

Representing Sahrawi Refugees’ ‘Educational Displacement’ to Cuba: Self-sufficient Agents or Manipulated Victims in Conflict?

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Mainstream accounts of refugee women and children have habitually portrayed their objects of study as ‘generic’ passive victims of war and/or famine. In stark contrast, however, since the early 1980s Sahrawi refugee women and children have been invoked as active agents constructing and maintaining their camps. In the first part of this article I explore the nature of a selection of mutually-reinforcing images produced by the Polisario Front (the Sahrawi refugees’ ‘representatives’ and camp managers) for a European audience. Their distinctive content could appear to be diametrically opposed, and perhaps designed to offer a corrective to the ‘universalizing representational practice’ identified by Malkki (1995: 11). In the remainder of the article, however, I argue that these and other portrayals of Sahrawi refugee women and children are in essence motivated by the same political and politicized priorities as those of ‘generic’, passive and victimized ‘womenandchildren’ (Enloe 1990, 1991). Examining three apparently paradoxical accounts of one context of Sahrawi displacement (Sahrawi refugee youth’s ‘educational displacement’ to Cuba), I highlight the extent to which Sahrawi women and children are consistently, if differently, mobilized by Morocco, Polisario and members of Spanish civil society to secure support from a range of state and non-state actors. Moving away from the external projection of these images, I conclude the article by highlighting how the Cuban scholarship programme has been conceptualized and negotiated within the camps, with reference to tensions between Cuban-educated women, their families, and Polisario veterans.

Keywords: Sahrawi refugees, gender, educational displacement, Polisario, Cuba

Introduction

Representations are, by definition, based upon an interpretive process throughout which ‘[s]ome manipulation or transformation is unavoidable’

(Bonner and Goodman 1992: 2). Far from reflecting ‘reality’, the precise terms with which individuals and groups affected by displacement are described and portrayed will often be intimately related to the particular audience being addressed (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a). Through the process of displacement, refugees are not only usually observed and thus subject to analysis and eventual representation by a wider international audience (including in reports written by NGO workers, academics, journalists, etc.), but often also obtain or develop a new ‘stage’ or ‘setting’ from which to present themselves and obtain humanitarian and political support for their particular cause. In this sense, analyses must be founded upon an *a priori* recognition of the existence of multiple layers of representations, founded on an equally varied range of motivations.

In given accounts, certain social groups and selected social, religious or ethnic characteristics may feature more prominently than others. Two main groups in particular tend to be placed at the forefront, often being merged into one hybrid category: ‘womenandchildren’ (Enloe 1990, 1991). As stressed by Malkki, mainstream reports tend to re/create ‘the refugee’ as a generic and essentialized figure, either as *madonnalike* figures (1992: 33, 1996: 389), or as weakened, dependent and victimized ‘womenandchildren’ (see also Moussa 1992 and Hacking 1999 regarding the social construction of the ‘idea’ and ‘category’ of ‘refugee women’). Malkki also argues that ‘children are a crucial element in the representation of refugees’, with Nordstrom noting that children’s images are often mobilized by campaigns to obtain political and humanitarian support for different ‘causes’ in contexts of complex emergencies (1999: 65). Refugee children and women’s symbolic power may thus be derived from their ‘embody[ing] a special kind of powerlessness’ or being the embodiment of ‘pure humanity’ and simultaneously of ‘a pure victim’ (Malkki 1995: 11–12).¹ A review of contemporary photographs of refugees leads Malkki to identify the ‘operation of a humanistic, universalizing representational practice’ in regard to refugee women and children (*ibid.*: 11). The messages of these images can be consolidated via written and oral statements.

Unlike the weak, dependent and victimized ‘womenandchildren’ who populate mainstream accounts of complex emergencies, however, a body of contemporary visual and textual depictions of Sahrawi refugee children and women have tended to portray these as active agents in their refugee camps and elsewhere. In the first part of this article, I explore the nature of a selection of mutually-reinforcing images produced by the Polisario Front (the Sahrawi refugees’ ‘representatives’ and camp managers) for a European audience. Their distinctive content could appear to be diametrically opposed, and perhaps designed to offer a corrective to the ‘universalizing representational practice’ identified by Malkki.

However, in the remainder of the article I argue that these, and other portrayals of Sahrawi refugee women and children are in essence motivated by the same political and politicized priorities as those of ‘generic’, passive

and victimized 'women and children'. Examining three apparently paradoxical accounts of one context of Sahrawi displacement, Sahrawi refugee youth's 'educational displacement' to Cuba, I highlight the extent to which Sahrawi women and children are consistently, if differently, mobilized by Morocco, Polisario and members of Spanish civil society to secure support from a range of state and non-state actors. Moving away from the external projection of these images, I conclude the article by highlighting how the Cuban scholarship programme has been conceptualized and negotiated within the camps, with reference to tensions between Cuban-educated women, their families, and Polisario veterans.

Methodology

This article is based on research conducted with and on Sahrawi refugees in Cuba, the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, Syria and Spain as part of my ESRC-funded doctoral research. The analysis presented below is informed by over 100 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in these field sites, of which 26 were completed with Sahrawi students based in universities and further education centres around Cuba (from Pinar del Río in the West to Santiago de Cuba in the East). These students, alongside those Cuban graduates whom I interviewed in the refugee camps, had spent between one and 15 years living in Cuba, and Spanish was therefore their second language (Hassaniya Arabic being the language spoken in the camps). Interviews in Cuba and with Cuban graduates were conducted in Spanish (my mother tongue), while I interviewed Syrian-based students and the families of Cuban students and graduates in the refugee camps in either Spanish or Arabic, without the need of a translator.

Whilst in Havana I also interviewed a number of Cuban academics who have previously taught Sahrawi students, and an employee of UNHCR-Havana who monitors Sahrawi students during their stay in the island. In addition, I was able to gain access to official (Cuban) statistics, demographic overviews, and local accounts of the study abroad programme held in Cuba's National Library and Havana University, which have allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of Cuba's scholarship project.

Background to the Conflict

The territory now known as the Western Sahara was a Spanish colony from 1884 until the mid-1970s, and has remained on the UN Decolonization Committee's agenda since October 1964. While Spain conducted a census of the territory in December 1974 to prepare for an eventual referendum for self-determination, by the end of 1975 Spain had decided to withdraw from its colony without holding a referendum. Although Spanish military and security forces had been combating increasing anti-colonial sentiment and activism in the territory between 1970 and 1975, with Spain's military

dictator (General Franco) gravely ill, and the Spanish mainland itself experiencing violent threats from political and military groups, these forces rapidly left the colony to 'maintain the peace' in the metropolis. It was during this period that the main anti-colonial movement, the Polisario Front, was born (May 1973) and gained popular support, first resisting Spanish colonialism, and later Moroccan and Mauritanian claims over the territory.

The International Court of Justice ruled in its Advisory Opinion of October 1975 that neither Morocco nor Mauritania had legal claims to the territory that should impede holding a referendum for self-determination (ICJ 1975: 12). However, 350,000 Moroccan civilians faced no resistance from Spanish or international forces as they crossed into the territory in early November 1975 as part of the 'Green March' designed by Rabat to recover its 'Southern Provinces'. Some 20,000 Moroccan soldiers soon joined their civilian compatriots from the North (Chopra 1999), while Mauritanian forces entered from the South, ignoring UN Resolutions (including Resolution 380 passed on 6 November 1975) deploring the march and calling for its termination. Moroccan administration of the territory began shortly after a Tripartite Interim Administration agreement was signed between Morocco, Mauritania and Spain in the second week of November 1975, a week before General Franco died (20 November). The armed conflict between Morocco, Mauritania and the Polisario Front intensified from the end of 1975 onwards, with a mass exodus of Sahrawis initially being displaced to other parts of the territory (Um Draiga, Tifariti and Guelta Zemmur), and later, following the bombardment of these first encampments with napalm and phosphate bombs (Lippert 1987; Andrade 2003; Mercer 1979), to the nascent Algerian-based refugee camps near the territory's border with that country.

Spain officially withdrew from the territory and unilaterally declared that it was no longer the administering power on 26 February 1976, a day before the Polisario Front proclaimed the birth of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Given the extensive overlap of members of the Polisario Front and the representatives of the SADR (for example, Mohamed Abdelaziz is both the Secretary-General of the Polisario and the President of the SADR, also see Shelley 2004: 182), henceforth I shall refer to 'the Polisario/SADR.' Political conflicts ensued between states which recognized and lobbied in favour of the Polisario/SADR's struggle for independence and those which did not. Such conflicts were bilateral (between Algeria and Morocco, for instance) as well as multilateral, playing out in arenas such as the Organization of African Unity and the Non-Aligned Movement (Damis 1983; Lynn Price 1981). From 1976 to the present, the conflict over the Western Sahara has thus been dominated by the main parties (Morocco and Polisario) attempting to convince influential state and non-state actors to support their respective political standpoints, and recognize the legitimacy of their claims over the territory and its inhabitants.

The Sahrawi Refugee Camps

The Sahrawi refugee camps were established by the Polisario/SADR in south-western Algeria, near the military town of Tindouf, in 1975–1976. At the time of writing, the refugee camps comprise four major established desert camps named after main locations in the Western Sahara (Aaiun, Ausserd, Smara and Dakhla), and a fifth, smaller camp, which has developed around the National Women's School (the 27 February School/Camp). The first three are respectively 65, 45 and 50km from the nearest Algerian city, Tindouf (WFP 2002), and 24, 40 and 19 km from Rabouni (calculated from ECHO map, 2001: 13), which is the administrative centre of the camps and where the SADR's 'ministries-in-exile' are found. Dakhla is the most distant camp, being over 150 km from Rabouni, and very close to the Algerian–Mauritanian border.

Although no reliable census of the camps exists to date, in 1999 a preliminary registration concluded that at least 107,000 camp-based refugees (potential voters and their immediate families) would wish to return to the Western Sahara under the auspices of a UNHCR repatriation programme if a referendum for self-determination were eventually conducted (UNHCR 2000: 187; WFP 1999: 4). The total camp population, including 'non-voters' living in the camps, is now calculated by UNHCR and WFP as being over 155,000. Although no statistics are provided for the 27 February Camp (which I estimate houses approximately 2,000 people), the UNHCR statistical yearbooks of 2002 and 2004 state that the Sahrawi refugee population of concern to UNHCR in Algeria was distributed as shown in Table 1.

Despite an absence of reliable demographic data, WFP estimates that around 60 per cent of the current resident population are women and girls, and that the average household size was between 6.7 and 5.2 in 2000 and 2002 respectively (WFP 2000, 2002).² The number of dependents per household is high, because the overall camp population is young, with a large

Table 1

Population of Concern to UNHCR by Location	
Location	Population of concern to UNHCR at location
Smara Camp	41,850
Dakhla Camp	40,440
Aaiun Camp	38,740
Auserd Camp	34,410
Tindouf (City)	9,570
TOTAL	165,010

Source: UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks for 2002 and 2004.

proportion of inhabitants having been born in the camps between 1975 and today. UNHCR's statistics for the year 2004 estimate that 56 per cent of the refugee camp population was under the age of 18 (19 per cent under five years of age and 37 per cent between 5 and 17), 31 per cent were aged between 18 and 59, and only 13 per cent were aged over 60. However, ECHO statistics for 1999 (in ECHO 2001) offer a somewhat different picture of the demographic composition, calculating that 57 per cent of the population in the five camps, but excluding the boarding secondary schools and the national hospital, was under the age of 12 (83,602 children out of a total population of 147,474). Those born in the camps have been recognized (*prima facie*) by the UNHCR as 'mandate refugees' since birth, and the older cohort of these have started to have children themselves, leading to two generations having been born into this protracted refugee situation.

Representing Sahrawi Refugee Women and Children

Sahrawi refugee women and children figure prominently in visual and written accounts of the refugee camps produced by NGOs, journalists and the Sahrawis' own 'representatives' and camp managers, the Polisario/SADR. A brief analysis of the types of photographs included in three Polisario/SADR-produced booklets (dating from 1980–1986 and written in Spanish and French) helps us contextualize the nature of the images projected to European audiences. Table 2 categorizes the photographs included in these documents as what we can label 'generic' or 'active' images of refugees. Drawing on Malkki's analysis of photographs included in academic and UNHCR reports (1995: 11), I have categorized images of women as mothers and carers, as weavers or craft-makers, or as passive refugees waiting for aid, as examples of 'generic' images of refugees. In contrast, when Sahrawi women are portrayed in military uniform, as participating in political demonstrations and meetings, or as providing professional services as doctors or teachers, I label these 'active' images in so far as they are designed to demonstrate to the audience that their refugee protagonists are dynamic individuals who are engaging with the socio-political challenges which they face.

These images of active women and children have consistently been presented to European observers not only through Polisario/SADR documents, but also through the 'parades' which are regularly organized when visitors arrive *en masse* to the camps, as reflected in Plate 1a and 1b taken by the author in 2007. Through a process of accumulation and repetition, these images in turn inform visitors' and observers' visual and written accounts of the camps, thereby solidifying an 'archive'³ of knowledge *vis-à-vis* this protracted refugee context.

While many 'generic' images are admittedly included in Polisario/SADR and NGO reports, the prominence of 'active' images of women and children is notable, and arguably provides the basis from which to compare the

Table 2

Categories and Descriptions of Photographs of Women, Children and Men Included in Three Polisario-produced Documents (RASD 1980a, 1980b, 1986)

Description of photograph	1980a	1980b	1986	Total
'Active' images of Sahrawi women				
Sahrawi women in positions of 'active' resistance (i.e. in a demonstration, participating at political rallies/meetings, making victory sign)	4	6	4	14
Sahrawi women in military uniform, on military parades or with weapons	4	1		5
Sahrawi women and men in military uniform, on military parade			1	1
Sahrawi women as medical professionals	3	2		5
Sahrawi women as teachers	1	2	2	5
Sahrawi women studying	1	5	1	7
Sahrawi women in agriculture			1	1
'Generic' images of Sahrawi women				
Sahrawi women in the foreground	2	2		4
Sahrawi women waiting for aid		1		1
Sahrawi women in front of their <i>khiyam</i> (tents)	2	1		3
Sahrawi women weaving or making crafts	1	1		2
Sahrawi women celebrating, singing or dancing		7		7
Sahrawi women with children	4	1	5	10
Sahrawi women caring for babies	2			2
Sahrawi women fleeing from bombing with children		1		1
Elderly Sahrawi women		2		2
'Active' images of Sahrawi girls and boys				
Girls and boys studying	2			2
Girls and boys in school	2			2
Girls and boys in parade	1			1
Girls and boys at demonstrations, holding flags...			3	3
Girls and boys in uniform			1	1
'Active' images of Sahrawi girls				
Girls studying	1			1
Girls in uniform	1			1
Girls making victory sign	1			1
Girls foregrounded in photographs in/of schools	1			1
'Active' images of Sahrawi boys				
Boys studying	1			1
Boys with weapons	1			1
'Generic' images of Sahrawi children/babies				
Sahrawi children with women (see above)				
Babies being cared for or in need of care	1	1		2

(continued)

Table 2

Continued				
Description of photograph	1980a	1980b	1986	Total
'Generic' images of Sahrawi men				
Sahrawi men in military uniform, on military parade, with weapons (not including images of Sahrawi men and women in military uniform, included above)	5		7	12
Sahrawi men in positions of active resistance (i.e. in a demonstration, participating at political rallies/meetings, making victory sign)		3	1	4
Sahrawi men on/with camels or horses		1	3	4
Sahrawi man digging well			1	1
Sahrawi men soldering		1		1
Sahrawi men at festivities		5		5
Sahrawi men meeting international diplomats	5	8		13
Sahrawi men as medical professionals	3	1		4

Sahrawi camps with 'other' refugee settings. The tendency to compare refugee groups and evaluate them accordingly is confirmed by many mainstream accounts of the Sahrawi refugee camps, including a recent report by the Norwegian Refugee Council, which explicitly indicates that these are 'unique' by virtue of their difference from 'other' camps (2008: 7). In the words of Voutira and Harrell-Bond, the Sahrawi camps are an 'exception' of 'what has become the norm' (2000: 68), while Williams claims that Sahrawi women are 'unique' and a 'positive example' specifically through comparing their position with the 'usual' position of generic refugee women in generic refugee camps (2005: 22). As I argue elsewhere (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a), the images of active and empowered Sahrawi women and children outlined above are particularly powerful precisely because they are 'unexpected' when compared with the 'standardized' images which have become the norm when discussing refugee camps (Fisk 1995: 15 in Shami 1996: 9).

Importantly, while Nordstrom has documented and denounced the tendency for NGOs and academics to 'focus almost entirely on adults' whilst failing, especially, to ask 'where are the girls' in war-affected regions (1999), many accounts of the Sahrawi refugee camps have emphasized the participation of girls in educational projects, in part by means of demonstrating the Polisario/SADR's goal of 'female participation and empowerment' in the camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a). One such focus has developed around the participation of both girls and boys in an international education programme which has allowed Sahrawi refugee children and youth to study at secondary and tertiary levels outside the camps.



Plates 1a and 1b

Women (a) and girls and boys (b) in military attire and formation participating in a parade organized by the Polisario/SADR for Spanish visitors to the camps (Smara Camp, April 2007).

Sahrawi Youth's 'Educational Displacement'

When the refugee camps were first created in 1975–1976, the construction of schools was a main priority for the Polisario/SADR. Sahrawi refugee children currently have access to 29 primary schools and 25 pre-school centres based in the camps, and, until recently, to two boarding secondary schools (the '9 June' lower secondary school was destroyed by major floods

in 2006, leaving only the '12 October' secondary school). However, recognizing the limited infrastructure of the desert-based camps, and the small number of trained individuals capable of teaching children, alternative modes of educating refugee youth were developed in the mid-1970s. Hence, when the Sahrawi Ministry of Education, Health and Social Affairs was created in 1976, its main aims included not only building and organizing schools in the camps but also requesting that friendly countries welcome as many Sahrawi children and youth as possible to educate them abroad (Velloso de Santisteban 1993). Although a number of 'educational hosting countries' have offered Sahrawi refugee children the opportunity to study outside the camps (including Algeria, Libya and Syria; see Chatty *et al.* forthcoming), the current article will examine the ways in which Sahrawi refugees' experiences of living and studying in Cuba have been represented by a number of actors.

Sahrawi Youth Studying in Cuba

Cuba was amongst the first countries to offer Sahrawi refugees not only a free education, but full scholarships for secondary and tertiary education. As such, Sahrawi students have often spent between 10 and 15 years living in Cuba in order to complete university degrees. During this time, the majority of children and youth were able to return to the camps only once or twice, if at all, finding that socio-economic conditions (and family structures) had changed radically during their absence. At the end of their studies, all students have been obliged to leave Cuba, with the understanding that they will return to the refugee camps to work as professionals (such as doctors, nurses, engineers, pharmacists, etc.), thereby reducing the need for 'foreign experts' and enabling the creation of a self-sufficient refugee camp context.

According to one source, the first generation of Sahrawi refugee youth were 'adopted' by Cuba in 1977, when 20 Sahrawi students were offered grants to study first in the (secondary-level) *Escuela de Amistad Cuba-RASD* (School of Friendship Cuba-SADR), in the Island of Youth, and then professional degrees in different Cuban universities (Petrich 2005). As one female medical student recalled during our interview in Havana,

When I was 11 I travelled to Cuba with another 800 Sahrawi children from the refugee camps. There were three schools just for us in the Isla de la Juventud, but that year they had to open a fourth school because there were so many of us. I lived with about 100 Sahrawi girls who arrived with me, although there were 25 new girls who lived with the older girls in another student residence.

UNHCR statistics specify that more than 1,400 Sahrawi refugee students were based in Cuba in 1995, with over half of these having returned to the refugee camps over the following decade. Around 600 Sahrawi students remained in Cuba in 2005 (ACN 2006). Cuban and Sahrawi media reports state that the number of Sahrawis who have trained as doctors in

Table 3

Sahrawi Students in Cuba from 1977 to 2006

Year	Sahrawi students in Cuba	Returnees to the camps
1977	20	
1978–94	No data available	
1994	1,493	
1995	Over 1,400 (\pm 200 females)	
1996	1,328 (1,247 by end of year) (\pm 200 females)	
1997	1,099 (1,000 assisted by UNHCR)	238
1998	963 (880 assisted by UNHCR) (140 females)	142
1999	862	
2000	802	
2001	901 (60 females)	185 (29 female)
2002	878 (27 females at start of year; 9 at end)	167 (21 female)
2003	721	
2004	719	
2005	597	143
2006	600	

Compiled by author from UNHCR reports, Cuban media reports and other sources.

Cuba is approximately 300 (RHC 2002a, 2002b; SPS 2002) while the total number of Sahrawi beneficiaries is estimated as being well over 4,000 (Salazar 2002; Um Draiga 2001; García 2001 in San Martín 2005). Table 3 offers a brief overview of the number of Sahrawi students reported to have studied in Cuba from 1977 to 2006, and, where information is available, the number of Sahrawi children and youth arriving from, and flying back to, the refugee camps.

As I have explored elsewhere (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009b), Sahrawi youth are not the only youth or indeed refugees to have obtained Cuban scholarships: since the beginning of the Cuban Revolution (1959), more than 40,000 students from over 120 countries have been granted full scholarships by the Cuban government, allowing them to pursue their secondary and/or tertiary education in the Caribbean island (Alfaro Alfaro 2005). Indeed, an island formerly known as La Isla de Pinos, was formally renamed La Isla de la Juventud (the Island of Youth) in 1978, coinciding with the celebration of the XI World Youth Festival. The transformation of this previously under-populated Cuban island into an 'International Centre for Studies' revolutionized both the island's demography and its economic capacity, as students boosted citric agricultural activity in the region by tending the fields when they were not studying (Alonso Valdés 1984). The first 'Basic Secondary School in the Countryside' in La Isla de la Juventud was created in 1971, with a total of 56 schools having been built there for secondary level Cuban and foreign students between 1959 and 1981 (Comité Estatal de Estadística 1982).

Eight pre-university installations were also created in the same time period, ensuring that many of these students could access Cuban universities with the state's financial support. To offer an idea of the number of foreign children involved in this programme, 10,468 non-Cuban children took up school scholarships in 1982 alone, amounting to 37.7 per cent of the total number of students in La Isla de la Juventud (Alonso-Valdés 1984). In 1988, foreign students numbered 13,098, with 1,972 of these being in primary schools, 9,151 in secondary schools, and 1,975 in pre-university centres (Richmond 1991).

Despite the extent and reach of this study-abroad programme, this element of Cuban 'internationalist' policy has received little academic examination (c.f. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009b), and yet the experiences of Sahrawi refugee youth on the island have been pinpointed by a number of commentators for different strategic political reasons.

In contrast with both the 'generic' reports of refugee situations referred to in the introduction, and the Polisario/SADR reports of the camps referred to above, which portray one common underlying representation of refugee women and children (as either passive victims or active agents, respectively), accounts of Sahrawi youth's 'educational displacement' to Cuba are revealed to offer divergent views of and about the same context of displacement. I shall thus examine, in turn, the ways in which Morocco, Polisario/SADR and members of Spanish civil society have tended to describe the 'educational migration' of Sahrawi refugee students to Cuba, followed by their return to the camps. It will become apparent that each party's approach to this period of displacement has largely paralleled each group's political perspectives on the matter of the Western Sahara. Despite the major differences which emerge in these portrayals, and while Sahrawi women and children are described as 'active' members of the refugee camps by the Polisario/SADR and European observers alike, in all three cases explored below it becomes apparent that images of these social groups have nonetheless been mobilized by powerful actors as key political symbols to obtain support from their respective audiences.

Moroccan Claims

Since the creation of the Sahrawi refugee camps, the Moroccan authorities and (state-monitored) media have systematically represented the inhabitants of the Algerian-based refugee camps as Moroccan citizens who have been kidnapped by the Polisario/SADR and subjected to a range of human rights abuses (see arabicnews 2004; moroccansahara 2007). As part of their attempts to discredit the Polisario and denounce this group's 'repression' and 'abuse' of the individuals under its control, refugee children in particular, and more specifically those children who have participated in the Cuban scholarship programme, have been constantly recreated as the victims of the Polisario/SADR system. Amongst those denouncing the Cuban study-abroad programme are Sahrawis who formerly lived in the refugee camps

and have reportedly 'defected' to Morocco, including several former high-ranking members of the refugee camp administration such as Keltum Khayat (the former Secretary General of the camp-based National Union of Sahrawi Women). Amongst those who have spoken out about conditions in Cuba, the majority appear to be women, including mothers who claim that their children were forcibly taken from them to study in Cuba (including Keltum Khayat, whose son I interviewed in Havana),⁴ and a number of young women who claim to have been abused whilst living in the island (for instance, Saidani Maalainine).

Following many denunciations of the abuse of Sahrawi refugee youth in Cuba, in 2004 the Moroccan delegation demanded that the UN Executive Committee conduct an investigation into this programme. The Moroccan party firstly claimed that the youth had been forcibly taken from their families in the camps without the latter's consent, and secondly, that the youth had been sexually abused, trained militarily, and forced into child labour.

In response to these and earlier claims made before the UN, UNHCR undertook two major monitoring and evaluation visits to students based in Cuba in 2003 and 2005, and concluded that the Sahrawi children interviewed (all of those present in Cuba at the time) were participating voluntarily (and with their parents' consent) in the project, were well cared for and supervised throughout their stay, and could decide when to return to the refugee camps (UNHCR 2003). Indeed, UNHCR reports on the protection situation of Sahrawi refugee adolescents studying in Cuba indicate that, in relation to Cuban students, Sahrawis 'enjoy equal educational opportunities as well as slightly more advantageous treatment in terms of material and health support provided in Cuban schools' (UNHCR 2005). In the 2005 UNHCR report it also highlighted that 'this scholarship programme meets the standards of treatment and care required by the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child', and that children are not abused (sexually or otherwise), militarily recruited or militarily trained in Cuba.⁵

While my own interviews with Sahrawi students living and studying in Cuba in 2006 coincide with UNHCR's conclusions as regards living conditions and the nature of these young refugees' participation in the educational project, several questions remain to be addressed. Firstly, although UNHCR interviewed all remaining students in Cuba in the early 2000s, it has not undertaken an analysis of the experiences of Sahrawi students in the past, thereby failing to recognize, for instance, the extent to which separations between children and their parents were considerably longer than initially expected in the 1980s and early 1990s, and thus the difficulties (and at times trauma) this has entailed. A second and more relevant question in the context of this article is why Morocco should rely so heavily on female informants of abuse (as mothers of students and as former students themselves) and claims of sexual exploitation.

Elsewhere I have argued that the projection of specific images of Sahrawi women to Spanish civil society is a mechanism through which

Sahrawi refugees' physical and political survival is ensured, demonstrating to Spaniards that their humanitarian and political commitment to the Sahrawi 'cause' is both valid and necessary (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a). The power of this representational element of the conflict over the Western Sahara has, however, yet to be explored vis-à-vis Morocco, since pro-Sahrawi academics and NGO workers have until now either ignored or simply dismissed the ways in which the Moroccan authorities develop specific images of life in the camps for political and strategic purposes.

I would argue that the power of these accusations is derived precisely from their gendered nature, and that the Moroccan delegations' representation of Sahrawi children and youth as victims of both Cuban and Polisario/SADR abuse is an integral part of this party's struggle to convince international audiences (including the UN and its members) of the justifiability of their political stance against the Polisario's claims for Sahrawi self-determination. Most importantly, it reflects Morocco's assumption that accounts of child abuse and maternal deprivation in socialist Cuba have the potential power to stigmatize the Polisario/SADR, thereby undermining a range of state and non-state actors' support for the Polisario/SADR simultaneously as the legitimate representatives of Sahrawi refugees in the international arena (including at the UN), and as respectable and responsible managers of the refugee camps themselves. The political rationale for developing such images is self-evident, given the power of such depictions of women and children to mobilize political support, as outlined in the introduction to this paper.

Polisario/SADR Views

The Polisario/SADR's representation of these refugee children's and youth's experiences is in direct contradiction with the official Moroccan perspective. In contrast with the image of Sahrawi children as victims of abuse, the official Polisario/SADR representation is that of resilient children who have accepted the responsibility of being the 'Sahrawi nation's' future and its route for self-sufficiency through education and training (interview with Polisario/SADR diplomat, Havana, November 2006). Whilst recognizing the difficulties of being separated from their families for up to (or over) a decade, Sahrawi officials have often stated that Sahrawi youth who have studied in Cuba have 'no problems when they return because they are Sahrawi inside', as I was informed by Fatma Hmada of the National Union of Sahrawi Women in an interview in the camps in 2002 (Fiddian 2002). The presence of Cuban-educated men and women throughout the camps' administrative and services structure, working as nurses and doctors, teachers and administrators, is notable. Although Cuban-educated male doctors⁶ have over the last few years increasingly attempted to migrate to Spain, where a need for qualified doctors guarantees them full-time and fully-paid jobs, from the mid-1990s onwards (when the first graduates returned to the camps), the camps have as a whole been run by individuals trained in Cuba.

In addition to official statements by Polisario/SADR representatives both in Cuba and in the camps, and the management of the camp structures primarily by Cuban-educated men and women, the fact that these young refugees so frequently act as 'guides' to Spanish-speaking visitors to the camps for practical and linguistic reasons is highly significant. Indeed, the identity and nature of the audience being addressed must be borne in mind when examining the Polisario/SADR's motivations for invoking these images of empowerment in relation to the period of Cuban 'educational displacement'. If the Moroccan authorities have targeted the UN with accusations of child abuse and sexual exploitation, the Polisario/SADR has historically reproduced a specific set of representations to Spanish civil society, which forms the core of the Sahrawi 'solidarity' movement, as a means of ensuring its continued political support for the self-determination of the former Spanish colony, and humanitarian and political support for camp inhabitants and the Polisario/SADR alike (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a).

Over 300 pro-Sahrawi solidarity groups exist in Spain, vigorously lobbying the Spanish government (as the former colonial power) and demanding that the UN finally hold the referendum for self-determination which was intended to take place in 1991–1992. These groups engage in awareness-raising activities regarding the demand for self-determination, the violation of human rights committed by Moroccan forces in the Western Sahara, and the humanitarian plight of Sahrawi refugees in their protracted refugee camps. They also manage a yearly *Vacaciones en Paz* (Holidays in Peace) programme (explored by Crivello and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh forthcoming), which annually transports up to 10,000 Sahrawi children to Spain during the summer months, thereby allowing children to avoid the hottest periods in the camps (when temperatures regularly reach 50°C). Charter planes are organized at least twice a year to allow 'solidary' Spaniards to travel to the refugee camps, including the Spanish host families for the *Vacaciones en Paz* programme who visit 'their' children in the camps, with several thousand Spaniards arriving *en masse* in the camps during the Spanish Easter and Christmas vacations. During these visits, and those completed on regular flights (via Algiers with Air Algérie), Spanish visitors bring commodities and cash to 'their' Sahrawi families, in addition to having the opportunity to see living conditions *in situ* (*ibid.*).

In such a context of dependence upon the political and humanitarian support offered by Spanish civil society, Cuban-educated men, but especially Cuban-educated women, in the camps play a key role. Hence, their visibility to Spaniards as 'guides' and camp representatives could be understood as literally embodying (for a non-Sahrawi audience) the Polisario/SADR's official principles of self-sufficiency. Further, the presence of these Cuban-educated women in particular personifies the Polisario/SADR's representation of the camps as characterized by female 'freedom of movement' for education and employment, claims pertaining to women's 'secularism' and 'liberalism', and their political participation in the camps, all of which are



Plate 2

Sahrawi women (presumably Cuban graduates) in medical gowns participating in a parade organized by the Polisario/SADR for Spanish visitors to the camps (Smara Camp, April 2007).

characteristics which are highly valued by Spaniards who are ‘in solidarity’ with the Sahrawi ‘cause’ (as discussed in detail in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh forthcoming and 2009a). By acting not only as guides, but also as bridges between Spanish civil society and the camp administration, these young women are perfectly situated to ‘demonstrate’ to their visitors the centrality of modern, educated refugee females in running the camps and ensuring their survival. In many respects, in their interactions with Spanish-speaking visitors to the camps, these Cuban-educated young men and women enact the ideal roles which have been assigned to camp inhabitants through the Polisario/SADR’s official representation of the camps: active members of a self-sufficient refugee community (Plate 2).

It is thus important to note the extent to which refugee camps simultaneously provide the potential for (external and internal) ‘managers’ to observe and ‘regularize’ refugees’ status and ‘normalize’ their lives (Malkki 1995: 112), and yet also provide a space for social and political invention and change, including for the re/production of mythico-histories (*ibid.*: 238). While representations of refugees are primarily created by external observers, the case under consideration demonstrates the connections which exist between externally re/produced representations, and images which are internally designed and directed.

Although ‘solidarity’ is often viewed in relation to notions of fraternity (Wilde 2007: 173; Martín-Márquez 2006), such a term hides the imbalanced power dynamics which underlie ‘solidarity relations’. Rather than ‘solidarity’

being offered between equals, there is a clear imbalance in this case between those who provide solidarity, and those who are conceptualized as the 'recipients' of support. Indeed, as Bob stresses, 'the development and retention of support are best conceived not as philanthropic gestures but as exchanges based on the relative power of each party to the transaction' (2005: 5). In the context under consideration, multiple forms of dependence on externally provided aid and support have directly impacted the ways in which the 'recipients' of solidarity represent or 'market' (*ibid.*) themselves to their 'solidarity providers'. Since NGOs and other solidarity groups habitually differentiate between groups which are or are not worthy of support, their continued engagement with a 'cause' often depends on donors being convinced as to the cultural 'authenticity' of the recipient (see Conklin 1997), or the usage of particular political discourses and methods by recipients (Bob 2005; Jasper 1997; Jean-Klein 1997). In this way, 'broader political contexts' often influence the particular identity which is presented by social and political movements (Jasper 1997: 329–330), and Bob stresses that 'movements must often alter key characteristics to meet the expectation of patrons' (2005: 5) who often act as 'auditors' (Jean-Klein 1997) observing both the implementation of their projects, and what could be termed the 'justifiability' of their engagement. It is within this framework of ensuring the perception of a 'justifiable' and acceptable solidarity that the Polisario/SADR engages with Spanish civil society and institutions, representing 'their' refugee camp community accordingly.

Solidary Spaniards' Accounts

I have outlined the main images projected by the Polisario/SADR to Spaniards, arguing that these are strategically essential, since ensuring their continued 'solidarity' ultimately guarantees the physical survival of the Sahrawi refugee camps and the political survival of the Polisario's national project. In the following pages I explore how certain members of Spanish civil society have represented Sahrawi youth's experiences of 'educational displacement' in Cuba to other Spaniards with this same 'solidary' goal in mind.

While no academic work has been produced in Spain on this matter, the number of Spanish visitors who have travelled to the camps since the mid-1990s following the declaration of the ceasefire, has allowed Spaniards to encounter Cuban-educated students living and working in the camps, and to jointly discuss their experiences of the Caribbean island. In addition to Spaniards who visit 'their' Sahrawi children or travel to undertake a 'tour' of the camps, many others develop and run humanitarian or development projects in the camps, and often therefore work alongside Sahrawis who were trained as doctors, nurses, engineers or teachers in Cuba. Combined with the fact that both the Western Sahara and Cuba were former Spanish colonies, Spaniards' perspectives of the Cuban scholarship programme are radically different from the image offered by the Moroccan authorities,

and, based on my interviews with Spanish NGO workers in the camps and in Spain, are often aligned to the view offered by the Polisario/SADR: that of these refugee students embodying the future of 'the Sahrawi nation' and its self-sufficiency.

Beyond individual Spaniards' perspectives based on their visits to the camps, several Spanish documentaries have now been made (or are in progress) on the experience of Sahrawi youth who have studied in Cuba. These include Galdeano and Pérez's *Caribeños del Desierto* (2006), and Pérez's later *Caribeños del Sahara* (2007). A *caribeño* is an individual from the Caribbean, in this case from Cuba; the first title highlights that these individuals' origin is from 'the desert', while the second specifies that they are from 'the Sahara'. One particular portrayal of the situation is offered in a recent film produced and directed by the Spaniard Márquez (2005), entitled *Las Cubarauis*. As the title indicates, the film purports to document the experiences of Sahrawi young *women* who studied in Cuba (indicated by the Spanish plural, feminine article *las*), with 'Cubarauí' (i.e. Saharauí + Cubano/a) used to refer to this particular culturally and linguistically hybridized group of Sahrawi refugees. In this 45-minute long documentary we are presented with a specific vision of the experiences of Sahrawi refugee women who have lived in Cuba. As the film asks how these women experience their 'return' to the camps after over a decade in Cuba, the film is shot in both the island and the desert-based refugee camps, and focuses on two young women who were still studying in Cuba at the time (one of whom is the SADR President's daughter), as well as recording a number of 'conversations' held by female *Cubarauis* in the camps. In these 'conversations', the young women discuss their expectations for the future in the camps, their hopes and fears, as well as reminiscing about their experiences as children and adolescents in Cuba.

Three intersecting issues emerge from this particular representation of Sahrawi refugee graduates from Cuba. Firstly, the focus of this film is on Sahrawi *women* who have studied as children and adolescents in Cuba, rather than on men or men *and* women. One of the messages transmitted via this film is clear (and, in fact, is the main tenet of the film's synopsis): as adolescents, these young refugee women left their desert-based refugee camps to arrive in a liberal, secular society which offered them unique social and educational opportunities; upon their return to the camps, these young women encounter major difficulties in readjusting to their families' and broader communities' expectations of them, as Muslim women living in refugee camps. They are thus revealed to form a new, unique, distinct and hybridized social group in the camps whose experiences encompass a combination of bearing the pain of separation from their families at a young age, the enthusiasm of obtaining certificates and degrees from training colleges and universities, and the uncertainty of their futures in their refugee camp homes given the international community's failure to resolve the conflict over the Western Sahara.

While this film could therefore be seen as presenting a number of perspectives *vis-à-vis* these women's experiences of studying in Cuba, a second major

point which arises is that the documentary was scripted and 'enacted' by the 'interviewee-actors', rather than recording (verbatim) interviews or presenting women's own individual or collective priorities. Hence, the shots have clearly been physically framed and planned by the director to represent specific experiences, and the topics discussed (sex education, family planning, marriage and employment) appear to have been selected as a means of demonstrating the 'emancipated' and secular nature of the speakers who have transcended the limitations of views espoused in their natal (Muslim) refugee camps. Further, whilst in Cuba I interviewed many of the women and men who appear in the sections pertaining to Cuban-based students, allowing me to reveal that a high degree of 'artistic licence' was enacted by the director, who, for instance, must have transported students between cities to create a false impression of the numbers of female students in Havana at the time. Other images appear to have been designed to recreate a precise picture of Cuba for the Spanish audience: images of a woman interviewed on Havana's *Malecón* (seafront) are followed by the same woman chatting with her female friend on the beach (which is a long distance from Havana city), reproducing an exotic image of Cuba as a beach paradise, and providing an ideal image with which to contrast the veiled women walking in the Sahara desert refugee camps. The documentary, therefore, is highly staged, and, as in the Polisario/SADR and Moroccan depictions of this period of 'educational displacement', highlights certain characteristics and images in order to elicit a specific response from the audience.

An interconnected matter is the director's decision to portray a situation through which the audience is led to believe that Sahrawi women are still sent to study in Cuba, despite my evidence to the contrary. While some 200 Sahrawi females were estimated to be studying in Cuba in 1995 (see Table 3), the number reported by UNHCR has decreased considerably since then, falling to nine at the end of 2002; by the time of my departure from Cuba, only three Sahrawi women were studying on the island, and all three of these were related to high-ranking members of the Polisario/SADR (regarding the implications of political/family background of Cuban-educated Sahrawi refugees see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a). The gender ratio at the end of 2006 (3 females to 600 males), and the identity of those girls who have been allowed to stay or who have in fact arrived over the last few years, is particularly pertinent for the current analysis of the representations of refugee youths' experiences of studying in Cuba. Given the 'real' absence of these women in Cuba, we must ask why this specific image has been represented to a particular Spanish audience.

Sahrawi Refugee Girls in Cuba?

Given the gendered focus of these three accounts, and the degree to which many Spanish observers have been captured by the participation of Sahrawi refugee girls in this study abroad programme, a brief analysis of changes in

female to male student ratios is essential at this point. As evidenced in the manipulations which characterize the documentary discussed above, the presence of two or three 'symbolic' women in Cuba allows the image of female participation in the scholarship programme to be fixed on film for a specific audience. And yet, despite the prominence of female graduates from Cuba in the camps, interviewees in both Cuba and in the Algerian-based camps confirmed that Sahrawi girls had always been a minority in the Caribbean island, with 100 girls arriving alongside 700 boys in 1989 (see quotation above). Indeed, at a certain point families rebelled against the Polisario's aim of training women there, and many demanded that their daughters be returned to the camps:

Around adolescence, some families started to ask for their daughters to return to the camps. They would contact the embassy who would in turn contact the Cuban Ministry asking for their daughters to conclude their studies and leave Cuba. They did this, and girls started returning to the camps (Female interviewee, Cuba).

That girls should have been recalled by their parents upon reaching puberty is consistent with the concerns expressed by many of my (adult) interviewees in Algeria regarding the movement of pubescent and post-pubescent girls in certain areas of the camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a). According to my research in the Sahrawi refugee camps, girls' movements there today continue to be increasingly limited as they develop physically and approach maturity, becoming young women who can be perceived to be *fatimāt* (feminine plural, carriers of temptation and its related chaos). As they are progressively expected to observe certain religious practices (*ibid.*) and to help their mothers with domestic tasks, combined with the possibility of marriage prospects emerging in the camps, parents may become more convinced of the need to recall their daughters at this stage.

At this time (around 1989), however, almost all families stopped sending their daughters to study in Cuba, although they continued to allow them to travel to those countries which were closer to the camps. This proximity was evaluated in geographical, linguistic, cultural and religious terms, with the largest number of girls travelling to Algerian towns and cities and the second largest group to Libyan centres. However, although girls continue to travel to and study in Libya and Algeria, the largest number of tertiary level scholarships offered to Sahrawis has always been through the Cuban state, with only a relatively small number of youth completing university degrees elsewhere. As a result, by stopping girls from travelling to Cuba, their opportunities to access tertiary education outside of the camps disappeared in essence, although they were still eligible for vocational training in the camps, as had been the case for those girls who had studied in Libya.

While I have presented a range of reasons behind the general shift in female participation in this programme in Chatty *et al.* (forthcoming), such changes ultimately appear to be directly related to concepts of ideal female

behaviour, and of female needs. Beyond claims that girls 'need' more 'things' than boys, as I was repeatedly told in interviews with Sahrawi youth in Cuba, Syria and in the camps, girls were also described as missing their families more than boys, and therefore finding the long-term separation from the camps harder to deal with. To this effect, one of the young women I interviewed in Cuba reflected that

each year, one or two girls would return to the camps because they found it too hard to bear. The girls who stayed behind wondered how they could have done that. Maybe some of them dreamt of returning too, but I was determined to study, and to do that, I knew that I would have to stay in Cuba. It's too painful to even describe how I felt at that time.

Other interviewees suggested that it was the families themselves in the camps who found it harder to be separated from their daughters, with parents requesting their return from Cuba as puberty approached, while those with daughters still based in the camps decided to send them to study elsewhere.

Despite the additional answers offered, it is my conclusion that this is the main reason why Sahrawi girls no longer travel to Cuba. Although parents were largely unaware of the fact at the time, Cuban gender roles and relations are starkly different from those considered appropriate in the Sahrawi context, and young women returning from Cuba (unlike women who have studied in Algeria or Libya) have often faced stigmatization from kin and community who were certain that the women had been 'bad girls' in Cuba (Fiddian 2002; Márquez 2005). This impression that *all* girls and young women had 'misbehaved' whilst abroad, no matter how they might have *actually* behaved, was derived from the experiences of what can only be called a minority: some of the older girls had entered into relationships and had become pregnant, facing serious consequences both in Cuba itself (being challenged by male students and political representatives alike) and when they were promptly returned to the camps to face their parents. Indicating the severity of their treatment upon return, some of these young women, according to three of my interviewees, Tortajada (2003: 87) and Caratini (2000: 448), were interned in the National Women's Prison (also referred to as the National Centre for Maternity Assistance), where women who have become pregnant out of wedlock have been sent since the camps were created (on this 'centre', see HRW 2008). Two of my interviewees, and one of Tortajada's sources, suggested that this was a 'good idea' since it was 'for their own safety', as they could face violent responses from their family and broader community as a result of their behaviour (on violence against women in the Sahrawi camps, see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009c).

The reaction in the camps was clear: girls would no longer be sent to study in Cuba, and many parents requested that their daughters should return immediately, although some were able to finish their degrees before returning to the refugee camps. Of those who returned, and of those who might have travelled to Cuba under other circumstances, some continued studying in

near-by Algeria and Libya, under close supervision by Sahrawi ‘monitors’. Nevertheless, as several Muslim Palestinian and Syrian students reflected during our interviews in Cuba, ‘it is not surprising that girls who arrived at such a young age should act like the Cuban women who surrounded them. It’s not really their fault.’ Without adult Sahrawi female role-models, the girls found it difficult to become ‘traditional Sahrawi women’, and rather became ‘Cubarauis’, a term which has become commonplace in the camps to describe this new social group.

The impact on these and future generations of girls and young women appears relatively straightforward, just as their parents’ reactions are understandable in the context of a recently sedentarized, Muslim Bedouin refugee group. Yet, beyond recognizing the ways in which being separated from their families and broader social structures, including isolation from religious codes, affected these girls’ transition into adulthood, it is important to draw attention to an additional impact of the girls’ disappearance from Cuba: the island can no longer realistically be represented as a means through which the Polisario/SADR can prove its commitment to female education and ‘empowerment.’

Indeed, although the Polisario/SADR may have situated Cuban-educated female graduates at the centre of their international public relations campaign directed to European audiences, these women have, since their arrival in the camps, been perceived to be potential threats to the current social and political balance. While many parents and broader community members may consider that they have undermined the moral integrity of the camps through their activities in Cuba, politicians have also recognized that Cuban graduates simultaneously have the capacity to challenge the representation of the camps to outsiders, and the status quo in the camps.

With the veteran members of the National Union of Sahrawi Women (NUSW) having monopolized the political scene in the camps since the 1970s and 1980s, Cuban-educated women have been granted roles which ensure that they are unable to directly challenge the power structures. On the one hand, their visibility to Spaniards grants them greater access to both material and social capital and networks (see Chatty *et al.* forthcoming), thereby leading Cuban graduates to recognize the benefits which arise from acting as the camps’ ‘ideal representatives’, and what they could lose were they either to refute the images reproduced by camp managers during their engagements with Spaniards, or to directly challenge the legitimacy of these bodies. In addition to this element of ‘self-policing’, and as became apparent during the Fifth NUSW Congress held in the 27 February Camp in April 2007, the vast majority of Cuban-educated women are officially restricted to fulfilling their assigned roles as ‘guides’ and ‘interpreters’, rather than being able to participate as conference delegates as many of them would wish.

Whilst enjoying more ‘freedom of movement’ around the camps, and accompanying visiting NGOs and journalists during their tours of the entire refugee setting, many of these young women are, for instance, unable to join these representative structures which continue as a whole to be run by

the same women who are repeatedly re-elected to executive positions (Khadija Hamdi, the SADR president's wife, is a case in point). Even those young Cuban-educated women who do work in the NUSW, encounter major difficulties in travelling to and from work, and find their activities being judged by family members and neighbours alike. A combination of familial and political pressure therefore works to keep these refugee women in their place, following their prolonged period of 'educational displacement' in Cuba.

Conclusion

Moroccan, Polisario/SADR and Spanish accounts of the 'educational displacement' of Sahrawi refugee children in Cuba all focus on the participation of female Sahrawis in this educational programme as a means of symbolizing a variety of factors and/or dynamics which are strategically mobilized to obtain support for their respective political standpoints. The conflict over the Western Sahara is thus in part a representational contest designed to obtain the support and solidarity of particular state and non-state actors. In this representational struggle, Sahrawi women and children emerge as playing central, if contested, roles.

In the Moroccan view, female children are the ultimate victims, having been forcibly separated from their mothers by the Polisario/SADR, and subjected to sexual exploitation in Cuba; this account is designed to unsettle the audience's assumptions that the Polisario/SADR is a legitimate representative of its people, and a respectable manager of the refugee camps. In direct contrast, Sahrawi girls' participation in the Cuban-based study-abroad programme is presented by the Polisario/SADR to non-Sahrawi visitors to the camps (especially Spaniards) as embodying its liberal and 'empowering' political agenda; the aim has been to secure the support and interest of these visitors, and thus ensure the political and humanitarian survival of the camps. In the Spanish representation offered above, these girls' experiences are presented to the public as a means of raising awareness of the refugee context in general, of highlighting female participation in the refugee camps (the women interviewed include several doctors and experts in communication technologies), and of demonstrating the Polisario/SADR's investment in female education from the birth of the camps.

Despite the apparent discrepancies between these accounts, however, in all these cases the images projected to the international audience can be interpreted as being strategically developed to fulfil specific political purposes, in essence to instigate external support either for or against the Polisario/SADR. These three cases are also united in that they consistently reproduce Cuba as a continued location of female education, failing to recognize the gendered shifts which have taken place since the late 1980s. By highlighting the differences between these parties' accounts, and the hidden reality of Sahrawi girls' disappearance from Cuban educational establishments since

the late 1980s, I have revealed the extent to which refugee camp inhabitants themselves have interpreted and analysed the period of 'educational displacement'. Unlike the projection of highly politicized representations of Cuban-educated Sahrawi children and women by Morocco, Polisario/SADR and many Spaniards to convince external audiences, the designation of these women as 'bad girls' by many camp residents, or as potential threats to the camps' political status quo, is intended for internal consumption only.

Whilst officially portrayed by the Polisario/SADR and Spanish civil society as active agents in the camps, and thereby potentially challenging the 'generic' images of refugees as passive victims of war and/or famine explored in the introduction to this paper, the analyses presented above reveal the extent to which Sahrawi women and children remain symbols which are mobilized by others whilst their own voices are either marginalized or strategically deployed.

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1. Another prevalent image is that of refugee women 'as the martyrs' mothers' or bearing a 'military womb' (see Peteet 1991: 185, 1997: 114), and what Schepers-Hughes (1998: 228) refers to as the intimate connection between 'maternal thinking and military thinking.'
2. These statistics fail to reflect the fluidity of household structures, many of whose members continue to be highly mobile, travelling between the camps, to the *bādiya* (the more remote desert areas) or abroad to visit family, to complete their schooling, or for employment purposes (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009a).
3. My usage of the term 'archive' in this context is derived from Foucault (1989: 25).
4. He is currently studying dentistry and had recently travelled to Spain to visit his sister there, who also studied in Cuba and is now working as a doctor in a Spanish province.
5. On the matter of military training, one of my interviewees in the camps reported that he had travelled to Cuba in 1985 and had studied in the Island of Youth for three years when the Moroccan army had started to build a sand structure dividing the territory of the Western Sahara. At this point he and approximately 300 other students had been called to complete military training in Cuba. He reported that after approximately one year of training, he had returned to the camps, only to find that the cease-fire between the Sahrawi and Moroccan armies had been signed and there was therefore no need for him in the army. Having left Cuba without completing his education, however, he decided to join the Sahrawi army voluntarily, and had only recently been demobilized at the time of our interview in 2007. Also see Gimeno-Martín and Laman (2005: 70).

6. Medical graduates from Cuba are readily accepted by the Spanish authorities, and several young women have also decided to leave the camps for Spain. The majority of young women, however, stay in the camps for a range of reasons, including to support their mothers and younger siblings, and due to both family and societal pressure which continues to encourage women to stay close to home.

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