

SAHARA NO SE VENDE



Published with financial support from Fredskorpset.

We participated in an exchange project between the Red Cross Nordic United World College (RCNUWC) in Norway, and the Polisario Ministry of Sports and Youth that is sponsored financially by Fredskorpset. All views expressed in this booklet reflect those of the authors and not the official positions of the RCNUWC, Polisario or Fredskorpset.

Layout: Heydays (heydays.info)

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Introduction

By Nina Taugbøl and Maria Dyveke Styve

ON THE 8TH of November the Moroccan security forces violently broke up a protest camp formed outside of La'ayoun in the occupied Western Sahara. Several people were killed, and many more wounded for taking part in what was a non-violent form of protesting against the Moroccan occupation. Within hours the protest camp had been burnt down, and the thousands of protesters forced to retreat back into the city. The crackdown has continued, and many of those suspected to have been involved in the protests are being arrested at the time of writing. In a separate development, UN- mediated talks are taking place in New York between representatives of Polisario and the Moroccan government. Given the tense situation, it is perhaps unlikely that these talks will lead to any immediate changes in the stalemate of a conflict that has lasted for 35 years.

We have never been to the occupied territories of Western Sahara. Our experience stems from living in the refugee camps outside Tindouf in Algeria for almost five months the spring of 2010. The perseverance of the Saharawi refugees in the face of enormous difficulties, surviving in one of the harshest deserts of the world, shows their dedication to their basic right under international law: to decide their own future. To communicate some of the lessons the desert taught us we asked a number of Saharawis to contribute their views on the conflict and on Saharawi life and society.

Malainin Lakhali is a renowned Saharawi journalist, and the leader of the Saharawi Journalist and Writers Union. His article discusses the human rights abuses by the Moroccan authorities in the occupied areas, and the current international political situation. Asria Mohamed is a journalist who has worked for the national radio in the refugee camps, and she has contributed an introduction to the history of the conflict. The subsequent four texts are based on interviews conducted in September 2010 on a visit to the refugee camps. Abba Lehbib is in charge of youth in the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and was also our coordinator for the exchange project we participated in. Mohamed Baba Yomani is a translator by profession and has contributed his views on the situation for youth in the camps. Najem Bashry Ibrahim is a student at the University of Batna in Algeria, and has shared his views on education. Finally Mohamed Suleiman Lebat is an artist and also a student at the University of Batna, and through his interview about proverbs we hoped to show a glimpse of the rich Saharawi culture.

Western Sahara, human rights abuses and international silence

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INTRODUCTION

The international organizations and big powers adopt a discourse that praises democracy, respect for human rights and social justice. They pretend to be the champions of the rule of international law, the promotion of democracy and equity, yet they are frequently the direct or indirect sources of all kinds of violations of these same principles in the Third World. In the Western Sahara, the last colony in Africa, not only has the UN so far failed to implement its own resolutions with regard to the decolonisation of this territory, its incompetence – fuelled by vigorous pressure from France – has also disarmed the UN mission on the ground and made it unable to even monitor and protect human rights in the territory under Moroccan military de facto control. Since 1991, the Western Sahara is supposed to have been under the direct jurisdiction of the UN through its mission (MINURSO), which is the only UN mission in the world that is not mandated to monitor and protect human rights.

FOUR DECADES OF ABUSES

Even before Spain officially withdrew from the territory on the 26 of February 1976, the Moroccan and Mauritanian armies invaded the territory of the Western Sahara from the north and south beginning on the 31 of October 1975. The Moroccan army, in particular, adopted the old tactic of “scorched earth”, erasing everything in its way - human beings and animals alike - and forcing thousands of Saharawi civilians to flee their territories, terrified by the hatred, the destruction and the barbarism of the Moroccan army.

This invasion introduced a new era of oppression in the Western Sahara and brought with it a new phenomenon of human rights abuses, such as forced disappearances, collective massacres, mass graves where nomads were buried alive by the Moroccan Army, secret imprisonment and terrible detention camps. Some of these were discovered, and then recognised by Morocco 16 years later, when Rabat was forced to release 322 Saharawi victims of disappearance. Until their release, these 322 were detained in secret prisons, yet their existence has always been officially denied by Moroccan authorities. In addition to this phenomenon, torture, intimidation, and harassment of the civil population have been the daily plight of all Saharawis. Further, the Moroccan authorities tried by all means to erase the Saharawi identity and history by imposing the Moroccan version of history, culture and norms on the Saharawis - especially the younger generation - in a traditional colonial attempt to

brain-wash the new generations, trying to “Moroccanize” them by force.

From 1976 up till now, more than 500 Saharawi civilians and 151 Saharawi prisoners of war are still reported missing after being taken to Moroccan prisons. Thousands of Saharawis have been arrested, tortured and imprisoned in secret detention camps for periods ranging between 1 month to 16 years, without been charged or tried. Cases of sexual abuse and rape against victims of both sexes under torture continue to be reported, even against children. Mothers had miscarriages or died while pregnant from torture or fear, while others have been arrested and disappeared, leaving behind infants and young children.

A military and security siege is still in effect in the occupied territories of the Western Sahara, making it one of the few places in the world where international media cannot operate, as the Moroccan authorities do not allow them to freely report on the situation. On the rare occasions that journalists or observers succeed in sneaking into this highly controlled region, they are put under police surveillance, harassed, arrested, expelled, and in some cases even ill-treated, as was recently the case of Spanish observers Javier Sopina and Laura Gallego in the occupied city of El Aaiun. The Moroccan authorities violate Saharawi rights of the freedom of expression, movement and association. Basically, anyone who opposes the Moroccan occupation is deprived of any kind of right – including the right to work - ill-treated, harassed, intimidated, and kept in poverty if not expelled or arrested and imprisoned or killed.

A 2,400 km military wall has been built by the Moroccan army (in six stages from 1982 to 1987), cutting the Saharawi people in two and separating members of the same families. The Moroccan wall causes a serious human rights situation in the Western Sahara. Saharawi families from both sides of the Moroccan wall cannot visit or see each other; nomads face problems with their herds and are unable to move freely in the territory because of the Moroccan military presence and because of the high contamination of the territory with millions anti-personnel landmines and cluster bombs. The wall is watched over by some 150,000 Moroccan soldiers and fortified by barbed wire.

Morocco, in an attempt to change the demographic situation – as all colonial and expansionist regimes have done

“The Moroccan authorities tried by all means to erase the Saharawi identity and history by imposing the Moroccan version of history, culture and norms on the Saharawis”

throughout history - encouraged Moroccans to settle in the Western Sahara, providing them with all the facilities and support needed to control the economic and social affairs in the colony. On the other hand, the authorities do all in their hands to push Saharawis, especially the young generation, to flee their land and immigrate to neighbouring countries to avoid oppression and police persecution.

INTERNATIONAL REACTION

Western Sahara appears to be the only territory in the world where the international human rights bodies seem to be unable to operate. International human rights organisations follow the Moroccan abuses with much difficulty, and usually do nothing about them because of political nuances and pressure from some international powers, especially France, the fervent protector and supporter of the Moroccan monarchy. In April 2010, France did not hesitate to strongly oppose any mentioning or condemnation of Moroccan human rights abuses in the latest UN Security Council resolution on the Western Sahara.

After three decades of silence on the situation, the UN finally succeeded in sending a UNHCR Mission to Western Sahara to investigate the situation. The mission visited the territory from the 15th to the 23th of May and the 19th of June 2006 and clearly recognized the seriousness of the situation, concluding that:

“1 – As has been stated in various UN fora, the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara must be ensured and implemented without any further delay. As underlined above, the delegation concludes that almost all human rights violations and concerns with regard to the people of Western Sahara, whether under the de facto authority of the Government of Morocco or of the Frente POLISARIO, stem from the non-implementation of this fundamental human right”.

Surprisingly, the report has been put under embargo to this date, because of pressures from the usual suspect, France, the “champion” of democracy and human rights.

As for the EU, it seems that the European countries tend to forget human rights and democracy when their economic interests are at stake. In the Western Sahara, the EU signs illegal agreements with Morocco to exploit the natural resources of the Western Sahara in a process that can only be

described as theft and plundering. The EU gave Morocco an advanced status of partnership, despite the fact that all international human rights organisations openly denounce Morocco and frequently express concerns about serious human rights violations in the territory.

WESTERN SAHARA, INTERNATIONAL LAW AT STAKE

The non-resolution of the conflict in the Western Sahara is proof of the inefficiency of the UN system and the dominance of Realpolitik and interests over the principles and rights that humanity has been struggling to implement in the international arena. It is unacceptable, however, that civil society actors and citizens of the world feel disarmed and unable to make any difference when faced with such abuses of peoples' right to freedom, justice and democracy in a world we all want to be fair and equitable for all.

The Saharawis' struggle is a legitimate fight for a fundamental right more than a mere political issue, and every citizen of the world must know that if he accepts to remain silent while Saharawis' rights are violated then the time will come when his own granted rights will face these same violations. And he will be justly treated the way he should, because he accepted to stand silent and inert, instead of moving to resist injustice.

The historical background to the conflict of Western Sahara

Asria Mohamed, 24 years old, journalist in the national Saharawi radio.



THE COUNTRY OF Western Sahara lies immediately to the south of Morocco in the west coast of Africa. Formally the territory of Western Sahara is known as the Spanish Sahara, as it was a part of Spain since the Berlin conference in 1884 until 1975 when Spain withdrew from the territory. Spain promised at the time that a referendum of self-determination of the indigenous people of Western Sahara, the Saharawis, would be held under the UN umbrella as most of the decolonization process went in the region, but unfortunately this promise was never kept. The tripartite agreement between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania took place in Madrid dividing up the formal Spanish Sahara into two parts, and Morocco invaded the territory from the north and Mauritania from the south. These invasions were insistently resisted by the POLISARIO front, the only representative body to all the Saharawis, that was founded in 1973 with the aim of freeing the territory from the Spanish colony. Mauritania was quickly reposed by the POLISARIO soldiers, however Morocco had a well equipped army and still occupies the territory.

The brutal Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara forced thousands of thousands of the Saharawis to flee from their home land to the open desert, and during their journey many were killed, wounded and the despair was vast. The only way they could survive was to make it to Algeria hundreds of miles away, arriving in the south west of Algeria where they established four refugee camps (Smara, Laayoun, Dakhla and Auserd).

On the 6th of November 1976 an estimated number of 350,000 poor Moroccans were brought to the territory of Western Sahara by king Hassan the second. It was named the green march, which for us is a black march.

The Polisario front while fighting against Morocco managed to liberate parts of the territory and declared the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, SADR on the 27th of February 1976. The republic is today recognized by more than 86 countries and is a part of the African Union.

The war went on from 1975 until 1991, when the UN intervened to solve the conflict peacefully. The intervention of the UN was welcomed by both parties, as a mutual lasting and acceptable solution to the conflict was in the interest of both parties and even more for the powers involved in this conflict. The UN plan is to hold a referendum so that the Sa-

harawis can decide whether they want full independence or integration with Morocco. On this point both parties agreed and the MINURSO started the process, but Morocco eventually rejected the UN plan and put many obstacles in the way for this solution to be implemented.

To return to some important historical events on the issue: on the 13th of December 1974 the General Assembly of the UN requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to give an advisory opinion on the status of Western Sahara. In this advisory opinion on Western Sahara, issued on 16 October 1975, the ICJ very clearly established that there never existed any ties of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity.

In addition to this, there is another important issue, namely that the world should take steps to destroy the wall of shame, which Morocco built to divide Western Sahara in two parts, the liberated areas and the occupied territories. This wall was built to separate the Saharawi people, it is full of land mines, and it is the largest separating wall in the world with a length of 2400 km.

In 2005 the INTIFADA started as a struggle of the Saharawis in the occupied territories. Morocco stepped up human right violations, killing protesters, carrying out arbitrary arrests and forcing people into exile. Because of these human right violations the POLISARIO front is lobbying internationally to get the UN mandate in Western Sahara to observe the human rights issue on both sides of Western Sahara. However, Morocco's friends in the Security Council still deny the UN from passing such a resolution especially France, which remains the most powerful Moroccan ally.

My belief is, like all the Saharawis, that one day we will get our independence. It is not difficult to solve this conflict, because international law is very clear on this issue, in resolutions such as the UN resolution 1514. But the Western Sahara conflict is yet to be solved, and only more pressure on Morocco and more political will from the international community can lead to a lasting and mutually acceptable solution.

Working for youth

Abba Lehbib, in charge of the youth in the department of Sport and Youth, Polisario.

A newly built centre for youth in Smara camp.



“The nomad life means to live with the open air, to eat the natural things, to respire the good air, to be free. This is the ideal life, no?”

Abba Lehbib



THE SITUATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

For us, the situation of the young people here in the refugee camps worries us. The Polisario Front has through the last 35 years done a great job concerning the education of the young people, and now you can find thousand of doctors, teachers and engineers in the refugee camps, who have been educated at high levels in the universities in Algeria, Libya, Cuba or in Spain. We also have three centers in the refugee camps for the professional education of young people. But when the young people finish their studies, they find themselves without work in the refugee camps. This point worries us a lot, because in the last couple of years we have seen some new phenomena that we haven't seen before, and all this because of the large amount of free time. This is normal, a young man or woman who has no work, and there is no infrastructure, or places that he or she can go to spend their free time, and the result of this situation is clear for anyone. The most important focus for us is to try to give work to the young people, by creating some initiatives with the help of some foreign NGOs, to create workshops to give work to the young people, and which can help them to practice their knowledge that they have gained in schools and centres of professional formation. Also, we work on “youth space”, we work to reduce the free time for the young people, by creating some activities, like what we can do with the help of the project with the United World College in Norway, to teach English in one part if the La'ayoun camp. The department of sports also works to create sports activities for young people, men and women. Their work also touches on sports in the schools. There is a school in Smara for education in sports, but also to help, especially the young girls, to practice sports. Each year they organize the Sahara marathon, which is an international event, bringing together more than 500 participants from many countries, last year from 26 countries, from South Africa, the US, Germany, Spain, Italy.

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS

I would like to say something about the human rights situation in the refugee camps because the Moroccan government and the Moroccan media have sent out a lot of propaganda on this point. They claim that there are only 40-50 000 people in the refugee camps and that most of these are not Saharawi, but come from Mali or other places. They claim that the Saharawi people are being kept here by the Algerian army and the Polisario security service, and they spread many lies like these. We have an organization which is concerned with the human rights situation in the refugee

camps and the occupied areas, its name is AFAPREDESA. Each year we are also visited by human rights organizations like Amnesty International, and anyone can read the reports of these organizations about the situation in the camps. None of these organizations have said that there are violations of human rights in the camps, not Human Rights Watch, nor Amnesty International. Anyone can read what they have said about the situation in the occupied areas, where there are daily human rights violations. The Saharawi refugee camps are visited each year by more than 10 000 foreign people. Our camps are open for anyone who wants to come to investigate about the situation.

LIBERATED AREAS AND THE IDEAL LIFE

You cannot imagine how the people are if you visit them in the liberated areas. Now there has been rain, and in one month from now a lot of people will go to the liberated areas. If you visit a family that you know well in the camps, and you visit them in the liberated area, you will find them to be more generous, more compassionate. This is because they go to the liberated area, their origin, with the rain and the goats, in their homeland. Their behaviour changes. When you come to a family here, they give you milk and so on, but if you visit them in the liberated areas they will kill a goat, this was our tradition. I think that the nomad, the Bedouin's blood cannot change. I know that my uncle spent 20 years in Spain. But when he hears that there has been rain, he comes to the liberated areas to spend time there with the goats and camels. When you see him there you cannot believe that he was in Spain. You will say that he is a Saharawi who was born here, and has not been anywhere else. This did not only happen to him, our ambassadors, people who stayed in European countries for many, many years, they go to the liberated areas and they change to a Saharawi pastor. It is very rare that you find a Saharawi who integrate well with the Spanish. We can adapt to many situations, but we cannot dissolve, like when you put sugar in tea, it is difficult. We can adapt to many strange situations, but we cannot dissolve. We can adapt well, but not to be a part of another country. The traditional Saharawi, his generosity, his dignity, his strong relations with his family and his neighbours, these things cannot change. It is still very strong.

The nomad life means to live with the open air, to eat the natural things, to respire the good air, to be free. This is the ideal life, no?

The lucky revolution

Mohamed Baba Yomani, 25 years old, graduated as a translator in English and Arabic from Batna University in 2009.



“The solidarity in our society is one of the things that make us unique. Our society is founded on solidarity and it is through this that life here still carries on.”

SAHARAWI STUDENTS AS AMBASSADORS

Saharawi youth worldwide strive for a common goal; a free, independent Western Sahara. The youth works together to spread awareness, participate in various activities in the camps as well as in foreign countries and continuously acting as ambassadors for their country.

Organized activity for youth during the summers has taken place in the refugee camps for several years, but since 2005 students in the refugee camps have organized a yearly caravan to support the protesting Saharawi students in the territories occupied by Morocco. This summer activity was initiated by the *intifada*, the peaceful demonstrations, that started in the occupied territories in May 2005. The activities organized by the young people in the refugee camps include demonstrations, music and cultural events, shows, competitions as well as trips to the liberated territories where courses about the history of Western Sahara and its conflict with Morocco are being held. The activities of the Saharawis are also directed towards the government, pushing for a solution to end the conflict. The youth of today will become the leaders of the next decades, so they have to know their land and its history in detail. We as Saharawis should know our land, as our fathers did.

The international network of the Saharawis is also growing as it now has branches in countries such as Algeria, Cuba and Libya. The Saharawi student union is becoming increasingly more active and since the election of Mohamed Abdullah in 2003, a lot of relations have been built with student unions and organizations in other countries. Although young Saharawis wish to engage in a lot of activities to spread awareness and keep fighting for their right to self-determination in activities such as the ones in the summers, some students tend to rather work in order to support their family and to be able to pay for their studies. Our situation here in the refugee camps is very difficult and several students also drop out of university in order to work and try to support their families instead.

THE LUCKY REVOLUTION

We have spent three decades here and we survive due to the solidarity amongst our people. People of all generations work together and try to do their best in this situation. The percentage of the young people with university education is increasing and although the elderly, more experienced generation is stepping back to make room for the younger

generation to take over, we will always keep the Hassania proverb in mind; “Sometimes it is better to ask someone with experience, than to ask a doctor”. Many young people who graduate and then return to the refugee camps find themselves without work. Thus graduates will not necessarily work in the exact domain that they studied, but often something related to it. The solidarity in our society is one of the things that make us unique. Our society is founded on solidarity and it is through this that life here still carries on. It is our belief that you should be satisfied with what you have. When God takes something from you, he gives you something else.

I like to say that our revolution is the lucky one, because when we gain our independence we already have qualified labor in most domains and thus we will not depend on imported labor to run our society.

THOUGHTS ABOUT OUR FUTURE

The situation of the Saharawis is difficult for the whole population, but I think it affects the young people the most. This is because the elderly generations know Western Sahara. They have seen it and they have lived there, but for us it feels like a dream. The only thing we want is our liberty. None of us want to spend all our life here in the camps. We are continuously struggling, trying to find a way to go back to our country. An urge for concrete action is rising amongst many young people as it seems that we cannot achieve our independence through diplomatic, non-violent solutions. Some people think that what is taken by weapons has to be reclaimed by weapons. No one wants war, but if it is the only solution I hope that other people can understand this point of view.

Solidarity through education

Najem Bashry Ibrahim, 22 years old, studies International Relations at Batna University in Algeria.

School class in Dakhla camp.



Najem Bashry Ibrahim



■ WILL TRY TO explain what education means to me and to the people here in the Saharawi refugee camps. Also I would like to touch upon how the role of education affects our society.

I believe that education consists of three parts, of which none can be removed in order to fully educate a person. Firstly the education in the family, secondly the education received in school and thirdly from the society. The education plays one of the most important roles in all societies and nations. The family gives the child its education in the first stages of life. The family will however continue its presence as the watchful eye following the child throughout its life. The education that the family provides is vital in shaping the personality of the young human and influencing what person he or she is to become. The second stage of education is provided by the schools and universities. Here young people will discover many new and different things such as new friends, teachers, and new ideas. In the schools the children are taught a different type of knowledge, like learning how to read, write, and calculate. I believe that the knowledge which young children receive in school is affected by the education they receive in their families. A child from a family which has prepared him or her well for this second step in the direction of knowledge will do better and struggle less than a child who does not come from such a family. With the completion of the studies and the entering into the adult world, a young person will interact with society in a new way. He or she will come to realize the different ideas and the disparity of this world. In my opinion an educated person is to some extent responsible for setting a good example, giving advice, helping those he or she can help and making use of the knowledge he or she has acquired.

In our society we appreciate all types of knowledge. Those with experience are as important, and sometimes even more knowledgeable, as those with university degrees. Many people here base their lives on advice given by the elderly as their experiences have taught them well. Education at all levels plays an important role in our society. It has taught us about solidarity, cooperation, love and unity. It has taught us our morals and helped us fight crime and injustice. This is what defines us and keeps us alive here in the refugee camps. We work together hand in hand and strive towards our common goal of one day to be able to go back to our country as a free and independent nation.

In my opinion it is important to keep the education for young people going even in the summer holidays or when we finish school or university. At the moment we are lacking activities which broaden our knowledge such as classes in languages, art or IT. I believe that it is important for young people here to become more active and to do useful things for themselves and others. The Saharawi student union is continuously improving and developing activities and also foreign organizations are involved with this in the refugee camps. I hope the useful activities for young people will increase and thus broaden our understanding and our knowledge.

Many young people leave their families to search for knowledge in other countries. University students attending universities in Algeria, Libya and Cuba do not see their families for long periods of time. In addition, the lack of activities and work in the refugee camps forces many young people to look for work in foreign countries such as Spain. This splitting of families has a big impact on our lives here in the refugee camps, but also it is what keeps us alive. However, our strong roots and our belief in solidarity will eventually bring everyone back to the refugee camps and his or her family. While being abroad people forget many things about their society and their culture, but the love for their people that is educated deep inside of him or her will never fade. No matter what happens or where we go, in the end we will always be Saharawis.

لكلام اخيار اقل و افاد

Name: Mohamed Sulaiman Lebat, 24 years old, studying English at the University of Batna in Algeria.

“Speech is good when short and useful” – لكلام اخيار اقل و افاد



“If the camel cannot stand with one leg tied, how can it stand with two legs tied.” – Sahawari proverb.

What role do proverbs play in Saharawi culture?

Proverbs are very important in Saharawi culture for several reasons. First it keeps a part of the history within these proverbs, some of them are parables, some of them tell part of a story, an important event, some of them tell about some of our ancestors. Saharawis consider them important for such reasons. Some of the Hassania proverbs come from the classical Arabic, some from religious sources, others from our long history; through times of war and peace, of poverty and prosperity.

Tell us a about your project, you now have a list of more than 1000 proverbs. How did you gather them?

When I started thinking about collecting these proverbs I started asking the people around me, my family, my grandparents. I started collecting them about five or six years ago, but I was interested in it long before that. The first part of the project is collecting Hassania proverbs, and here I have done the biggest part of the project. For the second part of the project, translating the proverbs into English, this takes more time.

Is there some common message or recurrent theme?

It sums up the long experience of the Saharawi people. You can find all the aspects of the Saharawi people's lives. Since it's taken from this long history, you'll find a huge number of them talking about wisdom, advice, warnings, and things like that. The theme of most of them is just to be good among your fellows. What's interesting in Hassania proverbs is that Saharawi people tend to use comparisons between things they want to do and what they have. They use camels, tea, tents, the desert and other things as examples to show you what is good to do and what is wrong.

For example, if I am going to show you that if you cannot do this, then it will be even more difficult for you to do the next thing. *“If the camel cannot stand with one leg tied, how can it stand with two legs tied.”* We use the camel as a symbol in our culture to show the meaning. I am interested in English, and I want to study it. Imagine I couldn't understand it, I find it very difficult. Suddenly I tell my friends I want to study Japanese, they will tell me immediately that if the camel cannot stand with one leg tied, then how can it stand with two legs tied?

Is one of the aims of your project to keep the proverbs alive or make them accessible?

One of the problems of the Hassania literature is that it is not fully written down. It is something we suffer from, we want to know our culture, but it is not yet written down. We hear about the famous poets and writers, but we don't know where to find their works. They are old and we are afraid that we will lose them, and lose a precious treasure with them. I want to tell young people about the importance of our history and culture. All of them are linked together. I am trying to widen this project, to do some research and study on a comparison between the classical Arabic proverbs and Hassania proverbs. There are some classical Arabic proverbs that we still keep the original version of. I also want to translate the proverbs to English. There are some strong similarities. Most of these proverbs have equivalent proverbs in English, for example the Hassania “don't buy a fish in the water” has an equivalent in “catch the bear before you sell the skin.”

Many people cannot believe that such similar things are expressed in proverbs and expressions in different cultures. How do these apparently different cultures have these common things? People everywhere share basically common ideas and thoughts about things, and might have basically the same concepts, only we express them differently. Say I am here in the desert, and you are in Sweden or Norway, but I do like these things, and don't like these things, and these might be the same for someone in a different culture, who knows nothing about me and I know nothing about him, but we share the same thoughts. These are human thoughts, only the language expresses them differently. So when we study cultures we will find very similar things, that can bring people together, rather than scatter us, only people don't know how to bring us closer. Literature, proverbs, songs and these things can bring people together more than people can imagine.

Here is an example of a good proverb that I really like. I like the ones that are very eloquent or that come with very good advice, or good imagery. Sometimes when you have a really good image in the proverb it can convince you. This one is very wise, there is no story, but it's very good. It says: Listen to those who make you cry, not those who make you laugh. This doesn't tell us not to laugh or be sad all the time, but it tells us about those who tell us things we don't like to listen to, but which in the end are good for us, and that we have to listen to. Another example is: The one who holds the camels head is the same as the one who slits his throat. This can



be applied very widely. If you are doing something, good or bad, and I am helping you, we are equal. The two are treated equally, in good and bad situations, and share the same responsibility.

What other things are you working with, apart from the proverbs?

I'm also interested in writing Arabic calligraphy. I'm interested in proverbs, English and calligraphy, so why not link them all together by writing proverbs in calligraphy and translating proverbs into English. It's not only the apparent shape of my calligraphy, but also the meaning in them that matters. If you can understand the meaning behind it, you not only enjoy the form, but also the meaning behind it. I have some Hassania proverbs that I have written in calligraphy. I have written some Koran verses, some Hadiths of the Prophet, some wise saying, proverbs, and poems. The things I like, the things I want people to like, I want people to see them in my way; in calligraphy. I know many people know these proverbs, or might know this poetry, but if you give them these things from another angle, calligraphied, they can enjoy it more.

If there is one thing you can wish for, for your project, what would it be?

I wish I could finish it, and make it known among people, I wish my message would reach people, that it's just a personal effort, and that a simple person can do this, they can follow the same example, they can do some studies, some other research on our culture in another aspects, like poems, stories, traditions, biographies of famous people in Saharawi culture. I wish I could make the young people notice, or be aware of the importance of preserving the culture, and spreading it, and most of all be proud of it. We need to protect our culture, because it's our real identity. If we are fighting Morocco for the land, then one of the things that people need to notice is that we are very different, there is nothing common between us and the Moroccans. If people can spread this idea of the difference between these cultures and these peoples, they have no claim on us. They can't tell us that we are Moroccans, I can't speak their dialect, I can't think the way the Moroccans think, I can't live the way the Moroccans live. I have my own identity, I have my own life, my own dialect, my own culture. I am different from them. So people can work on this as a way to show the rest of the world that we are not the same thing, we are not the same country, simply we are different.



HASSANIA PROVERBS

If a camel can't stand with one leg tied, how can it stand with both legs tied.

The one who holds the camels head, is the same as the one who slits its throat.

One hand doesn't clap.

The truth is bitter to the ear.

A mistake can be overlooked, but lying is forbidden.

Treat your camels equally, you don't know which one you'll need.



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