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## **Nationalism, Resistance, and Patriarchy: The Poetry of Saharawi Women**

*Abstract: The arts, and in particular poetry, have been swords of resistance for the Saharawis since the 1975 Moroccan and Mauritanian invasion and subsequent occupation of their country. In this article, I aim to investigate whether Saharawi women writers go further than the more common objects of Saharawi resistance and fight against patriarchy. Firstly, I focus on the work of the Saharawi 'Friendship Generation' of writers, exploring the Generation's collective (nationalist) aims. Secondly, I look at the construction of gender in Saharawi poetry, analysing how gender, particularly the idea of woman and femininity, are imagined according to the sex-identification of the author.*

Dijo entonces a Scheherazada: 'Hermana, por Alá sobre ti, cuéntanos una historia que nos haga pasar la noche'. (Quoted in Allende, 2004: 8)

'she can *be*, not write, a poem' (Ward Jouve, 1989: 44).

The roots of the Western Sahara conflict are entwined with the death of General Francisco Franco's regime in Spain. In 1975, as Franco lay on his deathbed, the Spanish king Juan Carlos signed a secret agreement dividing Spain's last colony — the Western Sahara — between Morocco and Mauritania. The subsequent unexpected and brutal invasion of the territory forced the stunned Saharawi people to flee for the Algerian desert, dodging the Moroccan planes that dropped white phosphorus and napalm. Those that survived the treacherous journey (which most made on foot) set up camp on borrowed land: the Algerian *Hamada*, the driest, most barren corner of the vast Sahara desert. Whilst all able-bodied men joined the Saharawi liberation front (known as the POLISARIO), Saharawi women began the arduous task of turning their chaotic refugee camps into a structured community capable of sustaining their population until freedom could be achieved. A year later, in 1976, the POLISARIO declared the birth of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), a state-in-exile recognized by eighty nations that continues to house some 180,000 Saharawi refugees. In 1991, the UN brokered a ceasefire between the POLISARIO and Morocco, with the promise of a self-determination referendum for the Saharawis. However, Morocco has continuously blocked this referendum, whilst the international community has failed to impose sanctions to force Morocco to abide by international law and hold it. Meanwhile, those Saharawis that did not manage to escape the invasion back in 1975 remain in the Western Sahara living under a highly repressive Moroccan regime. Here, the smallest manifestation of Saharawi identity warrants torture, imprisonment, and even death.

Since the Saharawi exile to the camps in Algeria, the vast opportunities for students to attend universities in countries all over the world, principally in Algeria, Spain, and Latin America has led to the Saharawi oral poetic tradition coming into contact with Western literary traditions and influences. Furthermore, the urgent need to spread the word about the relatively unknown Western Sahara conflict has contributed to the growing prevalence of a written tradition, which allows the wider distribution of Saharawi creative writing to international audiences.<sup>1</sup> Above all, the growing use of the pen as a weapon under the unbearable weight of 32 years of occupation and exile has led to the evolution of the Saharawi oral tradition into a literary poetics of resistance.

Some of the most celebrated Saharawi resistance writers are women. I am interested to investigate whether, through poetic discourses, these women writers go further than the more common objects of Saharawi resistance and fight against patriarchy in Saharawi society.<sup>2</sup> Do Saharawi women attempt to break the chains of patriarchy through their writing? How do they imagine themselves and/or other women? Do they form resistance to any other webs of oppression such as the Moroccan occupation? If so, what does this mean for gender equality in Saharawi society? These are the questions that I hope to address in the following article. In doing so I shall focus on the poetry of Zahra Hasnau — a founding member of the Saharawi Friendship Generation of Writers — and a short story by Lehdia Dafa, peripherally associated with the same generation. Firstly, though, I would like to look at the struggles and goals of the Friendship Generation as a whole, in order to place Hasnau and Dafa's work in its wider context.

The Saharawi Friendship Generation of poets was born at a conference in Madrid in July 2005. Together, they represent the voice of their people through poetry and creative prose, and are united by the common themes of the pains of war, the harrowing feelings of exile and the dream of return, and resistance to the violent occupation of their homeland by Morocco. On the home page of their online literary blog, the Friendship Generation describe their aim:

Estamos escribiendo la historia del Sahara Occidental. Al margen de la guerra, hubo vida feliz, infancia audaz y juventud soñadora. Es la historia de una generación que nació con las balas chillando en sus oídos y, a pesar de ello, para nosotros todo es literatura y, ahora lo estamos cosechando para refundar la literatura saharawi y de paso liberar nuestra tierra, porque la lucha de la intelectualidad es la más potente de todas las luchas. (Friendship Generation blog, no date)

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<sup>1</sup> An interesting subject for further study — relevant here — would be the transition from an oral tradition to a written tradition in a postcolonial setting.

<sup>2</sup> I am aware of the debate that surrounds the term 'woman writer'; however, this notion goes beyond the scope of this essay. For more on this debate, see Atwood, 1989; McClave, 1980; Bonner et al., 1992.

The members of the Friendship Generation share the bond of their common use of Spanish, which is one of the arms of their political resistance. All the members of the Friendship Generation were born in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the Sahara was still under Spanish rule. By writing in Spanish, they confront Spain with a joint history that the latter would rather conceal and forget. As Limam Boicha highlights, 'España ha estado con nosotros más de cien años. El español es parte de nuestra vida y no puede desaparecer' (Boicha, cited in Gómez, 2006).

The Western Sahara was once the 51st Spanish province, and as such Spain has a certain historical responsibility for the fate of the territory, which, it would seem, it needs to be reminded of. This is especially so since the return to power of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), which has taken a rather more Morocco-friendly stance than its predecessor the Partido Popular (PP). President Rodríguez Zapatero is attempting to 'woo' Morocco owing to issues such as 'illegal immigration, Ceuta and Melilla (Spanish possessions on Morocco's Mediterranean coast), and terrorism (Shelley, 2004: 6–34). His government, along with the French, was responsible for masterminding the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement, which allows the exploitation of the Western Sahara's natural resources for the benefit of Morocco and EU states (San Martín, 2006). In the words of the POLISARIO, this is 'an act of international banditry and plundering [. . .] in flagrant violation of international law' (POLISARIO, 2006). Thus, by writing in Spanish, the Friendship Generation haunts Spain with the latter's memory of its own shameful acts of betrayal.

Countless authors have pointed out that in the thirty-three years since Spain left the Sahara, neither the Cervantes Institute nor the Royal Academy nor any other linguistic institution has recognized that the Western Sahara is the only Spanish-speaking Arabic country.<sup>3</sup> Juan Carlos Gimeno Martín and Pedro Martínez Lillo ask (2006: 95) whether '¿[s]erá porque los saharauis son africanos?'. Limam Boicha's poem *Beso* is possibly a response to this racism, not only in Spain but in Europe in general,

Un beso,  
solamente un beso,  
separa la boca de África  
de los labios de Europa. (Boicha, no date)

The lyrics of the poem highlight the proximity of Africa and Europe, which is mirrored by the poem's form: the sentences are short, and the work itself is over as quickly as a kiss on each cheek, a Spanish form of greeting amongst friends and family. Furthermore, the repeated /s/ sound is onomatopoeic of a kiss. Europe refuses to 'greet' Africa as a friend, or recognize the proximity and the common bonds of the two continents. Thus, the poem confronts the West, criticizing it for its hypocrisy in turning its back on the continent that it plundered for years under imperialism, and continues to exploit under new forms of

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<sup>3</sup> See Gómez, 2006: 14; Alvarado, 2003: 9; San Martín & Bollig, 2007: 9.

colonialism.

Indeed, the Friendship Generation consistently use Spanish to make visible things others would rather were left unsaid. They resist their enforced invisibility at Spanish — and in the wider sense European and Western — hands. In the Friendship Generation's own words; 'Nos hemos marcado una meta, un objetivo primordial: hacer llegar la voz de los saharauis a todos los rincones del planeta a través de la poesía' (Friendship Generation, no date).

Yet the use of Spanish also forms another type of resistance, a nationalist one in opposition to Morocco. Writing in Spanish builds a national border in the realm of language and culture, differentiating the Saharawi 'imagined community' (Anderson, cited Wodak et al. 1999: 22) from the Moroccan given that the latter's colonial linguistic heritage is French, not Spanish. Bahia Mahmud Awah underlines this in his explanation for the use of Spanish: 'lo sentimos [. . .] como un legado diferenciador con respecto a Marruecos' (Mahmud Awah, 2007). Such reinforcements of what it means to be Saharawi in the face of Morocco is crucial during times of conflict in order to unite and mobilize 'the people' against the 'oppressors'.

Finally, the use of Spanish has one more very important advantage: it resists the emotional, psychological, and intellectual isolation of the Saharawis by facilitating bonds of solidarity. Fellow Spanish-speaking readers all over the world can share in the human anguishes expressed in the Generation's poetry, and be encouraged to move their pawns to support the fights and protests of the Saharawis. This is reflected in the choice of name of the Friendship Generation,

La denominación 'Generación de la Amistad' está cargada de sentido: Amistad del grupo de poetas que hemos compartido diferentes experiencias, infancia, exilio, estudio, trabajo en los campamentos; Amistad como saharauis con los españoles que nos han apoyado, escritores, profesores e instituciones; Amistad del pueblo saharauí con otros pueblos, como el español, el argelino, el cubano y tantos otros. (Friendship Generation, no date)

This friendship with other peoples extends especially to those with whom Saharawis have an affinity due to the nature of their struggle. Juan Carlos Gimeno explains:

[H]ay que destacar el papel importante que tiene el español como idioma contra-hegemónico de la emancipación social y de los imaginarios de los movimientos antisistémicos en los últimos años. [. . .] Esto posibilita el contacto y difusión de la cuestión saharauí con otros grupos que comparten con los saharauis aspectos como la lucha por la identidad cultural, las luchas contra la discriminación y el colonialismo, etc. (Gimeno Martín, 2007: 48)

Indeed, in their introduction to *31: A Bilingual Anthology of Saharawi Resistance Poetry in Spanish*, Pablo San Martín and Ben Bollig situate the Friendship Generation in a long heritage of political resistance poetry written in Spanish, including Eduardo Galeano, Esteban Echeverría, José Martí, Pablo Neruda, César

Vallejo, Mario Bendetti, Juan Gelman, and various members of the Spanish Generation of 1927, also known as the Friendship Generation (San Martín & Bollig, 2007: 12–18). In her poem *Estaciones*, Zahra Hasnauí makes an interesting reference to this Generation,

*A las dos Generaciones de la Amistad, la del 27 y la Saharaí*

Invierno de cuna  
soportan  
en tierras peregrinas.  
Se canta en compañía,  
a solas, susurran nanas.  
En los canales rebosantes  
de quimeras cornudas  
vierten las amargas ganas.  
Y día tras día,  
se colorea el lienzo gris del olvido  
a golpes cegados por la esperanza.  
Guillén,  
Salinas,  
Cernuda  
soñaban,  
soñamos, v  
erano de cuna. (Hasnauí, no date b)

In her dedication to the poem, she is recognizing the nominal link, yet perhaps also signalling other connections between the poetry of the two generations. Hasnauí's poetic canvas does indeed show threads of influences from many of the artists of the Generation of 27. Line 12 directs us to 'Guillén'. The first collection of Jorge Guillén, *Cántico 1928*, is characterized by a joyous and jubilant style, celebrating existence and the harmony of the world (Guillén, 1928). Indeed, as Terence McMullan highlights, sixty-five out of the seventy-five poems in the book have used exclamations (McMullan, 2000: 542). This style also marks some of Rafael Alberti's poems in his work *Sobre los ángeles*, in which he uses words associated with light, air, and the natural world as 'weapons' against the evil angels that invade his soul (Alberti, 2002). Hasnauí often employs a similar exclamatory and exuberant style in her own work, whilst the form of her poems — frequently comprising short sentences, lists of nouns and the second person pronoun — are also techniques used by Alberti in his aforementioned work. The poem 'Efecto poeta' serves as an example of these stylistic connections to the Generation of 27:

Revolotea la aliblanca,  
la gartufa se engalana  
por seguidillas se arranca,  
zambra, zahora, jarana!

Amgala, Castilla, Zemmur,  
Zuk, Miyek, Andalucía  
relucen, irradian glamour,  
jolgorio, algarabía!

La luna viste de lirio  
monte, mariposa, río  
participan del delirio,  
risas, bailes, jaleo, lío!

Y dicen que las palabras  
hojuelas son en el viento,  
ahorita, comprenderás  
por qué, con brío, disiento. (Hasnauí, no date a)

Words such as 'Revolotea', 'hojuelas', and 'viento' make the poem as light as air, whilst 'iris' and 'mariposa' add colour to create an imagistically vibrant collage. The steady meter and frequent rhyme throughout the poem give it a musical quality, a characteristic shared by the work of Federico García Lorca, another member of the Friendship Generation (see, for example, García Lorca, 1998). Again like Lorca, she employs imagery from the natural world 'monte, mariposa, río', and makes references to popular Spanish dance and music, 'seguidillas' 'jolgorio, algarabía', in this way giving the Dionysian poem a lavish abundance of life and energy. She once again weaves the two Friendship Generations together by spinning out lists of towns of their respective homelands, 'Amgala, Castilla, Zemmur / Zuk, Miyek, Andalucía', as if in a merry celebration of their joint heritages. However, the final word of the poem abruptly puts an end to the festivities as she invites the reader (or another unknown audience to whom the poem is addressed) to understand 'por qué, con brío, disiento'. One must ask what it is she disagrees with. I have two hypotheses:

Firstly, perhaps her disagreement is with the idea of the joy of existence, which is celebrated by Guillén and others with their lavish, exclamatory style. Perhaps the rest of the poem was just a mockery of the optimism and mask of happiness in a world where there is no harmony — there is no place for this when thousands are left to live and die in the barren Algerian Hamada. Indeed, following the Spanish civil war, many of the Generation of 27 changed their style. For example, the war and death themes of the later major work of Guillén, *Clamor*, are a stark contrast to his first, optimistic work mentioned above (Guillén, 1957).

Secondly, perhaps the uncomfortable disjuncting effect produced by the final barbed-wire word 'disiento' is there to reflect the fate of the Generation of 27 writers, which — in terms of the tremendous lacerations of war, exile, and murder — in some way reflects that of the Saharawis at the hands of Morocco. The killing of Lorca was a synecdoche for the death of a whole generation of artists, betrayed by a Spanish regime, just like their Saharawi counterparts. Therefore, it seems that by referring by name to the Generation of 27, Hasnauí is not only underlining the nominal and stylistic links between Friendship Generations — the Spanish and her own — but also highlighting the political parallels. Just as other

members of her Generation have endeavoured to do by using Spanish, Hasnauï resists the Spanish efforts to make the Western Sahara conflict invisible by shaking a Spanish audience to awaken from slumber and remember what happened to their own Generation of artistic geniuses, willing them not to let it continue happening to another child of Hispanic heritage, the Saharawi Generation.

What does this all mean in terms of gender issues? Zahra Hasnauï's poetry shares the same central preoccupations of the rest of the Friendship Generation, given its explicit nationalism in its denouncement of the Moroccan occupation, its resistance to the international endeavours to render the Western Sahara conflict invisible, and its documentation of the struggle for independence. This is illustrative of the way Saharawi women 'ally' themselves with men in the nation's struggle. They use their pens like sharp blades and fight for independence along with and on the same terms as men, which in turn facilitates the insertion of feminist goals into the nation-building project.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Hasnauï ensures that an active portrait of women is painted through her poetry. So how do Saharawi women writers imagine woman? Like her male colleagues, Hasnauï sees the nation as a beloved female, which the following quote from her short story about a Saharawi Don Quixote illustrates,

¡Oh, cómo se holgó nuestro buen caballero cuando hubo terminado sus prevenciones y más cuando halló nombre para su dama! Y fue, a lo que se cree, que en un lugar cerca del suyo había una moza, de quien siempre había estado enamorado. Llamábase República, y buscándole nombre que no desdijese mucho del suyo, y que tirase y se encaminase al de gran señora, vino a llamarla República Árabe Saharaui Democrática, porque era natural del Sáhara también, nombre, a su parecer músico y significativo, como todos los demás, que a él y a sus cosas había puesto. (Hasnauï, 2009)

On the other hand, unlike the male Friendship Generation writers, she makes woman more active. Her poem 'Saharauia' pays homage to Saharawi women,

*A la mujer saharauï*

Tuve sed, y tus dedos  
escanciaron el rocío.  
Tuve hambre,  
de pan, de paz,  
y tus cantos me colmaron.  
Con la capa de estrellas,  
arropaste la noche gélida,  
acercaste la luna y la brisa marina.

Espíritu,  
alegría, esperanza,

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the link between women's participation in national struggles and the incorporation of gender issues into nation-building projects, see Vickers, 2006: 96.

cómo compensarte, dime,  
cómo superar la magia. (Hasnauí, no date c)

This poem is dedicated 'la mujer saharauí', which would normally imply that the author is other to this category. In this way, Hasnauí allows the discourse to take on an Other's voice, whilst simultaneously maintaining her own (she is, after all, part of the category 'Saharawi woman'). This allows her to exercise a certain power, as she is able to create and interpret an image of the Saharawi woman from the perspective of the Other, whether that Other be Saharawi men, Saharawi children, or the Saharawi people as a whole. Hasnauí applauds and praises the achievements and courageous spirit of her exemplary Saharawi mothers and sisters, and makes them the active subject of poetic contemplation. Indeed the fact that the agent of all the verbs is the Saharawi woman creates a hall of mirrors reflecting her countless and valuable roles in society.

Like Hasnauí, Lehdia Dafa resists and recasts old patriarchal traditions to find a new women-centred way of writing. Her short story 'El Quijote y yo' appears in the volume *Don Quixote, el azri de la badia saharauí: un homenaje a la obra de Cervantes*, along with other tales written by various members of the Friendship Generation. The volume can be described as nationalist in its outlook, as numerous references are made to Saharawi traditions and culture, Hassaniya words are often used, and Tiris, 'un lugar de referencia poética para la sociedad saharauí' (Gimeno Martín, 2007: 48) is made into a homeland of mythical proportions. Its nationalist vision is also apparent in its aim to make known to an international audience the troubles of the Saharawi people, the cruelty of the Moroccan occupation, and Spain's joint legacy and heritage with the Western Sahara.

Each contributor has interpreted the title of the *Don Quixote* . . . volume in her or his own way, some employing the style and form of Cervantes, others writing about the Cervantes masterpiece itself, and others writing to Don Quixote, as if in the form of a letter. Dafa's contribution is a somewhat autobiographical account directed to Cervantes himself, telling of her attempts to write a tale to entertain her nieces and nephews, eternally imprisoned in the family *jaima* by the frequent sandy siroccos. The time taken carrying out her daily domestic chores, the dunes of sand deposited by the wind cloaking her desk and provoking her allergies, and the lack of a light source due to a new moon, create a tedious web of obstacles that impede her creative writing. But then, she sadly reflects, she can only write in Spanish, and since her nieces (and possibly her nephews) cannot speak this language they will not be able to understand her story — or Cervantes — anyway.

The overall theme of the story is analogous to that of the poems by Zahra Hasnauí and other members of the Friendship Generation. The windmills that this modern day Don Quixote must fight against are fruit of the nightmare of a desert exile that the Spanish betrayal has subjected her to. Yet she also deviates a little from this theme and writing becomes the midwife to a gender debate. This is



clear in the reasons she offers Cervantes for deciding to write a story in the first place; 'para vengarme de la crueldad del exilio que atenta a diario contra mi intelecto como persona y contra mi existencia/esencia de mujer, no tengo otra forma de luchar salvo con las palabras' (Dafa, 2009: 44).

A second reason for desiring to dedicate a story to her nieces and nephews was to be able to 'descansar sabiendo que desafiaba mi destino de ama de casa, sin más perspectiva en la vida' (Dafa, 2009: 47). This idea that, as a woman, she has no other opportunities in life apart from work as a housewife is very significant as it contradicts the image of Saharawi women promoted by the POLISARIO, that of emancipation. In an article on the position of women in Saharawi society published on the *Mujeres de Dajla* website entitled '¿Dónde están nuestras mujeres?' Dafa expresses this subversive idea more fully:

¿Continúa realmente la emancipación femenina saharawi un curso sano y correspondiente a las exigencias de las circunstancias actuales de la marcha hacia ese mundo de realización que desde hace más de treinta años soñamos? A ese respecto soy francamente escéptica. No hay que ir lejos para encontrar suficientes ejemplos que argumenten mi planteamiento o más bien preocupación por el estancamiento y la caída del peso de la labor femenina en la construcción de la nueva sociedad saharawi, independientemente del largo y cruel azote del exilio y la nefasta dependencia de la ayuda internacional [. . .] la emancipación femenina hoy por hoy es más bien un ideal que realidad. (Dafa, 2007)

In the final section of the short story, she once again shepherds her writing towards a critique of gender inequalities in Saharawi society, focusing on the disparities between the rights of boys and girls with regard to educational opportunities; '[m]is sobrinos ya son mayores, son veinte, de las chicas, nueve, ninguna terminó la primaria' (Dafa, 2009). By stating that none of the girls finished primary school, she implicitly suggests that the boys did. This idea is a reflection of those explicitly expressed in her article on the position of women:

Otro ejemplo, clásico quizás lo es la educación, donde se supone que la escolarización es obligatoria por igual para todos. Sin embargo en el caso de las mujeres me pregunto además si ello en la práctica significa que se trata solamente de la educación básica y por ende la producción de toneladas más bien de semianalfabetas que nunca pasarán del margen de la mediocridad. El número de universitarias por ejemplo que se han formado a lo largo de estos treinta años, y la cifra de éstas que acceden cada año a las universidades en el extranjero — no hay en los campamentos — en proporción con el sexo masculino sobre todo en los últimos catorce años es una realidad que por sí impone mi escepticismo y preocupación. (Dafa, 2007)

It seems clear that Dafa has used her contribution to the *Don Quixote* volume as a forum for voicing feminine concerns, thus giving birth to a story that could be described as feminist nationalist. The quotes above taken from her short story reflect the political ideas she expresses in full in her article, which reveal her concern at the double yoke of exile and patriarchy that women have to bear. This gender dimension is very important in the light of the almost universal international and historical post-war trend of excluding women from the nation-building process after liberation is achieved (see Vickers, 2006, and West, 1997).

Women all over the world — like Saharawi women — have played integral roles in national liberation movements, yet history has taught us that, once nationalist goals are achieved, problems faced by women are quickly forgotten and previously pro-egalitarian governments drop their feminist policies like a snake sheds its skin. For example, as Sherna Berger Gluck highlights (1997: 101), the Algerian state — where the Saharawi state in exile is situated — ‘has become emblematic of the way in which women’s gender interests are subverted, if not completely submerged, following independence’. Women’s participation in a nationalist struggle, even if that includes participation in non- traditional gender roles, will not result in the subversion of patriarchy in and of itself. As Norma Stoltz Chinchilla explains,

Feminism [. . .] is not an automatic consequence of women’s involvement in political struggle or of men’s experiences with women doing things they were not expected to be able to do. Feminism comes from direct challenges to gender ideologies and practices and giving women the autonomy, within mixed political organizations and outside them, to share experiences with other women and collectively decide on leadership and priorities for demands. Feminist nationalism and feminist class struggle imply a transformation of that struggle in the direction of greater democracy, tolerance, and respect for daily life than has traditionally been the case. (Stoltz Chinchilla, 1997: 216)

Dafa follows the connecting thread of all the contributions in the Don Quixote volume by making her principle message a nationalist one. Like Scheherazade, she fights for the survival of her people through the medium of storytelling. However, within her tale she has woven in a single yarn of feminism, thus suturing together women’s and nationalist goals. This reminds the reader that if gender perspectives do not play a central part in the national struggle, then gender equality in a future independent Sahara will be nothing more than a superficial mirage. Dafa suggests that women should follow her example of coupling their participation in the nationalist project with questioning, organizing, and pressing for change within the movement. In her own words:

Estoy convencida de que para lograr ser una parte igual de importante en el cuerpo de nuestra sociedad, al menos nosotras las mujeres debemos poner estas cuestiones en el ojo de mira. Habrá entonces que ir removiendo el suelo, y sembrar las semillas aunque la lluvia tarde en llegar. (Dafa, 2007)

In conclusion, both the female writers analysed here are — along with their brothers of the same Generation — using the arms of literature to carry out a nationalist project that resists the Moroccan occupation and fights the Spanish (and international) invisibilization of their situation. By affiliating with the national movement, Hasnau and Dafa increase the attainability of positive outcomes with regards to gender equality, as they illustrate that women are a very much alive and integral part of national resistance.

Furthermore, both writers subvert patriarchal traditions. Hasnau resists masculine tradition by making woman the active subject of her poem ‘Saharauia’, which celebrates the illustrious, positive characteristics of Saharawi woman and her role as the keystone of Saharawi society. Dafa takes a different path in her

resistance to patriarchy by openly revealing incidences of her society's sexism in her short story. These allude to the sharp attacks on the continued oppression of women voiced in her article '¿Dónde están nuestras mujeres?'. All in all, this illumination of patriarchy within a volume of nationalist stories that otherwise do not focus on gender issues constitutes a radical offensive against the POLISARIO's rhetoric of Saharawi women as fully emancipated. The words of Maima Mahamud, a member of the UNMS, echo Dafa's message:

Como mujer saharauí veo con recelo nuestro futuro, porque ésta paz tan anhelada puede que también sea la causa de que veamos desmoronarse tantas conquistas de los tiempos de la revolución [...] la verdadera lucha solo acaba de empezar, la lucha para que la mujer ocupe el lugar que le corresponde en un Sahara libre, sin ser discriminada ni marginada. (Mahamud Nayem, 2007)

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