«YOU HAVE RAISED ME BETWEEN TWO WORLDS»: MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND EMOTIONS IN THE SAHRAWI DIGITAL DIASPORA IN SPAIN

«ME HAS CRIADO ENTRE DOS MUNDOS»: MADRES, HIJAS Y EMOCIONES EN LA DIÁSPORA DIGITAL SAHARAUI EN ESPAÑA

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Abstract

The theoretical development of the concept of diaspora accounts for almost any transnational population that maintains strong emotional ties based on nostalgia and memory with their territories of origin, but also affects and ties with their territories of destination. These processes are generated through intrinsically diverse experiences that are constructed in-between both social realities. The emergence of digital technologies has provided these populations with a new scenario wherein the past and present homes are connected by immediate communication, which currently reduces distances, and uprootedness. However, few investigations have analyzed the frequent communication paradoxes that occur within these communities based on not only the need to be connected but also the failure to meet family expectations. Most studies have focused on the experience of mothers and the role they play in maintaining traditions linked to their places of origin, leaving behind the experience of daughters and their mutual relationship. This article addresses this gap while

exploring the challenges that these contradictions present for the Sahrawi digital diaspora in Spain. Specifically, it investigates relationships between mothers and daughters and their impact on the social media practices of the latter. Through a social media ethnography that was developed between 2016 and 2018 together with Sahrawi refugees in Spain, this research examines how aspects such as the maintenance of family honor and the need to build one's own life plan constantly clash in relationships between mothers and daughters with respect to cultural preservation, the emergence of new forms of belonging, emotional relations, and community expectations.

Keywords: Saharan diaspora; mothers; daughters; Facebook; belonging.

Resumen

El desarrollo teórico del concepto de diáspora describe hoy a casi cualquier población transnacional que mantiene fuertes vínculos emocionales basados en la nostalgia y la memoria con sus territorios de origen, pero también afectos y vínculos con sus territorios de destino. Estos procesos se generan a través de experiencias intrínsecamente diversas que se construyen en el intermedio de ambas realidades sociales. La aparición de las tecnologías digitales ha dotado a estas poblaciones de un nuevo escenario donde el hogar pasado y el hogar presente se conectan, reduciendo distancias y desarraigos a través de la comunicación inmediata. Sin embargo, son pocas las investigaciones que han analizado las frecuentes paradojas comunicativas que se dan dentro de estas comunidades basadas, por un lado, en la necesidad de estar conectadas, y, por otro, en no alcanzar las expectativas familiares. La mayoría de los estudios se han centrado en la experiencia de las madres y el papel que desempeñan en el mantenimiento de las tradiciones vinculadas a sus lugares de origen, dejando de lado la experiencia de las hijas y la relación entre ambas. Este artículo aborda esta brecha, al mismo tiempo que examina los desafíos que presentan estas contradicciones para la diáspora digital saharaui en España. En concreto, analiza las relaciones entre madres e hijas y el impacto de las redes sociales en su cotidianeidad. A través de una etnografía de redes sociales desarrollada entre 2016 y 2018, esta investigación explora cómo aspectos como el mantenimiento del honor familiar y la necesidad de construir su plan de vida propio chocan constantemente entre madres e hijas en esa relación continua entre la preservación cultural, el surgimiento de nuevas formas de pertenencia, las relaciones emocionales y las expectativas de la comunidad.

Palabras clave: diáspora saharaui; madres; hijas; Facebook; pertenencia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The theoretical concept of diaspora accounts for almost any transnational population that maintains strong emotional ties with its territory of origin based on nostalgia and memory but also with its multiple territories of destination through everyday relations and life projects. This tension between spaces and cultures is often experienced as problematic because it evokes a feeling of ambivalent belonging. The hybridity or fluidity of the sense of belonging in the diasporic experience could be both liberating and problematic due to the intersection between social and cultural realities. Thus, because of its emotional roots, the notion of belonging is one of the most heavily negotiated aspects of the diasporic space—especially in the case of refugee diasporas, which maintain strong connections with the first asylum countries in which their refugee camps were located, despite migrating away from them (Van Hear, 2009).

For refugee diasporas, refugee camps become the primary space of socialization with others through family and kinship relations, even though they are associated with mobility violence and a sense of limbo. In these cases, the sociality process in refugee camps continuously marks the migratory experience beyond them in terms of the maintenance of social relations with other members of the group as well as the cultural preservation of traditions and emotional relations linked to the refugee community (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). These social relationships structure day-to-day interactions with other family members, such as in paternal-filial relationships and those with siblings or cousins. In this sense, the possibilities that digital technologies offer to maintain constant contact with family and friends have influenced diasporic relations within and outside of the camps in regard to the emotional exchange of the group. The emotional impact of everyday conversations through digital technologies has determined transnational intimacy in personal communication, rapid exchange of information between places, and social control and surveillance.

However, scarce attention has been directed to family-related paradoxes that originate from the exchange of information in the diaspora space that is facilitated by digital technologies. In fact, the mother-daughter relationship and the emotional distance that is generated by everyday digital media practices remain understudied in the emergent field of digital migration studies

(Leurs & Smets, 2018). This article examines the everyday digital media practices of daughters and considers the rarely explored topic of emotional distance from their mothers in the refugee diasporic context. Although several inquiries have focused on transnational motherhood (Gedalof, 2009; Kofman & Raghuram, 2015), there is a lack of research on the mother-daughter relationship in a diasporic context.

In view of this research gap, this paper studies the case of the Sahrawi refugee diaspora, which has been displaced to the Tindouf refugee camps since 1976 but has been experiencing a new migratory wave from the camps to Spain since the 1990s. The incomplete decolonization process of the Western Sahara by Spain and the occupation of the territory by Morocco and Mauritania incited a war between these countries as well as the liberation movement of the region, the Polisario Front. The immediate consequence of the war was the displacement of a substantial part of the Sahrawi population to the Tindouf region of Algeria, where refugee camps were built, which was proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a state-in-exile. As in traditional nomadic Sahrawi society, feminine mothering roles formed part of a division of labor during this wartime period (Allan, 2019). Sahrawi women heavily dedicated themselves to a variety of duties within and outside the *khayma*[1] (Sahrawi nomadic tent), whereas men were at the battlefront. As in the traditional nomadic society, men usually spent time away from the *frig* (nomadic encampment) to attend to the grazing, while women carried out the majority of mothering tasks and were responsible for the daily affairs of the *khayma* (Allan, 2008). After the decision of Mauritania to leave the war, Morocco and the Polisario Front continued the armed conflict until 1991, when a ceasefire was declared following a negotiation process by the United Nations and an agreement to hold an internationally monitored referendum of self-determination, which never took place. The ceasefire period also influenced the division of labor due to the return of men from the battlefront to the camps. Consequently, women assumed a more domestic role despite the particular political role that they had claimed during the war. It also expanded their function as mothers in the society in terms of dedication to their families and the provision of

1. For words in Hassaniya dialect, the American Library Association-Library of Congress system is followed. Any errors are the author's responsibility.

education to their children about the values of the society. While women tended to their daughters' education, fathers assumed responsibility for educating their sons. According to Allan (2008), this difference derives from the idea that care of the elderly and young children is usually a task for daughters rather than sons, as the patriarchal system and its division of labor position women in the role of a care provider. Such differences are particularly marked by the gender norms of Sahrawi society, which support the expectation that women maintain the *sharaf* (honor) of the family (Errer, 2015). Hassanophone societies observe morality as central to social behavior and consider honor and modesty to be their core values (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Popenoe, 2004; Wilson, 2016).

The end of the war also produced a new migratory wave of Sahrawi refugees to the former colonial power, Spain, to seek a more promising future and improve the life conditions of their families and fellows in the camps (Gómez, 2011). Initially, the majority of Sahrawis who arrived to Spain had studied in Cuba during the years of the war. The Cuban government signed a cooperation program with the SADR to train Sahrawi refugees in the country as cadres for a future Sahrawi independent state. When they subsequently arrived to the camps, they experienced a cultural clash, as their moral and social codes differed from those of the people in the camps, especially the women (San Martín, 2010).

As a result, several Sahrawi refugees with high-level training decided to migrate to Spain to develop careers and improve the lives of their families. However, eventually, other Sahrawi refugees, who had not studied in Cuba, decided to migrate as short-term workers (Wilson, 2016) or with their own families through the *Vacaciones en Paz* (Holidays in Peace) program, which allows Sahrawi children to spend summer periods with Spanish families. Some of those children stay with their host families after the summer if they have medical problems. This means of entry is a key for some parents to request family reunification, while others arrive to Spain as instructors of the program and then decide to not return to the camps. Many of these instructors are women who arrive to Spain to pick up their children and then stay for several months in an irregular situation until they receive permission for residence.

The daughters and sons who grow up in Spain or live with a Spanish host family usually experience Sahrawi culture in a more distant way

(López-Belloso, 2016). In particular, Sahrawi women are positioned between two patriarchies with their respective gender norms: one is defined by the relations established by society and by the perpetuation of displacement in the camps, while the other is framed by their social position in the destination society—in this case, Spain—which intersects with their bodies and experiences according to their gender, race, class, sexuality, age, and other attributes. In this sense, Sahrawi women are situated at a «crossroads» (Anzaldúa, 1987) of gender norms that influence not only their daily lives and life projects but also—and especially—their mother-daughter relationships. This situation is currently accentuated by the role of digital technologies in maintaining contact with relatives in the camps. Gossiping or exchanging information about others on social media has become a common practice among refugees in the camps and beyond (Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020), which has influenced emotional affiliation in mother-daughter relationships.

By referencing the work of digital migration scholars who have explored the connections between emotion, media, and migration (Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020), this paper offers empirical insights into how refugee diasporic mothers and daughters have developed their own emotional relationships based on the digital media practices of the latter and the paradoxical roles of being connected with the refugee community. In this sense, most prior research around this topic has focused on women who migrate alone (Oso, 1997; Madianou, 2016) or the perspective of children who are left behind (Madianou & Miller, 2012), while few studies have addressed the relationships between mothers and children—especially their daughters—in their countries of destination (Liberatore, 2016). In investigating the emotional impact of the diasporic process and feelings of belonging, this paper argues that the digital media practices of some daughters have generated an emotional distance from their mothers due to social visibility and its implications in Sahrawi society.

2. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL SPACES

The mediation of emotions, affects, and belonging through digital media in transnational contexts has been discussed by a range of scholars (Wilding,

2006; Baldassar, 2014; Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2020). Increased mobility and improvements in digital technologies have allowed more people to experience transnational family lives through the possibilities of instant communication. The development of a sense of co-presence (Madianou, 2016) and the emotional implications of mediation of caregiving (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) have accentuated the «affective turn» (Clough and Halley, 2007) in media and social studies, which refers to analysis of the implications of emotions and affects in the communication practices of diasporic and transnational families. In this sense, a variety of scholars have addressed the emotional consequence of transnational motherhood for migrant women who leave their children at home (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2005). These inquiries have investigated how these women perform two active roles: one of mothers at a distance who utilize constant communication practices, and one of migrants who send remittances and contribute to the well-being of their families. These particular roles have intensified the «pressures and expectations on the responsibility of motherhood» (Madianou & Miller, 2012: 24) that perpetuate gender roles in the migration context with respect to kinship obligations of caregiving practices and maintenance of the family institution.

In sociological and anthropological terms, parents teach their children to be well-integrated members of society (Parsons & Bales, 1955) who follow concrete cultural and social norms. In diasporic contexts, the cultural realities of different places are combined with the cultural heritage of the country of origin and the cultural experience of the country of destination. This situation implies processes of social interactions based on multidimensional social relations between the origin and destination (Young, 2009). Feminist postcolonial theory has clarified the significance of family interactions—and their emotional consequences—in borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987). These intimate social relationships are characterized by moral obligations (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) that position women differently according to «a set of regulations based on hegemonic interpretations of gender roles within both their country of settlement and that of origin» (Al-Ali, 2007, pp. 45). This idea situates women in a particular space because of their emotional attachments to the family and the construction of their own narratives.

Diasporic groups develop strong, collectivity-based politics of belonging that conform to in-group boundaries in multiple ways. In refugee diasporas, women tend to maintain their traditions in exile and become symbolic guards (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). In this sense, refugee diasporic mothers frequently teach their children about their own social and cultural heritage, which, in several cases, relates to maintaining the assumption of gender roles from their origin countries (Liberatore, 2016). Despite this socialization process, diasporic children and daughters especially adopt a more cosmopolitan approach to the challenge of experiencing gender roles based on a combination of their formal education in the country of destination and their family education at home.

Intergenerational networks of reciprocity, obligation, love, and trust, which characterize family relations, are not exempt from conflict and problems. In fact, mother-daughter relationships in diasporic spaces also involve moral obligations and failed expectations. In her research on the construction of the self by a young Italian Muslim woman, Menin (2014) has addressed a sense of fragmentation and the moral conflicts that are associated with the necessity to achieve personal desires and family allegiance. Failed expectations on the basis of their everyday activities, social relations, or social media practices generate negative emotions (Turner, 2009), which pose consequences for the maintenance of family and community networks. In this sense, mothers are usually considered responsible for the gendered deviation processes of their daughters in, for instance, failing to assume a particular dress code, maintaining romantic relations, or even engaging in particular behaviors that are recurrently related to sexuality in specific cultures (Puleo, 2007). Informal agents, such as family members or relatives, usually address these deviation processes by applying sanctions to enforce rules, norms, and social values.

In a social media context (Miller et al., 2016), online presentation and public visibility are relevant to the configuration of the public and private self (Goffman, 1959/1994). Social media has become an important arena for social interaction and digital reproduction of the gendered values and norms of groups. Community values and social codes influence the kind of content that individuals publicly share online. In this regard, gender scholars have studied how diasporic women position themselves on an online crossroads

of moral codes that differ between their societies of origin and their destination countries (Subramanian, 2013). They have also investigated how social control is performed online through the development of a negative public reputation on the basis of personal pictures or comments, which can affect mother-daughter relationships.

3. METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS OF RESEARCH

This paper sources evidence from social media qualitative research (Postill & Pink, 2012) with young Sahrawi women in Spain that was conducted from 2016 to 2018. The research process followed a non-digital-media-centric approach (Pink et al., 2016) that focused on activities, relationships, and experiences around digital media. Therefore, it employed a qualitative methodology that involved interviews with users, the collection of digital material from social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) through virtual ethnography, and the attendance of a Sahrawi feminist event, which hosted a particular debate session about «our grandmothers, our mothers and ourselves.» This online-offline approach allowed for the generation of a complete vision of narratives and digitally mediated experiences.

The analysis in this paper draws from the narratives of 24 young Sahrawi women and the assistants to the feminist event. This population includes young women between 19 and 32 years of age who were born in the Tindouf refugee camps and have been living in Spain between 3 and 21 years. The majority also lived in the refugee camps for various periods of time. For most participants, their mothers were in Spain as well, and they lived with their families; the exceptions were three participants who lived with Spanish host families and two who lived alone with their mothers in the camps. Five participants had the status of stateless person, while the remainder possessed Spanish citizenship. In addition, they reported high levels of education, ranging from pre-university studies to bachelor's and master's degrees. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in Spanish with participants who were recruited through snowball sampling. Pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity. A similar strategy was applied for the assistants of the event, and their opinions and experiences were also anonymized. Interviews

and face-to-face events were followed up by digital participant observation of participants' profiles and groups on social media with their consent.

According to Estalella and Ardévol (2007), in social science research, it is imperative to avoid damaging those who are part of the inquiry and to respect their security and privacy in the research process. Power differences have been a significant concern in my research process. In this regard, I engaged ethically with participants by forming an honest relationship with each person on the basis of equality, respect, and confidentiality. As a feminist researcher, some crucial considerations for this study are my positionality in the research and the power dynamics that derive from hierarchies of class, race, education, and other factors, which could affect the research process. Further considerations include confidentiality, ownership of the research, and my responsibilities to the participants. These circumstances have led me to be continually conscious and critical of my research, in terms of my position within it and the ethics that it implies. The knowledge generated from the research is founded on this concrete position, which is traversed by not only hierarchies but also situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991). It is based on the real experiences of the research participants as well as my own conditioning factors and knowledge structures, which are informed by my personal experiences and the Westernized learning that determines the analysis.

In relation to social media issues, I perceived that some women were not comfortable engaging with certain issues that usually embarrassed them. In such cases, I intentionally refrained from pressuring the participant to talk, and I did not stress the issue. After carrying out some interviews, I realized the importance of conducting the interviews after our first meeting to ensure adequate time to develop trusting relationships with participants. During our second meetings, participants seemed more comfortable. Although this approach was more time -consuming than I had anticipated, it was a worthy pursuit to ensure high data quality and ethically obtained responses. During the event, I decided not to conduct any personal interviews, as I did not want to disturb the logic of the event itself, where the women discussed several topics, lived together for an entire weekend, and expressed themselves sincerely to each other. Instead, I performed interviews with participants online or in person after the event. I appreciated the trusting relationship that we established after spending the whole weekend together and conversing about intimate issues.

4. SAHRAWI DAUGHTERS AND THEIR DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES TOWARD THEIR MOTHERS

On one of the nights of the feminist event, the organizing team prepared a special evening dedicated to grandmothers, mothers, and themselves. As part of this segment of the event, they displayed a paper on the wall that was divided into the three groups entitled «our grandmothers,» «our mothers,» and «us.» They decorated each section of the paper with pictures: Sahrawi women in the war to represent their grandmothers; Sahrawi women in assemblies of the Polisario Front and the *Unión Nacional de Mujeres Saharauis* (UNMS; National Union of Sahrawi Women), women diplomats, and the famous Sahrawi singer Aziza Brahim, who recalled their mothers; and pictures of the well-known Sahrawi actress Mariam Bachir, among others, in the «us» portion.

They then talked about each category and the valuable role of women in Sahrawi society. For instance, they acknowledged the invisibility of their grandmothers and lamented that their names went unrecognized even though these women had built the camps, used their strength to carry out their children to Tindouf, and managed the basics of everyday life in the refugee camps. Participants in the event also compared the economic situations of their grandmothers with those of their grandfathers, who, as members of the Polisario military force, received a small pension after the war. The participants agreed about the importance of addressing this discrepancy through symbolic recognition of their grandmothers' role and acknowledgement of their specific names in place of using the general label of «women.»

When they moved on to the category of «our mothers,» the discussion changed to incorporate differing personal perspectives. Some of the participants emphasized the contribution of their mothers to the spread of the Sahrawi political cause. However, they also highlighted their mothers' role in their migratory trajectory away from the camps. One participant, Zeina, who was a 23-year-old Sahrawi woman, expressed the following:

> *Our mothers who have had to come here, who have had to endure the difficulties of being a migrant woman who comes and rents a house and looks for a job and educates her daughters and also grows up with the paranoia that we grow up with—of living between two things, you know?*

All of the participants recognized the relevance of their mothers and the particularities of the migratory process that they carried out. They also identified a common experience that they share with their mothers: a feeling of living here and there after migration. Zeina's expression «living between two things» implies a sense of coexistence of different cultures in a balancing act between those spaces and the performance of cultural practices from one's culture of origin while also adopting customs from one's destination. The interwoven relationships between both places and cultures have an influence on mother-daughter relationships and, in particular, daughters' understandings of themselves (Young, 2009). In this sense, some of them dedicated their interventions to elaborating on their complicated mother-daughter relationships and how they had generated an emotional distance from their mothers out of a sense of guilt about their own self-presentation, their failure to fulfill the expectations or aspirations of their mothers, or negative sanctions that their mothers imposed when they did not afford certain attitudes or relationships.

Some young Sahrawi women explained how they had run away from home after misunderstandings with their mothers. They delivered strongly emotive descriptions of how their mothers forced them to reconsider their romantic relationships with Spanish men, their way of dress, or their choice to spend their free time at parties where alcohol was present. After providing these testimonies, some of them reflected on the necessity to create a sorority network between young Sahrawi women who want to run away from home and need a place to stay for a period. As in other contexts (Menin, 2014), young Muslim women experienced conflicts with their families—especially their mothers—because their «Western way of life» clashed with the maintenance of traditional gender roles. Aisha, a 26-year-old Sahrawi woman, emotionally recounted her difficulties with her mother due to her relationship with a Spanish man. When the situation worsened, she decided to leave her home, and her relatives started pressuring her to change her mind:

> *I left for about a year and a half. During this time, I did not see my mother. Then I came back, and I sat with my mother because she was super overwhelmed… crying, like, «and with all I've done for you.» Of course, I said, «I appreciate what you've done for me, right? What you have done for me...thanks to that, I am this. You are the one who has taught me to be a strong woman—you alone.*

> *You have brought me forward and taught me that I, as a woman, can do it...you are the one who incited this. You are the one who brought me here. I did not say, 'bring me to Spain.' You have to be consistent with your actions. You brought me here. You have raised me between two worlds. I am the result of two cultures, and it is not my fault.» I've never cried as much as I did that day.*

Her words deeply affected the participants of the event and revealed similar realities among other young Sahrawi women who had created a distance from their mothers after their lack of understanding of their daughters' self-definition led to a complicated relationship between them. According to Young (2009), the mother-daughter relationship plays a large part in the development of a daughter's understanding of herself—beyond the idea of selfish disobedience against a mother's parental authority. Aisha's words illustrate how she formed a sense of self on the basis of her mother's position as a strong migrant woman; however, at the same time, she understood that her mother should be more aware of her reality in terms of recognizing her coexistence in different spaces, cultures, and realities. Another example was provided by Fatimetu, who was 27 years old and had lived in Spain for 19 years. She explained how she had left her house to take space from her difficult relationship with her mother and, after some years, restarted their relationship. She passionately emphasized the importance of reconnecting with her mother to establish an honest relationship and comprehension of one another:

> *My mother has never given me a hug or kiss in my life, but this last year when I went to see her, and even when she told me to leave her house, I stopped, kissed her, and left—but it was a way of making her feel that, in the end, I am not making the mistake, but that you [her mother] are taking a stand that is separating us.*

Despite the problems that the participants admitted in terms of emotional distance from their mothers due to various misunderstandings, the majority considered their mothers to be role models in view of their courage and adaptability as migrants in a new country. They also appreciated their dual roles as protectors of Sahrawi culture and champions of equal opportunities for their daughters and sons. Hayat, a 20-year-old Sahrawi woman, argued that, regardless of disagreements with the opinions of other participants in the event, she understood that her mother made an effort to educate her

about Sahrawi culture and traditions despite living in Spain. She clarified, «my mother, I think, is the one who insists more on my identity all the time.» For Hayat, such education reflects her mother's commitment to instilling the Sahrawi cause and its political ideas in her.

During the interviews, multiple other young Sahrawi women similarly described their mothers as guarantors of the continuation of Sahrawi culture and protectors of its culture and traditions despite their migratory context. An important symbol of their mothers' role in the maintenance of traditions is the *milḥafah* (traditional Sahrawi veil for women). Some young Sahrawi women recalled how their mothers instructed them to wear the *milḥafah* to cultural and political events about the Sahrawi cause, though they were ordinarily more flexible about it, including in religious and cultural respects. For example, Sukeina, who was 27 years old and had lived in Tenerife for 20 years, shared her experience and the influence of her mother:

> *I always go to Sahrawi events with my mother, and she tells me, «put on the milḥafah» (laughs)...And sometimes I go as I want, no, and sometimes I say, «well, come on, I put on such.» Because I understand her too, don't I? When I went to the European Parliament, she told me, «come on, put it on,» and I said, «okay, I'll put it on because it's a way of identifying my cause.»*

Similar experiences are present in other refugee diasporic communities; for instance, second-generation Somali women in the UK have noted that their mothers are excessively focused on clothing and external markers (Liberatore, 2016). In the present case, the political cause of the Sahrawis encourages an emphasis on external and symbolic markers—which are especially based on gender—to accentuate their differences from Moroccans (Allan, 2019). In this regard, mothers reinforce the activism of their daughters in pursuit of their cause and teach them to render their identity visible by displaying these elements at any political event.

4.1. Social media in the debate

Beyond the mother-daughter relationship in a diasporic context, another relevant topic was raised during the event and in the personal interviews. Specifically, several young Sahrawi women mentioned the significant impact of social media on their daily lives in terms of not only maintaining

relationships with family and friends who are still in the camps but also advocating for their political cause. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become integral to Sahrawi communication because they can facilitate a sense of co-presence despite physical distance.

During the event, Alia, a 25-year-old Sahrawi woman who had been residing in Spain for 11 years, suggested a debate about their feelings toward social media. The immediate responses of the group of Sahrawi women included words such as «dangerous,» «fear,» and «panic.» Alia then asked whether the women typically used social media even though its use provoked such feelings in them. Some participants consecutively intervened to explain why they associated these words with the use of social media. The majority narrated feelings of pressure when engaging with social media. They also described a general phenomenon of having their pictures stolen and shared on various groups and profiles.

One Sahrawi feminist activist who participated in the event presented her ideas about Facebook and the possibilities of social media for Sahrawi women. She stated that she started a campaign about women's rights and originally intended to accept all friend requests on Facebook because she wanted to spread her message to as many people as possible. However, after several years, she decided to limit the acceptances after several negative comments were directed toward her and her family. Sharing her ideas on Facebook also affected her relationship with her mother in the camp, as people told her mother about her Facebook page and the opinions that she expressed on it. She constantly received phone calls from her mother, who asked her to refrain from publishing certain ideas about gender roles, marriage, and beauty ideals in Sahrawi society. Although she ultimately chose to continue vocalizing her ideas, she recognized the problems that it introduced in her relationship with her mother and sisters in the camp. This outcome was also a consequence of her lack of anonymity, as she used her real name on Facebook when expressing her views. She believed that writing about women's issues on Facebook can impart notions of justice to Sahrawi society.

According to Subramanian (2013), second-generation migrant women often have disputes about Facebook with their mothers. Community control of their peers occurs when they violate gendered community boundaries, as relatives may inform families and mete out community punishment. In

this sense, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) has argued that attempts to control the bodies, reputations, and mobility of daughters is one mechanism that subordinated racialized groups have reinforced during years of migration processes to strengthen their sense of national, cultural, and ethnic authenticity.

In several interviews, some young Sahrawi women elaborated on the impact of their mothers on their own social media practices. Such impact intimately connects to the importance of public reputation and its strong association with the gender norms and moral values that characterize Sahrawi society. However, it is also linked with the responsibility of mothers to educate their children. For instance, in her interview, Amina, a 26-year-old Sahrawi woman who had been living in Andalusia for 14 years, mentioned a limitation to uploading her own pictures to Facebook and especially to Twitter, where she was more active. She showed me a publication in which she described how a picture of herself without the *milḥafah* was stolen from her profile and shared in multiple WhatsApp groups. She explained, «when this happens, my mother is made to feel like the worst scum for having given birth to me.» Amina's words reflect the pressure to which her mother is subjected when her daughter uploads such a picture. Her mother is responsible for her education, and some people in Sahrawi society consider such pictures to be unacceptable.

According to Costa (2016), the need to preserve privacy and protect intimate spaces from the gaze of outsiders is a component of Muslim culture that is associated with modesty and reputation. From this perspective, pictures on social media are understood as elements that amplify the possibility of exposing intimate aspects of a person's life to observation by others. Since Sahrawi society deems mothers responsible for the education of their children, transgressions regarding modesty, reputation, and the honor of the family translate to a failure of the mother to provide successful education about the social norms of the society. For example, Jatri, a 21-year-old Sahrawi woman who had been living in the Basque Country and La Rioja for 16 years, explained how her mother was worried about her active engagement with social media as well as her self-presentation on her Facebook and Instagram profiles:

> *Recently, a video came out of a girl who has a shaved side, who has this tattoo... my mother said, «your aunt said it was you, and it scared me.» I said, «she*

> *doesn't even look like me,» and she said, «but I was very scared thinking it could be you in front of the camera.»*

Through the word «scared,» Jatri's mother revealed her anxiety about the possibility that her daughter was on the screen, which would pose consequences such as others gossiping about her family.

In this sense, some participants referenced the expression *Iṯīrhā min lamāt* (literally that flies, that escapes from mothers, but it is used as an expression of a bad mother). This phrase is usually connected to such a lack of control of mothers over the social media activities of their daughters. According to Madianou and Miller (2012), in migration contexts, mothers experience heightened pressure and expectations about the responsibilities of motherhood.

During my research, I observed two ways in which Sahrawi daughters performed the self on social media with regard to the opinions of their mothers. On the one hand, some daughters would share any content they wanted on Facebook despite their mothers' reservations; on the other hand, some sought to avoid damaging their mothers with their digital media practices. One example of the former is Fatimettu. She explained that one factor that debilitated her relationship with her mother was having her pictures stolen from her profile and distributed on various Facebook profiles and WhatsApp groups, wherein some men called her *unsahrawi* or *naṣrāniyya* (Christian). With these words, they discredited her as part of the Sahrawi community. Her mother typically approached her to demand answers:

> *My mother phoned me and said, «it's just that they called me and told me that they've seen you in Madrid in a club» … And she said, «well, they told me» and I said, «well, whoever told you, what the fuck is he doing in a club? Why don't you ask him for an explanation?» And she said, «it's not that...he was...» and I said, «look, mom, stop being silly.»*

Despite this situation, Fatimettu was adamant that she would not change her social media practices in response to her mother's influence or because other people may not consider her to be a «real Sahrawi woman.» This attitude and her active use of social media caused an emotional distance with her mother, with whom she had a complicated relationship.

Sukeina also described the implications of the expression *itayarha men lamat* for her mother. Initially, Sukeina accepted all friend requests on Facebook and approved all followers on her Instagram profile. However, after her mother started to ask her to stop uploading the type of pictures she usually shared, which depicted her way of life in the Canary Islands, she decided to eliminate several contacts and be more conscious of the consequences of her social media practices—not only for herself but for her mother as well:

> It's just that my mother…do you know what happens? That her culture continues to be the other, even though she's here…her sisters, all of that carries a lot of weight for her…and I understand that because, damn it, my cousins, my friends, my whole environment here also carries weight for me…what happens is that this also causes her way of thinking to clash with mine many times.

Unlike Fatimettu, Sukeina chose to be more mindful of the impacts of her actions with respect to her mother's reputation, and she limited her social media practices to minimize conflicts with her mother.

According to Young (2009), in diasporic families, there is a key tension between cultural assimilation and cultural preservation that heavily influences how mothers and daughters relate to each other. A particular personal identity implies an expectation not only to assume certain attributes, but also to maintain the norms of behavior and appearance that are conferred by the social group to which one belongs (Goffman, 1959/1994). In this sense, for daughters, becoming aware of how the construction of their digital selves has impacted their mothers also implies a need to self-adapt to the context and social behaviors of Sahrawi society when engaging in digital interactions on social media platforms.

4.2. Developing digital honest relationships with their mothers

In their interviews, some of the young Sahrawi women reported that they decided to reduce their mother's control over their social media practices by using more than one profile on the same social media platform. This practice was intended to avoid provoking gossip and to allow them to express themselves in their Spanish life (Almenara-Niebla & Ascanio-Sánchez, 2020). At the same time, it enabled them to manage their public reputation and

demonstrate *iḥtiram* (respect) for their family members, especially their mothers. Despite the additional time that is needed to manage two profiles and the potential problems that might arise from it, some young Sahrawi women argued that, for them, the practice constitutes a normal mode of interaction because it mirrors how they have to behave in normal life in terms of navigating their own sense of belonging. Zaura, a 29-year-old Sahrawi woman, recalled that she initially contended with problems regarding her personal identity; however, once she accepted that her «reality was to be in the middle of two worlds,» she decided to respectfully adapt to the two contexts on account of her mother's public prominence as a politician in the Polisario Front.

Besides the practice of using two profiles, some interviewees reported limiting friend requests to reduce the range of people who can learn about their personal issues on social media. Sukeina noted that she accepted only particular Sahrawi people on her Facebook account in order to maintain a better relationship with her mother:

> *I don't have Saharawis who don't think as I do because then I wouldn't be free on my own Facebook. I also have some who don't...so I block their posts because it is a shock for them, and the problem is not that it is for them, because I don't care what they think, because everyone is free to think...but for my mother...so I have to fight against what my mother thinks.*

This selectiveness about her Facebook friends relates to her mother's opinion of her and, specifically, to the types of pictures that she would usually upload to her profile, which included images that were taken at the beach or at parties. Sukeina never uploaded pictures in the manner of other young Sahrawi women who include only part of their face or are completely dressed in the *milḥafa*. In this regard, Najat, a 32-year-old Sahrawi woman, stated,

> *Oh yes, pictures in which you only show half a face—«the guillotine,» as we call it—we always do that…I always wear the milḥafa in my pictures, principally because of my society…my mother in the camps perfectly knows that I do not wear the milḥafa in my everyday life in Spain, but it is better that she knows that from my part, not from social media.*

Najat decided to talk honestly with her mother about her way of life in Spain, even though she knew that her mother does not share her lifestyle. She also chose to wear the *milḥafa* on social media based on how she wanted to be

perceived by others (Serrano-Puche, 2014). Najat's words reflect the value she places on remaining loyal to her mother in terms of self-presenting as her mother is accustomed to while reinforcing their relationship with honesty and not creating distance from each other. Najat also considered it vital for her mother to receive information about her everyday life in Spain from her directly and not through other people.

Meanwhile, Sukeina adopted another strategy to talk openly with her mother and cultivate an honest relationship despite the situation:

> *There are many things that I try to work on with my mother many times to remove all those barriers. I always tell her, «Mommy, I know that there are things that you don't want to know, but you are the most important person. You are the person that I love the most—am I going to hide who I am?» Then she always tells me, «Stop fooling around.» She always tells me that, but even so, there are many taboo things in terms of relationships and so on...I feel free. She, for example, respects me. She knows what kind of lifestyle I lead, but she believes that we shouldn't share certain topics too...because she is very happy that I am happy, but because of the weight of what they say, and that weighs a lot on her.*

According to Usita and Du Bois (2005), constructive behaviors between mothers and daughters include communication and displays of loyalty. Sukeina's statement evidences the importance she affords to honestly managing her relationship with her mother in order to maintain a strong bond, demonstrate loyalty to her, and avoid neglecting each other despite their diasporic way of life. She did not want to feel guilty about hiding her life from her mother to avoid negative emotions (Baldassar, 2014).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The literature on transnational migration has rarely focused on the mother-daughter relationship in refugee diasporic contexts. Emotional distance and tension in the negotiation of gender norms in the diasporic space are present in not only the everyday lives of refugee diasporas but also their digital media practices, which create a sense of co-presence while also amplifying the social surveillance of these communities.

The situated analysis of the Sahrawi case illustrates that the sense of a «crossroads,» as observed by Anzaldúa (1987), is foundational to the relations experienced by mothers and daughters in terms of accepting and

challenging discourses of power that are articulated from both the refugee camps and the destination spaces. These discourses of power constitute the basis of the legitimization of certain forms of gendered behavior and the marginalization of those who evade the control and politics of belonging of the refugee diasporic group. However, the transformative nature of the diasporic space positions both mothers and daughters as active agents of changing these discourses and behaviors, which, as indicated by the analysis, develop in a «tug-of-war» relationship between them. This challenging relationship is managed within the intimate space but is directly related to the digital public space, in which the attentive gaze of the other can judge transgressions of these gender norms and their repercussions.

By enabling users to follow and create content with images and self-exposure, social media have amplified possibilities for group surveillance. This situation poses consequences for women all over the world. In the present case, the forced displacement experience and generational dynamics are important, intersecting processes in the everyday lives of women as the reproducers and agents of community maintenance.

Likewise, these media have intensified social control within the community with respect to not only self-exposure but also the social and moral codes of Sahrawi society. This effect has impacted the reputations of mothers as providers of education and, in turn, their relationships with their daughters. Beyond personal experiences and social media practices, feelings of responsibility, guilt, and failure to meet expectations have become relevant to mother-daughter relationships in the Sahrawi refugee diasporic context.

This article has illustrated how some Sahrawi daughters have refrained from publicly displaying their daily lives in Spain to avoid creating emotional distance from their mothers, as well as to produce their own sense of belonging to the Sahrawi community through the fluidity of the diasporic space. This concept of emotional distance has allowed for our analysis and comprehension of the intimate processes at play and their affective consequences for Sahrawi refugee diasporic women. Although some of the women found that the creation of such emotional distance was the only solution for managing the tension in their relationships with their mothers, specific forms of control over their daily digital media practices affected not only their own personal constructions but also their daily relationships in the intimate sphere. The

digital surveillance of the daughters' lives and the particular costs of their social media practices for their mothers directly influenced their intimate relations and emotional well-being. Some young women opted to limit their social media practices to reduce their sense of responsibility for the impacts on their mothers and to foster an honest relationship with them. Together, some of the women abandoned their «tug-of-war» dynamic in favor of changing restrictive gender norms in unison.

In summary, this article has illustrated the emotional responses of daughters and their attempts to develop their own self at the crossroads of multiple places, cultures, and feelings. The complex combination of experiences of belonging has influenced their relationships with their mothers as well as their emotional responses. Through these insights, this article reveals the perspectives of daughters and the impacts of digital technologies in a migration context intersected by a protracted situation of displacement and the fluidity of belonging processes.

6. REFERENCES

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