# Psychological Impacts of Forced Migration in the Youth Community of West-Sahrawi Refugees

*Phenomenological Studies*

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**Abstract:** The focus of this research is to examine the basic factors affecting the West Sahrawi young refugees' lives and survival strategies in their situation of exile in the refugee camps of Tindouf, Algeria. The purpose is to answer the following questions: First, which are the main problems as perceived by the youth born in the refugee camps? Second, which are their coping strategies? And finally, which are the protective factors that help them to cope with their situation?

The data has been collected through self reports and open interviews from 22 young Sahrawi refugees, age 12-30. The obtained texts have been analyzed with the help of the software MCA- Minerva, based on the phenomenological perspective of the Meaning Constitution Analysis.

The results indicate that there is a strong perception among the Sahrawi youth community that they lack the power to influence their future, leading them to a hopeless situation that increases their external locus of control. These factors contribute to an increased level of anxiety and decreased motivation in facing their future. Yet their strong sense of collective Sahrawi identity helps them to deal with the strenuous conditions of life and works as a protective factor. Thus, it is necessary to consider these factors when planning development strategies in the refugee camps.

**Keywords:** Western-Sahara, refugee, youth, phenomenology, Minerva software

**Word count**: 16.722

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## 1. Introduction

The following research seeks to present a deep analysis of the situation of the Sahrawi youth community of refugees in a situation of forced migration from a phenomenological approach. This research draws special attention to the Sahrawi culture as well as the Sahrawi context in order to understand the main problems as perceived by the youth community in the refugee camps of Tindouf, Algeria.

It draws attention to the psychological impacts and principal psychological needs of refugee children and youth in a situation of forced migration. Therefore this research aims to answer the following:

- Which are the external protective factors that influence young Sahrawi refugees to cope better in their situation?
- Which are the main problems as perceived by the youth born in the refugee camps?
- Which are the effects of change on the principal cultural and identity characteristics of the Sahrawi youth?

The purpose of this research is to present a thorough understanding of a phenomenological approach that is well combined with several representative theories of psychosocial work and cultural psychology, giving an overview of the youth in a situation of forced migration.

In the first section, the theoretical framework is explained. It consists of an introduction to phenomenology by presenting its main concepts, followed by the explanation of psychosocial work theories combined with cultural psychology. Moreover, it develops a perspective of how cultural psychology and psychosocial work theories can best be used to address the reality of the Sahrawi youth.

The second section introduces the Sahrawi context; it's historical background as well as Sahrawi culture is described. Here, the main issues of the Sahrawi conflict are presented; important historical dates and the first Sahrawi martyrs are examples of that. Moreover, this section highlights Sahrawi culture, emphasizing the changes experienced by the community in the transition from the mainly nomadic life before the conflict started to the life in the refugee camps, leading to the condition of refugees for more than thirty years.

Thirdly, methodology is explained based on the fieldwork conducted in Tindouf's refugee camps. Further, an introduction to the tool of analysis in this research is described: the Minerva software developed by Roger Sages. A deep analysis of all data acquired during the fieldwork is carried out with the help of Minerva, based on a phenomenological approach.

Finally results are presented describing the main entities and its main predicates. The results of the analysis of the main modalities point out that there is a strong perception among the Sahrawi youth that they lack the power to influence their future. Therefore, they feel unable to control their life, to change their future and their condition of refugees. The fact of facing a proactive situation of forced migration have serious repercussions in the life of young refugees, hence one of the big problems that this situation leads them to is that they become powerless and unmotivated in facing their future. However, the results show how the youh community have developed well under the circumstances, adaptating coping startegies to deal with this situation and thus, protective factors have been carefully analyzed.

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that is used draws on a phenomenological approach. The reason for conducting my research according to this perspective is because the main goal of phenomenology is to focus on people's life-world experiences. From a phenomenological approach the existential issues that people face in their everyday life are paramount. Thus, in order to investigate the meaning that the Sahrawi people give to their world in a scientific manner, I am going to use a phenomenological approach, paying special attention to observability.

I have studied the cultural life-world of the Sahrawi youth, their intersubjective world. Prominent authors in this matter, such as Husserl, Karlsson, and Moustakas, among others, have pointed out that the way we understand and see the world changes from person to person (Karlsson, 1995). For instance, the way a young Sahrawi refugee sees the world and perceives it, differs substantially from the perception among modern Western culture. Thus, in order to have a better understanding of their culture and their situation, it is necessary to pay special attention to their meanings and the way they interact with the world surrounding them.

The Sahrawi culture, being in a situation of forced migration and being forced to live in refugee camps for more than thirty years, has been facing a very strong process of changing values through different generations. Due to their daily-life interaction with the international community and many different aid organizations they also face a process of acculturation. Globalization and modernization have also been playing an important role in these communities. While the older generation of the Sahrawi community is trying to maintain strong cultural values and their ancient traditions as they used to in their old land, the youngest are involved in a process of change, going from the traditional values that their families have transmitted to them and living with the dream that one day they are going to be able to return to their country. A country that, even though they have not been able to see it, they can describe so perfectly and vividly in their minds that it seems as if they would have been living there their entire lives.

Moreover, another aspect that I find especially interesting and wish to focus on is that of identity. Ania Loomba has approached this concept by highlighting the creation of racial stereotypes and the construction by European colonizers of "outsiders" (Loomba, 2005: 92). This concept is crucial to the debate because in order to create an identity as a group, another group must exist that can be used as a comparison with "the other". In the case of the Sahrawi community the fact of being discriminated and forced to live outside their country, and find themselves as refugees, have had serious repercussions in their identity. This situation has brought them closer to each other with a very strong identity as a group and as a Sahrawi.

## 2. Theoretical background

### Phenomenology

Since the 1960's, phenomenology has grown into an alternative to positivism. The philosopher Edmund Husserl was its founder and he proposed phenomenology as the science that studies the essence of phenomena (Sokolowski, 2006). Robert Sokolowski (2006) describes phenomenology as a science that goes beyond the philosophical terms of describing facts. He defines it as the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such

experience (Sokolowski, 2006). Following this perspective, Wittgenstein (1975:121, in Sages, 2003) describes phenomenology as a process in which "All the things, though looking the same, are really different."

Among the phenomenological disciplines there is a phenomenological psychology. Phenomenological psychology is empirical and describes a certain life-world or some phenomenon within the life world. Husserl describes qualitative psychology on the basis of lived experience and the attempt to describe some particular feature of it to the scientific community (Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006). According to Ashworth and Cheung Chung, psychology that is involved with phenomenology will include the focus on meanings, the focus on people's perceptions, the use of a form of Epochê and will be aware of the individual life-world *(Ibid).* There is, for instance, a relationship between phenomenology and psychology focusing on the object of study of each discipline. Phenomenology studies the relationship between conscientiousness and subjective experiences of individuals, while psychology also encloses the study of conscientiousness when studying the mind (Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006). Hence, a human being is not seen as a passive receiver of sensations and impressions. On the contrary, he/she is involved in a continuous process of conscientiousness. We are then interested in getting to the meaning a person gives to the reality that is characterized by cultural, individual and material-ecological aspects. Therefore in phenomenology, objectivity can only be interpreted by considering the inter-subjectivity of each occasion and each individual that is to be studied.

Consequently, phenomenology searches for the meaning that activities, objects, situations, experiences and relationships with others have for a certain person. How people experience their world without seeing the world as a static and objective fact. Phenomenology seeks for the meaning that every person subjectively gives to his/her world. There is no such common experience; therefore we find realities that look the same but are experienced in a completely different way by each individual. Thus, if we can study and understand the meaning that a person gives to the world, we can also understand that individual's subjective experiences.

When we are studying human beings, from a phenomenological point of view, we are studying each individual's feelings, motivations, value systems, experiences- anything that can be important for the person we are studying. We attempt to enter in his/her world, because if we are able to do that we will be able to understand the person's inter-subjectivity. The multiple ways different people experience a certain

situation. If we know, for instance, what is important or essential for the person we are interested in, we would be able to help the person in a deeper way because we will know the real feelings of this person and which issues we should focus on. This is essential because phenomenology stresses the importance of focusing on the person's subjective experiences of reality; therefore the researcher will not focus on what he/she thinks is important as an outsider, on the contrary, the researcher is going to focus on what the person being studied is emphasizing. From a phenomenological point of view, what is important is what is perceived by the person as important, as well as the deep understanding of why this person perceives it in that way. For instance, two different people can perceive the exact same situation as something completely different and it can contain very different meanings for each of them. One could experience happiness in a certain situation and the other could experience confusion or sadness in the same situation. This is because they give different meaning to that same situation and have different perspectives on their life-world.

For that reason, the aim of phenomenology is the search for the meaning of a phenomenon, and it differentiates from other scientific disciplines such as positivism based in a collection of facts. Positivism, for example, understands facts as being conceived objectively and independently, and variables are operationalized in order to turn into observable facts (Karlsson 1995: 16). Phenomenology on the other hand is opposed to the idea that there are objective facts independent of a subject or a subjective consciousness; it is believed that every subject is determined by the concept of "intentionality" (Karlsson 1995: 16). Therefore in phenomenology, the principle of objectivity is achieved by acknowledging the absolute position of the subject and the values influencing and directing its personal experiences. Under objectivity, phenomenologists understand "the inter-subjectivity agreed under explained conditions" (Sages &Lundsten, 2002).

✓ *Intentionality*

The central issue in phenomenology is intentionality**.** Husserl (1962, 1977) suggests that our conscientiousness is intentional. This means that when we feel something, such as love or anger, it is always directed towards something or somebody (Ashworth &Cheung Chung, 2006). Phenomenology suggests that every act we perform, every experience that we have is intentional, meaning that all our awareness is directed toward something or someone (Sokolowski, 2006). Our conscientiousness though, is happening

outside of our awareness most of the time. This is important because it highlights the importance of knowing the life-world of a person. The life-world is another central concept in phenomenology, through which we can understand things that happened or ways that somebody acts that are beyond the explicit acts observed. Use of the life-world concept allows us to understand what it is implicit and embodied in a way of acting versus specific situations. Thus, "the vehicle for this process is our human ability to intuit the things themselves and to intuit that which presents itself to conscientiousness directly" (Ashworth &Cheung Chung, 2006:79).

✓ *The Epochê*

When talking about phenomenology it is necessary to describe the concept of the epochê. The epochê, a term taken from the Greek skepticism, is the Husserlian notion of bracketing, in an attempt to describe the essence which is another Husserlian objective of the phenomenon under investigation.

In phenomenology, to utilize the epochê means "to bracket past knowledge about the experienced object, in order to experience this instance of it freshly" (Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006: 84). This concept emphasizes the importance of reviewing and experiencing vivid images about important life experiences of a person in the moment he/she is sharing the experiences with the researcher. In this way the researcher is going to understand certain situations embodied in the subject's experience.

Furthermore there are three essential concepts in phenomenology that have been previously introduced and need to be further explained: the concept of *Meaning,* the concept of the *Life-World* and that of *Horizon.*

Firstly, the concept of *meaning* that plays a principal role when conducting research from a phenomenological approach. It implies the meaning that people ascribe to their world, their personal understanding and view of reality. Human meanings are the key to the study of lived experience *(*Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006). A thoroughly conducted research project should then be oriented to get to the meaning and complex interactions of meanings, as experienced by individuals (Sages, 2003).

The second principal concept in phenomenology is the **Life-World** experience. The *life- world* is the world in which we live and that involves the inter-subjective world of each individual (Sokolowski, 2006). The understanding of the life-world is

based on the individual perspective and it focuses on the importance of taking into consideration the context in which things are lived and experienced, rather than investigating specific isolated aspects of something that individuals experience without considering in which context and where lived experience occurs, as for instance, empirical psychotherapy does when conducting scientific research (Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006). Phenomenology differentiates between the objective scientific world and the subjective lived world (Sokolowski, 2006). According to Sokolowski (2006: 146) "the world we live in and directly perceive is only a construct made by our minds responding to the input from our senses, and the senses react biologically to physical stimuli that are transmitted from objects."

Phenomenology advocates that human activities always happen in a specific situation, characterized by the interaction with the culture and the context in which certain activities take place and involved in an ongoing process of change and development (Sages, 2003).

Collecting data from the life-world of the individuals is the way that phenomenology produces ecological data. The life-world of the individuals is about knowing what happens in the life of individuals, what it is surrounding them and when they experience something in their lives. The concept of life-world takes into consideration the relationship between the interviewed and the interviewer, as a better data collection will be achieved when the person providing information feels comfortable and truly wants to talk about something, especially when talking about personal and sensitive topics (Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006). This leads to the concept of inter-subjectivity. When human beings approach their world they have relationships with others and the way a person might experience these relationships with others is the inter-subjective world of the individual. The researcher must have a certain degree of inter-subjective understanding that is achieved through a good understanding of the cultural, historical, and social context in which the person is involved (Ashworth & Cheung Chung, 2006). When we relate to others we enter in the world of inter-subjectivity; certainly our experiencing embodies a dimension of other minds, we share meaning with others and we define ourselves in contrast to others (Sokolowski, 2006).

Finally, the third principal concept is the one of **Horizons.**
When describing what the concept of horizon means, I am focusing on the recent developments within phenomenology that emphasize cultural applications of the world horizon (Suzi, 2009). This is a quite new way of approaching the concept of horizon,

focusing on the inter-culturality of every encounter during the fieldwork. The encounters between different cultural complexes have been generating a debate about the multiple options and different approaches of conducting research. This approach highlights an intercultural perspective as an alternative to a Western-centric perspective (Suzi, 2009). Post-transcendental currents in phenomenology emphasize the importance of the emergence of the problematic of the world, highlighting its cultural articulation and encounter. Within this context, phenomenological investigations give emphasis to work with an interlinkage of different life-worlds that interpenetrate and stimulate each other in multiple ways (Suzi, 2009). According to Arnason, "The fundamental phenomenological concept of horizon expresses the insight that determinations can be made only against the background of an underdetermined context, which can be further determined and thus, it opens to diverging interpretations" (Weltauslegung, 1978; in Suzi, 2009). His approach highlights the importance of culture in considering the ways human beings acquire meaning from things and life experiences, along with the human condition of sociality and world relation. Thus, when we aim to learn and get insight into people's life-world, we are facing a new world of different kinds of experiences and context that are influencing the life of the individuals we are studying. This means that our perceptions are embodied in and attached to cultural contexts. Arnason thus looks at the world as a "shared horizon of cultural encounter (Weltauslegung, 1978; in Suzi, 2009). According to him, "the unity of the world can only be understood when the intercultural and contextual aspects are also centrally incorporated; thus the world is a unity that can paradoxically only be known as an intercultural plurality" (Weltauslegung, 1978; in Suzi, 2009 ).

Therefore, in this case, a phenomenological approach is the most appropriate way to study the case of the youth in the refugee camps of Tindouf because it provides an account of the intercultural world of the Sahrawi young refugees. Its emphasis lies on the importance it places on the problematic of the 'world' as trans-subjective, being embodied in a cultural horizon, irreducible to subjective and inter-subjective levels of analysis and meaning.

As a final point, I must make reference to the differentiation between a natural attitude versus a phenomenological attitude. The natural attitude is explained by the basic nature of every situation, here we do not move to anything more complex. It is the experience of something vivid by default (Sokolowski, 2006). In our everyday life we

experience all kinds of situations and we have material objects presented to us. We experience such a multitude of encounters every day in this world and all appear to us in different manners of presentation. "The world is more like a context, a setting, a background, or a horizon for all the things there are, all the things that can be intended and given to us" (Sokolowski, 2006: 43). A phenomenological attitude, nonetheless, considers a more complex dimension. It refers to everything that happens as being related to something, to an attitude in the way we perceive the reality and in the way we approach things.

The phenomenological attitude aims to describe the manifolds by which objects present themselves and are identified. The turn to the phenomenological attitude is called the phenomenological reduction. Reduction in phenomenology means that we suspend the intentionalities we contemplate. This is where the concept of the epochê appears. As described above, in phenomenology the epochê means the neutralizing of natural intentions, that we suspend our beliefs when we enter to the world. When entering into the phenomenological attitude, we describe the various intentionalities and their various objects. We distinguish between a thing and its appearances, also called the "ontological difference" in phenomenology (Sokolowski, 2006: 45).

Now that the basic concepts in phenomenology have been presented, I am going to move forward and relate phenomenology to perception, memory and imagination:

✓ *Perception and memory*

When we perceive an object, this is given to us in a mixture of presence and absence. Some parts of an object cover up other parts. If, for instance, we see an object from the front line we directly imagine and perceive what it is on the other side. Here the object is giving an identity through different forms of dimensions, aspects and profiles. Identity does not show up considering only one of the parts, on the contrary, identity is given to us as a whole completed part. An object, for instance, gives to us an identity considering the whole dimension of the object, even though we are only looking at one side of it (Sokolowski, 2006). Nevertheless, an identity can also be given when an object is remembered. Memory and the act of remembering provide another set of appearances and absences, another manifold of the object. More absences are involved in the process of remembering than in perception (Sokolowski, 2006). Phenomenology considers the act of remembering as a new form of giving an identity to an old

perception of an object. Memory is a vivid process interacting with other types of perceptions and memory in our brain. Thus, it is not considered a simple act of picturing an old image in our brain. In picturing for instance, we look at one object that portrays another. We simply visualize the object directly, in the simple way it is presented to us. On the other hand, remembering involves the act of perception: it is not only an abstraction that is presented to us; it involves a more complex process in which memory becomes involved in an active process of perception. In remembering, our memories become alive. We capture that earlier part of our intentional life and that is why memories can be so nostalgic, because they are the activity of reliving. Memory gives life to the past again. When we relive an earlier part of our conscious life we are reactivating an intentionality. Phenomenologically it is described as: "The very dimension of horizon of the past is given to us through remembering; the revival of my earlier perception involves a revival of myself as perceiving at that time" (Sokolowski, 2006:69).

Sometimes the revival of the past can be troublesome. If a person has done things he/she might be ashamed of or if a person was involved in a traumatic incident, we might be unable to rid ourselves of the experiences in question. An old Sahrawi man involved in the war in the territory of Western Sahara said, "the youth in the refugee camps become more and more involved in radical positions that are claiming for war. But the ones who have experienced the war, all we want is to forget, to take away these painful images from our head, although we are unable to do that…" (Sokolowski, 2006: 70). Sokolowshi (2006) describes this process as follows: "we are something like spectators when we reenact things in memory, but we are not just spectators, and we are not like viewers of a separate scene. We are engaged in what happened then" (Sokolowski, 2006: 71).

✓ *Imagination and Anticipation*

Memory and imagination are structurally very similar but memory operates with belief and imagination is encompassed by a kind of suspension of belief. An imaginary object can, for instance, be taken from real perceptions but it is projected into a new and unknown situation that did not occur. Despite that, in imagining we are creating a new world of perceptions and we can enter into a new imaginary scenario. We are not totally free, in the process of imagining we have some restrictions on what we can fantasize

about. There is a part of our imagination that tends to be realistic: it is the kind of imagination when we are planning something, when we imagine ourselves in some future condition. This anticipatory form of imagination is a displacement of the self, it is the reverse of memory (Sokolowski, 2006). We are anticipating a future experience instead of reviving an old one. This act of projecting ourselves into the future is what most of the Sahrawi young refugees experience in the refugee camps. As I am going to discuss further on in the results, the youth in the refugee camps tend to imagine a future life in their home country and they even get positive perceptions of life through this construct and vivid image of the future. Sokolowski (2006) says "we imagine certain wished-for satisfactions" (Sokolowski, 2006: 74). "Only because we can imagine we can live in the future" (Sokolowski, 2006: 74).

My choice in adopting a phenomenological approach as the main theoretical background in my research and thus excluding other approaches that might be oriented toward a more clinical approach and are more frequently used when working with refugees, does not intend to underestimate disciplines such as clinical psychology and subsequent psychological and psychiatric treatments when working with refugees. In some cases, when working with people affected by trauma and post traumatic stress disorder, for instance, these specialized treatments can be crucial. But phenomenology appears to be a more useful approach in my research as the focus of my study deals with the psychosocial implications of youth in a situation of forced migration, stressing the understanding of youth's perceptions of reality and how they deal with their situation or how it is for them to live in refugee camps and how the consequences are perceived by the affected people. Thus, phenomenology, as a theory and as a method, has been the best way of approaching these youth's perceptions of their reality. Phenomenology always takes into account the context and the influence of people's culture when facing their conditions of life and their future.

As I am interested in understanding how Sahrawi youth perceive their reality and which their main problems and worries are, in order to give a comprehensive overview of these implications, phenomenology provides a deep understanding of people's feelings and offers knowledge about which the principal needs of the young Sahrawi refugees are. This will be crucial knowledge when developing psychosocial interventions in order to ameliorate their situation.

# Psychosocial work

Today, professionals working in the field of humanitarian assistance show a lack of consensus with regard to what the psychological consequences of conflict and displacement are. It is often assumed these consequences of conflict and displacement have negative effects on the mental health of refugees. For instance, these consequences are many times conceptualized as trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, stress and mental illness. Thus, professionals have had a tendency to generalize the use of therapy or other psychological interventions to the whole community of refugees (Loughry & Eyber, 2003). Nonetheless, a closer approach is necessary when studying the consequences that conflict and displacement have for many refugees. It is necessary to be careful not to generalize the situation and the meaning that being a refugee has for different people coming from different situations and different cultures. Different people have varying perceptions of the reality they live in and will also cope differently in similar situations.

Richman (1996; in: Loughry & Eyber, 2003) describes an approach emphasizing the importance that psychosocial support plays in the life of individuals that are facing difficult situations. He emphasizes the important role that psychosocial support plays in the daily life of children facing hard conditions of life or coming from a situation of forced migration. This model highlights the importance of considering the context, including the individual's culture and thus, their cultural responses within the community. For example, the Sahrawi community has built a complex network of social relationships inside the camps that constitute the pillars of their life.

However, psychosocial work is a relatively new area of intervention in the field of conflict situations. Psychosocial work aims to try to get out of the focus on emergency relief and take into account the psychological needs of people affected by conflict or forced migration. It focuses on development projects that seek to develop strategies that would work as protective factors in the life of these communities.

When talking about the refugee community there is some communalities and shared terms that can be generalized. However, the refugee community comes from different life situations, they live in different places and contexts and they come from different cultures; thus, it is necessary to be careful when generalizing the psychological

consequences of conflict and displacement. In some cases people coming from a situation of forced migration or conflict can show very good coping strategies that they have developed in order to survive in their difficult life situation.

An overview of research of the psychological adjustment of refugees by Ager (2001; in Loughry & Eyber, 2003) examines research since World War II. He noticed that most of the research was focused on the psychopathology of individual refugees. In contrast, research focusing on the psychological and social functioning of individuals and communities was almost nonexistent. It did not arrive until the late 1980s when research started to readdress the focus on the psychosocial needs of refugees (Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

After World War II, researchers started to pay more attention to the psychological needs of children being displaced or affected by conflict, after a war that led many children to be separated from their families and displaced from their homes. However the first studies that appeared in this matter had a tendency to focus on the negative effects of the war and its negative psychological effects. This is understandable due to the context of that time, but research about psychosocial work was still almost inexistent (Loughry & Eyber, 2003). In recent years, however, there has been a switch and studies concerning refugee children or children affected by war and conflict have started to pay attention to the psychosocial needs of these children and their positive ways of dealing with the trauma and hard life experiences (Langmeier & Matejcek, 1975. In: Loughry & Eyber, 2003). Moreover, recently it has been argued that some of the Western culture's programs that are oriented toward alleviating the psychological consequences of war such as trauma or posttraumatic stress disorder are many times inappropriate in non-Western cultures. Some questionnaires that are used in those cases in order to make a diagnostic many times are not adaptable to individuals from non-Western cultures. Hence, psychosocial programs need to take into account the value that culture plays in issues of distress and mental health and they need to be adjusted to the cultural context (Eyber, 2002; in Loughry & Eyber, 2003). Eyber (2002) argued that in Mozambique and Angola, for instance, professionals tried to apply Western methods to help people with problems that they perceived as caused by "unforgiving spirits," such as diviners. In that context, the use of Western traditional methods was inappropriate because they were based in other ideas that would not be applicable in such a case (Eyber, 2002; in: Loughry & Eyber, 2003). Eyber (2002)

Langmeier and Matejcek (1975) suggest the importance of family when working with people affected by displacement. They looked at different studies of the effects of war and they concluded that what appeared to be more harmful in affecting the mental health of children was the fact of being forced to separate from their families. These studies indicated that the quality of the parental or family relationship was very important for the child in order to developed psychological well-being. For instance, the quality of communication between the family and children was contributing to an easing of the experience. Further, Langmeier and Matejcek concluded that despite the differences in children's readjustment, with caring family relationship, children coming from situations of conflict or forced migration appeared to show better coping strategies when dealing with adverse situations. (Langmeier & Matejcek, 1975. In: Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

In the light of Langmeier and Matejcek (1975), Freud and Burlinhamn (1943) focused their research on the importance that family and good care of family relationships have for children in situations of forced migration. They highlighted the importance of social support that children receive during and after a situation of conflict because it influences the way they are able to cope with their everyday life experiences (Freud & Burlinhamn, 1943; in: Loughry and Eyber, 2003).

Due to the lack of research about children's well-being and ability to cope in adverse circumstances, in recent years there has been a concern regarding this issue and more research is today being conducted in this area.

Many children that have experienced situations of trauma, for instance, are able to grow up and show good patterns of adaptation and psychological well-being. Moskovitz (1983), as referenced by Loughry and Eyber (2003), refers to some possible factors that would play a positive role in facilitating children's growth to adulthood after being in the concentration camps of the Holocaust. These factors were, for example, the power of religious belief, and in that case a sense of historic continuity with Judaism, strength derived from the community, strength of family relationship and a sense of public responsibility towards the community. In the case of the West Sahrawi refugees some similarities are found (they are going to be analyzed deeper further on in the results): for instance, in that case some of the protective factors that provided children with a resistance to risk had some similarities such as the importance of the family strength, sense of belonging to a group and public responsibility.

In a similar fashion, Garmezy and Masten (1990; in: Loughry & Eyber, 2003) identified four categories of protective factors that supports what has been described above:

- ✓ Positive personality dispositions
- ✓ Supportive family environment
- ✓ An external support system for strengthening and
- ✓ Reinforcement of a child's coping efforts

Additionally, in a study about the ameliorating factors of children in difficult life circumstances, Garbarino, Kostenly and Dubrow (1991), as quoted by Loughry & Eyber (2003), found that in children with a normal range of stress, the factors that were helping them to cope better in war situations were: the experience of self-efficacy, stable relationships, an open and supportive educational climate, as well as adequate social support.

*Stress and protective factors*

Stress plays a different role in different individuals' experiences. Garmezy and Rutter (1987; in: Loughry & Eyber, 2003) have defined five categories of stressors:

- ✓ Loss of a relative
- ✓ Chronically disturbed relationships
- ✓ Events that redefine the family composition
- ✓ Events that require family adaptation and
- ✓ Troublesome events, such as physical trauma or illness.

There are a number of personality characteristics that work as protective factors and possibly moderate stress while contributing to an understanding of resilience. They highlighted the importance of family strength when talking about protective factors and coping with stress (Garmezy & Rutter 1987; In: Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

Following the same line of research, other studies have concluded further elements that play a role as protective factors: the level of a person's distractibility, stimulation stress hold, approach to novel stimuli, intellectual ability, sense of humor, effective social problem solving skills, adequate use of coping strategies and an internal locus of control; all these factors would facilitate children's resilience (Loughry& Eyber, 2003).

Subsequent research proposes that instead of focusing on the protective factors or risk factors, what it is significant is the nature of their interaction with the stressors.

This emphasizes the interaction between the individual and the stressors. Thus, when the individual perceives the stressful event as manageable, there are better chances for the individual to cope with the stressors. Protective factors are in this case seen as attributes of individual children that moderate their likelihood of developing a mental disorder when exposed to high stress (Masten et al; 1990).

Some factors influencing how well children cope with stressful situations can be intrinsic to the child, such as temperament, gender, age and competence or they may be extrinsic, such as socioeconomic status, level of education, social relationships and previous life experiences. These factors influence the personal experience when dealing with stressors and vary between individuals (Loughry& Eyber, 2003).

Luthar (1991, in Loughry & Eyber, 2003) noticed that those individuals with a high measure of internal locus of control and good social skills had a higher chance of dealing better with their situations than those who did not. This suggests that when, on the contrary, the environment was perceived as uncontrollable or unpredictable for the child, it would have negative repercussions for them.

*Resilience*

In recent years a change of focus has occurred, from the traditional ways of studying childhood and youth vulnerability to develop any mental illness after being exposed to a stressful situation or conflict, to focusing on the positive adaptations that many children develop when coping with adverse circumstances (Loughy & Eyber, 2003). There are specific features of protective mechanisms such as competent parenting, a good relationship with one of the caregivers, ability in adulthood of *giving* social support, good networks of informal relationships, better educational experience, and involvement of organized religious activity. Moreover, taking into account children's psychological functioning, work as protective factors: high IQ, superior coping styles, task-related self-efficacy, internal locus of control, a high sense of self-worth, empathy, capacity to plan and having a sense of humor (Loughy & Eyber, 2003; Ingleby, 2005; Boyden & Berry, 2005).

Rutter (1996) has pointed out the importance of considering the interaction between such factors during one's lifetime. According to this view, it does not make sense to consider how individuals experience isolated situations. He stresses the importance of connecting life experiences over time that contributes to the

psychological well being or vulnerability in individual cases (In: Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

*Cultural Psychology*

- Would the protective factors appear to be the same in individuals from different cultures?

Interaction with social, cultural and political values appeared to be an important factor in children and adolescents' lives. In recent years interest for cultural psychology has been growing. Cultural psychology emphasizes that Western models are sometimes inadequate when they are implemented in non-western cultures. People have different ways of dealing with distress and suffering and different cultures have many different ways of coping with conflict situations or trauma (Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

Cultural psychology describes two terms that have been used to illustrate different approaches to health and illness: First, an emic approach which emphasizes the world view of the people themselves and studies behavior and illness within a cultural or social system; second, an etic approach that examines issues from a position outside a particular social or cultural system (Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

Phenomenology shares similarities with this approach and helps us to better understand the subjectivities of individuals and their inter-subjective World.

"The only true exploration, the only true fountain of delight, would not be to visit foreign lands, but to possess other's eyes, to look at the world through the eyes of others" (Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past. In: Smith et al., 2006). This is the principle that phenomenology and cultural psychology share and emphasize. In order to understand a culture and to work with individuals from different cultural contexts it is essential to understand how they think, what is important for them and how the individuals we are studying give meaning to their world.

Cultural psychology emphasizes that every community has particular ways to cope with certain situations and they vary from culture to culture. Thus, western models are not seen as effective when they are applied to non-western cultures (Wilson & So-Kum Tang: 2007).

Moreover, cultural psychology takes a further step, taking into account children's needs, not only viewing them as passive receivers, emphasizing the importance of viewing

children as active participants, taking into account children's perceptions of reality and working with them as equal partners (Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

In light of that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1994) has expressed the need to integrate cultural traditions of a community into the area of psychological assistance, and to listen to individual needs. Sometimes a specialist approach where professionals try to implement the same Western based techniques to people dealing with trauma, without taking into account cultural context, will lack effectiveness. For instance, the use of specialized techniques, such as questionnaires, has reported some problems when they have been applied to people coming from non-Western cultures, because the cultures have different ways of perceiving distress that are not always going to be reflected in a questionnaire (Loughry & Eyber, 2003).

## 3. Geographical and Social Description

### 3.1 Geographic context

The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is a partially recognized state, located in north-western Africa and bordering Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the North Atlantic Ocean. It covers an area of roughly 266,000 km2 (See appendix 1).

Western Sahara has a long extension of the Sahara Desert, the largest desert in the world. The landscape is mostly flat, with some mountains in the south and northwest. First, cities appeared near the ocean with the arrival of the first Spanish settles.

There are few rivers, but they are dry most of the year and fill up during the rainy season. The territory is rich in natural resources, mainly phosphates, and the coast line is particularly rich in fishing areas. During the colonial period, interest from other countries rises in the search for oil in the coastal areas (Callau, 2004).

### 3.2 Historical background

#### 3.2.1   Western Sahara conflict

The conflict of Western Sahara is a long protracted situation that has maintained the Sahrawi people in a situation of forced migration. It starts in Western Sahara and continues all the way to the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria. Western Sahara is now considered the last remaining colony of Africa.

The conflict began in the year 1975 when Hassan II, at that time the king of Morocco, initiated the Green March- a march of 350.000 Moroccan civilians accompanied by the FAR (Moroccan army), with the objective of taking over the territory of Western Sahara.

Western Sahara was an old colony of Spain, and it used to be considered by the Spanish government as "Spanish province number 53" (Bárbulo, 2002). In the year 1884 Antonio Cánovas, prime minister of Isabel II, sent the first expedition of Spanish settlers to Western Sahara. Since then the process of colonization of the Western Sahrawi territory has continued and lasts yet today. With the arrival of Spanish soldiers and workers, the first cities started to appear in the territory and some of the Sahrawi people started to settle down in some of these new cities. The Sahrawi were traditionally nomads and they moved through the desert pasturing their animals and following the clouds in search of water; it is because of this way of life that they were known as "sons of the clouds" (Bárbulo, 2002).

Many historian researchers have reported that the "real" colonization process did not start until 1959 when the Spanish population in the territory increased from 1.700 to approximately 5.800 and the city of Laayoune became the capital (Bárbulo, 2002). By that time Spain was under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, who was trying to maintain the occupation of the territory due to his economic interests in the area against UN pressure for the claim of a referendum for self-determination of the territory. Sahrawi people interacted during many years with the Spanish that were living in the territory and they used to have quite a good relationship. Western Sahara was perceived by the Spanish settles to be a hostile territory due to the harsh climatic conditions and because most of the territory was covered by desert. But by the 1940s and 1950s, some evidence of oil is discovered in the territory and the abundance of phosphates and fishing seemed promising. Soon, important oil companies, most of them American and some Spanish, Moroccan, and French, settled down in the territory and started looking for oil exploitation possibilities. Meanwhile the UN was putting more and more pressure on Spain to establish a referendum, and Sahrawi independence movements

started to organize themselves and claim their rights, a group mainly formed by Sahrawi students from the area of Morocco, Western Sahara and Spain. In 1969, Mohamed Sidi Brahim Bassiri, popularly known as Bassiri, founded one of the first organized nationalist Sahrawi movements called "Moviemiento de Vanguardia para la Liberación del Sahara". One year later, after Spain violently broke up an independence demonstration in Laayoune, Bassiri was imprisoned and a few days later declared disappeared. Morocco was aware of the instabilities in the territory and initiated several attempts to negotiate with Spain for control of the territory. In 1973, Sahrawi nationalists, mainly students, created the Frente Polisario[1] which, in the year 1976, proclaimed The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) also known internationally as RASD. Brahim Gali was elected general secretary of the movement followed by El Uali after his disappearance some years later. Bassiri, Bachir Lehlaui and El Uali became the first martyrs of the Sahrawi people. Moreover El Uali became the general secretary of the "Frente Polisario" and was some years later awarded the presidency of the RASD[2]. In 1976 he was killed in Mauritania after an attack in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania (Bárbulo, 2002).

By 1974 Spain was in a situation of political instability due to the poor health conditions of the dictator Francisco Franco and different channels of opinion about the issue of Western Sahara began to appear in the government. Franco continued with the intention to maintain the colony while Arias Navarro, at that time the prime minister, was ready to compromise with Morocco. At the same time Morocco took advantage of the situation and the instabilities in the territory and continued to push for the claim of sovereignty on the territory. The justice tribunal in The Hague decided to investigate the case in order to make a decision about whether Morocco had the right of claiming sovereignty of the territory. That same year Morocco sought the support of the United States which was confirmed by an interview with the American Prime Minister Henry Kissinger [3] in Rabat on the 15th of October of that year (Bárbulo, 2002).

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[1] Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro

[2] The current president of the RASD is Mohamed Abdelaziz who lives in the Refugee camps of Tindouf

[3] There is a telegram that has been published many times by international media and that has never been contested, where Henry Kissinger confirmed that the "project" was ready and Hassan II would be fully supported by the United States when taking over the territory of Western Sahara with the initiation of the Green March.

In 1975 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague officially proclaimed that there were no ties of sovereignty by Morocco in the territory of Western Sahara. However, by then Morocco already counted on the support of France, the United States and the complicity of Mauritania, as well as the volatile situation in Spain.

Morocco began with preparations for the Green March with the tolerance of Spain, who gave permission to Morocco to start introducing its soldiers on strategic points of the territory. At the same time though, Spain was publically promising its support to its colony and their help to the Sahrawi people in order to protect their territory (Callau, 2004).


- The Green March

The 16th of October, 1975 the official resolution of the International Court of Justice was proclaimed, stating that the process of decolonization of Western Sahara must be started and that the future of the territory was in the hands of the Sahrawi people. Starting from that point, the United Nations would have been able to promote a referendum of self-determination. But a few hours later, Hassan II went to his people and initiated the Green March; a march of 350 000 Moroccan civilians protected by the FAR, to take over the territory of Western Sahara. The 15$^{th}$ of November the illegal Tripartite agreements were signed, in which Spain handed over the territory of Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania (Bárbulo, 2002; Callau, 2004:104; Znined, 2007).

The Polisario combatants saw how, unexpectedly, Spain left the colony and they were left alone fighting against Morocco and Mauritania. The way Morocco entered the territory was considered genocide (Federacion Internacional de Derechos del Hombre, 1975; in Bárbulo, 2002:278). Thousands of Sahrawi were bombed with napalm and white phosphorus while they were trying to escape to the desert. Some were thrown from helicopters or buried alive. House breaking, arbitrary detentions and tortures were continually reported by different international Organizations (AFAPREDESA, 2008). The militants of the Polisario were trying to help as many people they could to cross the border into Algeria with old trucks that Spain had abandoned. Most of the refugee people were women, children and old people; some of those that were not able to find any vehicle to cross the border arrived by foot with open flesh wounds on their feet and injuries all over their bodies. The infant mortality was extremely high; one day 40 children were buried at the same time. Child mortality was so high during these years that nowadays it is difficult to find anyone that was born between 1975 and 1976

(Bárbulo, 2002; Delgado, 2009). During the exodus more than 10% of the Sahrawi population was killed (documentary TV3, 2008).

Morocco sent military armament to Mauritania to help them to attack the territory from the south and they continued bombing entire cities and even some improvised refugee camps in the desert. Moroccan soldiers were ordered to kill every nomad (Sahrawi) that they could find in the territory. The Polisario combatants fought back with unexpected attacks on the Moroccan soldiers in different ambushes in order to keep their attention away from the civilians. Sometimes they would spend several days with only tea and water (Bárbulo, 2002).

The Sahrawi people confronted the Moroccan army and the war was prolonged for more than 15 years, until 1991, when a cease-fire was proclaimed with Morocco agreeing to hold a referendum to determine whether the inhabitants of Western Sahara wanted a future independence or to be annexed to Morocco. When the preliminary results pointed to an absolute majority for an independent Sahara; Morocco opposed the referendum and it was annulled (Callau, 2004; Bárbulo, 2002). At the same time, the United Nations established MINURSO (The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara). Since then, there have been several attempts to hold a referendum with the Baker Plan but due to disagreements it has never been accomplished as of yet (MINURSO, 2010).

In 1976 when the Polisario proclaimed the RASD (the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) the Sahrawi flag became a national symbol. The dark line in the superior part symbolizes all the suffering, the white part and wider line symbolizes the peace will, and the lower line in green represents their hope for the future. One triangle touches the three colors and marks the blood spilt in their transition from suffering to hope. The red star on the white line symbolizes a gesture of peace towards the Arab World (Bárbulo, 2002).

The territory of Western Sahara is currently declared by the United Nations as a territory in process of decolonization.
Nonetheless, there is a military wall constructed by Morocco in 1980 that divides the territory. This wall, or blockade, is more than 2500 kilometers long and surrounded by more than nine million land mines. To the west of the wall, toward the coastline, are the occupied areas of Morocco that make up most of the (ex-)Sahrawi territory and on the

other, eastern, side is the liberated area of Western Sahara that is mostly made up of arid desert.

Since the conflict started, the situation of Sahrawi refugees has been very complicated and they have had to endure truly arduous living conditions. They are living in the desert, totally dependent on foreign aid. Food, clothing and water are brought in by car or airplane through humanitarian organizations. There is little or no vegetation and only a few of the camps have access to water and the drinking sources are neither clean nor sufficient for the entire refugee population. They have a lack of vegetables, nutritious food and medicines (UN, 2009). Furthermore, foreign aid is decreasing as the conflict is less and less attention from the international community (UN, 2009). On the other hand, those Sahrawi that have returned or are still living in Western Sahara are suffering violations of human rights, such as arbitrary detentions, mass deportations, violence against women, allegations of torture and denial of access to medical assistance and education (UN, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2008; Znined, 2007).

### 3.2.2   Sahrawi life and society before the conflict

The Sahrawi people were mostly nomads coming from the Middle East, mostly form Yemen. Traditionally there are five main tribes in Western Sahara: Ergueibat (the most representative), Larosillin, Aulad Edleim, Ezerguillin and Sal.lam.

The Sahrawi political organization had at least one representative of each tribe. In that way, the Sahrawi people lived in peace during many years because everything was solved between tribes. When a conflict appeared, the Echij was in charge of coming up with a solution. This solution was always in the form of economic compensated, depending of the gravity of each situation. The marriages were traditionally organized between members of the same tribe, because in that way they made sure to maintain or increase the number of people in each tribe. Of highest importance was the love of a person towards his/her family. Education was based on the teachings of the Koran and mostly following an oral tradition ( Jatri, 2010).

Hospitality is something that has always characterized the Sahrawi culture. Traditionally they had complex social networks of solidarity between families, based on the exchange of food and material goods that characterized the nomad life of the Sahrawi (Bulahi, et al.,2010).

### 3.2.3  Sahrawi life and society in the refugee camps

*Daily life in the refugee camps of Tindouf*

When the Sahrawi arrived to the Tindouf Hamada they organized themselves in four different camps: Smara, Laayoune, Ausserd and Al-Dakhla. Recently another camp has been created, smaller than the earlier mentioned: the 27 February camp. All camps, apart from this last one, are named according to the most important places of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). There are approximately 200,000 Sahrawi refugees living in the camps, located in one of the most inhospitable deserts about 30 km away from the Algerian city of Tindouf.  They are totally dependent on foreign aid in the form of water, food, medicine and other basic requirements to be brought in by cars or airplanes from international organizations. Each camp, called a *willaya*, is divided into 5 or 6 *dairas*, which are used to bring the administration closer to the Sahrawi inhabitants. These dairas have functions similar to a town council: they have a mayor, a registry and all the essential services that the administration has to provide. The dairas are also divided into quarters or groups of *haimas*, which are the initial level of the self-organization that is an essential characteristic of the Sahrawi society. An example of this is the very well structured organization of the education system; despite the isolation of the camps, the Sahrawi people been able to build an educational system that provides primary education to all Sahrawi children living in the camps. Further, when describing Sahrawi life in the refugee camps it is important to describe what a haima really means for them. They usually live between the haima and some constructions of mud and water where they can have a kitchen or another room to rest. The haimas are covered by carpets and they are used mainly for resting and socializing. When a guest comes to visit a Sahrawi family they traditionally invite the guest into the haima and the tea ritual starts. This is a very important ritual in the Sahrawi culture because it is their sign of hospitality towards the guest. This ritual starts with the preparation of the tea while the guest sits down in the haima and this is followed by the three traditional teas. It is said by the Sahrawi tradition that: "the first tea is bitter like life, the second one is sweet like love and the third is soft like death." (See appendix 2).

| Wilaya de Smara | Wilaya de Dakhla | Wilaya de Auserd | Wilaya de Aaiun |
|---|---|---|---|
| Daira de M'heiriz | Daira de J'reifya | Daira de Bir Ganduz | Daira de Guelta |
| Daira de Bir Lahlu | Daira de Argub | Daira de Mijek | Daira de Bou Craa |
| Daira de Mahbes | Daira de Um Dreiga | Daira de Zuk | Daira de Hagunia |
| Daira de Farsia | Daira de Bujdur | Daira de Aguenit | Daira de Amgala |
| Daira de Ej'derya | Daira de Gleibat Al'fula | Daira de Tichla | Daira de Daura |
| Daira da Hausa | Daira de Bir Enzaran | Daira de Laguera | Daira de Edchera |
| Daira de Tifariti | Daira de Ain Beida | | |

*Socio-geographical organization of the refugee camps*

*Gender*

The Sahrawi men and women have traditionally played different roles in their essentially nomadic society. Traditionally, while the men would be on their odyssey across the Sahara desert with their herds of camels and goats or trading with the products of their caravans, women would run the nomadic camps and daily life. During the nomadic life, women were traditionally in charge of the economy and the family organization, although socially they did not tend to play a big role in the Sahrawi society. With the war and consequently the life in the refugee camps this social role has been reversed and a special authority is given to women by their effective collaboration in the routine operation of their society, beyond domestic affairs and childcare (Mah Iahdih[4], 2010). Thus, the Sahrawi women became an element of cohesion in their society and the important decisions in the administration of the camps were taken by Sahrawi women. Nowadays, the Sahrawi woman hold outstanding positions in the administrative organization of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), where some of them are ministers and active participants of the social and political life of their community (Prohias, 2007)

### 3.2.4 Sahrawi education

As mentioned above, education has a very important role in the Sahrawi culture and is essential for the Sahrawi people. While I was in the camps, I was talking to a Sahrawi

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[4] Mah *Iahdih: Delegate of the Polisario Front in Catalunya.*

man, father of four children, about the importance of education and why the young should be educated if, afterwards, the youth return to the camps and are not able find anything to do with what they have learned. The man answered that "despite the hard situation that the youth face in the refugee camps where there is no work, they have to study because it means health for their minds." The Sahrawi people have been able to build complex social networks in the camps despite their severe isolation, and they manage to educate all the Sahrawi children up to the age of 12. Later on, those who want to continue their studies can do that in certain countries that they have special agreements with, such as Spain, Cuba, Italy, Algeria and Libya. Education in the Sahrawi culture holds a very important role; in fact, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic is the only state of Africa and the Arabic countries which has achieved a literacy level above 90% of the population (Prohias, 2007). Moreover, in the camps there have been initiatives by the people to create schools for children with special needs. An example of that is the school that a man known as "Castro" has built in the Wilaya of Smara in order to provide education to children with special needs.

*The special school of "Castro"*

This school was built many years ago by a Sahrawi doctor who studied medicine in Cuba. The school takes care of young people from 6 to 28 years old. Some of the people called him Castro because of his long beard and the revolution that he almost initiated in the camps in order to be able to open his school. This school is considered somewhat of a miracle in the camps due to the good results they have had and how well the school has been functioning in the inhospitable environment that characterizes life in the refugee camps. The main objectives of the school are:  education, integration and autonomy. Castro and the school staff work hard every day in order to accomplish these objectives and train the youth to enable them to adapt better to their society.

### 3.2.5 The migratory process and its influences in the Sahrawi identity

The migratory process in the Sahrawi society concerns different systems of transnational displacement. One refers to the big number of population that leaves the camps in order to study in other countries with which the SADR has exchange

programs. During that time, the Sahrawi youth live with local families or in student residences. The other type of displacement refers to the Sahrawi people who are living and working abroad.

In the first case many of the Sahrawi students, some of them that have spent more than 10 years abroad, have to return to the camps after the studies are completed. Upon their return, this has lead to the Sahrawi culture integrating elements from the different cultures that the youth have been exposed to during their stay abroad. Some of them feel lost in the beginning and have to redefine themselves in accordance to their original traditional customs. They have to learn how to deal with a new life in the refugee camps and reintegrate their experiences abroad in the Sahrawi culture. An example of that is the case of Jalil Jatri. He left to study in Cuba when he was 9 years old and came back to the refugee camps after he finished his medical studies in Cuba. Now he is living between Spain, Cuba and the refugee camps, to which he travels more than twice a year in order to carry out his medical specialization in the camps. "When I come to the camps people say that I have many influences from Cuba. I am proud of having been able to capture the multiple influences and teachings from the different cultures I have been in contact with. We are privileged for that reason. The Sahrawi people are today a community of different cultures. But despite all these cultural experiences, when we are reunited in Sahara, the only thought for all of us is the same: to be a State".

Those Sahrawi that are living and working abroad have to start a new life far away from their families and readjust their identities of being Sahrawi or being refugee in a new country, entering the world of a new culture. Even though they are distanced from their home traditions and family relatives it is common among the Sahrawi people to maintain their strong sense of identity and keep fighting in order to come back to their land and be reunited with their family members and their people.

### 3.2.6 Relationship between Sahrawi families and Spanish families

For several years during two months in the summer, thousands of Sahrawi children go to Spain. Some Spanish families have participated in a solidarity project, having Sahrawi children living with their families during these months. The principal objective of this project is to give to the Sahrawi children the possibility to part from the refugee

camps during the months that the temperature is at its most extreme, as well as to support the fight for the referendum which would allow them to go back to their homes in Western Sahara. Simultaneously, the project aims to care for the health of the children who come to Spain, giving them the opportunity to have a range of health controls in different medic centers.

Usually the children and the Spanish families who take care of them during these months establish a close relationship and many times a special bond between them is created. Evidence of this is the fact that many host families/members later undertake visits to the refugee camps and express general concern in solidarity with the situation of Western Sahara.

### 3.2.7  Actual situation and human rights violation

According to a report by the United Nations (UN, 2009) the situation concerning human rights in Western Sahara is devastating. Hundreds of Sahrawi in the occupied areas by Morocco are constantly suffering arbitrary detentions, violence against women, allegation of torture and those who are in prison are suffering all kinds of physical and psychological torture. Those Sahrawi that live in the liberated area of Western Sahara have no rights to healthcare or education and thousands have been killed or have disappeared after being arrested by the Moroccan police.

There is a military wall dividing the territory of Western Sahara. This makes almost impossible any type of communication between the Sahrawi families living in the occupied territories and those living in the refugee camps. Some families have been forced to be apart since the War started and some of them do not know where their relatives are. Entire families have been divided and some have died without the opportunity of seeing their relatives again because they are forced apart by the military wall that Morocco has built. A new project of the United Nations has appeared recently with the objective of providing the opportunity for some of these families to be reunited under protection of the United Nations (UN, 2009; AFAPRADESA, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2008).

# 4        Method

*Methodology*

This study uses a cross-disciplinary method based on psychological theory and a fieldwork methodology from development studies.

Regarding the methodological basis, I am combining aspects of qualitative and quantitative techniques. I believe that this mixture is the most efficient way of research regarding my subject matter.

I wish to provide a good theoretical background and a good informative basis. Through a phenomenological approach in my research, I have used descriptive results: subjects' descriptions of their experiences through self-reports and also informal interviews have been analyzed through a phenomenological approach. My aim has always been focused on getting deep into the subjects' experiences of their reality. Through my fieldwork I have been able to live with them in their community and share their experiences and opinions, getting a better understanding of particular individual experiences.

Moreover, I have incorporated the MCA-method (Sages, 2002) in my research. The MCA-method, "Meaning Constitution Analysis," is a powerful analysis tool for obtaining a clear understanding of the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of individuals and groups. As Roger Sages (2002) has pointed out, the MCA "explores the pluralities of the significations lying in the texts and implied by them." He has also developed a Software, MCA – Minerva, which has proven to be very efficient as a tool in the work of text analysis. By the MCA-method it is possible to analyze any kind of text in an accurate way. This method also allows for different statistical treatment of results which combine the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques (Sages, 2002).

Furthermore, I would like to point out the importance of doing fieldwork in my research. As Scharer and Ekman (1982) have reported, the field is the best way to approach real-life settings. In the case study of the Sahrawi culture all these aspects are essential in order to conduct research about their culture and the way they interact with the world. It is an opportunity to achieve a better understanding of the youth in a situation of forced migration and it also provides for a better understanding of how the

youth in the refugee camps are dealing with very hard living conditions and feelings of hopelessness when looking at the future.

*Fieldwork*

A phenomenological approach has been used in order to get all data during the fieldwork in the refugee camps of Tindouf. During that time informal but deep interviews and self-reports of young Sahrawi's experiences and personal observations in the field were conducted in order to gather all data. In that way, within a phenomenological approach, I acquired internal validity. This implies "a full acknowledgement of each individual's point of view" (Sages, 2003). Every person's perspective and experience was taken into account during the conduction of this study.

One of the first priorities was to share daily life experiences with the Sahrawi community in order to understand their position and the context in which they live. My previous personal experience in the camps was very important and useful in that context because it facilitated the interaction with the community and gave me more chances to talk to people because I was always able to establish the first encounter with them through another Sahrawi person.

Informal interviews were conducted in their natural social context. Thus, interviews were carried out in the *haima*, accompanied by their traditional ritual of tea. In that way the respondents could feel comfortable and just talk about their personal experiences without any time pressure. Time was always depending on the respondents, if they wanted to continue with the interview we could spend several hours and if, on the contrary, they didn't want to answer any more questions they left when they felt it was time. Interviews were conducted with young Sahrawi refugees and also with head officials of the Sahrawi government-in-exile responsible for youth issues.

Furthermore, in the case of the self-reports, one of the most important sources of information, they were acquired from different contexts: in the school, from Sahrawi students of different age range (from 12 to 30 years old); in the neighborhood of different Wilayas (with student and non-student youth) and in different youth centers were they are taught practical skills such as sewing and cooking, as well as studying informatics and mechanics.

When giving the self-reports I always introduced myself and my background as well as an introductory explanation about what I was doing and the topic of my research (in that

case the study of the youth situation in the camps). The question being asked in the study was as following:

*"Please can you tell me all about your feelings, emotions, ideas and thoughts about how do you see the future and why?"*

Due to the nature of the question, it could be conditioning the results by orienting answers towards the future, so I also asked to half of the respondents the following question:

*"Please can you tell me all about your feelings, emotions, ideas and thoughts about how your life is in the camps and what is important for you in this moment?"*

18 self-reports were collected in total and were then thoroughly analyzed with Minerva software (MCA-Minerva) developed by Roger Sages.

The data from the interviews has been used during this research as examples of different explanations about the Sahrawi community and their culture. They have been used in citation form. An example of that would be "Our hope is what makes us able to survive…" (Sahrawi girl, 12 years old). On the other hand, the data from the self reports has been analyzed with Minerva and is further described in the outcomes section.

*Minerva software*

It is not within the aim of this study to describe in detail the complex functioning of Minerva Software but to give an overview, it consists of three main areas: First, the systematic cutting-out of the text in small meaning units, second the association of the text to seven different modalities (affect, believe, function, property, subject, time and will), followed by a deep analysis of the main entities and predicates in the text. Modalities express the position of the individual in relation to the expressed meaning and they are oriented towards a time horizon. Time horizon refers to the time the experiences being described are oriented, they can be oriented towards the past, the present or the future (Sages, 2003). After cutting out the text into small meaning units, those are categorized into entity or predicate. The meaning contained, what exists for the individual is the entity, and the way of expressing is its predicate. Minerva also

provides statistics and various tables that help the procedure of the analysis of the text. The procedure when working with Minerva consists in:
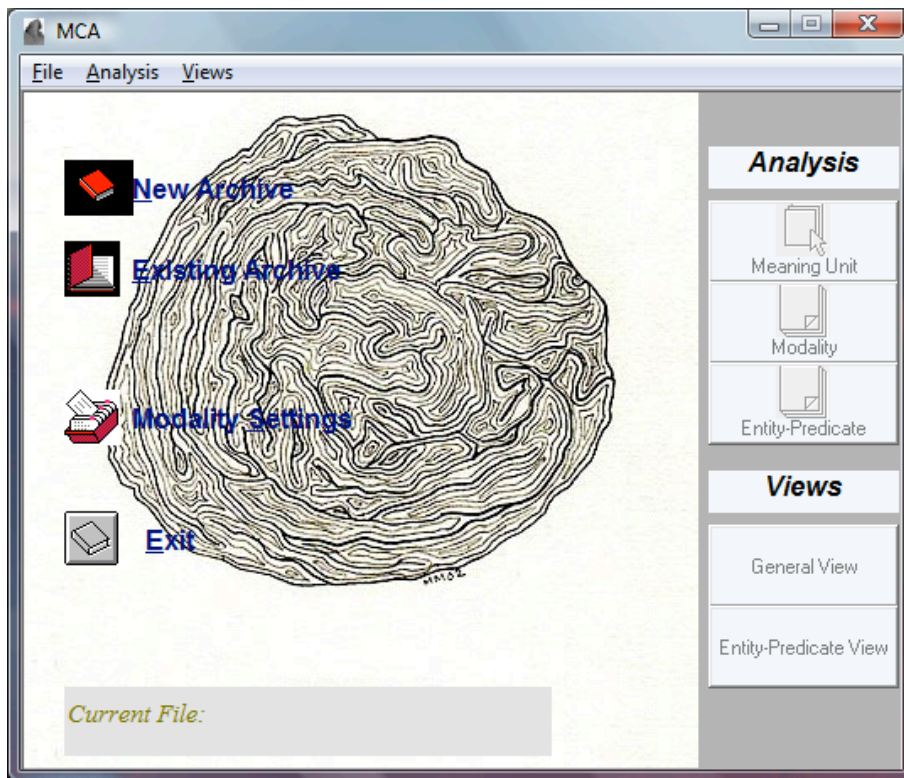
- The preparatory phase
- The analysis phase
- The interpretation phase and the conclusion

First, the researcher prepares a well formulated question; here we are in the preparatory phase. In the case of this study, it regards the question being asked in self-reports. The analysis phase consists of the work done with the assistance of Minerva software. Finally, in the interpretation phase and the conclusion, the researcher combines the information from *Modality*, *Entity* and *Predicate* to interpret the subject. In this phase it is relevant to consider statistical information on the frequency of the modalities, modality categories which occur with given entities, Entities and Predicates, and the Horizon tables "which define the world of future intentions of the subject based on meaning units with time *Modalities* in the *Past* category" (Sages, 2010).

In this research two different analyses were developed with Minerva. First, the introduction of all self-report data into the software in order to discriminate the meaning units with positive or negative affect from those that had a neutral *affect*. This lead me to a further analysis, based only on the text that contained meaning units with positive or negative *affect*. This provided more ecological validity to the study.

*Some examples of Minerva software*

The main menu page of the software

Cutting out the text into meaning unites

Modalities

**Modalities**

**Current**

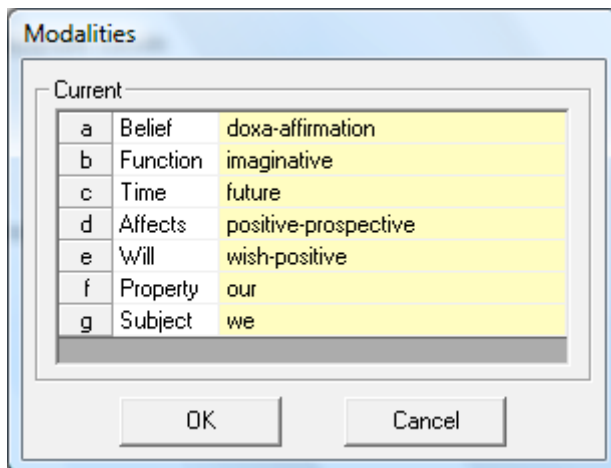| a | Belief | doxa-affirmation |
|---|---|---|
| b | Function | imaginative |
| c | Time | future |
| d | Affects | positive-prospective |
| e | Will | wish-positive |
| f | Property | our |
| g | Subject | we |

OK    Cancel

Entity and Predicates

[positive and negative meaning.arf] - Creating Partial Intentions, Entities, and Predicates...
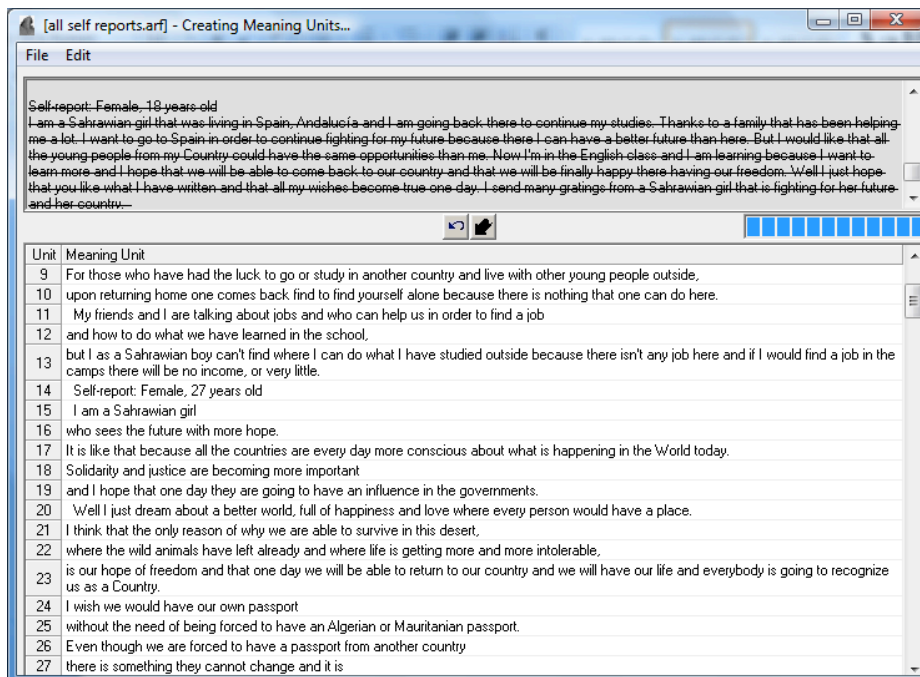
File    Show Statistics

| Unit | Pure Meaning | Partial Intention | Entity | Predicate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | We truly believe that all the nations must have the right to decide for their own future. | nations must have the right to decide their own future | nations | that must have the right to decide their own future |
| | | we believe that the nations must have the right to decide their own future | we | that believe that the nations must have the right to decide their own future |
| 14 | All we want is independency and freedom. | we want independence and freedom | we | that want independence and freedom |
| 15 | We want a green beautiful life and stable, the | we want a green beautiful life | we | that want a green beautiful life |
| | | we want a stable life | we | that want a stable life |
| 16 | life that gathers all the relatives and families in a freedom and independent Sahara. | life that gathers all the relatives and familes | life | that gathers all the relatives and families |
| | | independent sahara gathers all the relatives and families | Independent Sahara | that gathers all the relatives and families |
| 17 | For us Sahara is the most beautiful land. | sahara is the most beautiful land | Sahara | that is the most beautiful land |
| | | our sahara | Sahara | that is our |
| 18 | I hope to have in the future beautifull buildings like schools and hospitals. | I hope | I | that hope |
| | | future have beautifull buildings like schools and hospitals | future | that have beautiful buildings like schools and hospitals |
| | | beautiful buildings are schools and hospitals | beautiful buildings | that are schools and hospitals |
| 19 | We want to go back to our independent country that is our hope. | we want to go back to our beautiful country | we | that want to go back to our beautiful country |
| | | our contry is beautiful | our country | that is beautiful |
| | | our country can be independent | our country | that can be independent |
| | | the country is our | country | that is our |
| | | independent country is our hope | independent country | that is our hope |
| 20 | I just want to go back to my beautiful country. | I just want to go back to my beautiful country | I | that just want to go back to my beautiful country |
| | | my country is beautiful | my country | that is beautiful |
| 21 | We will remain constant until we will get our independency and our | we will remaind constant | we | that will remaind constant |
| | | we will remaind constant until we | | that will remaind constant until |

## *Self-reports*

The use of the self-reports in order to acquire knowledge about how the youth constitute meaning was a very useful tool because it gave them the opportunity to think about what they wanted to say, to go deeper into their feelings and to be able to take their time in order to write the self report, because all of them were free to answer

whenever it was the best moment for them. They could take home the question being asked to think about it and bring it back to me when they felt ready.

Self-reports were written mainly in Arabic because it was more comfortable for them. They were free to write in Spanish (for a lot of them their second language), or in Arabic. All self-reports were afterwards translated to English. Those that were written in Arabic were translated by a Saharawi person fluent in Spanish or English.

*Personal background*

In the year 2003 I was introduced to "the Spanish Association of Friends of the Sahrawi People" (ACAPS). I soon became a member of the organization and during the months when the children came to Spain I was coordinating different activities for them. At that time, my family and I also took care of a Sahrawi child during the summer.

In April 2004 I had the opportunity to visit this child and his family in the refugee camps and to live with them during one week. The summer of 2004 I was able to meet this child again and continue sharing experiences while he was back in Spain.

This personal experience is important in this context because it has afforded me substantial knowledge of the Sahrawi community and the situation that they are facing, as well as an interlink with Sahrawi people that have helped me a lot in conducting my fieldwork (2010) and achieving more depth in my interviews. At the same time, this personal experience could have been negative in a phenomenological context, because it could influence my research if I would have approached them from my subjective point of view, influencing the results. However, I have been aware of that aspect and the analysis of the main source of information with Minerva has insulated me from such bias. Minerva requires a shorting of the text into meaning units and this kept me apart from my previous judgments while analyzing the narratives, mostly because the longer the text gets, the more unconscious one becomes about any previous knowledge.

# 5  Outcomes

The discussion of the outcomes consists of the analysis of self-reports written by young Saharawi refugees. The tool of analysis has been the Minerva software, combined with the analysis of informal interviews, observations and data acquired during the fieldwork in the refugee camps of Tindouf.

### 5.1 Analysis of the main Modalities

The modalities that have been analyzed indicate that there is a prevalence of a negative affect when talking about their past or their present life. On the other hand, when they talked about the future there was a prevalence of positive prospective affect. Overall the results of the analysis indicate that there is a prevalence of positive prospective affect making reference to the future.  Generally youth did not talk as much about their present life.  On the contrary, they always wrote about how the future would be when they would return to their land. This image of the future was crucial for them because it gave them the strength to survive despite their hard conditions of life.

a)  The following table shows the highest category value per Modality.
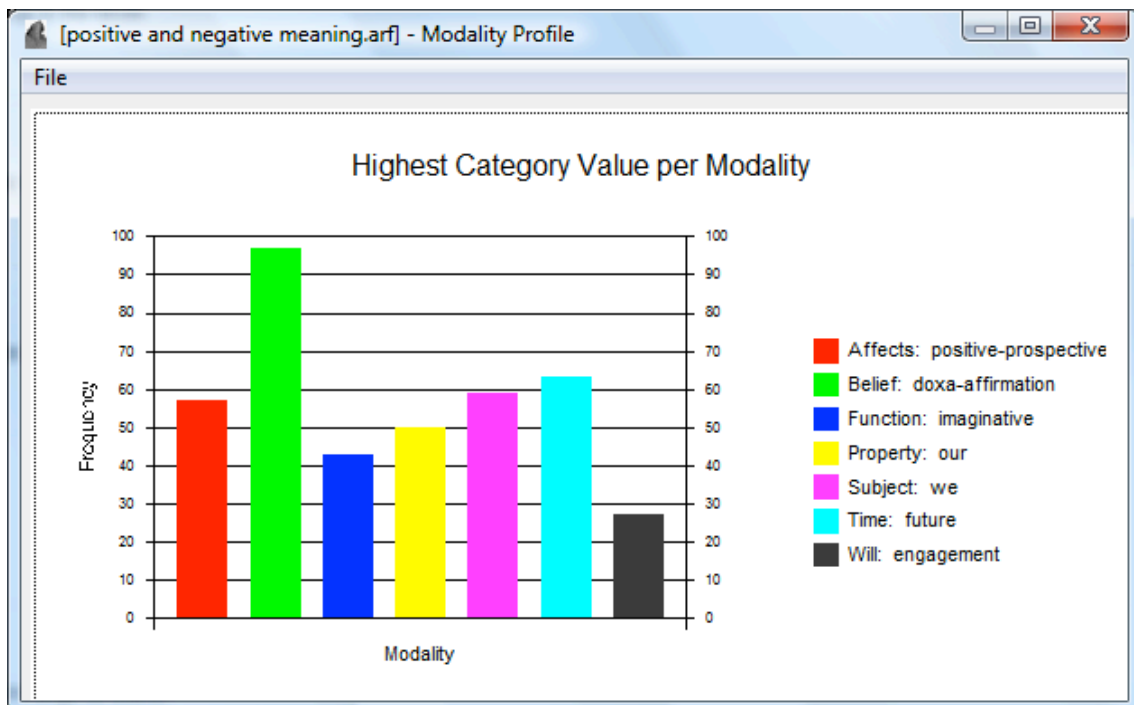
b) The following table shows the Modality frequency
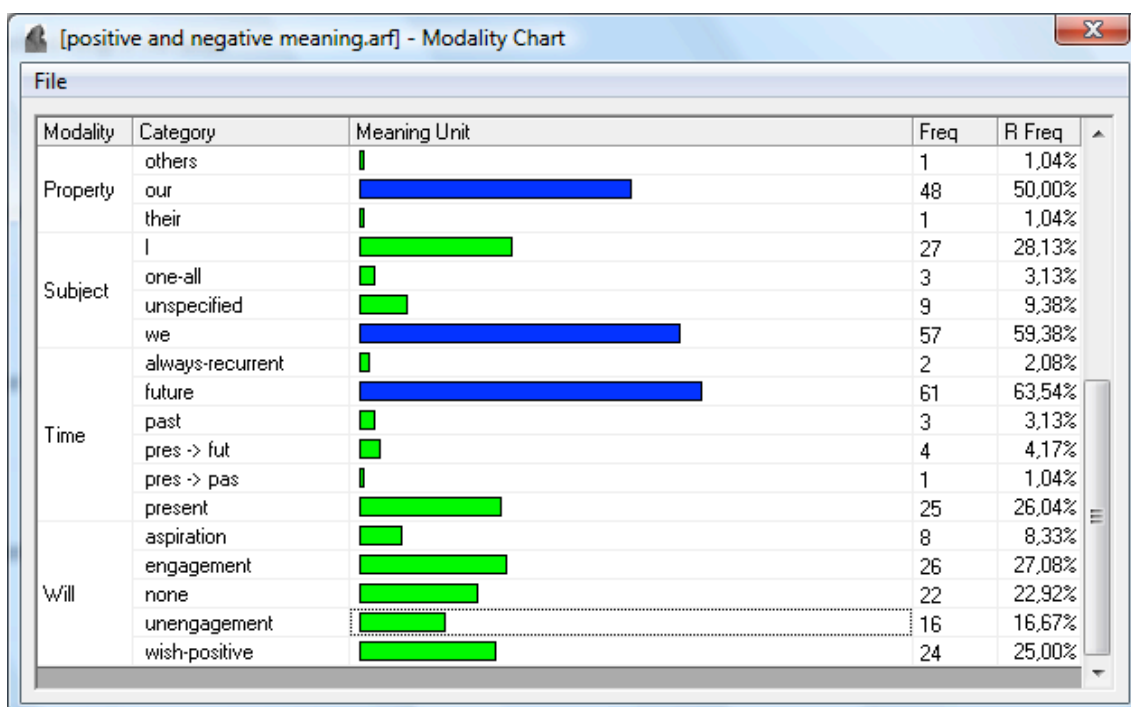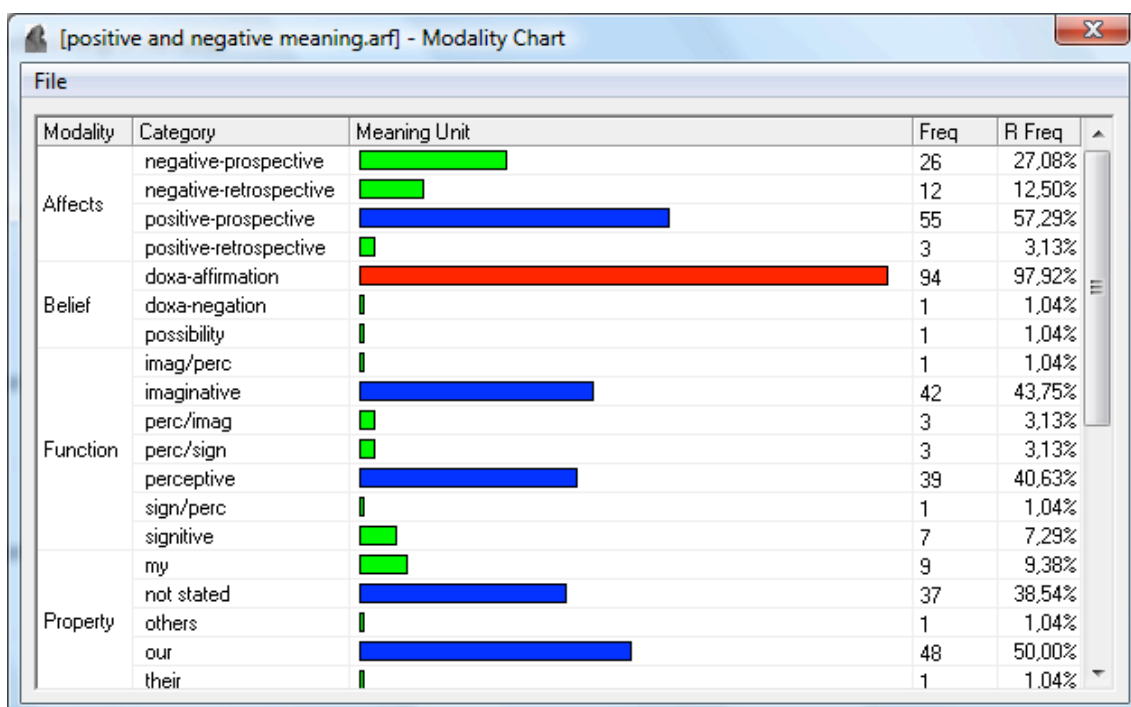




In the "affect" modality, as mentioned above, the most prevalent is a positive-prospective affect. They write mostly about positive emotions and thoughts. They do not focus as much on what is wrong, on the contrary, their way of expressing their feelings is more than half of the time oriented toward a positive emotion about the future, because the prevalent affect is prospective. The most prevalent "belief" modality is doxa-affirmation, meaning that the way they express their thoughts is mainly

affirmative. For instance youth do not use provability or negation in their narratives. Next, the highest value of the "function" category is imaginative. In their life-world everything is oriented towards the future but this image of the future is not based on their present life; this image of the future is imaginative. Young Sahrawi refugees imagine how the future will be with a strong sense of engagement, as we can see with the prevalence of future and engagement shown in the "Time" and "Will" Modalities. This means that when the youth imagine their future they are ready and motivated to participate in any activity that could help them in order to come closer to that vivid but imaginative vision of the future. Finally, descriptions are strongly related to '*we*' and '*our*' as "Subject" and "Property" Modalities. That is indicative of the prevalence of a collective culture. What really matters is what happens to all the Sahrawi people; therefore they are strongly attached to their community. The Saharawi sense of identity is very strong and this identity is founded in the community. What they care about is what happens to all the Sahrawi people; consequently they develop personal feelings, such as being worried or sad, for something that is happening in another place to some Sahrawi person even though they have ever met this person. They identify themselves with all the Sahrawi people and their identity is constructed by that. Their life world is the life world of all the Sahrawi people. This means that, if something bad happens to one member of the Sahrawi community they perceive it as strongly as if it would be happening to them. An example of that are the strong feelings and emotions that they develop towards those Sahrawi people living on the other side of the military wall, in the occupied areas. During the time I was in the camps, a group of Sahrawi activists coming from Laayoune were visiting each of the camps even though they were extremely prohibited to be there by Morocco. They knew that when they would go back to the Sahrawi capital they would be arrested and tortured but despite that, those Sahrawi activists wanted to go to the camps and be together with their people. On the other hand, all the Saharawi people in the camps, old people, youth, and small children were celebrating their arrival to each *daira* as if it would be the arrival of any of their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, or parents and grandparents. Long celebrations were held in the camps during several days due to the presence of the Saharawi activists coming from the occupied areas. When they were holding their speeches the emotion was so strong among all the participants that people were screaming and crying. They all experienced this situation as close as any family reunion.

From the analysis with Minerva it is found that:

✓ Positive affect is related to:

$$\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{Aspiration} \\ \text{Engagement} \\ \text{Wish-positive}\end{array}\right.$$

Therefore positive emotions are related to having aspirations; it is very important for the youth to be engaged in activities and to have hope or positive wishes for the future.

✓ Negative affect is more related to:

$$\left\{\text{Disengagement}\right.$$

Sahrawi youth developed adverse emotions and thoughts, mainly due to not being involved in activities or projects concerning their lives. When they become powerless, they also become unmotivated with everything concerning their lives. They do not see the point of facing their future. This situation leads them to an increased level of dissatisfaction towards life and negative emotions. Feelings of anxiety when thinking about the future are also developed by the Sahrawi youth.

✓ Function

$$\left\{\begin{array}{l}\text{Prevalence of perceptive when it is related to a negative affect.} \\ \text{Prevalence of imaginative when it is related to a positive affect.}\end{array}\right.$$

This modality is very interesting to take into account because it gives an overview of the origin of their emotions. There is prevalence among the youth that negative emotions are perceived, experienced; then youth enter into the imaginative sphere in order to experience positive emotions. Their perceptions of the reality are experienced as negative. But when young refugees are able to imagine another reality, in their home country for instance, then they are capable of evoking positive feelings or emotions. Therefore, Saharawi youth make use of their imagination in order to experience positive emotions. They enter another world through their imagination in which they have a place to stay, where there is peace, and they can live together with their families. A place where there is water and the weather conditions are not as extreme; a place where a better lifelife is possible.

"The eyes are not the eyes you see with; the true eyes are in the heart and if you close your eyes you can see anything. This is the saddest desert of all, sometimes if my mother does not sing or tell me stories, my fists begin to clench and I feel like crying. A day will come when I can go to a school with big windows and a garden with palm trees" (10 years old Sahrawi girl; in Munt, 2010).

✓ Time

$\Big\{$ Prevalence of future

Time prevalence in the youth narratives is future. They mainly write about future experiences and desires. Youth base their experiences mainly in an imaginative future. The present time do not exist for them, it only exist when they evoke all the memories from a past time where they had a land and where they lived in peace, and these memories are building their future. All the youth in the camps have never seen this country, but they have constructed vivid memories about it and they can describe this land as if they would have always lived there. The youth in the refugee camps live their present life oriented towards the idea of returning to their land.
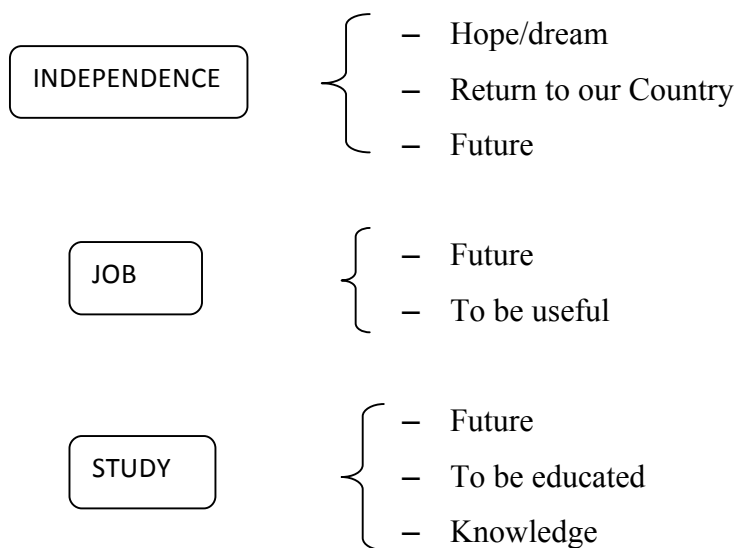
## 5.2 Main entities and its main predicates

WE $\Big\{$
- that have engraved in our heart that we are Sahrawi
- that survive because of our hope
- that are suffering because we are voiceless

FUTURE $\Big\{$
- To have a job
- Return to our Country
- To be able to study
- To be reunited

HOME COUNTRY $\Big\{$
- Future
- Beautiful and green land
- I am alive
- Family together
- Independence, government, everybody recognize us as a Country
- We can be useful
- There are buildings, like schools and hospitals
- Peace
- Our eyes

43

| INDEPENDENCE | – Hope/dream |
|--------------|--------------|
|              | – Return to our Country |
|              | – Future |

| JOB | – Future |
|-----|----------|
|     | – To be useful |

| STUDY | – Future |
|-------|----------|
|       | – To be educated |
|       | – Knowledge |

## 5.3 Identity

There is an import and crucial sense of identity in almost every expression used by the Sahrawi youth in the self reports. They talk mainly about "we," which is the main entity used in the narratives. In the analysis with Minerva, "we" is the highest and more prevalent entity used in the descriptions, 59% versus 27% of "I". Hence, the analysis shows that there is a strong sense of belonging to a group, they are a collective culture and that is why, in their descriptions, the entity that is most frequently used is "we". For instance, they talk about "we" that wish, "we" that hope, "we" that suffer, "we" that are Sahrawi.

The most prevalent property modality used in the descriptions is "our", 50%. In this case, for example "our" country is among the most frequent predicate and modality used.

Accordingly, Sahrawi people build their future thinking in a collective way and their life-world is always interrelated with their families and their people. In the descriptions they talk about their family and they look at the future as something that they are going to build collectively. They don't exist alone; they exist when they relate themselves to their families and the rest of Sahrawi people. For example, they do not only refer to what is important for them as individuals, instead they always make reference to what is important for all the Sahrawi youth. They wish that one day; they are going to meet the people living in the occupied zones, even though they have never met. Hence their strong sense of collective identity, the feeling of belonging, of being

Sahrawi, is their hope and the meaning of their life. As one 19 year old girl describes in the self report: "Our hope and the fact of being Sahrawi is what makes us survive in this desert, where the wild animals have already left".

Sahrawi youth are still fighting for the future because they have this hope. The hope of returning to their Land and being reunited with their families and their people, which is what gives meaning to their life. They are orienting their life-world towards this image of the future; all the Sahrawi living in the refugee camps have the same image in their minds, to go back to Western Sahara.

The youth in the refugee camps live their present life oriented towards the idea of returning 'home'. They want to be useful for their country and they want to build schools and hospitals in it. For them the life in the refugee camps is senseless: they feel that they are nowhere, they feel that they are left behind in a land where it is almost impossible to survive because of the lack of food and water and the extreme weather conditions. Thus, they only exist through the construction of their identity. The fact that they are Sahrawi gives them the strength to be able to survive.

"I just want to go back to my green beautiful country that can hold all of us together, the Land where we can have a future together" (12 year old boy).

# 6   Conclusion

The analysis of all data indicates that there is a strong perception among the Sahrawi youth community that they lack the power to influence their future, and as a consequence of this situation they become hopeless. This fact influences their locus of control by increasing their external locus of control; they feel unable to control their life and their future, relating what happened to them to external causes that get away from their control. Consequently all these factors contribute to an increased level of anxiety and decreased motivation in facing their future.

In relation to the modality of affect, the most prevalent is Positive prospective; young Sahrawi refugees do not have bad memories about the past, in most of the cases they imagine the future emotionally involved in their hope of returning to their "beautiful Land". They only perceive the future as attached to a negative emotion when they become hopeless after waiting for so long and when they feel they can not control what happens in the future.

Present time and the past are almost inexistent in the youth narratives. Hence for them there is no present and no past. Future is the only thing that exists, but it is only possible if they keep alive the hope of returning to their country. That is so important for them because it is what makes them experience positive emotions. In the reality of the camps, with the extreme weather conditions and the lack of food security, their perceptions of the present time are attached to negative emotions. However, when youth talk about learning and being useful for their society positive emotions are perceived in the present time.

When working with Sahrawi youth it is necessary to take into account the importance of their identity, as the Sahrawi identity and the feeling of belonging to a group is crucial in order for them to survive and give meaning to their life-world.

Consequently, the main protective factors for the Sahrawi youth are:

- To be useful for the community,
- strong sense of identity and feeling of belonging to a group,
- strong family and social relationship,
- education and
- hope for the future.

The main worries perceived by the youth are:

- The lack of job and things that one can do in order to be useful for their people,
- the lack of power to influence their future, and
- the fear of not having an opportunity to leave the camps and change their refugee condition.

## 7   Discussion

Today there is much research being conducted on the traumatic or psychiatric disorders of children and youth after a situation of forced migration. However, there is a lack of research in the field of psychosocial work concerning refugees. Many times refugee children grow up to be healthy adults; hence it is necessary to increase research about those aspects that help children to cope with stressful situations. It is important to improve our knowledge of which the protective factors are in facilitating psychological well-being from childhood to adulthood. Until today, humanitarian assistance has been based on emergency relief, providing food and other principal needs to refugees, but

when a situation of conflict becomes protracted and people have to spend several years dealing with that given situation, as in the case of the Sahrawi refugees, the humanitarian help based on emergency relief is not enough. Youth are requesting another type of help. Humanitarian projects that give assistance to people living in refugee camps should be readdressed and focus on the problems derived by the extended situation in which these refugees are living. This study points out the importance of considering cultural context when working with children and youth and readdressing humanitarian help to the principal needs as perceived by the refugees. It is necessary to know what they claim, to listen to their voices, instead of applying projects that are developed by the Western community that often do not know firsthand what it feels to experience certain situations of forced migration.

In the case of the Sahrawi young refugees, the importance of the community, sense of public responsibility, education, strong sense of identity and the strength of family relationships are crucial for their psychological well-being. These conclusions are not mere abstractions of the researcher; on the contrary they are based on people's thoughts and their voices. Phenomenology has in this case been a very useful tool in order to get to the meaning of the young refugees' personal experiences. Thanks to that, it has been possible to find out the main worries of the refugee community in Tindouf. The conclusions of this research highlight the importance of education and especially the need perceived by the young refugees of empowerment. Thus, humanitarian help should develop projects focusing on the importance of education and practical work that give knowledge and responsibility to the young Sahrawi community. Additionally, it is necessary to pay attention to the Sahrawi voices: What do they really want, what do they need? Youth should be a part of the discussions and the decision-making process when projects are designed and subsequently implemented in the camps. They need hope in order to face the future and to become involved in the main activities carried out in the camps. Youth are demanding that they be taken into account and considered an important part of the community in order to feel useful and to give meaning to their life-world.

Moreover, the results point out the importance of the Sahrawi identity. Thus, all projects should be respectful of the Sahrawi culture and their identity as a group, as a community. The feeling of belonging is vital to the Sahrawi community. They construct their identity from the memories their families have transmitted to them and they seek to complete this identity with the image they have of the future in their land, where they

will be reunited with their people and their families. This could be well implemented, for instance, when youth receive scholarships from NGOs or from governments in other countries and they leave the camps in order to study abroad. The importance of keeping their identity alive should not be forgotten in order to understand the way they wish to conduct their lives.

Due to the fact that phenomenology seeks to focus on people's perceptions and be aware of the individual life-world, it has been a very useful tool applied in the case of the Sahrawi community. In light of that, Sahrawi narratives have been very useful because youth had enough time to think about what they were writing. They felt more comfortable to express their thoughts and their feelings because they did not have the direct observation of the researcher. Hence, the researcher's expectations did not influence the results, as it would have been in another case like face-to-face interview.

Fieldwork is very important because it helps the researcher to come closer to the reality people are experiencing and it allows for a deeper understanding of people's life-world. Therefore, the researcher can better understand the culture and the way people acts in certain situations. The concept of life-world takes into consideration the relationship between the respondent and the interviewer; in this case previous personal experience has been a positive characteristic of the research because the Sahrawi people felt more comfortable and willing to share their personal experiences.

Accordingly, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the effects of prolonged conflict and forced migration on the youth community of Sahrawi refugees. It gives a better understanding of the social and cultural context influencing the situation of the youth in the refugee camps of Tindouf and it focuses on the importance of oral history and memory.

Consequently, in the development of projects in the humanitarian assistance field, the following should be prioritized:

- Education and vocational training,
- Expression and empowering,
- A deep understanding of cultural and societal values.

Furthermore, the field of humanitarian assistance reflects a lack of consensus with regard to what constitutes the psychological consequences of forced migration and prolonged situations of conflict. It is necessary to consider more aspects influencing

refugees' lives than just considering the negative aspects and psychiatric implications of conflict and displacement. It should not be forgotten that different people have varying perceptions of the reality they live in and will also cope differently in similar situations. It is necessary to have a good understanding of the cultural and contextual implications of the people we are working with. The aim is to get out of the focus on emergency work and instead to develop projects that work according to people's perceived needs of the reality. It is necessary for instance, to increase the knowledge about what the protective factors are in the life of these communities.

Moreover, results suggest that individuals should not only be seen as passive receivers of experiences; they should be considered as active participants of the projects that concern them.

## Limitations:

Further research should aim to find out if there are gender differences among the Sahrawi youth when perceiving or imagining the future. Would we get the same results if we would conduct the same study with only young Sahrawi boys or with only girls? Do they live with the same image of the future and perceive the same present reality? All these questions suggest very interesting topics to consider in further research. Moreover, another very important aspect is to know if the youth we are talking to have the same family conditions. As the family is vital among the Sahrawi community it would be interesting to know how results would vary according to family differences. For example, do young refugees whose parents are alive imagine the same reality and have the same vivid memories as those who only have one parent left?

Finally, if possible, it would be very interesting to conduct the same research with those Sahrawi youth that live in the occupied areas of Western Sahara. They live in their country but they are treated as "outsiders" in their home country. How would these factors influence the results? The fact of suffering from violation of human rights and living with the fear of expressing their identity as well as living discriminated for the fact of being Sahrawi. The aspect of identity, the importance of belonging to a group, the hope for the future, the image of the home country – would all these factors be the same in that case? Do the Sahrawi youth in that case have the same priorities as the Sahrawi youth living in the refugee camps? If there are differences, how are they

affecting Sahrawi youths' lives? And finally, what happened with the Sahrawi diaspora, do they attribute the same meanings to the reality? How do they perceive all these factors from a foreign country?

Consequently, further research addressing all these aspects would be a very interesting source of information in order to compare the different situations in which the refugee community is involved.

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# Appendix

- Appendix 1

<u>Western Sahara map</u> (Minurso, 2010)

- Appendix 2

<u>Refugee camps of Tindouf</u>



- Appendix 3

SELF REPORTS:

**<u>Self-report: Male, 12 years old</u>**

The Sahrawi youth, like in any other place in the world, want to do many things.

I know the future is very hard for us and that I have to be responsible. But our life now, in Sahara, is very hard, especially for the youth. Any young person in the camps doesn't know what he/she is going to do in the future. Every young person has an image in their mind about what he wants to do in the future but when he thinks about it this image disappears, because at the end you have nothing in your hands to shape the future.

The youth, girl or boy, studies in order to make a lot of things in the future. For those who have had the luck to go or study in another country and live with other young

people outside, upon returning home one comes back find to find yourself alone because there is nothing that one can do here.

My friends and I are talking about jobs and who can help us in order to find a job and how to do what we have learned in the school, but I as a Sahrawi boy can't find where I can do what I have studied outside because there isn't any job here and if I would find a job in the camps there will be no income, or very little.

**Self-report: Female, 27 years old**

I am a Sahrawi girl who sees the future with more hope. It is like that because all the countries are every day more conscious about what is happening in the World today. Solidarity and justice are becoming more important and I hope that one day they are going to have an influence in the governments.

Well I just dream about a better world, full of happiness and love where every person would have a place.

I think that the only reason of why we are able to survive in this desert, where the wild animals have left already and where life is getting more and more intolerable, is our hope of freedom and that one day we will be able to return to our country and we will have our life and everybody is going to recognize us as a Country. I wish we would have our own passport without the need of being forced to have an Algerian or Mauritanian passport.

Even though we are forced to have a passport from another country there is something they cannot change and it is engraved on the heart of every Sahrawi, we are Sahrawi and we are proud of it.

We have only one heart that holds us all; despite that now it is divided by two: those people living in the refugee camps fighting against the nature, against the hot weather, the "sirocco" and the lack of food and money and the other half of the people living in the occupied zones by Morocco and being abuse or suffering from rape and human rights violations. Our people are imprisoned because they say that they are Sahrawi or just because they claim for the right of freedom like other countries.

But still, despite of everything, we have the hope that one day a good surgeon will come (like the UN) and will make an operation (like the Referendum) to our hearts and then we will be able to rest in peace in our bodies (our Land) the Western Sahara in peace.

## Self-report: Male, 24 years old

I am a young person and like all the Sahrawi youth I have studied the primary school in the refugee camps and later on I went to study until the University in Algeria. When I got there I didn't want to continue because there is no work in the camps. I suffer, like all the other young Sahrawi because of the hard conditions of life like the heat and dryness in the refugee camps that makes it very hard for living conditions.

I need many things that are important for me, one of them the freedom and the return to my Land.

Through my studies I have learn but now I am living here in this land with extreme conditions of life. Every person should fight for a better future despite that the Sahrawi' future is still on the hands of other organizations like the UN in order to accomplish the Referendum that they have promise to us.

We truly believe that all the nations must have the right to decide for their own future.

I believe that the poverty and the lack of work and the fact of being refugees shouldn't be a barrier for the Sahrawi youth in order to get what they want.

During the past years Sahrawi people have get to show (through the war, the demonstrations and through keeping all our people together for the freedom) how to confront the enemy who divided our people and our Land.

## Self-report: Female, 12 years old

All we want is independency and freedom. We want a green beautiful life and stable, the life that gathers all the relatives and families in a freedom and independent Sahara.

For us Sahara is the most beautiful land. I hope to have in the future beautiful buildings like schools and hospitals.

We all struggle against the enemy for our independency and freedom, for our Sahara. We want to go back to our independent country that is our hope. We wish that our country is going to be free of enemies and wars. We still are struggling and fighting against the colonialism.

I just want to go back to my beautiful country and make my country beautiful in which I could live with other people and other ethnicities. We will remain constant until we will get our independency and our border.

**Self-report: Female, 13 years old**

I come from Western Sahara and I hope I will fulfill my dream that is going back to our country and to our independent and freedom land.

I hope we will go back to our eyes, where there are beautiful views and a unique state. Our country is unique and has to be free and independent. Then we will have our markets, cities, and the most beautiful nature of all the other Arabic countries.

I wish I could see all the Sahrawi political prisoners, like Aminetu Haidar and her children, be relisted from prison and I want to find the true activism.

I just want to go back to our Independent and free land.

**Self-report: Female, 18 years old**

The basic dream for all the Sahrawi people is Independence and freedom and going back to our country.

In the future I would like to become a successful doctor to assist all the Sahrawi people. I want to support those innocents that don't have any fault and all the mothers.

All the Sahrawi people have the same dreams or the same hope and here I say that all the Sahrawis are very humanitarian, they love others and they are very tolerant and kind. They live in a very nice atmosphere together. All the Sahrawi youth is involved in national activities and this is our main issue. Youth it's the support hand for everybody and it's the basis for our country. Young people from Sahara study liberty and Independency becomes their main dream.

The young people that live in the tents have a passion that makes them face all the difficulties and all the hard conditions of life. They are always ready to fight and sacrifice for our country and the return to our country. We have willing to play our roles and rebuild and reform our country. All we want is your support.

**Self-report: Male, 19 years old**

We are grown youth and knowledgeable people. But because of our reality and present life we don't have the conditions or equipments to qualify our self or to work for our country's interest or our fare issue.

We ask all who can help us to assist and support us with all the mechanisms to be able to step forward for our interest as Sahrawi youth that we want independence.

**Self-report: Girl, 17 years old**

Our unique slogan is that we have a right to live as other youth in the World. We want to enjoy having a land to sit on and be able to finish our studies in it and be able to work for our country's interest and be loyal for our wonderful country.

**Self-report: Male, 18 years old**

Our wishes are the same as the other youth. We want to learn more and more and we want to learn or improve in development and innovation. We always dream that we have the right, like the other youth in the World, to live in our country and finish our studies well. I want our people to be able to invent and innovate in a loyal way in terms of development for our country, our land.

**Self-report: Female, 18 years old**

Our dreams are study and acquire a peaceful and political knowledge. I dream of creating an awareness and progress of our generation and to be useful for our country in the future. In the future we don't want to live in a bad life as it is know. We want to live in our land, free, stable and happy.

**Self-report: Male, 17 years old**

We want an independency. I'm a Sahrawi young boy, I love my country. I am now learning Arabic, English, French and Spanish and I am just 17 years old. I want to study

until I become knowledgeable. We are now a small and vulnerable Country. But we want our Independency and freedom. We don't want to be arrested, being in a prison and to be tortured. In the prison you get raped from the Moroccan authorities and police officers. The youth living in the occupied areas have already suffered from the torture just because they were struggling for their dear Country. We are a nation that loves our country and we want independency and freedom. But our voices now and our suffering are voiceless. Thanks for the organizations.

**Self-report: Female, 20 years old**

I am a young Sahrawi girl and the only dream I have is to go back to my free Country. My wish is to study the language, especially English because it is a very useful and universal language that can help me to build my future and also the future of the people of my country and our children. At the moment I am studying my first year in English and I am good at learning a little bit of it.

**Self-report: Female, 30 years old**

We as other youth in the World wish to become a contributor in a positive way for building our country. I want all of us to be useful for our country and fulfill our dreams and live independently in our land. We want to be productive; I want to make an effort to build our circle of life, to be useful. We are now studying in order to get our degrees or diplomas and our future depend on it. Also it helps to guarantee a proper life for us and for our families. We dream to struggle for our independency and we will make of our country a paradise. We should focus on developing all the arenas like agriculture, industry, tourist sector and education. We will focus as well in all the buildings, construction and the infrastructure in general.

We will never stop unless we get our independence. Like a poet says" if a nation wants a life, it must face its destiny"

**Self-report: Male, 28 years old**

I think about our Country, that it must be free and we should be able to have our government like the rest of the World. We want to have a future like the rest of the young people in the World. Because here we feel that there is no future. We don't have

anything here, we don't have water, and electricity, anything that would make us feels better.

I see the future like a lie because we are waiting everyday but never end up changing anything. There are always the same people here in the government and it doesn't change anything.

My dream is the freedom. I dream about having a future, to be able to walk free and see the World. If I could go back to my country I would like to work, I would like to have a house with rooms. I am jealous of the World because I can't have any of this.

I feel that we don't have anything here. I have a family but we barely have food because here there is no work, there is nothing here. We can't work in Algeria or in any other place because we don't have papers. Anybody give us an opportunity, we have got all the doors close and here there is no work.

### Self-report: Male, 25 years old

I want to express what it feels like to be here. I wish I could escape far away, because then I would be able to study, to become a better person and I would be someone in the future. I would like to be able to work in any part of the World.

Despite of everything I feel good here, the truth is that there is a lack of work here but luckily the situation is bearable for us because there are many countries helping us in the good times and in the bad times. It is a pity that many of the things that we get here, have to go around to many hands before we get it and we usually only get half of the product.

### Self-report: Female, 18 years old

I am a Sahrawi girl that was living in Spain, Andalucía and I am going back there to continue my studies. Thanks to a family that has been helping me a lot. I want to go to Spain in order to continue fighting for my future because there I can have a better future than here. But I would like that all the young people from my Country could have the same opportunities than me. Now I'm in the English class and I am learning because I

want to learn more and I hope that we will be able to come back to our country and that we will be finally happy there having our freedom. Well I just hope that you like what I have written and that all my wishes become true one day. I send many gratings from a Sahrawi girl that is fighting for her future and her country.

**Self-report: Female, 17 years old**

I live here, in this land and I want to continue studying but here there is no future to continue the studies, that's why I would love to continue my studies but there is no future here. I want to continue fighting for my future. I wish we could live in our land, but I don't know if in the future we will continue fighting for that. My dream is to be able to have a future in my country and I wish we will continue fighting until we get our freedom and our Land.

**Self-report: Female, 19 years old**

I am a Sahrawi girl. I have been studying in Libya. I want to continue studying but here, in the Sahara there is nothing to study. I hope I could get a better future, because I would be able to see things that don't exist in this country. Here the life is very hard. We have to fight for our country to be able to get our freedom in the future. I want to become a doctor to be able to help the people from my country because in our country there are just few doctors.