 12.
[119] Czarnecka 2005, p. 29.

Nation-building needs sociocultural structuring and a process which will ideally lead to a shared national identity, values and goals. What is more important than the similarity of these values and goals is the inclusivity and recognition of differences inside of the shared identity.[120] It is possible to argue, that a certain degree of confessed values and goals or at least a shared myth of these is important, but the *diversity of values and goals is an undeniable feature of every (democratic) nation-state*. A common goal could be existing as a nation, but that is where shared goals of a nation-state often end.

However, it is not rare to talk about the values of a region or a state to characterize the culture and socio-political orientation of it, but if we would critically narrow down the scope of the examination to the level of states, the abstract character of the shared values becomes more visible. To simply put; we can talk in general terms about how Americans value freedom and Japanese modesty, but we cannot argue that these values would form the core of these nations – or that every Japanese values modesty more than freedom and every American values freedom over modesty.

In order to illustrate the concepts of analytical and normative nation-building more clearly, the nation-building processes of the actors in the Western Sahara conflict will be examined next. In the context of the conflict, the concept of nation-building can actually be examined from four different perspectives. First, it can be seen as a strategy of the West to keep Morocco stable due to the economic and political interests of its allies. Second, it could be examined via the support of Algeria to the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic to establish a functioning state within the Western Sahara. Third, the concept could be scrutinized as an attempt of Morocco to unify the Western Sahara with the other regions in Morocco through the process of *morocanisation* and regional investments. Fourth, it could be seen as an political objective of the Polisario Front process in order to strengthen the political system of the SADR and gain international legitimacy to the independence of it. Due to the restrictions of the scope of the research, only the two latter examples of a nation-building process in the context of the Western Sahara conflict will be discussed in greater detail.

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[120] Hippler 2005, p. 9.

Nation-building process has the prerequisites to be successful in the long run only if the basis of the process roots from an unifying ideology, which in the two examples shortly introduced are both different variations of nationalism.[121] In Moroccan efforts in keeping the Western Sahara region, the ideology lies on the concept of greater Morocco. Furthermore, it lies in the identity of being a Moroccan, which is at its core believed to be something different from being an Algerian, a Mauritanian, a Spanish and certainly something else than being a citizen of the SADR. On the other hand, on the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic side, the ideological foundation comes from the generally accepted legal principle of self-determination of a nation and the ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity of being a Sahrawi, which is something different than being a Moroccan.

The aim to keep Morocco as stable as possible partly explains the lack of initiative for many Western countries to take too strong stands against the country. A calm and stable, regionally unified Morocco with managed marginal regional conflict serves the interests of her allies best, mainly the United States and France. In addition to the economic incentives, Morocco is an important partner in the areas of countering extremist violence and radicalization, as well as a gate keeper of closed doors between the continents of Africa and Europe from refugees hoping to get inside of the European Union.[122] The wider the process of *moroccanization* in the regions is, the smaller the breathing space for the Sahrawi culture and national identity gets. Nevertheless, as long as the primary identity of the Sahrawi people and other ethnic minorities in Morocco lies within the ethnic group with weaker national identity of being Moroccan, the nation-state will run the risk of being destabilized.[123]

Morocco clearly operates within the scope of analytical nation-building, as it is already an established nation-state. The state has built strong Moroccan nationalism through long historical roots but also with the help of wide personal cult behind the king. The current King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, has ruled the country since 1999 and is highly popular

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[121] Hippler 2005, pp. 7–8.
[122] The overseas territories Ceuta and Melilla of Spain strengthen the geographical and political link between the EU and Morocco. Thousands of refugees and immigrants are regularly trying to get to the terrain of Spain with various means. In 2017 the pressure was especially high, when thousands of refugees tried to get over the fences which mark the borders of Spain in the North of Morocco. The movement has not stopped: in January, over 200 migrants stormed to Melilla, Spain (The New Arab 2018).
[123] Hippler 2005, p. 8.

throughout the country. What adds up to his popularity, is that he is believed to have descented from the prophet Mohammed of Islam himself, which makes him simultaneously the legitimate ruler of the religious elite of the country as well. Political corruption and regional inequalities are real problems, but the king of the country, who is seen to be 'the protecting father' of the country is seldom held responsible. It would therefore seem, that economically growing Morocco has succeeded in the process of nation-building rather well since its independence from colonial France in 1956.

However, the many minorities of the country might not agree. The religious, sexual[124], linguistic and ethnic minorities do not have the same rights in the country as Moroccans, who practice Islam and speak Darija[125]. Some ethnic minorities, in addition to the Sahrawi people, demand wider socio-political rights with more or less secessionist connotations.[126] The objective of Morocco is thereafter to keep the nation as unified as possible with the help of the tools such as military force, strong central government authority, protest containment and investment plans for the economically speaking neglected North and South of the country. Attempts to unify the many ethnicities of the country can be seen to belong to the field of *analytical nation-building*. A unified Morocco is the ultimate political and cultural aim, regardless of the ways the goal is achieved.

The Polisario Front and the SADR build more on the basis of *normative nation-building*, because the structure of a nation-state is an objective, not political reality. One could argue that we cannot speak about nation-building in a context, where there is no unified and completely recognized state. However, it is obvious that the Polisario Front aims at achieving a state, and in order to achieving that aim, it uses the toolkit of normative nation-building. This politico-strategic process of nation-building allows us to examine the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic from the viewpoint of nation-building, regardless of the differing views concerning the status of the Sahrawi people as citizens of a nation.

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[124] Especially the rights of gender and sexual minorities in Morocco are in an alarmingly bad stage. Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Morocco and can be punished with anything from 6 months to 3 years' imprisonment and a fine of 120 to 1,200 dirhams (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007).

[125] The Moroccan dialect of Arabic, which has influences from the French and Spanish languages.

[126] Ethnically Berber population of the Rif region in North Morocco has felt neglected by the central government for years. Large demonstrations have taken place in the North, having hundreds arrested after the protesters claimed for their socio-economic rights, better education opportunities and hospitals to be established in the region. However, from the many ethnic minorities in Morocco the Sahrawi people of the Western Sahara will be in the focus.

What could be a less contradictory observation, is that the SADR attempts to legitimize the country's status in international arenas, to create a unified nation of Sahrawi refugees and to convince the international community on the necessity of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The objective is backed by the government of Algeria, which is supporting the young (hoping to be) state inside of its own national borders. It would be possible to claim that a nation must have established a steady ground first with the help of normative nation-building process before it can be further developed through social and political reforms, which fall to the side of analytical nation-building.

In addition to the politico-cultural aspects of nation-building, there are practical requirements for the workings of the process. Nation-building cannot efficiently function without national or state infrastructure. The building of a nation needs physical, social and media infrastructure that is accessible to the entire civil society.[127] Furthermore, the national economy, communication, transport and nationwide media channels are crucial in order to establish a national cultural, social and political discourse. In addition to the communication channels and a national economy, a state also needs an effective fiscal system, organized police and legal forces and an administration to govern the different domains.[128] However, it is difficult to build a nationwide infrastructure and administration without a state entity controlling the territory. A nation function best inside of the political entity of a state, which is why the concept of state-building is often discussed beside the concept of nation-building.

State-building often refers to the process of building a state after military intervention or instead of a military intervention. It aims to stabilize potentially or clearly unstable countries, who are at the risk of collapsing into a chaos or internal violent conflict. Both of these cases, led by a military force or with more subtle means, state-building can be characterized to be more or less interventionist in nature.[129] Even though state-building usually refers to as something done by the outside powers of a country, in this context state-building is seen more as a structured framework for nation-building – processes that can go hand in hand with each other in exceptional contexts as the Western Sahara

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[127] Ulrike and Kloke-Lesch 2005, p. 140.
[128] Hippler 2005, p. 9.
[129] Sutter 2009, p. 8.

conflict. The objective of the Polisario Front is *to build a nation and to have a state for the nation.*

Some of the components of state-building are relatively easy to obtain from outside, such as help to build functioning and nationwide infrastructure of roads and railways. However, some of the components must come from within a state, as is the case with the ideological basis of a shared national identity.[130] The attempts of Morocco to highlight the support of Algeria for the SADR strives to make the demands of the Sahrawi less legitimate. If the dispute was only about regional dominance between Morocco and Algeria, such thing as 'the voice of the Sahrawis' would not exist to be taken into consideration. Even though we should acknowledge the importance of the Algeria's support for the Polisario in the military and economic aspects, it is important to point out the identity of being a Sahrawi or not is close to impossible to be artificially manufactured from the outside.

Nevertheless, strong national infrastructure, media network and shared culture are not all there is in a state. To be fully considered as an independent state, a state requires international recognition of other states, which ultimately often happens through admission to the United Nations. In other words, "each nation must make 'sense' to the world around it."[131] The questions of political recognition are important for the evaluation of the aims and demands of the ethnic and national minorities as well.[132] Political recognition should first be established among the members of the national community, secondly by the surrounding nations and lastly in the eyes of the international community. There are many political entities which get stuck on the first or second levels, having legitimacy among its own, but not being credible in the eyes of most of the countries or nations around the world. That is, what the Polisario Front is currently struggling with: not being accepted as a state in the eyes of Morocco, many other states and the wider international community.

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[130] Hippler 2005, p. 9.
[131] Ulrike and Kloke-Lesch 2005, p. 141.
[132] Nimni 2007, p. 351.

3.2.   *Nationalism and National Identity*

As stated before, nation-building needs an ideological basis that gives it legitimacy and fuel, which is often nationalism. A nation links a state to its subjects and distinguishes them from the subjects of other states.[133] A crucial part of nationalism is on some level the idea of shared national identity, and the relationship individuals have to their own nation. The concepts of nationalism and national identity are interconnected and they are therefore analyzed in parallel to each other in this following chapter.

First of all it is useful to notice, that it is easy to take nationalism for granted, both in the everyday life of international and national politics. We tend to notice its existence only when it triggers social conflicts or manifests itself in a violent manner. However, it has been and is there all along, throughout the relatively short history of nation-states. Nationalism has its role in the foundation of the daily working mechanisms of nation-states – in the language people speak, in the passport they carry and in the way they look and understand history. Nationalism is the basis for collective identity and to the form of a nation-state, which has dominated for over than the last 200 years.[134]

Before the modern era, the term 'nation' meant people who shared culture and a place of birth. The earliest examples of modern nationalism have been identified from the tensions that led to the English Civil War, in the Latin American independence movement and in the French Revolution. By the end of the eighteenth century and the French Revolution in 1789, the discursive formation of nationalism was already prospering.[135] As often is the case with the history of concepts in social reality, the history of nationalism can be explored from various points of views. More than from the changes of rule in states, Bauer[136] seeks explanations from the merge of modern capitalism, which has produced national culture for all people. The change has taken place by uprooting the population from the agricultural lifestyle and redirecting them by place and profession towards the

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[133] Verdery 1996, p. 227.
[134] Calhoun 1997, pp. 1–3.
[135] Ibid, p. 9.
[136] Bauer 1996, p. 46.

formation of modern classes and professions. Modern national culture is achieved through democracy, education, military service and equal suffrage.[137] Also Benedict Anderson argues that the first nation-states in Europe were founded and based around their national print languages, because before that nation-wide communication was not possible and accessible for most of the citizens.[138]

Anderson must be among the most cited authors in research on nationalism. He has defined nations as 'imagined communities' which describe the non-tangible nature of social communities and relations well: they are there, because they are believed to be there. Anderson writes, that a nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"[139]. However, members of the community are not seen only in relation to the other members of the community, but also to the others in different communities. The knowledge of life outside of the nation's boundaries is the 'precondition of all national consciousness.[140] Derichs strengthens the understanding of nations as something invented, not formulated on the basis of the real world or needs, as she writes:

> "A nation emerges as a conceived community irrationally, as it were, since 'reason' would suggest that each member of society should look after him or herself and accept an individual or…particular (cultural, religious, ethnic, social) identity."[141]

Nationalism can be seen to have three different dimensions. First, nationalism can be understood as a *discourse,* which refers to the production process of cultural understanding and the framing of the world through the concepts of nationalism and national identity. Second, nationalism can be looked upon as a *project*, which refers to social movements and policies through which people try to advance their collective interests, for example in the sector of foreign policy. Third, nationalism can be conceptualized as *evaluation*, when political ideologies claim superiority of one nation

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[137] For more comprehensive historical outline see for example Calhoun 1997 or Anderson 1991.
[138] Verdugo and Milne 2016, p. 4.
[139] Andersson 1991, p. 6-7.
[140] Bauer, 1996, p. 61.
[141] Derichs 2005, p. 49.

over the others.[142] National identification can build self-esteem: citizens feel good about themselves and about their relation to the society, when they belong to a nationality they consider superior to others.[143]

Even though nationalism is based on a shared idea of a shared community, the individual aspect of it is equally important. The discourse of nations is colored in terms of identification and passion, while that of states is analyzed more through the concepts of reason and interests: "Nationalism has emotional power…because it helps us to make who we are."[144] Systems of social classification establish grounds of legitimacy via the categories they create and make the categories seem natural as well as socially real. This makes nations as aspects of political and symbolic order, but also a part of social interaction and feeling.[145] Nationalism is close to every citizen or a member of the group with the help of the individual's experience, while the state is more distant, bureaucratic and far emotionally.

Nationalism lifts its head in the national celebrations of independence days, in the traditional culture preservation efforts and in the violence of radical right-wing activist against immigrants and refugees. Nationalism demands some level of similarity, something shared that everyone can name but cannot grasp on in the physical reality. Even though we can differentiate more and less constructive forms and manifestations of nationalism, all the forms of national identity and loyalty are shaped by the common discourses of nationalism.[146]

Calhoun introduces ten characteristics that are often combined with the rhetoric of a nation: 1) *boundaries* of territory and population; 2) *indivisibility*, seeing the nation as an integral unit; 3) *sovereignty*, usually in the form of a state; 4) *legitimacy* of the government through the will of the people; 5) *participation* in collective affairs 6) *direct membership*

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[142] Calhoun 1997, p. 6.
[143] Lebow 2016, p. 4.
[144] Calhoun 1997, p. 23.
[145] Verdery 1996, p. 226.
[146] Calhoun 1997, p. 3.

to the nation; 7) *shared culture* with some combination of language, beliefs and values; 8) *shared history*; 9) *common descent* and 10) *relations to a territory*.[147] In different nations different points are more important than others and in all nations all of the introduced aspects can not necessarily be found. In the case of the Sahrawi people, the aspects of shared culture and history, mostly common descent and genetic origin, relation to the Western Sahara territory, the indivisibility and legitimacy are the most apparent. However, even though the combination of these elements often varies in different states, some of the relationships in nations cannot be replaced. A 'memory' of the common past or history, a density of linguistic and cultural ties enabling social communication and the conception of the equality for all members of the same national group are close to essential ones.[148]

National and abstract boundaries separate an inside from an outside and set lines to diversity and difference. That makes them closely linked to the construction, production and reproduction of identities and the dichotomies of 'us' versus 'them'[149] In the case of nation-sates, formulating the recipe of national identity is the task of the government inside of the state institution. State policies, which regulate the behavior of people residing in a country have effects in the national identity. Especially policies concerning immigration, annexing or colonizing another country, and policies regarding the citizenship are good examples of the interconnectedness of national identity and the possibility of a state to govern the terms of the inclusion.[150]

The government of a state has the ways and the infrastructure to spread the 'national' idea among its citizens via the administrative machinery and mass media.[151] Moreover, national symbols, songs, flags and national holidays combine culture to the idea of shared national identity. If the security, economic and social policy domains are functioning well for everyone, national cohesion is stronger and the acceptance of the national identity become easier to accept.[152] On the other side of the coin, if the development of the

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[147] Calhoun 1997, p. 4–5.
[148] Hroch 1996, p. 79.
[149] Buckley-Zistel 2006, p. 5.
[150] Verdugo and Milne 2016, p. 13.
[151] Derichs 2005, p. 42.
[152] Ibid, pp. 44–47.

economy has stagnated or taken steps back, it can create mistrust towards the leaders of the country and question the pride people have for their national identity.[153] For strong national identity the citizens of the nation must feel they are getting something back from the loyalty they give.

National identity is an 'ideal type' of concept and describes better the world of theory than the world of reality. In other words, although there are certain generalizable features between different national identity processes, the empirical study of national identities always has to take into account the peculiar contextual, cultural and historical factors that affect to the actual formation of the national identity and its meanings. Regardless of the many debates over the term, different scholars usually agree that a national identity is a sense of belonging to a nation or a state, which is affected by various factors, such as relational, normative, contextual and historical factors. In short, national identity is a sense of belonging to a geopolitical entity, a state.[154]

3.3. Identity Formation

Identity and kindred terms in other languages have a long history as one of the core concepts in Western philosophy, dating back from the Greeks to the modern political and social sciences. The term was originally borrowed from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis to the social sciences and started gaining ground in the 1960s in the United States. Responding strongly to the rise of individualism and ethnic movements demanding their rights, the use of the term 'identity' spread quickly to the domains of journalism, academia and political analysis.[155] Today, the use of the term has prospered in the fields from academia to practice, and even work on gender, ethnicity, immigration, culture, race and religion have felt the need to address the question of identity.[156]

Identities are shaped, reproduced and shifted with time, context and place. A particular identity must be seen as coined from a particular time and place, not as something stable

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[153] Verdugo and Milne 2016, p. 10.
[154] Ibid, p. 2.
[155] Brubaker and Cooper 2000, pp. 2–3.
[156] Ibid, p. 4.

and unchangeable. It is never everywhere the same, but it is nonetheless there.[157] A few key uses of the term of *identity* can be identified, even though the use shifts from the research field and scope of the analysis. Identity can be understood as 1) a basis for socially or politically motivated action, differentiated from shared interests; 2) a collective denominator of the similarity of the members of a group, which can be understood objectively or subjectively; 3) a core understanding of a social being in comparison to other social beings; 4) an end product of social or political action, processual development of collective self-understanding; 5) the multiple, fluctuating and unstable "self", used especially in the post-structuralism, post-modernism and ethnicity literature.[158] Reading the list makes it clear, that the term has a lot of work to do and many different meanings to cover. Buckley-Zistel argues, that people need a sense of identity and belonging, a feeling of limits and boundaries, not because of 'human nature' or needs, but because without identities sociality would be impossible.[159] Shared concepts, meanings and understandings 'language games' are needed for interaction to be meaningful.

Some constructivists in the field do not claim the 'identity talk' as theirs. Brubaker and Cooper argue that the use of the word 'identity' has gone too far. The fussiness of the concept, identity being never the same everywhere and moving together with time and place, make it a problematic concept for the field of social sciences. 'Identity' easily means either too much, if we understand it in a strong sense, and too little, if we understand it in a weak sense. The constructivist understanding of identity as something constructed, fluid and multiple sets challenges to talk about identities at all.[160] What we call identities are really combinations of multiple self-identifications, which arise from various sources and have unpredictable behavioral consequences.[161]

However, we can argue that most of the terms in social sciences, especially in the ontological understanding of constructivism, is trying to grasp on something fluid and constructed. The ever changing social reality does not prevent us on trying to make imperfect models from it, no matter how constructed the reality is. We have to have

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[157] Buckley-Zistel 2006, p. 17.
[158] Brubaker and Cooper 2000, pp. 6–8.
[159] Buckley-Zistel 2006, p. 8.
[160] Brubaker and Cooper 2000, p. 1.
[161] Lebow 2016, p. 7.

terminology, which is broad at its spectrum, if the goal is not to separate different domains of social sciences even further away from each other. The much echoing demand of multidisciplinary approaches on the staircases of peace and conflict research is possible only if the shared concepts can be used effectively and broadly in the research field.

Surely, the broadness of the term 'identity' can be criticized – only with genuine critique we can see the true explanatory power of different concepts. In Brubaker and Coopers view, the main issue lies on the use of the term as both in the categories of practice and in the categories of analysis.[162] We should try to avoid accidentally reproducing meanings by taking them for granted and by adopting terms of practice as terms of analysis:

> "Just as one can analyze 'nation-talk' and nationalist politics without positing the existence of 'nations'…one can analyze 'identity-talk' and identity politics without, as analysts, positing the existence of 'identities'."[163]

Not to be guilty for criticizing without a clear alternative, seven terms are introduced to replace the use of the word 'identity' in different contexts: identification, categorization, self-understanding, social location, commonality, connectedness and groupness. As is the case with identity, how one identifies oneself may vary greatly with different time, context and place. The state is a strong identifier, not because of its capability to create identities, but because it has the infrastructure to impose the social categories with administration and cultural influence. Categorization require identifying yourself or someone fit to a certain description or a specific social category such as 'a feminist', 'a conservative' or 'a vegetarian'.

The writers argue that self-understanding is a dispositional term similar to "situated subjectivity", describing one's own understanding of who she or he is, strongly linked to one's social location. The experience of belonging to a special group with the feeling of solidarity and oneness with other group members and the different levels of the felt solidarity can be described through terms of commonality, connectedness and groupness. Strong sense of groupness can have its foundation on commonality and a feeling of belonging together with a minimal level of connectedness, for example with entities as

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[162] Brubaker and Coopers 2000, p. 2.
[163] Ibid, p. 5.

'nations'.[164] Even though these suggested terms seem to succeed in grasping on the many meanings identity is used referring to, changing the terms in the field would need a lot of effort and development further. Identity as a concept is so strongly rooted into the vocabulary in the fields of international relations and peace and conflict research and most of the researchers in these fields seem to acknowledge its usefulness.

3.4. *From Nation-State Ideals to More Autonomy*

It is easy to state that nation-states have never been unproblematic entities in the short but flourishing history of the concept. Nation-states have provided a spark for violent conflicts throughout world history, whether the case has been about independence efforts or the repression of a religious, ethnic or lingual minority to name just a few examples. The claim for the state structure of a nation has succeeded in cases such as Israel and (more or less with) Kosovo, but remains as an unfulfilled objective in other cases, like the Sahrawis, the Kurds and the Palestinians. The political problems and human rights violations of ethnic minorities in most nation-states have been mostly dealt with either democratic representation, political repression or violent conflict. There is no country in the whole wide world, who could pride oneself upon respecting the political rights of the minorities fully throughout all of its history.

As a concept, multiculturalism is respected only in the third state of nation-building previously introduced, which not only requires creating a national unity, but also *both recognizing and accepting diversity*.[165] It seems clear that there are not too many countries which would deserve a place on that list. However, some examples of the most inclusive third level nation-building can be found from states such as Sweden, Canada and Indonesia. Nevertheless it seems, that no matter how the representational and legal questions in different countries are dealt with, there are no nation-building processes without some degree of political or legal mess.

One could argue that the defenders of traditional liberal nationalism ignore the contradiction of shared national culture as supporting the dominancy of one cultural

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[164] Brubaker and Coopers 2000, pp. 14–21.
[165] Pfaff-Czarnecka 2005, p. 29.

group at the expense of the other. The reasoning behind the ignorance is clear. If liberal nationalists argue that it is desirable for states to be always specifically nation-states, multinational states face two unattractive options: to split the country along national division or to allow the larger national group to assimilate the smaller ones to the majority culture.[166] In the context of the Western Sahara conflict, the former is what the Polisario Front is aiming for and the latter is what Morocco is currently doing.

Both strategies have been equally applied around the world with more or less catastrophic results. National minorities can only secure the fulfilling of their cultural needs if they gain power in the legislative and administrative domains of a state. They are systematically excluded from the core of power because they are minorities.[167] The majority of current nation-states are ethnically multination states that endorse the legal, political and cultural customs of dominant nations.[168] In order to answer to this demand created by a contradiction, the two following parts present briefly different alternatives for traditional nation-states: federalism and autonomy, which are highly used ways to overcome the 'tyranny of the majority' and a National-Cultural Autonomy Model, which remains less addressed, but highlights the fact that there are options, which would require further exploring and developing in the scheme of nationalism research.

According to recent research in the field of nationalism studies, federalist structures are regarded as the best institutional option to transform violent ethnic conflicts into peaceful ones.[169] What is intriguing in the case example of the Western Sahara conflict, is that the asymmetric federalist systems are more frequently designed to overcome ethnic conflicts than symmetric ones.[170] Examples of asymmetrical federation systems can be found from Russia, Spain, Italy, India and Iraq for example. At its best, the federal model strengthens democratic participation, the sharing of sovereignty, the principle of subsidiarity, the flexibility of the decision-making and the decentralization of power. Moreover, there is more room for the objectives of minorities to be articulated and realized.

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[166] Kymlicka and Straehle, 1999, p. 76.
[167] Nimni 2007, p. 349.
[168] Ibid, p. 351.
[169] See further for example Pfaff-Czarnecka 2005, p. 36.
[170] Pfaff-Czarnecka 2005, p. 36.

Federalist structure or autonomy for the Western Sahara has been presented as one of the options in the peace negotiation process, but the proposition has faced resistance especially from the sides of the Polisario Front and Algeria. Understandably, once they had agreed on the referendum for independence in 1991 in the UN sponsored plan, it is hard to let the ultimate self-determination ideal of the national sovereignty go. The fear of the situation continuing as it is with a superficial stamp of autonomy can be found and recognized from the Sahrawi side. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of Morocco, the independence of the region is not even a real option. After decades of firm stances, it is hard to agree to compromise, because the stakes of making a compromise is constantly getting bigger in both sides.

Ethnic and other minorities, who are unhappy with the current state of power dynamics in nation-states are not hard to find. One manifestation of this is dissatisfied minorities over the world demanding a state of their own in order to become a majority in their own nation-state. Consequently, many modern nation-states are being threatened with separation by the very same principle that sustains their claim to independent existence in the first place.[171] The objective of the National-Cultural Autonomy (NCA) model is to structure democratic representation in societies that are deeply divided on ethnic grounds.[172] The objective fits well to the analysis of the Sahrawis in and outside of the borders of Morocco. The NCA model is presented here as a case example of understanding cultural autonomy and simultaneously thinking outside of the nation-state and federal structure boxes.

The original National-Cultural Autonomy model was already introduced in 1899 by Renner's article titled 'State and Nation' as an alternative to protracted intrastate ethnic conflicts. The objective of the model was to contain secessionism with the constitutionally guaranteed collective rights, wide cultural autonomy and cultural self-determination for the national and ethnic minorities of a country. The basis of the model is based on the 'personality principle'. The idea that communities are organized as sovereign collectivities no matter of their actual location in the multinational state (or outside of it). The structure is labelled as 'personality principle' because it refers to the widest personal

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[171] Nimni 2007, p. 349.
[172] Ibid, p. 357.

choice of its members of belonging to the community. It is compared with the 'territorial principle' of a nation-state with a limited geographical territory: "(T)he personality principle… would separate the question of governance from the issue of protecting national and cultural identities, just as religious freedom separated church from the state."[173]

Simply put, cultural autonomy is what many cultural or ethnic minorities all over the world dream of, but what the central governments of many countries are not willing to give to them. To name a few, we can find examples from the Saami people in Scandinavia, from the Inuit's in Canada or from the San people of Southern Africa. Even though the Sahrawi people are demanding more than barely cultural autonomy, NCA might provide a model which would be acceptable to Morocco and sufficient to the divided nation to sustain their culture and the still partly existing nomadic way of life of the Sahrawi people. Many of the Sahrawis' demands of today concern their socio-economic rights, equal opportunities for education and descent level of income. The most challenging political stalemate originates from the requirement of the Sahrawis political representatives, the Polisario Front's, demand for the self-determination process of the nation via referendum.

Based on the NCA model, all citizens would declare their nationality when they have reached the age of adulthood and gain socio-political rights, such as the right to vote consequently. The members of the national communities, regardless of their physical territorial location, would form a public association which would have sovereignty over all national-cultural affairs. Nimni points out the fact that the "national territorial boundaries always create minorities and propensities for ethnic discrimination".[174] The principle of equal representation via individual equality[175] threatens the equally important need for the recognition of diversity.

The acceptance of diversity and multiculturalism is still lacking from many today's modern liberal democracies. The NCA model provides an example of a non-secessionist political structure for cultural autonomy, which is based on the individuals will to belong,

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[173] Nimni 2007, p. 345–346.
[174] Ibid, p. 347.
[175] In equality and human rights debates individual equality is unfortunately often misunderstood as a synonym for sameness, which it is not.

on the democracy of the ruling method, on an equal distribution of resources and on the basis that ethnic and national communities can be organized as autonomous units in multinational states.[176] It is one prominent example on how multinational states could remain their existence without being divided into many smaller countries.[177]

3.5.   Sahrawi Nationalism and Distant Nation-Building

Due to the fact that the Sahrawi people are living as a divided nation, the formulation of a coherent nationalistic identity would intuitively seem to be close to impossible. Most of the Sahrawis live in the refugee camps of Algeria, while some have been subjected to the policy of *morocanization* in Western Sahara and a small population, mainly following the nomadic lifestyle in the desert, lives in the other side of the wall. The policy of Moroccans moving to Western Sahara has shifted the ethnic composition of the territory in the favor of Morocco, marginalizing the Sahrawi to become a minority in their previously owned land. The processes of *moroccanization* is suppressing the Sahrawi culture in the area governed by Morocco, which includes the banning of a Sahrawi dialect *Hassaniya* and any display of Sahrawi culture and symbols, encouraging the usage of Moroccan dialect *Darija* in the institutions and education.[178] This shift in the ethnic mix does not encourage Sahrawis to move back from the Algerian refugee camps, where the temporarily intended status of a refugee has become the norm.[179]

As the political leaders of the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic, the Polisario Front need to build its nation-state mostly from a distance. The geographical area which the Republic strives to control is situated far from the state institutions in exile, which are governed from the refugee settlements of Tinduf in Algeria. The headquarters of the theoretical country are physically situated almost 50 kilometers south from the Algeria's military base Tindouf, in a small town called Rabouni.[180] The distance from Tindouf to the capital of Western Sahara, to Laayoune (لعيون Al-ʿAyyūn), is approximately 500 kilometers.

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[176] Nimni 2007, p. 354.
[177] More broad introduction to the NCA model and its critics on Ephraim Nimni (2004), *National-Cultural Autonomy and Its Contemporary Critics*.
[178] Murphy and Omar 2013, p. 354.
[179] Martin 2017, p. 35.
[180] Conrad 2014.

In order to describe the peculiar status of the Sahrawi nation and distant nation-building led by Polisario regarding 'their own' Sahrawi nation, the term *distant nation-building* will be used. Distant nation-building refers to nation-building in both the strategic and normative sense, which is manifested from a geographical distance via political local activism, telephone and face-to-face communication, traditional state media and social media.

Since the 1,559 kilometer-long borderline between Morocco and Algeria has been closed since 1994, physical access to the region from Tindouf to the region of Western Sahara is not possible by foot. Even without the challenges to cross the borderline from Morocco to Algeria, the many minefields alongside the Berm wall keep anyone out who Morocco is not willing to welcome to the Moroccan terrain. Among the most secure defensive walls worldwide, the berm consists of almost 10-foot-high walls, electric fences, barbed wire and soldiers surrounded by what is believed to be the world's longest continuous minefield.[181] Landmines and other explosive remnants of war have not only endangered the lives of local populations and their livestock, but also posed additional threats to the UN military and international personnel, [182] who are monitoring the ceasefire and providing logistical support to the area.[183] It is safe to conclude, that there is no such thing as free movement from or to the region of Western Sahara.

With the referendum on independence stumbling on to the definition of who is considered to be 'a Sahrawi', the national identity label has been a subject to vast political contention. In Arabic, the term origins from the word 'sahra', which refers to an inhabitant of the desert. The politicization of the term emerged at the end of the Spanish presence in the region and was mobilized and monopolized by the Polisario Front in the 1970s. Polisario used the label as a political unifier for the many tribes moving around the region. This tribal identification being the basis for the eligibility to vote in the referendum makes the definition politically and legally important.[184] Within the complexities of descent, regional boundaries and ethnicities, the most generally understood, pragmatic definition of

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[181] Swenson 2014.

[182] In February 2008, a mine action program was established called the MACC (Mine Action Coordination Center) inside of the MINURSO to support the mandate in ceasefire monitoring with reducing the threat of mines and other explosives devices.

[183] UNMAS 2018.

[184] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 8.

Sahrawis is that they are: "the Hassaniyyah-speaking peoples who claim membership among at least one of the social groupings found in and around the area now known as Western Sahara."[185]

One of the most distinctive features of the Sahrawis is the nomadic way of living. Nomads live in different locations, moving from one place to another when the water resources and food for the animals run out. The Berm and the division of the Western Sahara into two has erupted the possibilities of the free movement of people, endangering their traditional nomadic way of life. The compaction to one village or center of habitation in the refugee camps does not fit for all. There is a tendency of the Sahrawi people moving away from the administrative core of the camps to enforce their independence and privacy from Polisario and other institutional structures, such as the international agencies.[186]

Without having direct physical access to the region, media and other communication channels gain special importance. The Sahara Press Service was established in 1999 "to publicize the facts and developments on the question of Western Sahara". The content in the internet can be read today in five different languages: Arabic, Spanish, French, English and Russian.[187] The language variations demonstrate the fact that the Sahrawi news are not only meant for the 'citizens' of the SADR, but for the international community as well. In addition to the official Press Service, the Saharawi Journalists and Writers Union [UPES] has its own page, where the content is currently only available in Arabic.[188] On Facebook, the non-official site of the 'Sahrawi Democratic Republic' page has 18,759 likes. The site seems, once again, to be targeted first of all at the international supporters of the independence movement, as most of the posts are in English with a few sentences in Spanish, French and Arabic every now and then. The official state television channel RASD TV uses Spanish and Arabic in their website, which refers to the fact of being made for the Sahrawi by the Sahrawi.[189]

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[185] Zunes & Mundy 2010, p. 93.
[186] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011, p. 28.
[187] Sahara Press Service 2018.
[188] UPES 2018.
[189] RASD TV 2018.

The information war is tangible between the conflicting parties, as with every site the SADR or Polisario produces, there is a Moroccan alternative. For example the "Polisario Confidental" website, which works in English, French and Spanish, is described to have the objective 'to provide information on the Cold War between Algeria and the Kingdom of Morocco, in a context where alliances are disrupted and balances are reversed around energy interests (Algerian side) and political interests (Moroccan side).' Contrary to its name, the site is clearly promoting the Moroccan side of understanding, even though the side is allegedly run by a Sahrawi journalist living in Spain. [190] After reading just few headlines on the various websites it is possible to have a good guess, what are the real interests behind providing the information – or at least, what is their stand in the information war.

Even though the amount of face-to-face interactions with the Sahrawis living in different parts of Algeria, Mauritania and Western Sahara is far from habitual, families have been able to stay in contact to some degree with the help of the UN. During the war many families were divided, as some families escaped to Algeria while others stayed on the Moroccan governed side. The UNHCR has created a confidence-building measures programme[191] in the region in order to facilitate communication between the Saharawi refugees in the camps and their families in the Western Sahara territory. Family visits and cultural seminars have been the two main components of the plan. The amount of families in the program is vast: between 2004 and 2012 the total amount of people registered was 48,252.[192] Between 2004 and 2014, over 20,000 individuals benefited from the program through flights and ferries to the Western Sahara and back. Disagreement between the parties stopped the program in 2014, and the family visits are yet to resume.[193]

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[190] Polisario Confidental 2018.
[191] The UNHCR Confidence Building Measures program in Western Sahara began already in 1998. It was originally a part of the UN Settlement Plan with the aim to support the planned voluntary repatriation of refugees from the Tindouf camps to take part in the referendum. However, due to the political and practical disagreements about the program between Polisario and Morocco, the activities began only after 2003. (Jacobsen 2017, 9.)
[192] UNSC Report 2013.
[193] Jacobsen 2017, p. 10.

4. Research Questions, Material and Methodology

The interplay between the research questions, the research material and the methodology of the analysis is in the focus of this chapter. First of all, the research questions formulated on top of the theoretical basis are developed. Second, the research material to which these questions will aim to provide answers to is shortly introduced. After the description of the research material, the methodology of a narrative analysis in the scope of the research will be examined. Finally, one sub-chapter is devoted to the limitations and ethical considerations of the research, as they are a crucial part of every research process. In the field of Peace and Conflict Research, this piece of work can be seen to represent a voice-giving research, because it gives space to the views of the Sahrawis, which are not heard in the mainstream media or policy analyses. It highlights something crucially local and cultural, which is political (and strongly politicized) due to the stagnated nature of the unresolved conflict.

From the basis of the theoretical framework, it is possible to state that Sahrawi nationalism and the feeling of a shared Sahrawi identity is one of the core fuels on the journey of the nation towards the independence of Western Sahara. The stagnated situation evokes a lot of questions to be answered. One of them is that what is the relation of Sahrawi nationalism to the promises of the long-waited self-determination. Has the waiting, the patience, become one of the features of the story of the nation? Even though the state-driven nationalisation process through national narratives strives to be comprehensive and to be adopted by all the citizens of the nation, it rarely is. Thus, are there any competing narratives of the Sahrawis current story or the future of it inside of the movement? Nonetheless if there is, it is another story is it visible in the narrations the Sahrawis present and tell to the external audience.

Moreover, a nation-building process often concerns a region, where the officials and the leadership of the nation have full access to. However, that is not the case of the divided nation of Sahrawis, partly habited in Western Sahara and partly in the refugee camps of Algeria. How distant nation-building is built and enforced in the Western Sahara region, which is dominantly governed by Morocco? From these interesting question marks, the following research questions are formulated: 1) *What kind of narrative lines can be*

identified in the story of the Sahrawi nation directed to the outside audience? and 2) *How the prerequisites for state-building and the nation-building of the SADR is described in the nationalistic narratives of the Sahrawis?*

With posing these and other questions, we must be self-aware of the fact that we approach the conflict from the outside and therefore can have only very limited knowledge of it. Answers to these research questions would surely vary if the region of the Western Sahara would enjoy the freedom of speech and press, or if there would be possibility to interview personally people living in the region of Western Sahara. With the current circumstances we have no other choice but to rely on content that is already 'out there' and pose these research questions in relation to the material at hand. The limitations of the research and the research choices made are discussed in the end of the chapter, after introducing the research material and narrative analysis as the methodological approach of the thesis.

4.1. Research Material

The research material is collected from publicly available documents and other materials (mostly through the internet) that have been released or published after the year 2000. The timeframe has been selected from two reasons: to narrow down the big amount of data and to formulate one possible understanding of the *current* elements in the Sahrawi nationalism and nation-building processes. Via the trend of globalization and technological improvements, the nation-building processes of nations have gotten new tools to function. The social media applications from Whatsapp to Facebook are one of the many manifestations of this change, which are in great importance for the Sahrawis in order to keep in touch with family members and friends on the other side of the Berm. Furthermore, 2000 is the year when the UN negotiator James Baker introduced the first Baker Plan, suggesting that Western Sahara should be accepted as a semi-autonomous part of Morocco. Even though the proposition did not change drastically the path of peace negotiations at the time, it was the first time in the process when referendum of the self-determination of the region was not presented as the sole possible way out of the dispute.

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The research material is categorized with numbers from one to eleven. The first interview is found from the webpages of the African Democratic Institute and is conducted in 2017. Under the headline of #YourOpinionMatters, a 45-years old journalist and a human rights defender, Malainin Lakhal was interviewed. In a ten questions long interview he was asked about issues such as the living circumstances in the Western Sahara, the international power dynamics in the region and the future of the Sahrawi nation. The interviewer was not named, but it seems that the website of the African Democratic Institute is a strong supporter of the independence cause of Western Sahara.[194] The second interview dates back to the year 2012 and was conducted by a journalist, Bhakti Shringarpure, in New York in March, around the Fifty-sixth Commission on the Status of Women held at the headquarters of the United Nations. Shringarpure interviewed Fatma El-Mehdi, the Secretary General of the Sahrawi National Union of Women concerning the status of the conflict, the history of the conflict and the rights of women in the Sahrawi society. The interview can be found from the pages of a news web site maintained by the Arab Studies Institute and called as the "Jadaliyya Web Magazine."[195]

The third interviewee represents the older generation of the Sahrawis. A Sahrawi grandmother called Mbareka is interviewed by Russell Fraser in an interview published on the webpage of the UN organization UNCHCR in the 14th of June 2018.[196] The fourth, very short interview is found from the webpages of the human rights organization Amnesty international, where a famous Sahrawi activist Aminatou Haidar appeals for attention to the Western Sahara conflict after 14 days of hunger strike, protesting her expulsion from Laayoune in Western Sahara by the Moroccan authorities.[197] The fifth interview in order is from the year 2001, when Michael Bhatia managed to have a long interview with a Polisario Front commander, Brahim Bedileh. The interview is the one of the few interviews found which achieves the standards of a research interview from the

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[194] The Western Sahara conflict is described in the website under a headline of "The last Colony of Africa" with the following terms: "The West often portrays itself as the champion of democracy, rule of law and human rights. Yet, when we look at Western Sahara, the hypocrisy and dishonesty in such portrayals are laid bare. The story of Western Sahara – the plight of its people and their struggle for freedom – is willingly and deliberately ignored by Western powers and mainstream international media despite the fact that it is the last colony standing in the African continent." African Democratic Institute, 2017

[195] M2, Shringarpure 2012.

[196] M3, Fraser 2018.

[197] M4, Amnesty 2009.

perspective of the social sciences field and brings therefore important viewpoint also to the more "official" Polisario representatives views on the conflict situation.[198]

The sixth interview is conducted by Nina Nedrebo in December 2010 in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria. Nedrebo had recorded the oral history of five Sahrawi woman, who are called Dajna, Aza, Asisa, Dmaha and Fatimatu. The carefully conducted and formulated interviews provide womens views on their childhood in the Western Sahara, the Sahrawi culture and customs in the camps and the role of the woman in the society.[199] In addition to interviews already in a written form, also video documentaries where used in order to have even wider material basis for the research. First selected documentary is made by Silvia Luzi and Luca Bellino and it is published in 2015. A documentary called "We are Rebels. Western Sahara." has subtitles in English, but the original languages in the interviews used are Hassanyaa and English. The documentary is 26 minutes long and in there the Sahrawi male activists voice is stronger than the females, as only few women are interviewed.[200] Another video form material, which is found and chosen from the platform called the Youtube, is the Vice News produced story line with the title "The Sahara's Forgotten War" from the year 2014. The report from the conflict situation is 36 minutes and 41 seconds long and the languages used are French, Hassaniya and Spanish. The report is a versatile description of the current situation and gives space for Sahrawis both in the camps and in the "occupied" territories of Western Sahara.[201]

The third video form material was produced by Dancing Turtle Films in 2012 and is called "La Badil - Western Sahara documentary". The fifteen minutes long documentary interviews local Sahrawis, who live in the Moroccan controlled side of the Western Sahara. The background of the documentary is described with the following terms: "La Badil (No Other Choice), was filmed undercover in the Moroccan occupied territories of Western Sahara, on the eve of the second anniversary of the 2010 uprisings at Gdeim Izik."[202] Fourth and last video form material used is a short documentary called the "Voices of

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[198] M5, Bhatia 2001.
[199] M6, Nedrebo 2010.
[200] M7, Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[201] M8, Vice News 2014. Under the video a background of the reporting is described with the following terms: "VICE News travels to Western Sahara's occupied and liberated territories, as well as the Polisario-run refugee camps in Algeria, to find out more about one of the world's least reported conflicts."
[202] M9, Dancing Turtle Films 2012.

Western-Sahara" from 2016. The short documentary, filmed by Kristoffer Klunk, is only 2 minutes and 26 seconds long and can be found from Vimeo video service.[203]

In order to get a better grasp of the situation and having power over the questions in the interview situation, one face to face interview was conducted in Helsinki, Finland on the 5th of February 2019. I sat down with Menna Lehbib, the Polisario representative in Finland in the Polisario Front information office and discussed about Polisario as a political movement, about the living circumstances in the refugee camps and about the cultural features of the Sahrawi people. We discussed in English around one hour and she was happy to answer to all my questions, which where fifteen together, starting from her personal background and ending up to the future of the Sahrawi nation. I was welcomed to visit the refugee camps myself, which I will do when I have time and financial resources to do so.

As can be concluded from the introduction of the material used, the linguistic basis of the material is versatile: Hassanya, English, French and Spanish are all used. However, due to my language skills scope having only English and French in use from these four languages, a big part of possible material was excluded from the possible reach. Nevertheless, it is possible to claim that with this restriction the material is best suited for the scope of the research's interest – which is the narrations visible to the outsiders of the Sahrawi community. That is the material, which is directed to the external audience of the international decision-makers, politicians, activists and researchers.

The ways of communication with the internal and external audience vary with languages, tools, objectives and means. One hypothesis, which is difficult to prove, is that the Sahrawi national narrative appears more coherent and structured to the external audience, than it is in the everyday communications between the Polisario Front leaders and its Sahrawi

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[203] The text under the video describes the situation: "40 years have passed since Morocco occupied the territory of Western Sahara, and 23 years since the war ended. The young generation of today has never seen the war, but never experienced a free homeland either. They have ideas and dreams. they have traveled abroad to get an education, and return hoping to be resources for their community. In the camps, however, there are no jobs waiting and they fill their days with different activities irrelevant to their education. In this movie we tell the story of some of the young people living in the camps, waiting for a political solution of the conflict." Klunk 2016.

citizens. Like already stated before, as outsiders of the Sahrawi community, we have access only to the content, which is meant to be seen and made visible.

Furthermore, we would get a different view of the Sahrawi identity and nationalism if we would hear and listen only to the views of internationally oriented and well-educated individuals, who have a strong role in the Sahrawi society as part of the Polisario leadership elite, in comparison to the people following nomadic lifestyle or people working as shop keepers or taxi drivers in the camps. To acquire wider scope of the views on the Sahrawi nationalism and local and distant nation-building processes, interviews from different socio-economic classes was chosen. By giving voice to people from multiple positions it is easier to evaluate whether there are some internal conflicts inside of Sahrawi society – or more accurately, are the political conflicts of society visible to the external audience. Moreover, the material is gathered from the genders recognized in the cultural context of North Africa, both female and male Sahrawi. Approximately half of the interviews are from women and half from men, but the potential differences of the two genders is out of the scopes of this research.

4.2. Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis as a methodological choice lays its foundation on the understanding of constructivism as the ontological basis of the social world. Through speech and writing, we make our thinking tangible to the reality outside of ourselves and by doing that, simultaneously construct and negotiate the nature of reality – both our own and the shared one. As social animals, we have the need to belong to a larger social unit like community or society, which in part explains people's constant effort to negotiate shared meanings and formulate coherent stories with the people surrounding them. People wish to be seen, heard and understood. In order to understand their own lives and what happens around them in the world, actions and events get a meaning via positioning them in a bigger narrative.[204]

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[204] Czarniawska 2004, p. 5.

People plan and justify what they are doing partly in their minds through thoughts, but rather mostly with wording those thoughts in conversations with other people.[205] Explaining actions and reasons of existence happens throughout spoken narratives. In the begin of our lives we are mainly subjects of the stories of our family members and close ones, but with growing grows also our own voice to represent ourselves. Narratives are profoundly political, because these representations of ourselves and others shape the social reality and what is considered to be possible in it.[206]

The origins of narrative analysis can be traced down to literacy theory, ethnography and psychoanalysis, but the method is nowadays used by researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds such as sociology, history and organization management. The combining element of these fields is relying on narratives as a method of research through acknowledging the importance of the interaction of people, who make sense of the complicities of the world through story-telling and narratives. Connections with constructivist turn of social sciences can be drawn, due to the interest to address narratives as constructions of meanings and accepting the fact that there exists multiple perspectives and understandings of reality. Moreover, the belief that the visibility of the most relevant, 'most popular' truths are grounded in social relations and are manifested through people's interaction is a prerequisite for the use of narrative analysis as the method of research.[207]

As we are unlikely to ever be able to grasp 'the truth' objectively, we must settle for examining the truths, in plural – the ways people see, experience and describe the reality: what is true to them. We have to make sense of the events that we partake in, to give them structure and to: "organize human experience into meaningful episodes."[208] The ways these descriptions are made is through spoken and written words that portrays the thinking and feeling in a way understandable to people on the same basis of culture, and in some degrees beyond that, shared by members of humankind. I define here narratives as *structured manifestations of the experienced reality with story form, which are produced individually but shared collectively*. The relationship between language and culture goes

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[205]Czarniawska 2004, p. 4.
[206] Wibben 2010, p. 43.
[207] Slembrouck 2015, pp. 239 – 240.
[208] Wibben 2010, p. 43.

into two ways: language can be thought of as not only a manifestation but also a product of the culture.[209] The story form of the definition refers to the logic of the narration: Narratives are usually logical and well-rehearsed.[210] The attractiveness of a story, a narrative, does not depend on whether it is true or not, but is always negotiated situationally.[211]

There are multiple possible ways to use narrative analysis. The most suited for the aims of this research is to use thematic analysis, where language is viewed as a resource that offers access to meanings, not as a topic of investigation in itself. In the thematic analysis the emphasis is on the content of a text, rather on "'what' is said more than 'how' it is said".[212] In the examinations of nationality and nation-building, narratives are seen as a part of a larger narration (or narrations), which are spoken out by individuals of the collective, but aim to represent the shared story of the nation. Even something shared is first manifested through an individual. Bigger narratives, so called 'grand narratives' restrict which kind of understanding and meaning is reasonable and rational and which is not.[213] *The story of the nation is a grand narrative, where uniformity of description is desired and conflicting information or evidence is likely to be regarded as irrelevant.*

In the analysis the focus will be on the elements that many Sahrawis share and express concerning the nature of Sahrawi nationalism, in part via the individual experiences of individuals and in part through the organization they are representing. In order to understand society, it is essential to discover its most important stories and understand the history behind these stories - especially the ones related to identity-formation of the given society.[214] This is important to note as narratives are not arbitrary but are instead always historically effected and directed and continually framed by traditions and various other contextual factors. In the example of national narrative, it is often constructed with a combination of historical main events, dominant cultural elements and stereotypes of personality traits of a representative of the nationality.

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[209] Minami 2015, p. 76.
[210] Czarniawska 2004, p. 52.
[211] Ibid, p. 8.
[212] Kohler Riessman 2004, p. 707.
[213] Wibben 2010, p. 43.
[214] Czarniawska 2004, p. 5.

Looking into narratives is a way to examine different perspectives on the social reality, which is, the only reality that people share. Shared social reality is limited by the human psychology of the maximum number of people you can meet and remember during your life, by cultural norms and understandings, by the size of the local community you are interacting with and the personal experiences and viewpoints, which have all great impact on how effectively you can practice social interaction and examine critical evaluation towards it. Even though social reality is the closest that we can get to a shared one, it is different depending on the time and place in the history of humankind. Narratives rarely describe or even aim to describe the present. The retrospective dimension is at the core of what narrative is, as narratives always contain looking to the past from the present moment.[215] However, narratives do not represent the past world objectively or describe necessarily how the events were experienced then but are in constant contact with present and the expectations of the future.[216] What fits to the story, is told. What does not fit or support it, is in all silence left out.

4.3.   Considerations and Limitations

In this section, the most apparent ethical considerations and limitations are presented. Most of them connect with my personal relation with the region, which is simultaneously both a possibility and a threat. That being said, the possibility to examine these threats and risks might help to avoid the fall to the most obvious holes in the research ground, which are the lack of objectivity and on the other hand, ignorance towards the real dynamics in the region in research scope. Another part of the limitations gets their basis from the lingual limitations and the geographical distance which I had to find solutions to. Before starting the study, I had more beliefs than knowledge about the Western Sahara region and the conflict. One of them was the ignorance towards the fact that the Sahrawis do not speak French as their second language like Moroccans do, but Spanish. Without the knowhow of Spanish and with only limited knowledge of Arabic, the research material used has been either translated in English or French or conducted with using these two

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[215] Freeman 2015, p. 27.
[216] Kohler Riessman 2004, p. 709.

languages. It is apparent that the usage of mostly translated texts and interviews as research material creates the possibility of small misunderstandings due to the potential of errors in the translation. In order to avoid this setback, I have practiced a great deal of source criticism while choosing the analyzed material.

As was shared in the introduction, two of my personal motivations to do this study on the Western Sahara conflict are both voice-hearing and voice-giving. From the beginning of July to the end of December in 2017, I worked in the Embassy of Finland in Morocco in the capital of the country, in Rabat. After living in Morocco for six months and being constantly subjected to the one-sided information of the conflict, my interest began to grow to see the other side of the coin. However, if even some diplomats, let alone activists, human rights observers and researchers, were not allowed to enter to Western Sahara, it was clear that I had no possibility whatsoever to go there as a western researcher, working in the Embassy of Finland. After finishing my thesis, I wish to be able to see the reality of Western Sahara and the refugee camps in Tindouf with my own eyes.

One potential deficit of the research is my lack of experience from the actual conflict area of Western Sahara and the other is my warm relation to the country and its people of Morocco. Nevertheless, my aim for objectivity and distance from the viewpoint of Morocco can be proven by the simple fact that the viewpoint of Morocco is not from what I am *per se* interested in in the scope of this research; the objective is not to repeat something, which is already very well presented in politics and in people's minds. Both the obstacles of not being able to conduct research interviews in Western Sahara and the imbalance of my time as a researcher used in Morocco are situational limitations that must be taken into consideration. The first one of the two is more concerning, but can hopefully be forgiven due to the limitations regarding Moroccan law, the power of Morocco in relation to its Embassies in Rabat, financial and time resources and safety of the researcher.

Scrutinizing characteristics of a party in a conflict from cultural and geographical distance has many challenges and questions to be addressed. First of all, it is impossible to *know* how identity and nationality are experienced and felt in the hearts and minds of the Sahrawi people - would be arrogant and misguided to suggest otherwise. More culturally

informed and comprehensive study on the identity, nationalism and nation-building of the Sahrawis would require being able to live in the region and make interviews both in the refugee camps and in the Western Sahara region. The non-ideal conditions for making this kind of research from the distance are recognized. That being said, the longitude of the conflict and the prolonged refugee situation of the Sahrawis in the camps of Algeria give significance and justification to the efforts to capture some of the perspectives influencing to the conflict also from the distance. The aim of the research is to grow understanding and awareness of the conflict from the framework that we have in our hands.

In addition to the geographical distance and in link with it, there are few limitations in the scope of the data as already suggested. First, the language barriers with the Sahrawi dialect 'hassanya' naturally limited the amount of the material, which directed the framing of the research questions. Unlike the Moroccan dialect 'darija' with mostly the mix of Arabic and French, 'hassanya' has considerably more influence from Spanish. Due to the close links of the Sahrawis with the Spanish solidarity networks and NGO's, Spanish language skills would have been in the end more useful than French has proven to be, as many Sahrawis speak Spanish as their native or second language. However, the variety of translated content to English and French made it possible not to limit the estrade of voice-giving only to the most educated elite and the Polisario Front international representatives, who have wider language repertoire. Furthermore, the usage of readily translated material makes the research much depended on the accuracy of the translations. However, in the documentaries and interviews used, there is no reason to suspect the purpose of the interviewers and documentary makers to be anything else but to present truthfully the aspirations of the Sahrawi interviewed. Simultaneously, we have to acknowledge that every interview, every documentary and every conversation has certain way of understanding and framing the world and the conflict in question: no one is capable to full objectivity.

To conclude the limitations and ethical considerations of the research, it is needed to point out that the setting shares some questionable features with research made from issues "somewhere out there" without having the practical knowledge and cultural understanding basis to fully understand the issue, which should be constantly self-

reflected. Nevertheless, the narratives presented to the external audience is in the focus here – not the self-understanding or internal communication and narrations of the Sahrawi. To the outsiders from our closest circles, we tell a continuous story, with careful consideration to what to say and what to leave to the hands of silence. Through interviews, documentaries and speeches the layers of the nation and nationalism are colored and strengthened, for narration tellers themselves and for us, to the external audience. As the struggle of international recognition is a crucial part in the aim of self-determination for the Sahrawi, *the narration of the nation matters*. How the nation is pictured, how it is seen and heard and do the international community think it has legitimacy to survive as a nation, are the questions that will, in the end being the ones that will determine the fate of the Sahrawi nation.

5. Research Findings: Analysis and Discussion

There are many ways of reading and analyzing a text. The effort in this piece of work is oriented to *understand,* not to explain what meanings the text and words hold in themselves. We do not have the power nor the knowledge to explain what the interviewees meant and thoughted while being interviewed. Only the individuals producing narration have the power to explain what they meant, us in the outside observing that action have only the possibility to *interpret*. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that narratives are never fully complete, but also conflicting, incomplete and fragmented. In the search of narrative lines, we are balancing in a thin robe: on the other hand, between simplifying the narration and from another, making the narration an understandable totality. To make justice to the original narratives lies in the responsibility of the researcher, which has been the objective in classifying the data.[217] Furthermore, speaking and writing are two different modes of discourse.[218] The analyzed material has been originally in the form of a speech, but transferred to text through subtitles. Through written form meanings achieve longer life than the event of the speech act.[219]

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[217] Czarniawska 2004, p. 62.
[218] Ibid, p. 69.
[219] Czarniawska 2004, p. 69.

In the first section of this chapter, the analysis process will be scrutinized to make the different stages of the research followable. After that the focus is turned towards the clearest narrations risen from the material, which are analyzed one by one. The research can be seen to represent theory-bound research[220], where the analysis of the material is not directly based to the theoretical framework, but the theoretical understanding of the operated concepts and the framework are supporting the conclusions of the research.

First stage of the analysis was to take a closer look to the themes and forms of the chosen texts and documentaries. Even though the styles of the narrations varied to some degree, they were most structured in the same way than a traditional interview: a journalist would ask a question and the interviewee would answer. Only one of the used texts had significantly more space for description and narrative forms of telling. The 'Memories of Western Sahara' documentation by Nina Nedrebo (2010) reminded more of an ethnographical research setting than a short interview for a journal or an online magazine. In the other written interviews, the questions that the interviewer posed for the interviewee where visible. Contrary to the written from, in the documentaries the answers where to a large part cut out, remaining faithful to the genre of documentaries, but leaving the viewer without the context of the wordings of the questions. The possibility to estimate the questions attitude and the effects of the wording to the answers is outside of the material's usage. Regardless of the lack of information what comes to the formulations of the questions, the documentaries offer usable material by widening the scope of material from written to also video form of documentation.

After scrutinizing the differences in the form of the material, the next step of the process was to organize the data thematically under two research questions. Some additional words were added under both research questions to give more direction to the sorting out of the material. The supporting words for the first research question looked like this:

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[220] Research in social sciences can be divided between theory-driven, theory-bound and data-driven research.

With sorting out the material, which were at this point named with numbers, each of the pieces where coded with the color of the two research questions one by one and then divided into different documents based on the different color coding and the theme of the paragraph. At this point, the material was divided into three groups: in addition to the two questions, the information concerning the self-determination process was separated from the rest of the material.

After all the material was thematically divided, the next step was to turn towards the larger narrations rising from the material. However, it is important to point out at this point that the classification between the two research questions was not easy or simple, as many of the elements in the narrations could have been under either one of the two questions. Nevertheless, for the first research question, four main narrative lines where found and named with defining features of each main message. The natural and personal national characteristics where described both explicitly with different adjectives and implicitly between the lines. Description, which was clearly strengthening the positive self-understanding of the Sahrawis was named with the headline: *"We, the good Sahrawis: determinant and forgiving"*. Beside the cultural stereotypes about the nature of the people, traditions, habits and the way of life form another important domain of the story. These cultural feature descriptions where named as the *"Unique Sahrawi culture – nomadic lifestyle and tea ceremonies".* With a strong history with traumatic war experiences, Sahrawis understand themselves a lot through the painful memories of exile, fight and defeat. The third identified part of the story of the nation describes that dynamic with the title *"Life of struggles, suffering and war"*.

As a rather small nation spread untraditionally inside of different countries, to the "occupied" land of Western Sahara and in the Algerian deserts, there is a specifically strong sense of solidarity found among the Sahrawis – at least it seems like that to the external audiences. This fateful yet appealing unity among the Sahrawis is described from

different actors' mouths in the fourth element of the narration called "*Our destiny, history and future*". Here the larger historical framework of the nation is introduced and mixed with elements of fatalism and possible martyrdom the future might bring - fighting until to death or until total freedom of the nation.

The thematization with the second questions was done in a similar way than with the first research question: first some support words under the question where labeled, second the material was gone through with identifying the themes in the text with color codes. The support words for the thematic analysis where:

> -> nation-building, distance to the homeland, communications with people in the WS region, the importance of media, life in the WS

Even though many Sahrawis have been born and raised in the refugee camps close to Tindouf in Algeria, vivid descriptions from the beautiful and rich coast line are repeated in the oral stories of the elder, who still remember the time of fight and flight. Tales about the promised homeland, which was once theirs is introduced under the title of "*The sea, the breeze and the oppression of the homeland*". In addition to the distant nation-building dreams, another interesting feature of the nation is the division of it: How are families able to keep in contact with each other when there are hundreds of kilometers and a massive wall dividing them? Even though the modern social media channels provide many possibilities to keep contact, the desert is not the most well-connected geographical area to keep connections to other Sahrawis or even to the "outside world." The second main storyline describes the interpersonal relations of the Sahrawis and the political objection working in secret. The subchapter is named to be "*Our communication exceeds their walls*".

One, very interesting and significantly defining feature of the political representation of the Sahrawis is the gender equality in the camps. The strong representation of females in the local and international community is rare in the region of North Africa, in the linguistic basis of Arabic and the religious rules of Islam. Features describing the institutions,

political systems and the democratic representation of the Sahrawis is examined in the third subchapter called the "*State of freedom, democracy and strong women*". Altogether, there are seven different major narratives analyzed, four inside of the first and three in relation to the second research question. The final subchapter of the analysis part concludes the different elements of the narrations and answers to the two research questions introduced before.

5.1. Narratives on Nationalism

We all have a life story, as individuals and as nations. Our stories provide us (close to) coherent answers to questions, such as "where do we come from?" and "where are we going?". Questions concerning nations can get quite fundamental, such as "what our way of living is?", "what are our common values?" and "who belongs to 'us'?". The stories of nations are always connected with the stories of other nations: if there would be only one nation, there would be no real or imagined national special characteristics, as all of us would be seen to belong to the same big group of human beings.[221] In a life story of both individuals and nations, there is a beginning: in the life of an individual it is a shorter process of birth than in more abstract story of the nation. However, what differentiates the life story of an individual from the story of the nation more drastically, is that the nation does not have a foreseeable end. In between of the members of a nation, it is a shared hope that the nation prospers and does not end – idealistically ever. Part of the charm in nations is that the story goes on, long after our individual stories come to an end.

The imagined, uncoherent story of the nation provides a fruitful basis for many kinds of viewpoints of exploring, but our interest in the framework of this research is first and foremost in the self-understanding of the nation by the members themselves of the Sahrawi nation. As outsiders of the Sahrawi community, it would be challenging to get a grasp on what is the story told inside of the nation, but possible to scrutinize what is told to the outside of it, to the outsiders of the community. However, one of the suppositions

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[221] See e.g. Anderson 1991.

of the research is that the story told inside of the nation and to the outside of it do not drastically differ from one another. Anything else would be both bipolar and hard to keep together. In the sections that follow, each of the most dominant storylines on Sahrawi nationalism risen from the material are analyzed one by one.

5.1.1. We, the Good Sahrawis: Determinant and Forgiving

Like stated before, an essential part of every nationalistic story is the imagined uniqueness of us: us Americans, us Finns or us Sahrawis. There are national characteristics that are reconstructed by the way we behave and explain our behavior in the way we best see fit, offering the most flattering or suitable explanation for the given cultural or spatial context. National stereotypes are simplifications that we can either consciously or unconsciously enforce or try to resist. However, our own attitude towards them do not make them disappear. Stereotypes have often a negative side included in them, which makes them, in a sense, more balanced with positive and negative elements than the stories that we tell ourselves about our nation. How we describe our fellow citizens and our nation give visible clues concerning on how we see ourselves and how we wish to be seen in front of the eyes of the others.

Not surprisingly, the narrative line about the special characteristics of the Sahrawis is composed from many positive adjectives. Determination and persistence of the nation is one of the themes, which is often mentioned both implicitly and explicitly in the narrations of the interviews. Persistence and determination seem to connect both to the harsh living circumstances in the Algerian desert as well as to the continuity of the fight regardless of the voice of the Sahrawis being heard by only a few in the international community's arenas. Moreover, the independence of the Sahrawi nation in Western Sahara is seen as the ultimate outcome in the end, which is destined to prevail sooner or later, because the Sahrawi people "are not giving up fighting".[222] The strength of the

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[222] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017: "Now, in our case I am sure we will gain our independence *because my people are not giving up fighting*. They are decided to take back their future from the usurpers of our land."

determination of the Sahrawis is described to be comparable to a gun, as a weapon that simply cannot be destroyed. It is an immaterial resource, which stays alive across individual's life span and is stronger than the fear of losing individual's own life. Speaking of the dangers in being part of the resistance movement in the time of the beginning of the war, Commander of Polisario in the Tifariti region, Brahim Bedileh, describes the immortality of the Sahrawi determination with the following terms:

> "Before the Palestinians were bombed in Lebanon, we were bombed here. Despite the danger, the Sahrawis continued their determination. *This did not kill their determination, the tanks, the mortars, the satellites with photo capacities, the weapons* supplied by the US, France, Italy, Belgium, the UK, Israel, Germany…"[223]

The message can be read to be simply: "Our determination is stronger than the enemy's guns". Furthermore, the Commander Bedileh makes another comparison to the tools of war: "We have not increased our soldiers, nor have we bought new material. *The main weapon we have is our determination and willingness.*"[224] Implications to determination is done also by speaking of how the Sahrawis have already decided their future with a clear choice for freedom.[225] As if, regardless of whether the actors outside of the community accept it or not, the choice for the future is already made. Some interviewees describe how nothing can stop the determination of an individual Sahrawi fighting for her country, and how the fight will continue until death, if necessary. Rabab Deid, the Mayor of the Lemsid district of the refugee settlements, describes the situation with the following terms: "We are here due to a national question, the liberation of our land, and *we will continue on the same path, even if we end up in a common grave*. We are awaiting here our independence."[226] Malainin Lakhal, a Sahrawi human rights activist and journalist repeats the same message with different words by saying how the Sahrawis cherish freedom and independence in the same way all free Africans do. If the price for the freedom is death, so be it.[227] Behind the strong words there can be found some connotations to fatalism and even clear martyrdom, when the sacrifices of the individual lives loose importance

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[223] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001.
[224] Ibid.
[225] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017: "It is a message from our people to the so-called international community that we, the Saharawis, already have decided our future, and we are ready to confirm it in a self-determination referendum if we are allowed to. Otherwise, our choice is clear. We want to be free! There is no other alternative to our freedom."
[226] M8, Rabab Deid in Vice News 2014.
[227] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017: "Because we are free Africans, we have always cherished freedom and independence, and *we will die free if that's the price we have to pay for the freedom* and the dignity of all Africans."

compared to the goal of an ultimately independent land for the Sahrawi nation. The rhetoric used is strong, powerful and demanding.

According to the narrations on national characteristics, the Sahrawis have other virtues in addition to their determination and persistence. Described features of tolerance and forgiveness present softer tones of the characteristics than the narrations of martyrdom and 'walking the path of freedom until the end'. The Polisario Commander Brahim Bedileh makes comparisons between the provocation tactics of the Moroccans to the Sahrawi way of respecting the rules of the international law:

> "All of these years, we have avoided all kind of activities that do not comply with the international law...(W)e wait for a legal solution, because we are pacific and responsible government. *We always respect the rules dictated by the UN and international organizations. We never opted for the ways of terrorism or something like that*, in spite of quite a lot of provocations by the enemy. We have been bombed by napalm, including the city centres of the Sahrawis. And yet, *we always have been fighting in legal terms.*"[228]

According to the narration, regardless of the experienced injustices, the Sahrawis have not only fought with legal terms, but further, been very tolerant and forgiving. The Sahrawis have awaited patiently and given the peace process support still after many failures from the side of other conflicting parties and the international community representatives, such as the UN.[229] Further on, the Commander Bedileh describes the Sahrawi nation to be a unified one, fighting together for a legitimate cause of liberation.[230]

However, the patience of the Sahrawis is described in contradictory terms. As if the patience of the Sahrawis is an apparent common resource of the whole nation, which, nevertheless, has the potential to run out in any possible given moment. For example, in one section of the interview with the Commander Bedileh the patience of the nation is told to last until the time of the war[231], in another it is implied that the patience of the

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[228] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001.
[229] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001: "We were happy when Baker was selected as the intermediary of this conflict, in spite of previous US support for Morocco. *We forgot the past. Our people have a lot of tolerance. We forgot the problems of the past.*"
[230] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001: "First, all the Sahrawis are fighting for their legitimate and unified cause. We are volunteers, all Sahrawis are volunteers. We are not here for a professional purpose, but for the fight for liberation."
[231] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001: "*But we have patience, and until the time we have to return to war, we will be patient.*"

Sahrawis can stop in any given minute and explode, causing a full violent war by itself.[232] There seems to be a following dynamic in the narrative: We do have patience, but because of the exploitation of our patience without any results, the resource of patience is soon running out. This could, and maybe should, cause the making of the following statement: the Sahrawis are patient in waiting – but for how long? It seems that this kind of dynamic is apparent especially in the more militaristic sides of the Polisario movement, which is not that surprising: in the end, it is the job of the military fractions of the society to keep the soldiers ready to defend their region or to attack to the terrain of the "enemy", depending on how the political situation of the society evolves.

Nonetheless, in most of the outcomings of the interviews, there cannot be found this kind of inner tension in the message. Some of the statements can be positioned closer to a verbal threat of having enough, with the moment of escalation to violence being close. A Sahrawi activist, Lanzari Mohamed Salem is clearer in his personal views about the situation:

> "In my opinion*, too much pressure will cause an outburst of anger*. I'm repressing my anger, *but sooner or later others will not do the same. Nine out of ten of us are ready to sacrifice our lives to save one*… How long will the internet be enough to express my feelings and my nostalgia? There will come a day when human bombs will explode. *When we'll arrive at some point, when we'll have enough*...I'll be one of the first to break the wall, at least I'm speaking for myself."[233]

A Sahrawi war veteran, Ahmed Sale, shows his frustration to the situation also very directly: "We're close to war. *We can't control ourselves anymore.* The UN hasn't brought any solutions. 23 years for a referendum they planned to organize within six months."[234]

To conclude, there are multiple repeated elements in the story of the stereotypical Sahrawi character, such as clear determination, strong willpower and persistence to both to the provocation of the "enemy" and to the uncertainty of the prolonged conflict situation. Moreover, the Sahrawi nation seems to have a high respect for the rule of law

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[232] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001: "In this time, we are standing-by, but *we have begun to lose our patience*. I have no words to convince these soldiers for this kind of waiting, the soldiers insist daily to do something. *They will solve the problem peacefully or they will go to the front, and one day they can get out of control, and attack behind the berm into Morocco*."

[233] M7, Lanzari Mohamed Salem in Luzi & Bellino 2015.

[234] M8, Ahmed Sale in Vice News, 2014.

and the international institutions like the United Nations, at least based on the self-understanding of the nation in the research material. These characteristics form an outline for the shared understanding of who are the good Sahrawis like and how the national special characteristics of the Sahrawis are explained and recreated to the outsiders of the community.

5.1.2. Unique Sahrawi Culture – Nomadic Lifestyle and Tea Ceremonies

Regardless of the cultural diversity among the Sahrawis, there are some aspects in the Sahrawi culture that can be named as important and uniting in the nationalistic story. In the Master's thesis of Silje Rivelsrud, where she examines the manifestations of the national identity of the Sahrawis in online blogs written by two female Sahrawis, Rivelsrud found three most frequently used cultural symbols and traditions among the Sahrawis to be: 1) traditional female headgear called *Mehlfa,* which changes both in style and in colors 2) the famous Sahrawi tea ceremony and last, the 3) Sahrawi Arabic dialect of *Hassaniyyah* spoken in the region.[235] In order not to underestimate nor repeat the message of Rivelsrud's piece of work, the focus in here will be in the analysis of the elements risen from the interview material of this research, which differ slightly from the work of Rivelsrud.

The clearly strongest cultural feature in the examined narratives is the *nomadic way of life* of the Sahrawis. The nomadic way of life is described to mean a harmonious connection with the nature and the environment, the freedom of movement and the varying cycles of moving from one place to another. The Berm dividing the Sahrawi areas and the governmental structure of organizing the society in the refugee camps has made the nomadic way of life more difficult, but the remembering of the continuous "on move life" seems to be considered important part of the Sahrawi identity. A Sahrawi woman called Aza, who lives in the refugee settlements, tells that before the governmental organization

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[235] Rivelsrud 2010, p. 52.

of the Sahrawis, the society was based on a tribal system, where each tribe had their own representative.[236]

The historical framework of the Sahrawi community can be divided into three phases of *nomadic*, *colonial* and *exile* living. Despite many changes in the living circumstances of the Sahrawi people, most cultural features of the society have been able to remain as the same. The strong role of women in the society has been formulated already in the first stage of the nomadic lifestyle: "(T)he first stage is the nomadic period of time, where women played an important support role in the places they lived. People moved depending on the rain, and it was a difficult life, where they were relying on the animals for what they needed."[237] Moving happened with the rules of weather and resources guiding the way, staying few months in one place and then moving on, closer or further depending on the humidity of the season.[238] Even though the movement from one place to another has lost its status as the preferred lifestyle for the majority of the Sahrawis, the living conditions do not vary that much; in the open desert or in the camps, most Sahrawis live in tents. A Sahrawi grandmother, who was exiled from Western Sahara in an early age and who currently lives in the Smara refugee camp, Mbareka, describes the significance and the humble way of life in the tents: "We do everything in here: sleep, eat, drink tea, receive guests. They are part of our culture. If you offered an old person here a villa or a tent, we will choose the tent."[239]

However, the Sahrawis have managed to build also some more permanent apartments for living over the years, as the community has stayed in the same settlements for so long. The nomadic way of life is today closer to a myth of a lifestyle than the everyday reality for most of the Sahrawis. The Polisario Information Office representative in Finland, Menna Lehbib, has been born in the refugee camps of Algeria and has lived in Spain, Norway and Finland after Algeria. She describes the living conditions in the camps with

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[236] M6, Aza in Nedrebo 2010.
[237] M6, Daina in Nedrebo 2010.
[238] M6, Aza in Nedrebo 2010: "If it was a good season for rain, we moved, but we would not move far. We might have stayed two or three months in one place, and then we moved again, but not a long distance. Yet, if we were in a dry season, we could move very far."
[239] M3, Mbareka in Fraser 2018.

the following terms: "We lived in tents without any houses where I was born. Now there are some small houses made by the Sahrawis themselves, but overall there are no good life conditions there."[240] She points out, that everything is made by hands in the camps, as there is no proper water circulation or electricity networks and continues:

> "We are refugees, living without any basic conditions for living on the edge of the world. Our consume of water for a family is for one year what it is for a Finn per day (40 l). I heard it from the YLE selkouutiset, that is what they say the Finns consume. We need to protect our environment and the water. In here, you have a machine to clean your clothes and a machine to clean the house, you can imagine that what it is when we do everything by hands. We hope that one day we get these kinds of machines to help our everyday life."[241]

Regardless of the though living circumstances, the social life of the Sahrawis seems to be rich in nature. Many social events are combined in the importance of the Sahrawi tea ceremonies. Like Lehbib puts it: "We are very social, if you want to go to drink tea, you can go in any time you want."[242] What is needed for a tea ceremony according to the traditional Sahrawi customs is "charcoal, people, and time."[243] The triangle of three remains also in the more modern saying that the tea is "sweet, strong, and soft", depending of the order in which the cups of tea is drank.[244] Tea brings the people of the Sahrawi community together and provides a framework for discussions from everyday issues to the storytelling of history: "Tea is considered everything. Saharawis can sit, relax, talk, transmit history, tradition, and changing events. It's the 'key' to the idea of exchanging experiences", Asisa explains.[245] The oral history of the Sahrawis, social problems of any kind and events of celebration are all transferred from one to another in front of a cup of tea.[246]

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[240] M11, Menna Lehbib 2019.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] M6, Embarka in Nedrebo 2010.
[244] M6, Zorgan in Nedrebo 2010.
[245] M6, Asisa in Nedrebo 2010.
[246] M6, Fatimatu in Nedrebo 2010: "(T)he ceremony of tea was a very important moment to transmit history, religion, to find a person who can teach children about history for Saharawi people. They talked about the rain, about places they could search for animals, and who was going to win traditional plays for youth. Games, marriage, social problems or issues were topics."

However, what is left without saying, is the importance of tea among different ethnic groups around the Sahrawis, such as among the Moroccans; Morocco is famous of its mint tea culture. Overall, versatile tea culture is famous in the whole region of North Africa, but the traditions and customs around the cultural traditions vary from region to region. It is possible to conclude, that the tea culture is closer to something regional than specific only to the Sahrawi community. What ever is the case, the tea ceremony meaning in the Sahrawi culture seems to be undebatable.

5.1.3. Life of Struggles, Suffering and War

In the narratives of a determinant, free and righteous Sahrawi nation who enjoy the possibilities of nomadic lifestyle and a cup of tea with the members of the community, there is also parallel narrative lines of strong struggles, suffering and war. The struggle of the Sahrawi people is frequently compared to the struggles of other countries and nations, who have been undergoing the process of anticolonization in Africa, countries such as South Africa.[247] Support for the Sahrawi cause is tried to achieve through appealing to fellow Africans in the continent and declaring the battle for freedom to be for the sake of the whole Africa, like journalist Malainin Lakhal is doing:

> "Now, I want all Africans to understand well that we are fighting on their behalf, because the fight for freedom and self-determination in Western Sahara is not the exclusive duty of the Saharawi's alone. No, it is, and it must be the fight of all freedom lovers in the continent and abroad."[248]

Reasons for the instability in the region is searched from the powerplay of Morocco and its ally France, who the Sahrawis are fighting against to protect the common good and freedom for all in the African continent and beyond.[249] Fatma El-Mehdi, the Secretary

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[247] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017: "Like South Africans once suffered under Apartheid, we are still suffering in the occupied zones of Western Sahara from arbitrary detentions, peaceful demonstration are banned and if organized violently oppressed, we have right now around 50 political prisoners in Moroccan jails, many of whom were tried before Moroccan Military Courts though they are civilians and mostly students."

[248] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.

[249] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017: "So, I want to urge all Africans to keep an eye on this part of our beloved continent, because Morocco and France want to push it again into wars, chaos and sufferings. Yet, your brothers and sisters Saharawis will be standing against this plot, and will fight to the last

General of the Sahrawi National Union of Women speaks about the cycle of bitterness defining the sorrows of many Sahrawi generations:

> "It's very difficult, and it's very bitter when you know that my grandmother and my mother, their life was very difficult. I am now adding my story to theirs. For me, that's a very dark side of our history. But my worry is not my life; my worry is the life of my children and their children. This gives me the strength to fight—to enable them to someday have another kind of life."[250]

The fight for independence is described to be a struggle of generations, where the detail of which generation will see the day of independence is not the most important one.[251] The mental distance from the region of Western Sahara in the camps is also described through generations with feelings of disappointment: "There are many generations like mine, born and raised in the camps and they don't even know the city of their grandparents."[252] Returning to Western Sahara, when it would still be in the control of the Moroccan Kingdom, is seen to mean recognizing the occupation and not appreciating the sacrifices that the past generations, parents and grandparents of the Sahrawis living today, have done.[253] Moreover, the Polisario Front war time commander Brahim Bedileh presents the struggle to have been continuing not only for generations, but even for a century or more:

> "France still has its old colonial culture, and they ignore the rights of the Sahrawi in this region, in spite of the fact that they had had previous experience with the Sahrawi people. They struggled with the Sahrawi people. We have a variety of martyrs and warriors, who fought against France in 1912…. Our struggle for freedom is not recent, but for a century or more."[254]

Furthermore, the narrative lines of the Sahrawi nation hold elements of victimhood, deception and suffering. The Sahrawis see themselves to be victims of not only by the violence of Morocco, but also the victims of the international community's passivity and local and international medias. Unsurprisingly, having Morocco in control of the local

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drop of their blood. Because we are free Africans, we have always cherished freedom and independence, and we will die free if that's the price we have to pay for the freedom and the dignity of all Africans."

[250] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.

[251] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017: "So to my understanding, our struggle is one of generations, and it does not matter which generation will see and assist to the great day of freedom, the most important to each one of us is to keep the struggle alive, and to set clear goals to this struggle, so the following generation can take the lead later and finish the mission."

[252] M7, Yahdih Mohamed-Fadel in Luzi & Bellino 2015.

[253] M10, young Sahrawi man in Klunk 2016: "We cannot go back to Western Sahara so long it is under occupation, because that would mean recognizing the Moroccan occupation and turn our backs to the sacrifices done by our parents and grandparents in the sake for freedom."

[254] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001.

media in the Western Sahara region creates clear challenges of one-sided, biased information moving around. When asked that why she thinks that the Western Sahara conflict is not on people's radar, Fatma El-Mehdi's explanation is the following:

> "I will start by saying that we have always been victims of information, of the media. All of the local media is controlled by Morocco. I remember in 2001, with the support of Spanish women, we visited three countries: Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. We could meet a lot of groups, women's groups, but nobody could talk about this visit in the media. I think the media is very important to create visibility. That's what we need."[255]

The other deeply felt deception comes from the lost opportunities of the UN to organize the referendum for the self-determination of the nation, despite the many efforts and promises.[256] In some of the interviews, especially with male Sahrawi activists, there can be found even radical tones of sacrifices and martyrdom in the message, like already stated before. Jalil Mohamed, a Sahrawi activist, who lives in the refugee camps seems to be ready for war:

> "As a young man, if I can't imagine my life without freedom for 30, 40 years... Why do I have to be a refugee for 50 years? I'd die in a refugee camp! This is leading young people to say: war, war war! Because we are aware that we'd win the war. If you fight for your people, you win even if you die, because you're a martyr. I'm sure there will be a conflict. This is obvious."[257]

It is clear that the Sahrawis in the refugee camps of Algeria and the Sahrawis in the Western Sahara territory live in different realities. However, it seems from some of the narrations that wherever there is a Sahrawi, there is some kind of suffering. At least that is what an activist Lanzari Mohamed Salem is making the situation to sound like:

> "What hurts me is that the Sahrawis here, in the refugee camps, also suffer from being refugees. They suffer the weather, which is very cold weather in the winter and very hot in summer. In the occupied territories they suffer the cold of the prison and the heat of the torturer's truncheon, oppression and censorship. *When you observe a Sahrawi you still see the suffering whether he lives in the refugee camps or in the occupied territories.*"[258]

Despite the beautiful picture painted by the Sahrawi people concerning their culture and the way of living, it seems that many feel to be in some kind of prison by their own lives – either in a role of a refugee or a fighter in other ways, waiting the justice to happen.

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[255] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[256] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001.
[257] M7, Jalil Mohamed in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[258] M7, Lanzari Mohamed Salem in Luzi & Bellino 2015.

5.1.4. Our Destiny, History and Future

One of the prerequisites in the self-understandings of a nation is the shared history of it. History provides meaning, grounding, legitimacy and a purpose for a nation, which drives national self-construction to constantly write and rewrite its own past.[259] In the interviews of some Sahrawis in the material scope of this research, their common history is seen to begin from the occupation of Spain, in other narratives even before that. An important part of the historical remembering are the national celebrations, national symbols and the traditional, unifying festivities. In most of the countries worldwide, the elements mentioned above are most apparent in the independence days. For example, we in Finland have our own festivities every 6th of December, when the Independence Day is manifested from blue and white candles to a ball in the presidential palace, where the representatives of different domains of the country from sports, politics, army and culture get together to be hosted by the presidential couple.

The National Independence Day of the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic, the SADR, is celebrated in the refugee camps annually on the February 27th with parades, speeches, music and dance. In 2014, the prime minister of the SADR, Abdelkader Taleb Omar, stated that on the occasion of the Independence Day, "we should feel pride, honor and salute the resistance and determination of our people in the occupied territories."[260] The Independence Day seems to evoke a lot of contradictory feelings among the Sahrawis according to the interviews. On the one hand, a clear pride for the success of translating the political will of the Sahrawis in to a form of a constitution and the proclamation of independence, and on the other hand a simultaneous sadness from the reminder of not being free or independent after many years of political attempts to reclaim freedom.[261]

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[259] Zunes & Mundy 2010, p. 92.
[260] M8, Abdelkader Taleb Omar in Vice News, 2014.
[261] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.

From the historical point of view of the Sahrawi community, some important events rise more defining than others. At least in 1975, maybe even before that, the Sahrawis started to reflect their existence against the Moroccans, but "the problem" of occupation started already with Spain. Spain was the colonizer of the Western Sahara region from 1884 until the year of 1975. Another important year for the Sahrawis is told to be the year 1970, when the Sahrawi revolution was followed by the proclamation of the Polisario Front in the May of 1973.[262] The history of invasions from France, Portugal, Mauritania and Spain, in addition to Morocco, makes it easy to understand why the Sahrawi historical narrative is seen and explained through periods of violence. Fatma El-Mehdi sees the situation as the following:

> "In fact, when we think about our history, our past, we can only think about violence because we lived this violence with Spain. And even before Spain, there were other forces, like France and Portugal, which tried to invade us. Before Spain, there were Morocco and Mauritania. When we think about our past, we can only find violence, but I think it is precisely this condition that makes one realize that what is important is peace. But unity also becomes very important. I think we have very solid social values, due to which we have been able to survive all of this violence."[263]

The period of Spanish colonialization before the Moroccan one is referred many times as "the period of secrets" in the history of the Sahrawis.[264]

The history of a nation and the remembering, representing and reconstructing of it again and again are all intertwined and connected to each other. As Sahrawi activist, Yahdih Mohamed-Fadel, puts it: "The memory is the mere existence of a people. A people must have a memory to exist. If there is no evidence of your existence, then you don't exist. The memory is the proof that people exist that it has existed through different stages."[265] Transmitting the history of the community to the younger generations is extremely important in the Sahrawi society. Mostly, the information sharing concerning the history, culture and tradition is done through oral stories. In addition, the significance of written history is acknowledged as there is a risk that some of the stories may be lost with the unfortunate loss of individuals of the community.[266] What is typical to the national stories globally is repeated among the Sahrawis - even the oral history sharing of the nation is

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[262] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Nebrebo 2010.
[265] M7, Yahdih Mohamed-Fadel in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[266] M6, Fatimatu in Nedrebo 2010.

done by focusing on the battles, with strong features of heroism and sacrifices while protecting the nation: "There is an example of a battle against France, against a colonel named Girard", tells a Sahrawi woman called Embarka.[267]

The desired self-determination process of the Sahrawis seem to be less about the governmental practicalities and more about having the right to decide upon the 'destiny' of the nation: "The problem is not autonomy. The key question is that the Sahrawi people must determine their destiny by vote, by self-determination", explains the Polisario Front Commander Brahim Bedileh.[268] The future of the nation is seen to be bright and prosperous, if only the Sahrawis would have the ownership to the lands what belongs to them and the political power to govern the region of Western Sahara. Malainin Lakhal paints a balanced and democratic picture for the future of the Sahrawi nation:

> "We want to build our State and our Nation, and we are ready to do that, because we already have built our own institutions, our own government that succeeded for more than 40 years to run the only refugee camps in the world run, administrated and organized by refugees themselves."[269]

Based on the data and the narrations of the research, the future of the nation is far from sketchy if it would be in the hands of the Sahrawis themselves. However, it is impossible to know how much of the desires and fantasies for the future would prevail in reality, if the Sahrawis ever would have the opportunity to govern themselves in the region of Western Sahara.

5.2. Narratives on Nation-Building

Nation-building is a multiphase prosses, which have to be an "inside job". A nation or a state can be either strengthened or weakened from the outside, but in order to get and maintain real legitimacy, the leaders of a political entity must have its mandate from the citizens of the nation, elected via democratic process. Something else or less is not real or sustainable – legitimate power and authority get their strength from value-based

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[267] M6, Embarka in Nedrebo 2010.
[268] M5, Brahim Bedileh in Bhatia 2001.
[269] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.

leadership, transparency and right motives to govern. One of the potential future challenges of the Polisario Front is how the SADR of Western Sahara is governed and the power maintained when there would be more than one party in the political field of the society.

The second part of the narrative analysis focuses on the nation-building process and the many elements of it by the Sahrawis in the Algerian desert and beyond. Three dominant narrative lines found from the research material are recognized and examined. First of the narrative lines concerns the memories of the Western Sahara region and the hopes concerning "the homeland" of the Sahrawis. The next main narrative found deals with the communication ways between the Sahrawis in the Moroccan and the Polisario govern territories. The third main narrative scrutinizes the infrastructural elements, the strong position of the Sahrawi women in the society and the prerequisites the Sahrawis have to actually built a functioning state for the nation.

5.2.1. The Sea, the Breeze and the Oppression of the Homeland

The everyday life of the Sahrawis is described to be challenging until the day of the hoped return: "Every day is a challenge, and we will have this challenge until we go back."[270] After close to 50 years, the Sahrawis are still waiting for a political solution to the conflict. Most of the Sahrawi refugees were born in the camps, never having stepped their feet in their promised "homeland" of the long coastline. Some members of the older generations remember the time before the exile. A Sahrawi grandmother already introduced earlier in the previous part, Mbareka describes her memories in the region with close to poetical vibes: "I miss the air, and the earth".[271]

Another Sahrawi woman called Aza remembers the vast ocean and the long coastline dividing the land from the sea, but tells to the interviewee that it is simply impossible to

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[270] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[271] M3, Mbareka in Fraser 2018.

focus only one part of the region.[272] In addition to the picturesque view of the coastline, the richness in natural resources is mentioned repeatedly in the interviews. Many Sahrawis seem to be painfully aware of the exploitation of the natural resources by the Moroccan Kingdom. Malainin Lakhal describes the Western Sahara land as the following terms:

> "But, of course, Western Sahara is a very rich territory with all sorts of resources, renewable and non-renewable. This is one of the main reasons why Morocco, backed of course by France, refuses as you rightly said to recognize not only our independence but our very right to existence, to freedom and to self-determination.[273]

Morocco seems to be seen still as a protectorate of the French colony, even though the decolonialization and independence of Morocco has happened already decades ago. It is easy to claim that the Western Sahara conflict is also about financial gain, traditional colonialist policies and power interests. However, while looking the conflict from the individual perspective of a Sahrawi, a lot more humane picture takes place.

The living circumstances in the Moroccan controlled Western Sahara and in the refugee camps of Algeria differ significantly. However, it seems, that both of the areas have considerate challenges to cope with – harsh weather and dependency from a foreign aid in the refugee camps and harsh control and surveillance in the coast side in "the promised homeland". Some go even further with differencing how the Sahrawis living in different regions are not even similar to each other. A Sahrawi activist, Lanzari Mohamed Salem, describes the differences in the following terms:

> "The Sahrawis living in the refugee camps are not like Sahrawis living in the occupied territories. In the refugee camps they have freedom, whereas in the occupied territories they suffer from being oppressed. What hurts me is that the Sahrawis here, in the refugee camps, also suffer from being refugees…In the occupied territories they suffer the cold of the prison and the heat of the torturer's truncheon, oppression and censorship. When you observe a Sahrawi you still see the suffering whether he lives in the refugee camps or in the occupied territories."[274]

The awareness from the contractionary political situation of the Sahrawis is woken up from an early age. Malainin Lakhal describes his childhood in Western Sahara: "Growing

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[272] M6, Aza in Nedrebo 2010.
[273] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.
[274] M7, Lanzari Mohamed Salem in Luzi & Bellino 2015.

up in the occupied Western Sahara is like growing up in a huge open-space detention camp."[275] The differing treatment of different ethnic groups in the Moroccan controlled Western Sahara starts already from the schooling system. Lakhal talks about the difficulties of the Sahrawis to get higher education in the country, when he was still living in the region:

> "In school, we were discriminated against. It was difficult in those days for a Saharawi to finish school. The colonial authorities would do anything to dissuade us from progressing in our studies. And, reaching the university was a miracle for many of us. As kids, we were forced to become very politically aware since our youngest age because of this treatment, and of course we were also politically active, and we tended to do all in our power to make life difficult for the colonial authorities in the streets, especially at nights. In brief, life in the occupied zones of Western Sahara is the life of a colonized people struggling for their freedom and oppressed by the colonizers because of this struggle."[276]

Like in other conflict areas of the world from Israel all the way to Afghanistan, war and instability have an especially lasting influence on children and their development. Famous Sahrawi activist, Aminatou Haidar describes the unfortunate state of the children growing up under political oppression:

> "This generation and the children [in Western Sahara] witness with their own eyes the police oppression. Just imagine many children instead of drawing toys; they draw a policeman with a gun and a stick beating people and people behind bars. I am scared that they will become violent and incite violence: because practicing violence, one day will incite violence."[277]

Aminatou Haidar was arrested because of carrying the flag of the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic. Later on, she has moved to Spain as a political refugee due to her activism.[278]

An older man, who lives in the so-called occupied territory, confirms the socio-political segregation: "Life is very hard for us. The Moroccans are the only ones getting jobs." [279] One middle aged woman repeats the message in her own words: "We the Sahrawis don't have any rights in Morocco." [280] The memories and the remembrance of the Western

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[275] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.
[276] Ibid.
[277] M4, Aminatou Haidar in Amnesty 2009.
[278] Amnesty 2009.
[279] M9, an old man in Dancing Turtle Films 2012.
[280] M9, a middle aged woman in Dancing Turtle Films 2012.

Sahara region provoke deep feelings among the Sahrawis. A Sahrawi woman living in the refugee camps, Fatimatu, describes her feelings:

> "It's not easy to cope with the circumstances…Those circumstances we have considered go very deep, the feeling when somebody misses his or her land and others are playing with his or her resources…and when there is no kind of protection of the human rights, and no meaning given to the dignity for him or her as a normal person." [281]

Like stated before, political activism of the Sahrawis is suppressed in the Moroccan controlled part. Hayat Rguibi, a Sahrawi activist living in the Western Sahara tells about her everyday life and troubles concerning societal activism:

> "Everything I've experienced this far is daily persecution. The Moroccan police was always around my house, tailing me to school every day and in every place I went. Even my family has suffered the same treatment. They arrested me…We grew up seeing the fear in the eyes of our relatives, we have witnessed dispersed families, a part of them in the refugee camps and the other part in the occupied territories. Among them there was no communication, no one knew if the others where dead or alive."[282]

Not surprisingly, many of the Sahrawi activist have been arrested and jailed. Mohamed Salem tells about his experiences in the local jail and the feeling after the experience: "I was freed and I realized that I had not been the only one to be imprisoned, but also my entire country was in prison. So I left a smaller prison to enter a larger one."[283]

The means of activism and protesting in the region have many forms: the SADR symbol usage, civil obedience and activism via the social media channels are few of them. Having a long history of being under political occupation and suppression first under Spain and then under the Moroccan Kingdom, the Sahrawis have become close to professionals of different forms of political activism. Malain Lakhal describes the history with the following wording:

> "So, during the years of the war the Sahrawi civilians' resistance existed though it was under the form of secret organizations dedicated to raise awareness among people, gather support to the Polisario and sometimes perform some sabotage operations against Moroccan institutions and military and police forces. After the UN established its Mission, MINURSO, in the country, the Sahrawi resistance in the occupied zones opted for peaceful demonstrations and directed its struggle towards civil society activism defending human rights, natural resources, and social demands. This peaceful resistance is ongoing to this date led by an active Sahrawi civil society in parallel with the Sahrawi official diplomatic and political actions."[284]

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[281] M6, Fatimatu in Nedrebo 2010.
[282] M7, Hayat Rguibi in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[283] M7, Mohamed Salem in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[284] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.

Even though the memories of oppression, fleet and the sea breeze of Western Sahara manifest different sides of the myth of the homeland, first and foremost the stories repeat the same narrative about respect, recognition and remembering. Holding simultaneously on from the past through oral history telling and looking to the future with full of hope the Sahrawi nation recreates its existence. Mbareka, who still remembers the everyday life before the fleet from Western Sahara has a wish before her life comes to an end: "I hope to go home before I die, and I fear for my daughter, my son-in-law, and for Abdullahi – that they will stay here and grow old. My fear is the same as everyone's here, *that we will stay here and be forgotten.*"[285]

5.2.2. Our Communication Exceeds their Walls

In the 21st century, the communication revolution has changed the ways how we keep in contact and interact with our family, friends, workplace and peers. The globe has become smaller, there is a vast availability of different information online and the time and the channel of the communication sometimes grows more important than the geographical place of a person. At the same time, it gets more difficult to get reliable information and source criticism becomes one of the most crucial skills a critical individual and thinker can have. Depending on electricity, satellite connections and technological infrastructure, information and communication can travel thousands of kilometers in only nanoseconds. In the field of Peace and Conflict Research it means that momentums, social connections and the reliability of a person gain even more ground than in the old world order.

However, as long as there can be found states, identities and nations in our social reality, there will be both borders dividing and characteristics unifying them. In the context of the Western Sahara conflict communication is one of the keys. The Sahrawi diaspora around the world is waste and active: it is not rare to go to have a university degree elsewhere and then return home to the camps or in the West Sahara region. In the Moroccan governed territory, there is no universities and no possibilities to higher education, as all the universities of the country are situated up in the north. Whether the lack of university

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[285] M3, Mbareka in Fraser 2018.

teaching is the south is a strategic decision, regional politics or something else, it diminishes the opportunities for the Sahrawis to develop their knowledge and get higher level of professionalism in their field – the less educated people are, the easier it is for Morocco to govern and rule them.

Like stated before, the Moroccan and the Polisario Front controlled parts of the West Sahara are divided by a wall. Around 2 700 kilometers long wall divides the territory in to two different parts, without "no access from the inside to the outside or vice versa".[286] The Berm is surrounded by one of the largest landmine fields in the world, being strongly inspired by Israel. From the top of the Berm, the Moroccan military groups hold surveillance over the Polisario Front governed area. Fatma El-Mehdi thinks that the landmine field is weapon directed especially to the most vulnerable parties of the Sahrawi community, such as children and the animals:

> "It is basically a kind of weapon against the nomadic Bedouin people, especially women and children. If they ignore the landmines, the children start to play with them, and there have been a lot of victims. Also, it becomes impossible to get water from the land, since it's dangerous. People have also lost their animals. The nomads' animals cannot be controlled, so they end up dying."[287]

Due to the restrictions for the freedom of the movement in the area, the significance of traditional and social media grows. Convicted activist in the field of media, Ahmed Badi Mohamed Sale, believes the media channels to support finding out the truth from the conflict from the perspective of the Sahrawis:

> "Any means that give us the opportunity to claim our rights, it's our right. Although Sahrawi activists are not media professionals, they can spread the truth through the new communication tools, even if Morocco tries to hide everything. They are ordinary citizens spreading the reality despite the difficulties. This is part of our daily activities. We consider it as a struggle. It can be means of persuasion, but also a weapon to hurt the enemies, because it uncovers the truth about the enemy, the Moroccans. How do you hurt the enemy? By revealing the truth! We'll achieve our goal, only by so doing."[288]

Like it often is the case in conflicts, enmities and oppositions are being reproduced and rebuilt by strong language usage, for example speaking about "the enemies" and "the truth." On the other hand, it is very understandable that signs of frustration and anger are repeatedly expressed, due to the power asymmetry in the conflict. When it comes to the

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[286] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[287] Ibid.
[288] M7, Ahmed Badi Mohamed Sale in Luzi & Bellino 2015.

resources, power, and the international supporters, the Polisario Front has the lower hand in the international arenas. Nevertheless, it was Morocco who was out from the continental body of Africa, from the African Union for so long, not the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic. This regional political detail proves that the Polisario Front and the independence efforts of the Sahrawis have at least a lot of support in somewhere else than the hegemonic west and the previous colonial authorities of France and Spain.

The status quo of the conflict has remained stagnated for so long that the Sahrawis are continuously developing and improving their strategies for their pacifist battles. Lanzari Mohamed Salem, a Sahrawi activist describes going through and around the wall with the help of carefully planned communication:

> "The wall…We can break the wall through the communication strategies. I'm part of the group 'Cries against the wall' that protest against the wall, revealing its true nature and the worst of its images to the world. It's a shame that this wall still exists in the 3rd millennium. The wall has divided the land into two parts, but it couldn't divide the Sahrawi people. The people remained united mainly thanks to the internet."[289]

The family relations between the Sahrawis living in the refugee camps, in the Moroccan controlled area and in other Spanish or Arabic speaking countries worldwide face similar challenges than people in other conflict areas and situations of exile are faced with; the distance between the people and the ways of dealing with the distance. The United Nations has organized visits between the camps and the "occupied territory" to unify family members, but only a part of the Sahrawis have been able to benefit from the program.[290]

Many political activists underline the strong solidarity feeling between the Sahrawis worldwide; if your existence as a nation is under a threat, it seems to unite people like nothing else. The communication mechanisms and contact keeping to the loved ones are found from the letters of the last century and from the WhatsApp messages of today. However, social media can never truly replace face to face human interaction, and the frustration of some of the Sahrawis activists seems to grow also regarding this matter.

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[289] M7, Lanzari Mohamed Salem in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[290] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.

Lanzari Mohamed Salem points out, that the internet will not be forever enough to express his feelings of caring and nostalgia. [291]

The feeling of victimhood seems to be strong among the Sahrawis, not least because of the lack of international interest and media coverage. How Fatma El-Mehdi puts it is:

> "I will start by saying that we have always been victims of information, of the media. All of the local media is controlled by Morocco. I remember in 2001, with the support of Spanish women, we visited three countries: Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. We could meet a lot of groups, women's groups, but nobody could talk about this in the media. I think the media is very important to create visibility. That's what we need."[292]

Media activism is practiced in the Western Sahara region, in the Algerian desert and in the diasporas worldwide. Another Sahrawi media activist, Ahmed Ettanji, tells about the structure of the activism practiced:

> "The 'Media Team' is made up of Sahrawi activists. We are aware of the power of the alternative media: they are ways to fight and to incite people to fight. We want to spread the real image of the life under occupation since we are aware of the indifference of the international community due to the economic affairs with Morocco."[293]

El-Mehdi strongly believes that the lack of interest and attention in the international forums is due to the lack of awareness from the conflict and the misfortunate fate of the Sahrawis: "I think our case is not well known yet. I think we have to create our own media, because we cannot count on international media. This way we will be able to travel, make connections, and make ourselves visible. I think that's what we need."[294]

Sahrawi media activism uses the platforms of TV, radio and social media. Jalil Mohamed explains, that the SADR TV News is created first and foremost to defend the "historical values and…identity" of the Sahrawis.[295] The Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic is the only Arab (wannabe) country, whose nation speaks Spanish because of the Spanish colonial history. According to Mohamed, that strong cultural and historical feature is "a key factor to be defended", because the Spanish colonization is part of the historical heritage of the country. Mohamed continues, that even though the Sahrawis are not proud

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[291] M7, Lanzari Mohamed Salem in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[292] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[293] M7, Ahmed Ettanji in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[294] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[295] M7, Jalil Mohamed in Luzi & Bellino 2015.

to have been colonized, they are proud to speak Spanish as their second language.[296] Communication channels are seen as an important part of the info war:

> "Publishing is the new war and we are at war. All the Sahrawi people know that the media are essential. Can we say that we are at war? Yes we can. Do we have fewer communication tools? Yes, actually we have fewer tools. But we have the main thing: the truth."[297]

A group of young activists in the Western Sahara region share the view of information spreading as a way to spread knowledge and their version of the events:

> "We are 30 young Sahrawis who strongly believe in the independence of Western Sahara. The Martyr magazine is absolutely prohibited in the Sahrawi occupied territories. International media is forbidden access to the territory to see the sufferings of Sahrawi people. There is no terrorism in Western Sahara. It's the Moroccan occupiers who terrorize the Sahrawi people."[298]

The media activism of the Sahrawis is clearly recognized as an important part of the warfare. Difficulties in that are the secrecy of it – everything in the Moroccan controlled part of Western Sahara is done with a great risk of being jailed. However it seems that many Sahrawis are willing to take that risk, what ever the outcome in the end will be. A strong hope for the future unifies the community and gives fuel to work for the common objective. The Sahrawis are well aware that in order to make to the priority list of the big players, you have to make a lot of noise.

5.2.3. State of Freedom, Democracy and Strong Women

The strong position of women in the society of the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic differentiates Sahrawi nation from most of the Muslim cultured countries in the Northern Africa area - at least according to the hegemonic nationalist narratives in the refugee camps. Regardless of the rather progressive views and the history of the Sahrawi nation with equal status in the society between men and women, there are obviously some differences in the believes between different generations. Cultural clashes take place especially when younger generation Sahrawis return to the refugee camps after studying years abroad with more liberalized and open cultural atmosphere. After years in the new

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[296] M7, Jalil Mohamed in Luzi & Bellino 2015.
[297] Ibid.
[298] M8, a group of young activists in Vice News 2014.

surroundings socializing back to the exceptional living circumstances in the refugee camps is understandably challenging. The gap between the views of older and younger generations, especially with people who have studied in the Western and in the Caribbean countries causes some tensions and conflicts inside the families.[299]

Despite the tensions between the old and the new generations, the Sahrawis have succeeded well in formulating a positive image about the competences of the Sahrawi nation to govern themselves without strong outside influence or guidance. Even though the refugee camps are governed by a political party, which is simultaneously the leader of all the institutions of the state in exile, the system does seem democratic by nature to the outside audience. Fatma El-Mehdi describes the dualism of the movement with the following words:

> "When the Polisario Front decided to proclaim the nation-state, even while they're still fighting, they also want to emphasize that this is a movement, a political movement. Now we have the two systems. *We are a movement, but also we are a nation-state.* The objective is to try to build and construct our nation-state while we are fighting to get independence."[300]

When asking the Polisario Front representative of Finland, Menna Lehbib, about does she think that the Polisario Front represents the Sahrawi society, her answer goes as the following: "Yes, without any word for that. Because I think that the Polisario is the sole movement that has the legal status in the United Nation, representing Western Sahara. That is the only legitimate representative of the people of Western Sahara."[301]

What is peculiar about the Sahrawi situation is that even though the Sahrawis are completely depended on foreign humanitarian aid for running their economy, they organize and govern the institutions of the camps by themselves. Malainin Lakhal believes the Sahrawi community to be more than ready to build their nation in the area the Sahrawis claim to belong to them:

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[299] Martín 2010, p. 127.
[300] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.
[301] M11, Menna Lehbib 2019.

> "We want to build our state and our Nation, and we are ready to do that, because we already have built our own institutions, our own government that succeeded for more than 40 years to run the only refugee camps in the world run, administrated and organized by refugees themselves." [302]

Furthermore, the educated and prepared Sahrawis are pictured to not only be ready to build their own state, but to contribute larger to the prosperity of the whole African continent.[303] Sahrawis are aware of the political nature of their existence as a nation from an early age, both through education in the Sahrawi families and through the political oppression they face in the Western Sahara region. Lakhal describes his childhood in Western Sahara with the following terms: "As kids, we were forced *to become very politically aware since our youngest age*… and of course we were also politically active, and we tended to do all in our power to make life difficult for the colonial authorities in the streets, especially at nights."[304]

The mixture of origins among the Sahrawis, being descending from different tribes of North Africa has made the society quite diverse, but also inclusive in nature. The mass movement (or "strategic exile") of young Sahrawis for education abroad after basic school levels recreates and reconstructs the cultural diversity of the Sahrawi nation. Diversity and inclusiveness create a useful and believable storyline in comparison to the cultural suffocation and *moroccanization* strategies of Morocco in the Western Sahara area. Fatma El-Mehdi describes her family situation as the following terms:

> "*My family, it's like a small planet*. Some members speak Spanish, and others only Arabic, and others only Spanish. Some of them have Sahrawi culture, others European culture. I think that's the situation of the Sahrawi society. *It's a society where all the cultures have come to be included*. There are students who were studying in Europe or Latin America, and we have a lot of our students who are studying in Cuba."[305]

However, as stated before, the cultural variety in the camps has also the potential to provoke some clashes between the more conservative and traditional and the more liberal and international members of the Sahrawi community. It seems that there are both

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[302] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.
[303] M1, Malainin Lakhal African Democratic Institute 2017: "On another hand, our people, though small in number, they are well prepared and educated. They will be an addition and a driving force in the African renaissance and progress."
[304] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.
[305] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012.

conserving and modernizing forces debating about the right direction of the Sahrawi community in the camps, not least between the more inpatient young generation and the middle aged and elder, who some have seen another possible lifestyle as children, different to the one in the refugee camps.

The young Sahrawis, who have the opportunity to do their studies abroad, assimilate to a new cultural framework for years. When they do come back to the refugee camps, they have to 'relearn how to be a Sahrawi'. In addition to the dialectical adjustment and the differences with more moderate or traditional religious views with Islam, the excitement from the world outside and everything new has the potential to build a strong contrast to the harsh everyday living environment of the desert, the lack of stimulus combined with more traditional Sahrawi cultural values.[306]

Even though the circumstances where the SADR is built are exceptional, it seems that the Sahrawis do see the Polisario Front as a legitimate government of a state without disagreeing voices coming to the ears of the outside audience. Like a Sahrawi activist in the refugee camps, Sidahmed Talmidi, puts it: "We are a democracy in here, but we are not in our own lands. We need our independence."[307] However, it is possible to question the democratic nature of the 'state institution': Can one-party state be democratic in nature, if there are no significant rivalries about the power to lead and to govern? Easy answer would be that clearly, it cannot. Democracy means societal pluralism, diverging views and debating about them, which seem not to be the case in the refugee settlements of the Sahrawis. Nevertheless, there are no visible signs from clear political repression in the camps, which means that either that kind of societal conflicts among the Sahrawis are well hidden or that they are so marginal in size that the common objective of independence easily beats other minor societal disagreements in the society. Lakhal believes that the Moroccan regime would not get to the same level with the Sahrawis, if we would to make that kind of comparison:

> "We have one of the most stable governments in Africa for more than 40 years so far with no single major political problem…(T)he Moroccan medieval regime is of course afraid of having next to it a

[306] Martín 2010, pp. 125-126.
[307] M8, Sidahmed Talmidi in Vice News 2014.

successful and democratic republic that would shed light on the Monarchy's dictatorship and failure to give the Moroccans what they want: democracy, dignity and freedom."[308]

The last point he makes is especially intriguing, as it compares the Sahrawis and the Moroccans to want actually same, not different things of democracy, dignity and freedom. These kinds of uniting references are rare in the research material, but not nonexistent; the recreation of enmity towards the Moroccans is visible only in the most radical Sahrawi activist voices and in the rhetoric of the Commander Bedileh. From the basis of the research material it also seems that the female voices of the Sahrawi community are more constructive in their tone of voice than the more aggressive rhetoric of the Sahrawi males. However, this division of the different ways of narrative building and forming between different Sahrawi gender groups is not possible to develop further in the scope of this research.

What has come clear already before in the analysis, is that the Sahrawi women have an important role in the building of the nation. Female Sahrawis seem to have more traditional role at home with taking care of the Sahrawi children, but also very responsible and visible positions in the political and organizational spheres of the society. El-Mehdi reveals that for a Sahrawi woman, there are two battles always ongoing; one with the independence efforts of the nation and another with advocating more strong female participation and women's rights after the independence.[309] The equal role of women compared to Sahrawi men is in some narrations taken more for granted than in others. Some Sahrawis see the equality between sexes as something very natural, but the activists actually working in the field of the rights of women seem to be aware of the different smaller connotations of the battle for equality. Many Sahrawi women see their role as mothers to be the teachers of the Sahrawi culture and to educate the Sahrawi children about their historical roots and the Sahrawi identity:

> "As women and mothers in Western Sahara, we are aware that we have a very difficult and important role; it is [to] educate our children to stick to the Sahrawi identity, Sahrawi culture and Sahrawi traditions. It is not an easy task and it is not a new issue. The Occupation is always trying to absorb the Sahrawi culture."[310]

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[308] M1, Malainin Lakhal in African Democratic Institute 2017.
[309] M2, Fatma El-Mehdi in Shringarpure 2012: "We are a movement, but also we are a nation-state. The objective is to try to build and construct our nation-state while we are fighting to get independence. And that is also why, as women, we are trying to reconstruct our new society. We aren`t only dealing with the problem of managing and securing peace, but also with the process of improving human rights and women`s rights after the independence."
[310] M4, Aminatou Haidar in Amnesty 2009.

When a Sahrawi woman marries, she can decide herself whether she wants to stay with her own family or join the family-in-law. The original family of the bride buys gifts for the wedding: "two or three camels to sit on, to honor her, make her a 'useful' person, not just a person seeking for people to help her. They like to show that their girls are very strong girls who don't have needs or are weak in the vision of others", Daina, a Sahrawi woman living in the refugee camps explains.[311] Fatimatu says that the lives of a Sahrawi woman and a Sahrawi man do not differ from each other that much:

> "As a woman, as a Sahrawi woman, it's no different. This life [now] is basically the same as the past. We live in a nomadic society, therefore we are relying on nature, and we relied upon everything naturally. The position of the women is a very strong position inside the society, and it's no different from the role the man played inside the society. She works very hard inside the family, inside the society. She tried to educate the kids, and she tried also to do the difficult work of helping the men for issues or for their jobs. Also we're aware of the importance of women inside the family.[312]

Whatever the position in the society is, common objective unites all the Sahrawis. The Sahrawis are very keen to prove they have the prerequisites to actually build a state for the nation, which they already have started in the refugee settlements of Algeria. Fatimatus last words in her interview are the following ones:

> "I consider it a principle of Sahrawis to go back in dignity and liberated. From the child, to the woman and to the adults... (W)e have strong hope, very strong hope, soon we will have that. As a Sahrawi, as Aminatou Haidar, as anybody together, we have one body, one moral, whoever is here, or in the occupied territory or inside Morocco, everywhere we have very strong hope. We have slogan that the victory is soon, that the victory is soon."[313]

6. Conclusions

The aim of the research was to examine the unique situation of the Sahrawis, who wish to build their own nation and state. The research puzzle had two focus directions. The first one was concerned with the questions of identity, foundation of the Sahrawi nationalism, typical Sahrawi national characteristics and the shared history of the nation. The second main line was focused on the memories and images about Western Sahara, the

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[311] M6, Daina in Nedrebo 2010.
[312] M6, Fatimatu in Nedrebo 2010.
[313] Ibid.

communication strategies of the Sahrawis and the democratic structure pieces of the wish-to-be-state. These narrative headlines should not be understood as competing but complementing in relation to one another: the narrative lines found have all potential to add up to the understanding concerning the conflict situation.

It is clear that an up to date research on the Western Sahara conflict is lacking. It is equally clear that we need to understand the mental state and self-understanding of parties in conflict in order to solve it. Furthermore, the original people of Western Sahara, the indigenous Sahrawis, are underrepresented in most international organizations, in the field of international politics and in the mainstream media flow, which gives a voice-giving and -hearing kind of research value by itself.

Currently, the peace negotiation process has started (or rather continued) after six years pause. That is a significant step and gives hope for a better, more just future for the Sahrawi people in the framework of the international law. No nation should have to live like the Sahrawis are, depending completely on foreign aid and simultaneously fighting for their right to exist. What has already been given from the international community, is the justification, the legitimacy for a referendum and the right for a nation to determine their own fate. Every individual, every nation and every country should have the right for self-determination and self-identification. Even though we are always connected to others and bind by the ways others around us understand us, we should first and foremost have the right to understand ourselves and then name for the outside world, how we wish to be seen in front of the eyes of others. However, we do not live in a world of ideals.

In the first part of the analysis, the outside audience directed storylines of the Sahrawi nation where scrutinized. Even though the elements where clear from the material of this research, different kind of narrative lines would surely rise from interviewing different Sahrawis than here have been. However, the story lines where so often repeated that clear classifications where possible to be drawn. On the basis of the analysis, it is hard to deny the charm and the appeal in the Sahrawi nationalistic storylines and to that charm the nation seems to put some part of their hopes in. Story of the Sahrawi nation has versatile elements and, in the scope of this research, it seems rather uncontradictory. The second part of the narrative analysis was concerned about the structural elements of the wish-

to-be state. On the basis of the analysis there seems to be good foundation for the state to practice state- and nation-building in Western Sahara. However, how these conditions will manifest themselves when the wishes and dreams of the Sahrawi nation would actually come true, will be surely interesting to be followed at.

All in all, even though the Sahrawis are described in the framework of the thesis as a nation, it has not been taken as for granted. The Sahrawis are seen as a nation simply, because they meet enough of the requirements for a nation to be considered as one: the belief of the Sahrawis that they form a nation, the common history of the people, unifying political institutions, a strong relationship to a specific geographical area and shared political objectives. It is possible to claim that before the colonization period of Spain the Sahrawis did not have the need to politicize their existence, as they had the possibility to live as moving nomadic tribes free from political institutions and governing. However, when the Western Sahara was handed from Spain to Morocco, real fight for independence started against the new colonizer. The question remains: does a nation always need the politicization of its existence before it can consider itself as a nation? In the field of identity politics and nationalism, nations are always mirrored against others, while recreating the division of them and us, the enemy and the fellow nationals. Following this line of thought it is possible to say that the colonization of Western Sahara is the event that created the Polisario Front and the Sahrawi nation. It is often only through shared enmity a nation is unified.

In the future, there is still a lot of research needed in order to update the Peace and Conflict Research perspective on the Western Sahara conflict. Few ideas that could be developed further are introduced next. One interesting viewpoint for research would be that how the Moroccans perceive the Western Sahara conflict situation and the Sahrawis; as terrorists, as separatists, as Algerian puppets or as something else? Moreover, it would be interesting to know how well the official truth of the Moroccan Kingdom from the conflict is transformed to the everyday believes and opinions of the "ordinary" Moroccans, who do not work in the spheres of diplomacy, state relations or politics. Furthermore, it would be equally intriguing to research the relations Sahrawis have between Moroccans – are there any family fusions, links, strong networks and friendships among the political enmities?

Moreover, when (or if) the Sahrawi Arabic Democratic Republic acquires more level of independence and the Sahrawis get access to the many resources which belong to them by right, it will be interesting to see how the political system in the region will develop. What is now a one-party state aiming towards democracy might shift to something else when the state actually obtains control over the dreamed "homeland". Will there be any political opposition? Will the Sahrawi youth become more radicalized and difficult to govern after decades on the refugee camps or will they be in a key position in the state-building process of the fully recognized country? Only time and further research will show answers to these questions.

In the context of narrative analysis, it would be intriguing to find out, how different cultural and situational factors have an effect on how the country and the nation is seen, recreated and experienced. For example, it seems based on the material, that there is a strong gender division between more peaceful and constructive female voices and stronger and militarist male voices. However, like previously mentioned, it is impossible to draw further conclusions on these possible divisions in the scope of this research. More emphasis on the narrations from the viewpoint of intersectional feminism and its theories would provide fruitful understanding to the local and cultural differences and to the questions of how age, gender and socio-economic position in our societies have an effect on how we experience and built our social understandings from our own and shared social worlds.

What research should always be aiming to is to get slightly closer to 'the truth'. However, the famous 'truth' of matters always takes steps further from us as we approach it. We will never catch it, but we can, and maybe should, always try our very best. This piece of work was a humble attempt to get to the bottom of what being a Sahrawi means and also, what it could mean in the future, if the Sahrawis ever have a real possibility to build a nation in Western Sahara. However, even though there is no objective truth and there never will be, we can find out something closer to it if we just keep our eyes, ears, minds and hearts open. This piece of work is dedicated to all who have a truth-seeking soul, a curios mind and longing for both unity and freedom. These motivations led me here and I am happy how the research ride was; not short, but simultaneously sweet and bitter. As

concluding remarks for all the nations of the world: I hope one day you will get your freedom, whatever that may mean.

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