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Women's Empowerment

A case study of the Westsaharian women's empowered democratic citizenship in the
Westsaharian refugee camps.

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This paper is dedicated to my dear friend Sania Hajoub that introduced me to the Westsaharian women's life and struggle.

Quote:

The possibility for women to empower their ability and in equality fully participate within all levels of society, inclusively participate in the decision making process and have access to power, is a fundament to reach equality, development and peace. Women's rights are human rights.

/Article 13 & 14 in The Beijing Declaration at the UN's women's' conference 1995.

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Abstract

Women's Empowerment – A case study of the Westsaharian women's empowered democratic citizenship in the Westsaharian refugee camps.

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The Westsaharian women are a civic group that during their soon to be thirty years as refugees in the Westsaharian camps in south western Algeria have become empowered as citizens and advanced strongly in political representation. In theory, empowerment of women's democratic citizenship has been described as a complex phenomenon. To gain an understanding about this in this study, I have described the women's perceived access to resources and attitudes, and in what way these factors play a role for their active citizenship. This has been done by the use of Axel Hadenius' theory about the democratic citizenship and Jo Rowlands' theory about which resources that are to be considered as essential for women's empowerment. To be able to perform the study, a case study was performed in the Westsaharian refugee camps during April-May 2004, followed up by a second during October-November 2004.

The study shows that there are resources and attitudes within both human and social capital that the women perceive to play a significant role for their active citizenship. These factors make the women take part in societal activities, strive to reach higher political positions, and work for a common civic development as women and as Westsaharian citizens. The result of the study further shows that there are contextual inhibiting and encouraging factors that the women perceive to affect their resources and attitudes that play a significant role for their active citizenship.

Key words: Westsaharian refugee camps, Women's empowerment, democratic citizenship, resources, attitudes, perceptions, political participation.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Women's Empowerment in the Westsaharian Refugee Camps

This is a study about the empowerment of the Westsaharian women in the very poor, exposed and, to parts of the world, unknown Westsaharian refugee camps in south western Algeria. The Westsaharian women are a civic group that during their soon to be 30 years of forced settlement in the camps strongly has advanced within political representation and decision making. In 1975 when Morocco occupied the Westsaharian territory and the armed conflict started this lead to a forced need for women to organize themselves on their own. With the Westsaharian men fighting at the border and being absent, the women had to take on political power and take over political activities in order to administer and assure the survival of the refugees in the camps.

From a gender perspective, the effects of armed conflict are often related to further marginalization, abuse and discrimination of women. However there are some positive aspects related to the impact of armed conflicts on women¹. In some cases, as in the case of the Westsaharian women, it opened a 'window of opportunity' of empowerment as they took over roles that traditionally were performed by the men.

However, empowerment of women as citizens is a complex phenomenon. In order for women to become empowered there is a need for them to develop and get access to characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes, but also for them to remain active, keep their position and representation in society after the armed conflict has ended. This is due to the common case that the gains that women might have had are lost when the men return and retake their previous responsibilities². There are however exceptional cases, like the Westsaharian women who despite having suffered from decline in political representation since the cease-fire in 1991, have continued to be a politically active civic group in the camps. The women's political activism is a civic development that I found

¹ Gardam, Judith; Jarvis, Michelle, 2001. p. 51.

² Ibid.

most intriguing, since they have managed to stay active despite living as refugees in exile for soon to be three decades and being totally dependent on external aid.

In the attempt of reaching an understanding of which characteristics in terms of resources and attitude that characterize the Westsaharian women's empowered democratic citizenship, a minor field study was performed in the Westsaharian refugee camps during April-May 2004, followed up by a second during October-November 2004.

1.2 Aim and Purposes

The main purpose of this study is to give an insight into which characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes that characterize the Westsaharian women's democratic citizenship in the refugee camps. By studying the interviewed women's personal stories and their perception of themselves and their lives, I want to describe the women's access to resources and attitudes and in what way these factors play a role for their active citizenship. In so doing I want to show which characteristics are significant for women to be empowered citizens and thus take it one step further than only relating to it in theory.

To be able to fulfill my aim the following primary question has been addressed:

1. Which resources and attitudes are by the Westsaharian women perceived to play a significant role for their active citizenship?

Furthermore, it has come to my knowledge that when doing research on women's empowerment, factors that have an inhibiting or encouraging affect on women's resources and attitude can often be identified³. Due to this knowledge and since it is my belief that this might be the case of the Westsaharian women, which I find is an important

³ This is the case of Jo Rowlands dissertation on empowerment of women in Honduras that is presented in her thesis *Questioning Empowerment* (1992).

aspect to include since it relates to the analysis of their active citizenship, I have therefore added the following secondary question:

Which inhibiting and encouraging factors are perceived to affect the women's resources and attitudes that play a significant role for their active citizenship?

1.3 Outline of the Study

To fulfill the aim of the study the following structure of the study has been applied: To first give the reader some background information on empowerment research related to gender, a short discussion about previous research ends Chapter 1. The second chapter provides background information about the Westsaharian women's citizenship in the refugee camps to enable the reader who is unfamiliar with the group and its situation, to picture the women's political, civil, and social citizenship. To chart my exploration of a theoretical framework on the empowerment of women's democratic citizenship, I in Chapter 3 discuss conceptualization, the constituting resources of democratic citizenship, and women's empowerment resources to finally account for the operationalized theoretical framework that I have developed in order to perform the study. This is followed by a discussion about methodology and material in Chapter 4, with a presentation of the selection of geographical area, unit of study, method as well as the interpretation of the results. In Chapter 5, where the analysis is presented I analyze and discuss the women's perceived access to the operationalized resources and attitudes and how these play a role for them as active citizenship. To provide the analysis with a structure I have used my operationalized theoretical framework as a basis. By so doing I have been able to extract the necessary information and answer the addressed questions in this study. Chapter 6 holds the results and conclusion of the study, followed by an outlook on the future in Chapter 7. To conclude, literature and sources, and appendices on acronyms, questions and coding, some important historical dates, and a map of Western Sahara are to be found at the end of the study's content.

1.4 Previous Research

Research and the use of the term *empowerment* began in the 1990's. It is a relatively new research domain that has started to surface more and more the last few years within political science and development work. A great part of the existing empowerment research concentrates on trying to define and theoretically develop the term empowerment, due to its recent development. However, research about what kind of resources that play a significant role for marginalized civic groups to be and remain empowered is limited. Instead, within empowerment research there have been great efforts to outline how empowerment can be measured. Here gender researchers like Naila Kabeer and Jo Rowlands have contributed with essential theoretical work regarding the development and definition of the term and its scopes. This has been done with the ambition to try to define empowerment and discuss how it can be measured depending on its definition. Looking at other actors within empowerment research, to date there is no major development agency that have been able to develop a method for measuring and tracking changes in levels of women's empowerment^{4 5}. Research about women's empowerment in relation to the democratic citizenship and which resources that characterize women's empowered democratic citizenship within political science is also relatively unexplored, perhaps due to the need to first establish a theoretical frame of the term and how it can be measured. Should this be presented, a theoretical and methodological tool could be provided, and further research about empowerment could take place.

⁴ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. p. 3.

⁵ What are to be found on the international arena is instead declarations recognizing women's empowerment like The Beijing Declaration, CEDAW, The Millennium Declaration, and The Cairo Program of Action.

2. Background⁶

In order to provide a deeper understanding of the questions addressed in this study and the theoretical description that will follow, I have chosen to include a short historical and contextual background description about the Westsaharian women's citizenship in the refugee camps. I consider this knowledge to be essential and therefore it is presented herein.

2.1 History of the Westsaharian Women

Before the proclamation of The Sahraoui Arab Democratic Republic (S.A.D.R.) in 1976, the Westsaharian⁷ women, had during the last century been submitted to two patriarchal structures, their nomad community and the Spanish colonial power. Socio-political structures that led to a discrimination of them both as citizens and as women, preventing them from enjoying or having access to their civic rights⁸.

With the war of liberation against the Spanish colonial power beginning in 1967 and the creation of the liberation movement Polisario Front, the women would however come to play a fundamental civic role in the Westsaharian community's struggle for independence. By organizing and participating in demonstrations, mobilizing campaigns, raising awareness about the need of resistance, women quickly became politically active. Activities often ending in being disposed to mental and physical repression by the Spanish apparatus⁹.

Women's participation and the need for it would further come to increase in 1975 with the Moroccan occupation of the Westsaharian territory, setting off an armed conflict between Morocco and Polisario Front, resulting in an immense flee of the majority of the Westsaharian population into Algeria, and the creation of four refugee camps¹⁰ in the Algerian desert. With the men fighting at the frontier, the Westsaharian women, most who at this time were illiterate, were forced to take over responsibility within

⁶ For further historical information or reading see chapter 'Literature and Sources' and Appendices 3.

⁷ The Westsaharian population originally descends from a Mauric ethnical group that can be found in North and Western Africa. (Nationalencyklopedin, 1994).

⁸ The National Union of the Sahrawi Women, 1985. *Memorandum on The Women in the S.A.D.R.* p. 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Smara, Dakhla, Auserd and El-Ajoun.

management, organization, and other various domains¹¹ in the camps.¹² It was a forced separated organization that enabled women to assume responsibility in the private *and* public sphere, being able to participate and be represented within decision making, as well as realizing that they were able and had the right to do so.

2.2 The Westsaharian Women's Citizenship in the Refugee Camps¹³

Westsaharian women's right to exercise their civic rights as well as being recognized as equal citizens to men, were announced and implemented in 1976 with the foundation and proclamation of S.A.D.R. With the cease-fire in 1991, resulting in the return of men to the camps taking back positions, women's representation decreased. Nevertheless, women have remained active citizens, and are today part of a well established and strong civil society. Their continued civic presence in society therefore constitutes a continuous development for Westsaharian women as individual citizens and as a civic collective in the refugee camps.

2.2.1 Political Citizenship

Based on my observation, the Westsaharian women, along with elderly and children, today constitute the majority of 165 000¹⁴ Westsaharians living in the refugee camps. This number is only an official estimation, but also a disputed one among actors intervening in the conflict. Today, there are no exact official numbers or statistics on the size of the Westsaharian population in the camps. Neither are there any numbers nor statistics on the percentage of women and men that constitute the population.

¹¹ Education, Healthcare, Nutrition, Security in the camps etc.

¹² NUSW, 1998. *Forum Internacional de Solidaridad con la Mujer Saharaui*. p. 22.

¹³ The theoretical description about citizenship is based on T.H. Marshall's theory about citizenship.

Further details about his work can be found in the chapter 'Literature and Sources'.

¹⁴ Sahara-Update Digest Number 594, and Thunberg, Lena, 1998. *Västsahara- Afrikas sista koloni*. p. 46.

According to constitutional law, Westsaharian women have the right to speak, organize themselves freely, vote, and stand for election both at local, regional, and national level. Even if there are no formal obstacles that prevent women from being elected or becoming responsible for an official office, and although that the electoral body consists of merely women in the camps, women are rarely nominated or elected as representatives in the society's establishment at regional and national level. They are most often to be found as representatives at local levels. From a gender perspective, it is therefore in relation to the population to be found that there is an unbalanced political representation in the camps:

Figure 2.1 Women's Political Representation

National Level¹⁵:

1. Ministry: 2 out of 20 ministers are women.
 - The Minister of Culture
 - Secretary of State for Social Affairs
2. Parliament: 12 out of 51 members are women. The Westsaharian Parliament has 5 members in the African Union Parliament, 2 out of which are women.

Regional Level:

1. Head of Wilaya: 0 out of 4 are women.
2. Head of Daira: 1 out of 26 is a woman.
3. The council of the Wilaya Smara: 3 out of 28 members are women.

Local Level¹⁶:

1. Head of Hay: Political positions are dominated by women.
2. Head of Cell: Political positions are dominated by women.

Figure 2.2 S.A.D.R.'s Political Institutional Structure

Political Institutional Structure in the Camps:

National Level:
 President
 Government
 Parliament

Regional Level:
 Wilaya (refugee camp council)
 Daira (camp district councils; 6-7 dairas/camp)

Local Level:
 Hay (block councils in camp district; 4 hays/ daira)
 Cell (sub-committees, 6 cells in every hay)

The above information indicates that within the block councils and sub-committees at local level, women dominate political positions. However, looking at the political representation on the regional and national level, in general, women constitute a minority. It can thus be seen that within the Westsaharian Parliament, women nearly constitute a

¹⁵ Naafa Mohammed Salim, Polisario's Nordic representative in Stockholm/ Sweden.

¹⁶ Khadouga Ahmed Salim Brahim, Principle of a primary school in Auserd.

fifth of the elected parliamentarians and more than fifty percent of the representatives in the African Union Parliament, which shows that the women are politically present at higher level.

The lack of women's representation in the political arena can be explained by illiteracy, poverty, conservatism (women related to the private sphere and men to the public), and a present distinction between the private and public sphere, that continues to exclude women. Obviously this explanation is insufficient, due to the complexity of the women's situation as citizens in an alternative society in the refugee camps, where societal infrastructures are considered temporary and where civil society's effort to develop civic rights are looked upon as preparatory work for the return to their country after the independence of Western Sahara. This status quo, along with social and economical hierarchies, tribe membership, patriarchal structures, and post-war consequences related to gender, are obstacles for women's empowerment and also have to be considered.

2.2.2 Civil Citizenship

Most women in the camps are members of an institutional department at local or/and regional level, in which they have performed and still perform duties to assure the development of the population. Depending on which department a woman is involved in and work for, the duties vary, but can include the distribution of food, water, and clothes; providing health care and assistance to sick, old and handicapped; campaign work and lobbying for women's and children's rights, work to improve the conditions for women, children and the population in total; efforts to keep traditions and culture alive; sanitation work in the hays and dairas to avoid spread of diseases etc. Most of these duties are considered normal work duties amongst the women. However, as citizens of an alternative society where few of these duties are salaried due to limited means and lack of resources, most women (and men) therefore work on a voluntarily basis.

In regard to the women's civil rights, the remains of an old tradition still marginalize them, that is, polygamy. Despite allowed by Westsaharian law, it is today rare that men

marry a second wife, due to the current lack of social acceptance of polygamy among most Westsaharians in the camps. Meanwhile occasions still arise. Should this occur, women have equal rights to file for a divorce and therefore often leave their husbands. Until today there is no family law within S.A.D.R.'s constitution that secures a woman's rights after the divorce from her husband. Instead, the legal procedure of the divorce is carried out according to Islamic law by a Muslim priest working under the Ministry of Justice. No matter the verdict, in most cases women obtain custody of the children and get to keep the *jaima* (tent) and its belongings, due to the social shame for men to do the opposite, and in order for the women to be able to raise and take care of the children. Due to this formal regulation and due to the fact that many women lost their husbands during the war, women sometimes remarry. Nonetheless, most women move in with their families, which is why single mothers are very common in the refugee camps.

2.2.3 Social Citizenship

The Westsaharian women have the right to education, health care and work. At the beginning of the war in 1975, an estimated 90% of the women were illiterate. With the establishment of compulsory school (1st- 6th grade) for all children in the camps at their creation, and the setting up of women's schools¹⁷ in every camp the last couple of years, this number is today estimated to be only 20%¹⁸. After the completion of compulsory school, young women and men have the possibility to continue their studies (secondary, college and university) in Algeria, Spain, Cuba, Libya etc. due to political co-operations between these nations and Polisario, where the national governments finance the students' studies through scholarships. Officially, young women and men have the same rights in access to education abroad. However, in reality young women do not enjoy the same opportunities as young men, whom are often prioritized since young women have a

¹⁷ In 1978 The 27 February School was founded by Polisario. Later in 1989 The Olof Palme School was built in El-Ajoun in cooperation with The Swedish Social-Democrat Women. With the aid of the Algerian AFAD, the other three remaining camps have also been equipped with a woman school each. Dakhla in 2001, Auserd in 2002 and Smara in 2003. The UNHCR have a mandate to maintain the AFAD schools and pay salaries but fail to do so, so today AFAD runs them on its own and also assist on maintaining the Olof Palme School.

¹⁸ Aleksijevitj, Svetlana; El Saadawi, Nawal; Drakulić, Slavenka; Mossaed, Jila; Palm, Ingrid; Thunberg, Lena; Valenzuela, Luisa, 2001. *Omvärldsbildning – Kvinnor i världen; Kvinnor berättar om kvinnor* p. 72.

social responsibility to fulfill. Many young women thus get the opportunity to go, but there is an increased number of young women that leave their studies early, due to illnesses and social responsibilities within the family. This tendency has become a problem for the women's school in the camps, as they are not able to accommodate all women who request to continue their studies in these institutions. In consequence, this is now becoming a threat to young women's possibilities to develop as citizens and in the long run it is a menace to women's possibilities to advance as a civic group¹⁹.

¹⁹ Fatma Mehdi, president of the NUSW.

3. Theoretical Perspectives

This chapter begins with a discussion about the conceptualization of empowerment, women's empowerment and empowerment resources. I then move on to discuss what women's empowerment implies, after which I present Axel Hadenius' theory about the constituting resources of democratic citizenship, and Jo Rowlands' theory about women's empowerment resources. To conclude, I lay out my theoretical framework and a theoretical summary.

3.1 Conceptualization

3.1.1 Conceptualization of Empowerment

By using a broad definition of empowerment it is possible to claim that empowerment concerns the strengthening of marginalized civic groups. It emphasizes the idea of citizens who become active agents by increasing their influence and access to power in the long term. It also draws attention to the fact that it is about strengthening their civic role within the private and the public sector. Empowerment is however a complex concept and an arguably over-used term. Its definition richly varies due to its different uses within various scientific institutions, and due to a variation in the nature of empowerment that is cross-contextual²⁰. In its application, it is therefore necessary to use the term with clarity and focus²¹. Although there is a broad agreement among empowerment researchers that empowerment is a *process*, this is insufficient. A definition that further tries to identify what empowerment constitutes of is the following one which I find most suitable to use as a basis for this study:

The process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop proficiency and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community.²²

²⁰ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. p. 17.

²¹ Oxaal, Zoë with Baden, Sally, 1997. *Gender and empowerment*. p. 23.

²² McWhirter, E H in Rowlands, Jo, 1997. *Questioning empowerment*. p. 15.

The above definition clearly describes what empowerment constitutes of and that it is a *process* where individuals/groups gain power to empower themselves, rather than to dominate others²³. In detail, the process of empowerment is composed of three interrelated key instruments²⁴. First, there are *resources* that are the enabling factors and the source of empowerment, factors that form the input and foster the empowerment process. Second is *agency*, which in other words means that individuals themselves in an empowerment process must be significant actors in the process of change. Thirdly, *achievements* are the outcomes of the empowerment process.

The definition includes the second and third element in its description, although it fails to specify which resources are significant for citizens to become and remain empowered, which is a fundamental aspect to include and define in order to be able to study empowerment and reach an understanding of it. The definition of resources is nevertheless a complex issue. There are theories about which resources that lead to empowerment²⁵, however what constitutes empowerment for a civic group may be very context specific. A factor may be perceived as empowering in one context but not in another. One should therefore avoid generalizations about underlying resources, and develop context and case specific factors behind empowerment²⁶.

This study specifically focuses on resources of *women's empowerment*. It is therefore necessary to theoretically define what this is composed of, to keep theoretical clarity.

²³ Kabeer, Naila in Arnfred, Signe; Dominique, Edmé; Kabeer, Naila; McFadden, Patricia & Sadallaah, Sherin, 2002. *Discussing Women's Empowerment*. p. 31.

²⁴ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. pp. 7-8.

²⁵ E.g. UNICEF in 1994 adopted the Women's Empowerment Framework; UNDP's GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) report from 1995; *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*; A report commissioned by the Gender and Development Group of the World Bank in 2002 etc.

²⁶ Oxaal, Zoë with Baden, Sally, 1997. *Gender and empowerment*. p. 22.

3.1.2 Conceptualization of Women's Empowerment

The conceptualization of women's empowerment encompasses aspects that are necessary to enlighten and apply when investigating it. First, women are not just one group amongst other marginalized civic groups e.g. poor, immigrants, ethnic groups etc. They are also a cross-cutting category of individuals that overlap all these other groups. Second, household and interfamilial relations are a central locus of women's disempowerment which is not the case for other disadvantaged groups, which is further why women's empowerment must be especially cognizant at the household level²⁷.

Given the diversity of the conceptualization of women's empowerment, it is important to clearly define it. In doing so, it allows me to further delimit my theoretical frame of research, keep focus and clearly demonstrate its difference from the definition of empowerment used in this study (described in previous Chapter 3.1.1). Like the concept *empowerment*, there are several different definitions of *women's empowerment*, due to its recent development as a scientific field of research and different ways in using it within institutions such as e.g. political science, where more specifically gender aspects in academic and political writing related to citizenship for a long time have been ignored²⁸. A definition that well describes women's empowerment is:

A process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.²⁹

I find this definition suitable to employ as a reference point in this study, since it in a clear and a concise way describes the aim of women's empowerment process. However, this definition shares the same problem as the definition of empowerment. It does not describe resources that are essential for women's empowerment, but instead emphasizes

²⁷ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development. p. 5.

²⁸ Lister, Ruth, 1997. *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. p. 1.

²⁹ Keller, B; and Mbwewe, D.C. in Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development. p. 6.

agency and achievement. Since *resources* are at the core of this study on women's empowerment, its content throughout needs to be discussed theoretically.

3.1.3 Conceptualization of Empowerment Resources

When resources are referred to within theoretical discussion about empowerment, they are referred to as factors that when obtained provide marginalized citizens with more influence and power than they previously had. The resources are therefore often considered as the tools that launch the empowerment process. However, whether any empowerment resource really amounts to empowerment in a particular context is an empirical question³⁰. It may be possible to identify empowerment resources that can be applied in a wide variety of contexts, but there will always be situations in which a particular resource does not signify empowerment. This does not mean that the development of empowerment resources is a futile task, only that the complexities of women's empowerment research must be taken into account when developing theoretical frames³¹.

Another important aspect that needs to be included when discussing empowerment resources is its implementation from a methodological point of view. Several researchers argue that empowerment processes should emerge from a "bottom-up" rather than a "top-down" approach to reach development³². A "bottom-up" method allows an approach which respects people's abilities to identify and express their own needs and priorities³³, as opposed to the top-down approach. The latter often fails to identify resources that need to be empowered at individual or collective level, due to its ineffective approach that rarely reaches marginalized groups in the population³⁴. Therefore, the need for individuals or groups to participate in the empowerment process in order to be able to

³⁰ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. p. 9.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid p. 8; Rowlands, Jo, 1997. *Questioning Empowerment*. p. 4; Oxaal, Zoë with Baden, Sally, 1997. *Gender and empowerment*. p. 23 etc.

³³ Rowlands, Jo, 1997. *Questioning Empowerment*. p. 4.

³⁴ Ibid.

identify the resources that need to be obtained or empowered, is a fundamental argument within empowerment theory, where communication between the receiving and assisting part is essential³⁵. Should this not occur, there is a risk that the individual or collective ability to recognize and utilize resources in their own interest would decrease, and consequently, the resources would not bring about empowerment³⁶.

3.1.3.1 Will and Knowledge – Two Conditions for Empowerment

Women's access to resources is nevertheless not a condition for them to become empowered in the long run. If a woman does not have the *capacity* and the access to *knowledge/education* of how and to what extent she can and have the right to use it, there is a risk of relapse or passivity instead of development. But the woman not only has to know how to use the resources, she must also be willing to take part in obtaining the resources and the eventual changes that they will bring about. The woman's *will* to become part of an empowering process is in this case therefore essential and also has a direct influence on the result. This clearly shows that the meaning of any empowerment resource will always depend on its interrelationship with other resources³⁷. In order for the empowerment process to be constructive and not forced upon, communication and cooperation between the empowering actors and the receiver has to be established to make sure that the will and knowledge exist.

Another important aspect is the need to follow-up after an empowerment process, and not for the empowering actor to disappear right after the resources are considered to be obtained by the receiver. From a theoretical point of view, the ideal situation would be to take it one step further after having defined which factors that are considered essential within an empowerment process and then after having considered the women's need, possibility, will to use them etc., study how these resources in the best way can be

³⁵ Kabeer, Naila in Arnfred, Signe; Dominique, Edmé; Kabeer, Naila; McFadden, Patricia & Sadallaah, Sherin, 2002. *Discussing Women's Empowerment*. p. 31.

³⁶ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. p. 9.

³⁷ *Ibid* p. 10.

implemented so that the women in the long run will be able to use them to empower themselves and others³⁸.

3.2 Women's Empowerment

Empowerment of women and other marginalized civic groups share the common aim to *raise the group's awareness*³⁹, an awareness of themselves and others, as individuals and a collective, without access to equal rights and with the possibility to influence their situation in society. Awareness-raising is therefore considered a key resource that needs to be enforced in order for women to be empowered⁴⁰. Further, women's empowerment is related to the development of *gender-awareness*⁴¹. This more specific definition of the factor shows that there are certain injustices that more than others tend to oppress women. The aim of gender-awareness is therefore to provide knowledge and insight about injustices and hierarchal power structures in society⁴². Women need to become aware of the condition of subordination and the cause of subordination (disempowering factors) within both the private and public sphere in society⁴³, and to reach an understanding of present power relations, where e.g. leading groups, ideologies, traditions, patriarchal structures, conservatism and colonialism dominate them as citizens⁴⁴. Gender awareness-raising thus concerns the development of women's ways of thinking, their self image and conception about the present reality, e.g. that the reality they live in is neither natural nor unchangeable, and that they have the possibility and right to question and fight against societal structures, if there is a will to do so⁴⁵.

³⁸ Kabeer, Naila in Arnfred, Signe; Dominique, Edmé; Kabeer, Naila; McFadden, Patricia & Sadallaah, Sherin, 2002. *Discussing Women's Empowerment*. p. 31.

³⁹ Bunch & Frost in Kramarae & Spender, 2000. *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*. p. 554.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kvinnoforum, 2001. *Measuring Women's Empowerment*. pp. 22-24.

⁴² Within women's empowerment research, this is also sometimes referred to as *Awareness of Injustice*.

⁴³ Stromquist, Nelly P in Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. p. 11.

⁴⁴ Bunch & Frost in Kramarae & Spender, 2000. *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*. p. 554.

⁴⁵ Rowlands, Jo, 1997. *Questioning empowerment*. pp. 14-15.

Women that during a long period of time have suffered from political, economical and/or social oppression often conceive of themselves as helpless victims⁴⁶. This self-image is often difficult to change due to severe indoctrination that in many cases has persuaded the women to believe that their situation as oppressed citizens is normal, and not to be questioned. The aim of women's empowerment is therefore to replace insecurity with *self-confidence* and *ability to act* at the individual and collective level, for women to consider themselves as autonomous agents, capable of working independently and with others, to affect their life situation and society in general⁴⁷.

However, the problem with gender-awareness, self-confidence and ability to act is that they are too vaguely defined factors, in order for one to be able to use them as indicators in a women's empowerment work. It is necessary to concretize their content, where activities and behaviors characterizing the women - aimed to be empowered in a case - are being studied. By documenting women's activities it is possible to define which resources that needs to be reinforced in order for empowerment work to have a positive outcome, and for women who participate in the project to become active citizens.

3.2.1 Women's Empowerment through Financial Resources

In certain cases economical resources are considered one of the most essential factors within women's empowerment process. Access to financial resources, such as *land*, *equipment*, *finance*, *working capital* etc. is claimed to increase the disempowered women's level of independence and capacity to act⁴⁸. In the discussion about women's empowerment *micro credits* is another resource that is considered to have this possible affect. However whether there is a causal relationship between empowerment and access to financial resources is a controversial question. Some studies show that access to micro

⁴⁶ Bunch & Frost in Kramarae & Spender, 2000. *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*. p. 555.

⁴⁷ In the Beijing declaration *The Human Development Report 1995*, it is stated that "by empowering women's ability and encourage them to practice their will, this in itself is not only of importance but also the most certain way to contribute to economical prosperity and general development".

⁴⁸ A possible reason for the belief in this causal relations might be the found in modern liberal theory about democracy development, that today dominate west European and North American policy.

credits does not necessarily lead to empowerment⁴⁹. In some cases it has instead disempowered the women, due to the risk of ending up in debt if for example knowledge about how to use the micro credits is not provided to them. Instead, empowerment work ought to focus on resources that can be material, both individual and collective⁵⁰. Material resources such as tools to be able to perform work. Individual resources like e.g. knowledge, creativity, and skill aimed to empower the woman, and collective resources like cooperation and trust, aimed to establish and reinforce networks and relations between women, for them to reach a development that they to the same extent cannot reach on their own.

3.2.2 Women's Empowerment and Armed Conflicts

The effects of armed conflict from a gender perspective are often related to further marginalization, abuse and discrimination of women, leading to poverty, social exclusion, the subjection to violence, forced displacement (external or internal) etc⁵¹. It can however also have positive affects, being a time of empowerment where gender roles shift and are redefined, allowing women to take on responsibilities previously held by men, take part of decision making etc. Changes that in the long run often lead to women becoming more aware of their abilities and civic rights. The aftermath of armed conflicts however imply different consequences. Either it causes a return to the civic role women had before the conflict, exacerbating existing gender inequalities or, like in some cases, women succeed in changing their civic positions permanently after the conflict, becoming less although remain exposed to a gender unequal society⁵². Therefore, from a gender perspective, peace for women does not simply mean the end of an armed conflict, but a time of continued struggle against structural power imbalances and gender inequality⁵³.

⁴⁹ GEM in Oxaal, Zoë, 1997. *Gender and empowerment*. p.19.

⁵⁰ Kabeer, Naila in Arnfred, Signe; Dominique, Edmé; Kabeer, Naila; McFadden, Patricia & Sadallaah, Sherin, 2002. *Discussing Women's Empowerment*. p. 20.

⁵¹ El Jack, Amani, 2003. *Gender and Armed Conflict*.. p. 9.

⁵² Söderberg Jacobson, Agneta, 2005. *Tänk om! En handbok för varaktig fred*. p. 10.

⁵³ El Jack, Amani, 2003. *Gender and Armed Conflict*.. p. 10.

As an internally displaced person (IDP)⁵⁴ women are further disadvantaged and prevented from becoming empowered citizens, since the displacement results in reduced access to resources to cope with the situation and for development work⁵⁵. Young women often have to assume more responsibility such as caring for children, the elderly and the sick, along with managing burdensome domestic work⁵⁶, which has an impact on their possibilities to develop on their own. However, some women benefit from displacement, by getting the opportunity to participate in training and development programs in health or education, as well as income-generating activities⁵⁷. Should this be the case, women nevertheless still have to struggle to be able to practice their knowledge and assume the newly recruited skills, trying to overcome empowerment obstacles like poverty and/or patriarchal structures within the private/public sphere.

3.3 Democratic Citizenship

Several researchers within political science have claimed that an active democratic citizenship has direct influences upon society and keeping a democracy alive. The French philosopher Tocqueville, one of the theoretical founders, stated that citizenship is a prerequisite for the development of a democratic society. After his studies about the causal relationship between *citizenship* and *democracy* in the United States between 1805 and 1859, he claimed that the American citizens empowered the democratic constitution and its consolidation through their active civic participation⁵⁸. He therefore came to theoretically establish that an active civic society is essential to keep democracy alive.

⁵⁴ Dip's unlike refugees outside narrative borders are not protected by The UN Refugee Convention of 1951. The international community therefore has limited options to protect people displaced within their own borders.

⁵⁵ El Jack, Amani, 2003. *Gender and Armed Conflict*. p. 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Tocqueville, Alexis in Hadenius, Axel, 2001. *Institutions and Democratic Citizenship*. p. 2.

3.3.1 The Constituting Resources of Democratic Citizenship

Axel Hadenius is a researcher within political science that has continued to develop the theory about the democratic citizenship. Unlike Tocqueville, Hadenius tries to decompose the definition of the democratic citizenship in order to describe which resources it constitutes of. Hadenius claims that to reach an understanding of which resources that can possibly ascribe democratic citizenship, one has to divide potential factors into *individual* and *collective factors*⁵⁹. He names the individual factors *human capital* and the collective factors *social capital*⁶⁰. The human capital implies resources that have an impact on the individual citizen and are considered to be essential for a person to become an active citizen within society:

It includes political competence and capacity: keeping well-informed on political and other questions, being able to take initiatives [...] Political resources are usually thought, furthermore, to include access to 'time and money': that is, on the one hand, the opportunity in terms of actually available hours to participate in political and similar activities; and, on the other, the ability to exert influence by means of pecuniary contributions to the activities and candidates one supports. Partly associated with these factors – competence and economic capacity especially – is another characteristic of crucial importance: independence.⁶¹

However, Hadenius further claims that it is not only *resources* that are necessary factors for a citizen to enjoy democratic citizenship. One should also include *attitudes* in order to establish a complete picture of what the democratic citizenship constitutes of. It is necessary for the individual to have the right attitude and will to participate in society so that the person in question obtains access to resources and develops into an active citizen:

[...] it includes a developed political interest, a desire to become involved, and wish to exert influence. The persons in question should also have a firm faith in their ability to make their voices heard. In their basic political attitudes, moreover, they should be open, tolerant, and broad-minded, and they should apply a rationalist and deliberative method: that is, they should be interested in seeking out facts and respectful of rational analysis.⁶²

⁵⁹ Hadenius, Axel, 2001. *Institutions and Democratic Citizenship*. p. 17.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid p. 18.

⁶² Ibid.

One can see that Hadenius makes a difference between what characterizes attitudes and resources. Resources are often referred to as factors that one can develop on her or his own or with aid from another person, while attitudes in most cases only can be developed if the person *wants* to, regardless of what others might think or want. The same division is also made with social capital. Here Hadenius stress resources such as *institutionalized networks* (e.g. departments, governmental organizations, NGOs and associations that work independently or in collaboration with each other). Another resource is the presence of *coordinated actions*, which refers to joined activities where people act together. Referring to collective attitudes Hadenius points out the need for established *relations between* individuals, where they feel *trust* and *affinity* for each other. A person should be able to *identify* her- or himself with a larger whole, *recognize* the group and the obligations towards it. It is a question of *trust* and *solidarity* with a unit of people⁶³. Without these attitudes civic groups cannot develop their democratic involvement completely, since there are questions and/or activities that an individual cannot deal with on her or his own, but that demands cooperation with other individuals⁶⁴.

Hadenius' theory focuses on the democratic citizenship and with which resources and attitudes it can be associated. The factors mentioned in his theory can be associated with all citizens' democratic citizenship. It applies to it from a general dimension, and does not relate to marginalized groups' citizenship, such as women's citizenship. Since there are specific resources and attitudes that need to be taken into consideration in the analysis of women's empowerment, a problem regarding the use of Hadenius' theory therefore arises: there is a risk that this theory becomes an insufficient theoretical starting-point, since it does not include a discussion about which resources and attitudes that he considers essential for women to be active democratic citizens. Women's empowerment studies also demand a case-specific definition of resources and attitudes. Hadenius' theory therefore further risks becoming an insufficient theoretical point of departure.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid pp. 18-19.

To be able to study which characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes women are perceived to have access to and how these play a role in their empowered democratic citizenship, it is therefore necessary to complement Hadenius' theory with a theory about women's empowerment resources.

3.4 Women's Empowerment Resources

The gender researcher Jo Rowlands theorizes in her dissertation *Questioning Empowerment*⁶⁵ about empowerment of marginalized civic groups, focusing specifically on women's empowerment. Drawing from two case studies in Honduras where she studied how and why empowerment occurs, she has from her experiences defined resources that actively encourage and inhibit women's empowerment when it comes to themselves, their everyday life and being members of a society. According to Rowlands, empowerment does not only concern increasing participation in decision-making, it is also about undoing negative social constructions, so that citizens come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions. It operates within three dimensions⁶⁶:

- **personal:** developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalized oppression.
- **relational:** developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.
- **collective:** where individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each one would have had alone. This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on co-operation rather than competition. Collective action may be locally focused e.g. groups acting at the village or neighborhood level; or be more institutionalized such as the activities of national networks.

⁶⁵ Rowlands, Jo, 1997. *Questioning Empowerment – Working with Women in Honduras*.

⁶⁶ Ibid pp. 14-15.

Like Hadenius, Rowlands describes that there are various essential resources, operating within different areas that need to be present. The factors that Rowlands refers to, however differ from those described in Hadenius' theory. Rowlands states that within the **individual dimension**, the substantial factors are related to *self-confidence*, *self-esteem* and *sense of agency*, being an individual who can interact with her surroundings and make things happen⁶⁷. A woman should also have the *ability* to act and learn, and feel *dignity*, not only being worthy of respect from others, but should have the right to that respect⁶⁸. It is therefore presupposed that an empowerment process should include the participation of the individual aimed to be empowered. By so doing, with her knowledge and ability, the woman could influence the empowerment work, which in the long run would raise the chances for empowerment to occur.

Closely linked to the individual dimension is the **collective dimension**⁶⁹. This group describes the essential factors to be a *sense of collective agency*, a *sense of identity and dignity as a team*, and *self-organization and management*, collective resources that are also described in Hadenius' theory. In comparison with him, Rowlands points out that the individual and collective dimension mutually interact and affect each other. For example if a woman would join a group with her experiences, as the other women in the group would do, all the knowledge would be brought together, knowledge that together provides a platform equipped with the necessary proficiency to establish a continuity of the empowerment process.

Related to the individual and collective dimension is the **relational dimension**, emphasizing relationships that are established and/or already exist between individuals⁷⁰. In his theory, Hadenius states the same. Relations between citizens are essential for them to be able to develop. In contrast, Rowlands however describes that this dimension includes other factors, and that it instead relates to a woman's private development. She claims that it is about a woman's *ability to communicate, negotiate, and defend her rights*

⁶⁷ Ibid pp. 111-112.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid pp. 116-117.

⁷⁰ Ibid pp. 119-120.

(explicitly and/or implicitly), skills that themselves also represent ‘changes’ that demonstrate personal empowerment⁷¹. This is a dimension that can be considered a ‘bridge’ between the personal and the collective, where women, through their relation with other women, together come to realize what they should work for in order to reach their aims. An achievement that is hard to obtain individually.

Rowland describes these resources as essential in the empowerment process, however she also states that apart from these factors, there are various other ones of contextual, structural and psychological nature. Factors that are related to specific cases, and that need to be considered and included when working with empowerment theoretically and/or empirically.

Which resources and attitudes are then essential for the empowerment of women’s democratic citizenship? The resources described by Rowlands provide a framework of which factors that have an impact on women’s empowerment. Unlike Hadenius, she does not focus on the democratic citizenship, or on the factors that have an impact on women’s democratic citizenship. A consequence that might lead to the exclusion of certain factors from the theoretical framework, or considered unessential ones in the analysis of the empowerment of women’s democratic citizenship. I therefore find it necessary to use both Hadenius’ and Rowlands’ theories in the attempt to establish a theoretical frame of analysis.

3.5 Empowerment of Women’s Democratic Citizenship

Both Hadenius and Rowlands’ theories describe the importance to recognize individual *and* collective factors. To fulfill this demand, I have therefore chosen to apply Hadenius’ theoretical division of human and social capital, when constructing my theoretical framework. Since Hadenius also distinguishes between resources and attitudes when theorizing about the democratic citizenship I have also chosen to include these categories in my theoretical framework. To follow, I have then from Hadenius’ and Rowlands’

⁷¹ Ibid.

theories extracted and categorized the essentially described resources and attitudes within human and social capital. Factors that can be related to empowerment of women's democratic citizenship.

An essential problem shared by Hadenius and Rowlands is that they do not emphasize the importance of a citizen's *reading- and writing abilities*, in order for the citizen to develop into and remain an active citizen. Nevertheless, several written reports about empowerment of women's civic participation have stated that reading and writing abilities is a fundamental resource, considered necessary in order for women to gain access to knowledge, and for them to develop on their own and within a group⁷². Hadenius as well as Rowlands assert the need for the individual to develop a political competence, in order to act with capacity as a citizen in society. To reach this aim Rowlands also claims that the capacity to learn is essential. Neither of them however notes that an essential prerequisite to enable such a development is to be able to read and write. I have therefore chosen to add this resource to human capital in my analytical schedule, even though it has been excluded as a resource in both Hadenius' and Rowlands' theory, since there are reasons to believe that literacy skills are a substantial resource within women's empowerment.

Based on the same kind of reasoning, I have also chosen to add the resource *gender-awareness*. This factor is in most discussions about women's empowerment often referred to as one of the most essential resources needed to be taken into consideration within empowerment work or analysis⁷³. This is due to the reason that in order for women to continuously develop as citizens, there is a need to reach an understanding about the injustices and power structures that oppress them within the private and public sphere in society⁷⁴. The lack of this insight and awareness is an obstacle that prevents and aggravates women's empowerment process. In her theory, Rowlands describes that

⁷² Kvinnoforum, 2001. *Measuring Women's Empowerment*. p. 18; Development Alternatives for Women in New Era (DAWN) in Oxaal, Zoë, 1997. *Gender and empowerment*. p. 4; Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*. pp. 30-32.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The argumentation is based on the discussion about what women's empowerment imply in chapter 3.2.

empowerment within the personal dimension should include ‘undoing the effects of internalized oppression’. However (like in the case of reading- and writing abilities), Rowlands’ theory, like Hadenius’, does not include any prerequisite for such a possible development, where gender-awareness constitutes such a possible one:

	HUMAN CAPITAL	SOCIAL CAPITAL
R E S O U R C E	Reading- and writing abilities Capacity Independence Political competence	Gender-awareness Dignity Institutionalized networks Coordinated actions Self-organization & management
A T T I T U D E	Dignity Sense of agency Self-esteem Self-confidence Develop a political interest Wish to exercise political influence	Collective agency Group identity Trust Solidarity

In order for me to be able to study which resources and attitudes that Westsaharian women perceive to have access to and how these play a role for them as active citizens, I have used ‘the democratic citizenship’ as a basis and further operationalized each and everyone of these substantial factors within both human and social capital. The operationalization is therefore presented herein:

Human Capital:

Human Resources:

- **Reading- and writing abilities** – a woman should obtain literate basic knowledge in order to obtain an education, get information and actively participate in debates, meetings, negotiations, and political issues.

- **Capacity** – a woman should have enough confidence and knowledge (ability) in order to become an active citizen who participates in debates, meetings and negotiations where she can make herself heard and defend her rights by communicating with other citizens.
- **Independence** – a woman should be able to make decisions on her own that concerns herself, and venture to freely express her thoughts. She should also be able to work in order to drive the political questions that interest her, without the need to obtain permission from another actor.
- **Political Competence** – a woman should obtain knowledge about politics, how to influence, make and carry out decisions. With this knowledge, she should be capable to exert influence on politics, her self and her surroundings.

Human Attitudes:

- **Dignity** – a woman should feel that she can and has the right to practice her democratic citizenship like other citizens in society. She could then develop a view of herself as an equal citizen.
- **Sense of agency** – a woman should develop a feeling of being an individual who can interact with others and her surroundings, with faith in her ability to make her voice heard and influence e.g. decisions.
- **Self-esteem** – a woman should develop a feeling of faith for herself as a citizen that has the right to be treated equally to other citizens.
- **Self-confidence** – a woman develops a belief that she *can* exercise power and influence over herself as well as political questions that concerns her and her surroundings.
- **Develop a political interest** – through knowledge and information, a woman should develop an interest for politics, and reach an understanding of how she can affect herself and her surroundings through political participation as an active citizen.
- **Wish to exercise political influence** - on her own, a woman has to realize that she by being an active citizen *wishes* to influence the policy that is pursued in society.

Social Capital:

Social Resources:

- **Gender-awareness** – women should become aware of policies, institutions and power structures within the private and public sphere that prevent them from exercising democratic citizenship and being treated like equal citizens.
- **Dignity** – women should realize that they have the right to be recognized and treated equally like other civic groups, exercise the same rights and not accept to be treated as a marginalized group.
- **Institutionalized networks** – women should establish and be organized in fix networks through which they can spread knowledge, make contacts, co-operate and perform activities to be recognized as equal citizens and carry out an active citizenship.
- **Coordinated actions** – women should establish relations based on trust and solidarity, and act together as a unit of active citizens in order to nurture the ambition to serve the common civic interest of the group and mutually reinforce the group within society.
- **Self-organization & management** – women should develop knowledge and capacity to be able to carry out effective work and developing common work on their own in order to as a civic group achieve an extensive impact for themselves and other women.

Social Attitudes:

- **Collective agency** – women should develop the feeling of being a group that can interact with other civic groups and their surroundings, having faith in their own ability to manage and organize actions, make their voices heard and influence policy.
- **Group identity** – through the feelings of trust and affinity, women should identify themselves with other marginalized women or civic groups. By establishing a feeling of kinship with others in a group and recognizing the obligations towards it, trust and solidarity could develop within the group, thus strengthening it.
- **Trust** – women should develop a feeling of trust towards other women or a unit of people, their abilities to act and motives for action. The women's self-interest is replaced by the interest of nurturing women's common civic interest to reinforce the group in society.

- **Solidarity** – women should carry out activities with the aim to make other women become more active citizens, for the spirit of community that exist between them, and to make sure that women stay together. Further, solidarity regards treating other women with an understanding, and the active work for an improvement of their civic situation for them to be treated like equal citizens.

3.6 Summary

Above I have described the general theories by Hadenius and Rowlands. Firstly, I have accounted for the resources and attitudes that constitute democratic citizenship according to Hadenius' theory. Secondly, I have described and discussed Rowlands' theory about which factors that are essential for women's empowerment. Finally, I have made a summary of the most substantial resources and attitudes that have been emphasized in both theories. These resources and attitudes within human and social capital constitute the theoretical point of departure that I will use in my analysis. With these theories as a starting point, I believe that I am able to analyze which resources and attitudes that the Westsaharian women perceive to have access to and how these play a role for them as active citizens.

In the following section I will account for the sampling method that I have used in my study and analysis.

4. Methodology and Material

This chapter presents the procedure of the analysis. First I present a discussion about the selection of geographical area, unit of study, methods and material, where reliability and validity discussions also are included. I conclude with a discussion about the interpretation and coding of the collected material.

4.1 Case Study

This study is a case study of the women in the Westsaharian refugee camps near Tindouf in south western Algeria, conducted in three out of four camps (Smara, El-Ajoun and Auserd) and The 27th February School. The latter started as a boarding school for women that is situated close to the camp of Smara, but with time it has grown and become residential, now the size of a camp's daira, and I therefore refer to it as a fifth camp.

I chose to do a case study in order to investigate specific questions linked to a social problem, a method that gives me the opportunity to provide a complete description of the unit that is being investigated. The strength of a case study is that it constitutes a valuable instrument for intensive studies despite the lack of written resources, which has been the case of this study due to the limited written information about Westsaharian women, but also because of the difficulties in finding statistical information in the camps, due to the lack of material in present institutions and means to collect and provide such information.

One weakness of a case study is the lack of opportunities to do wide generalizations since one case is insufficient to either confirm or falsify a theory. However, this is not my intention. By the careful study of one unit, I hope to reach an understanding of women's empowerment and which characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes that characterize women's empowered democratic citizenship, deepen the knowledge about it,

and provide information about the Westsaharian women in the refugee camps, the geographical area where the majority of the Westsaharian population today live⁷⁵.

In most of the empowerment literature it is recommended to follow a process at least two moments in time when doing a case study, in order to increase the chances of capturing a process of empowerment⁷⁶, and allow the researcher to verify the already collected information. It is however not my intention to follow the empowerment process of the Westsaharian women's democratic citizenship over time. Although I had the possibility to return to the camps a second time six months after the first performed study, I instead used this opportunity to study the same social problem and collect further material in order for me to be able to study the women's perceived access to resources and attitudes and how these play a role for them as active citizens. Even so, should I have wanted to follow an empowerment process over time, the time gap in between my two stays in the camp would have had to be considerably longer for me to have a relevant possibility to be able to do so.

Further, the opportunity to visit the camps twice has also allowed me to identify supplementary resources and attitudes in addition to the ones in my theoretical framework, resources and attitudes that the women perceive to have access to and that play a relevant role for their active citizenship. This additional identification increases the reliability of my analysis and strengthens its result.

I also find it important to stress that it has never been my intention to make a historical comparison between 1975 and today. The study only aims to describe the women's

⁷⁵ Not all Westsaharian live in the camps. Due to the earlier armed conflict the Westsaharian population has been shattered and divided over four areas, where the population officially according to the UN troop Minurso are estimated to be*:

- 165 000 Westsaharians with the right to vote live in the camps near Tindouf.
- 45 000 Westsaharians with the right to vote live in the occupied territories.
- 8 000 Westsaharians with the right to vote live in Mauritania.
- 2 000 Westsaharians with the right to vote live in the 'liberated area' (on the east side of the wall)
- 100 000 Westsaharians are not entitled to vote and are not counted in the census of population.

(*these numbers does not include minors nor non-registered Westsaharians at the counting in 1974.)

⁷⁶ Malhotra, Anju; Schuler, Sidney Ruth; Boender, Carol, 2002. Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development. p. 19.

perceived access to resources and attitudes at the point of time when the study was conducted. Although it would have been an interesting aspect to include, this was not possible since several of the interviewed women were young and had not experienced this early period of time.

4.2 Selection

4.2.1 Geographical Area and Unit of Study

I chose to perform my study in the Westsaharian refugee camps for both theoretical and practical reasons.

The Westsaharian women's citizenship in the Westsaharian refugee camps has gone through a notable civic change during their soon to be 30 years of stay in the camps. During their time in the camps, the Westsaharian women have become a civic group that is highly active despite their severe condition as refugees in exile, a development that suits my purpose well since I want to study the characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes that characterize women's empowered democratic citizenship. The fact that the majority of the Westsaharian population is situated in the camps and not in the occupied territory, and that most of the present population are women, children and elderly, was also to my advantage since I focus merely on women in this study.

I chose to perform the study in the camps Smara, El-Ajoun and Auserd as well as The 27th February School for practical reasons, all of which are closely situated to each other and the protocol Rabouni, from where most activities are administrated. Their location allowed me to more easily find transportation to travel between the camps and overcome the problem of transfer that exists due to the lack of vehicles and the harsh environment. Another important reason was that this is where the National Union of Sahraoui Women (NUSW) easily could help accommodate and organize interviews for me during my stay. They nevertheless offered me to visit the camp Dakhla, which is the furthest situated camp from Rabouni. However, I chose not to go there, due to the long distance to reach it, and the problems of transportation and communication, and since I did not want to

abuse NUSW's hospitality and will to assist me. Finally, since I never had the intention to compare the women's developed resources and attitudes in the different camps, I decided that visiting three out of four camps and The 27th February School was more than enough for me to be able to collect the material needed for my analysis.

To research the Westsaharian women in the camps was also my only option in getting valid information. The organization of the camps is based on the democratic constitution of S.A.D.R. There, women have the right to speak, move and organize freely, which is not the case in the occupied territory, where Westsaharian constitute a minority that is oppressed by the Moroccan regime, deprived of the right to speak and act freely. The majority of the citizens in the occupied territory who claim to be Westsaharian are in fact Moroccan settlers who moved there during the invasion of Moroccan settlers in 1975, also named the "Green Marsh". It was therefore never an option for me to travel to the occupied territories to perform my study.

Further, as there is an immense lack of research about this Arabic civic group that culturally, ethnically (being a nomad population) and due to their severe situation as refugees in exile for nearly three decades, differ from other Arabic women groups, I chose to study this case, a case which I find important to enlighten because a great part of the empowerment literature that exists focuses on women in totalitarian countries in the Middle East, Asia, and South America, or on Western democracies. I find it most important to challenge this, from my point of view, occidental dichotomy and turn my interest toward an Arabic population that fights to live under democratic values, even if it is in refugee camps in exile.

Also knowing that there exists a considerable body of academic and political writing about the citizenship that ignores a gender perspective, I find it most important to stress this relation. I have therefore chosen to specifically focus on women's democratic

citizenship in my study, in an attempt to emphasize that there is a need to understand and recognize women's citizenship as differing from the general norm of citizenship⁷⁷.

4.2.2 Sample of Women

In order to map out the resources and attitude that characterize the empowered Westsaharian women citizens, I needed to interview active women. Prior to traveling to the camps on my first visit, I had been in close contact with the NUSW, a sub-organization to Polisario that formally represents the women in camps. They have a well established organizational network in all five camps and with their help I was able to get in touch with and interview a number of active women from all four camps that I visited. Not only did this simplify my work immensely in acquiring the possibility to meet with my interviewees, but it also gave me the chance to attend meetings and perform observations during my time in the refugee camps.

During my stays in the camps I conducted interviews with women that are active within NUSW's executive councils in the camps Smara, Auserd and El-Ajoun; and with the president of the national executive council in The 27th February School. However, to fulfill my aim, I found it crucial to interview active women from a broad field of domains, both young and old, in order to get as valid information as possible. Therefore, during my stays I also interviewed women responsible or working at: a) a primary school in Auserd, b) the AFAD women schools in Smara and Auserd; the Olof Palme women's school in El-Ajoun, and the 27th of February women's school, c) the hospital in Smara and Auserd, d) the workers union in Auserd, e) a hay and a cell in Auserd and El-Ajoun, f) a दौरا in Smara, g) governmental level, meeting with the Secretary of the State for Social Affairs, h) women cooperatives in Auserd, Smara and El-Ajoun, and, i) the Minurso office in The 27th February School. Altogether, 33 interviews were conducted, 25 being personal ones and 8 being group interviews.

⁷⁷ For further theoretical analysis about Citizenship from a feminist perspective, see Ruth Lister in chapter 'Literature and Sources'.

It is significant to be aware that having received the assistance from the NUSW in getting in contact with my interviewees, there is a risk that they might have led me into meeting with women that are to be considered “faithful” and “reliable”. However, to diminish the problem of reliability that arises, when the occasion arose, I spontaneously conducted interviews with women that I met by accident in the camps during my stay and that I found interesting. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of the interviewed women have a relation to the NUSW and/or their contact network, and that this have had an affect on the collected material is clear, although it is also important to keep in mind that this is a civic group that are part of a population that are in a very vulnerable situation. They are living as refugees in exile in a harsh and unfriendly environment in the middle of a political conflict, and are therefore a very exposed group that constantly needs to defend themselves politically, in order to survive and fight for their cause, a consequence that might have contributed to a polarization of the thoughts and descriptions that were presented during the interviews. This polarization can further be seen to derive from the need to describe a united strength and determination, and not show signs of weakness in order to keep the group together and intact. To my belief, this result that is understandable because of the group’s status quo, which in turn, might be the reason for why the group has managed to stay intact for almost thirty years, which is unique of its kind, and has not assimilated to the Algerian population.

Finally, having interviewed only active women and women in responsible political positions, this has provided me with one perspective on the social problem that is analyzed in this study. Should I have interviewed women from other domains, or women that are not active, the result would most probably have differed.

4.2.3 Interviews

A major part of the collected material is based on interviews with women from the four camps where the study was conducted. I conducted both personal and group (with two or more women at the same time) interviews, and to test my questionnaire for the women candidates, I further performed “test interviews” at my arrival during my first stay. I then

discovered that some questions were being misunderstood by the interpreter and respondent, and after some critique and reformulations I found myself with a better and simpler questionnaire. A trial-and-error procedure that lessened the problems of validity and reliability that always haunt the methodological decisions.

Unfortunately, due to the vast lack of information and research about the Westsaharian women's civic development, I have not had the chance to cross-check the obtained information from the interviews with written sources. However, as I had the possibility to go back to the camps and conduct further interviews and observations there, this allowed me to double-check my obtained information and identified resources and attitudes.

The risk of doing interviews is that the respondent for example might exaggerate when describing themselves and other women in the camps in order to get a stronger response from me as a researcher, or to attempt not to show signs of subordination or weakness. This was a problem that appeared at several occasions during interviews due to a great nationalism and pride that exist among Westsaharian women. These feelings are justified in regard to their situation as a people in exile and considering what they have accomplished in the harsh environment where the camps are situated during their long time there. However, it should not affect the study, and to overcome this hurdle I tried to pose as non-leading and non-comparable questions (now-and-then) as possible, and rather descriptive questions. At several occasions I also asked the same questions in different ways to the respondents, which sometimes led to a differentiated/modified answer. Because of this phenomenon, it is important when performing interviews to see the interviewees not as truth speaking respondents but rather as politically aware actors⁷⁸, and to be aware that interviews have a polyphone aspect and that a statement is only one of other possible ones⁷⁹.

The interviews with the women were semi-structured and more over they were open, in-depth interviews, or discussions. At all times the interviews were done under very

⁷⁸ Alvesson, Mats; Deetz, Stanley, 2000. *Kritisk samhällsvetenskaplig metod*. p. 217.

⁷⁹ Hydén, Margareta in Haavind, Hanne, 2000. *Kön och tolkning*. p. 145.

unofficial and familiar circumstances. All group interviews were conducted at the respondents' working place. However nearly all individual interviews were performed in the respondents' home which provided me with a good chance to observe the respondents environment. To be in the person's home I believe had a reassuring affect on the interviewee since it was their wish to do the interview there, a place where they felt relaxed and comfortable. It however had another practical impact on the interviewee. At all occasions, there were always another or several other persons (both women and men) in the same room, listening to the interview and sometimes interrupting the respondent, adding information to her reply which often led to a discussion between the women. It is clear that in most cases this affected the respondent, sometimes modifying her answer and sometimes arguing even stronger for her given reply when she did not agree with what had been said by someone else in the room. Several times, the women's children were also present which sometimes distracted the respondent in developing an answer.

Depending on the interviewee and her position/working domain, I could observe differences in the perception of the sensitiveness of the questions. The questions were therefore sometimes adjusted. This poses a lack of unity to the questions which in turn risked creating a situation with difficulties to value and compare the responses. However, I found this adequate because if the same questions would have been asked to all interviewees, some might have felt distrust and been reluctant to answer due to the sensitivity of the questions. Nevertheless, what draw my intention was that regardless of the precaution that had been taken, most women that were interviewed were very outspoken and critical in their reflections. This however came to vary with the level of education and age of the respondent. Still, it is important to state that this is only my observation and that it is too difficult to make any sort of generalization about this since I only interviewed a small number of women for the study.

In the interview situation it is important to be aware of the role of the interviewer. It should be discussed if whether the fact that I as an interviewer, being a female and of Arabic origin, speaking the same language as the Westsaharian, that is Arabic (although with another dialect), could have affected the outcome of the responses in terms of the

degree of honesty, openness, and straight forwardness. Another question immediately also comes to my mind which is that despite my origin and language ability, which was to my great advantage since this allowed me to communicate openly with the people I met in the camps, I was still a foreigner in the camps, treated with special care. This situation might also have had an effect on the information I collected. It is difficult to say how this has influenced the material since every interview situation is unique in the way the interviewer behaves and how this affects the respondent and her way of answering the questions. The social context, in this case the interview situation is of great importance on how the interview is developed⁸⁰. It is therefore hard to make generalizations, because my previous experiences and personal values will always have an influence on what I choose to observe, on what I think is accurate and relevant data, and including how I present it. In research, it is impossible to convey a complete objective message; however awareness might decrease the risk of the problem of reliability⁸¹.

Another important issue regarding the interviews is the language and the role of the interpreter. The Westsaharian women speak an Arabic dialect called *Hassania* that is close to classical Arabic. This enabled me to perform the interviews in Arabic, although since I speak Arabic with a Tunisian dialect there were often words and meanings that I could not understand. Therefore, during my first stay in the camps, I had an interpreter present at all interviews who helped me translate from *Hassania* to English to make sure that I would understand everything that was said by the respondent. The use of an interpreter raises the problem of the material's validity. Some situations that could occur are that the interpreter misunderstands, shortens and/or modifies the respondent's answer or the question that has been posed. However, since I understood most of what was being said and translated during the interviews I did not fully depend on the translation and could note the answers on my own. It also allowed me to object when I noticed that misunderstandings arose and e.g. questions were not posed correctly. It was to my advantage that I had the same interpreter during all the interviews. In my point of view, this diminished the problem of invalid data since this allowed the translator to gain an

⁸⁰ Alvesson, Mats; Deetz, Stanley, 2000. *Kritisk samhällsvetenskaplig metod*. p. 217.

⁸¹ Jacobsen, Jan Krag, 1993. *Intervju – konsten att lyssna och fråga*. p. 182.

understanding of my research and the questions that were posed. For every interview the mistranslations decreased. A second advantage of having the same interpreter was that it allowed me to obtain useful contextual information from her about the NUSW, the organization and the development in the camps; social, political and legal problems that faces the women in the camps; Westsaharian cultures and traditions; how the severe situation in the camps affects the women's ability to develop etc. Finally, at some occasions the interpreter could also provide more detailed information about the interviewee when situations became a bit delicate, comment the interview situation, and the sensitivity of different topics.

During the second stay in the camps, I had adapted to the Westsaharian's Arabic dialect after my first stay and was now able to perform the interviews on my own without an interpreter. Not only did this allow me to get first hand information (direct from the interviewee, and not second hand through an interpreter), but it also raised my possibilities to double check the already collected information and identified factors. I also discovered that my ability to talk to the women directly made them speak even more freely than before, having the possibility to reach out to me straight away and not through an interpreter, whose presence could have an inhibiting effect. It is my belief that the possibility of direct communication raised the interviewees' confidence in me as an interviewer. However, to what extent this can be claimed is difficult to say since it could not be measured during the interviews. The ability to perform the interviews personally, I believe further(raised the validity of the information.

4.2.4 Participant Observations

Another primary source that allowed me to collect further information about which resources and attitudes that Westsaharian women perceive to have access to and how these play a role for them as active citizens, are participant observations. Using a combination of this method and interviews in a case study investigation increases its

quality substantially⁸², and is therefore often recommended when carrying out a minor field study of this kind⁸³. Often, certain information about the phenomenon that is to be investigated is concealed from the public (often referred to as tacit phenomenon⁸⁴) and therefore, the use of direct observations might serve the researcher in the attempt to get a complete perception⁸⁵.

During my stays in the Westsaharian refugee camps I was able to take part in different daily activities, rituals, interactions, and meetings which enabled me to gain insight into the women's lives, habits, and traditions. Since I at both occasions stayed with families during my whole time in the camps, and being able to communicate with them in their language, this gave me the opportunity to have everyday conversations with women that I met or got acquainted with. It also allowed me to observe activities that I found was of importance to reach an understanding about their active citizenship: a) an informative meeting in a *daira* about health and family in Auserd, b) a demonstration in the liberated area near the "Wall of Shame" where a huge number of women participated c) a conference in the 27th February School about women's political participation organized by NUSW in cooperation with the Basque solidarity organizations HEGOA, d) informal meetings in the women's home e) cultural events such as three weddings and two naming ceremonies e) a visit to a primary school and a kinder garden in Smara where merely women work, f) a women's centre in El-Ajoun, and g) a conference about Children's and Women's Rights in the Olof Palme School organized by NUSW and the Swedish Social Democrat Women.

Another related issue I find important to discuss is how my presence as an observant outsider affected the outcomes in different situations. The fact that I was always "being on"⁸⁶, as an always alert participant observer, interacting by asking questions, writing notes etc. might have had a repressing affect on the women's behavior, as they perhaps felt that they were being observed. This is a cost of participation that I find hard to avoid,

⁸² Yin, Robert K, 1994. *Case Study Research – Design and Methods*. p. 78.

⁸³ Esaiasson; Oscarsson; Gilljam and Wängnerud, 2003. *Metodpraktikan*. pp. 333-334.

⁸⁴ DeWalt, Kathleen M; DeWalt, Bille R, 2002. *Participant Observation*. p. 1.

⁸⁵ Esaiasson; Oscarsson; Gilljam and Wängnerud, 2003. *Metodpraktikan*. p. 334.

⁸⁶ DeWalt, Kathleen M; DeWalt, Bille R, 2002. *Participant Observations*. pp. 58-59.

since regardless of my language abilities, will and possibility to adapt to their environment and life style etc. the consequences of my presence are inevitable. I believe that this is also particularly discernible when the study is performed during a short period of time, which was the case of both my stays, due to the time needed to develop trust between the researcher and the population that is being observed. However experiencing these kinds of fieldwork dilemmas is often a vehicle to a deeper understanding of behavior and meaning⁸⁷.

4.3 Interpretation of Results

4.3.1 Coding Westsaharian Women's Empowered Democratic Citizenship

To be able to describe which resources and attitudes that the Westsaharian women perceive to have access to and how these factors play a role for their active citizenship, I have chosen to apply a qualitative content analysis. This method is often used in studies that focus on societal dilemmas to study what kind of explicit information a text conveys to the reader⁸⁸. Unlike quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis is not about counting or quantifying phenomena, but rather about performing more complicated coding⁸⁹. I found this method suitable for two reasons: first, because I want to bring out the information that has been put into words in the interviews, as well as what has been manifested in my observations, and second, because the use of a content analysis gives me the possibility to test the general theories in this study⁹⁰. The search for manifest elements can however also be used in obtaining implicit information when coding the collected material⁹¹. I find it necessary to include this aspect in the analysis, since the aim is to provide a complete description of the social problem in this case study.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 58.

⁸⁸ Bergström, Göran; Boréus, Kristina, 2000. *Textens mening och makt*. p. 45.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bryder, Tom. *Innehållsanalys som idé och metod*. p. 56.

⁹¹ Bergström, Göran; Boréus, Kristina, 2000. *Textens mening och makt*. p. 46.

To be able to perform a qualitative content analysis, there is a need for me to work out an instrument of analysis for classification of answers, that is, themes, words, arguments etc. that is revealed by the material⁹². Through the revision and coding of the material I have therefore used a number of questions that I have posed to the information, based on the operationalized theoretical framework, which have enabled me to pick out the substance in the material, provide the analysis with a structure, describe the studied problem, and fulfill the aim of the study and answer its questions. I have therefore used the theoretical summation as a tool in my analysis.

Since I have chosen to use a qualitative approach there is no guarantee that another researcher would analyze the Westsaharian women's perceived access to resources and attitudes and how these play a role for their active citizenship in the same way, since I myself have been a measuring instrument in the study and therefore might be subjective. Nonetheless, I have tried to prevent subjectivity by using my theoretical framework in analyzing the material, which I believe has provided good validity.

⁹² Ibid. pp. 50-51.

5. The Westsaharian Women's Resources and Attitudes

This chapter presents the analysis of the collected material. The analysis is made in two steps. First I focus on analyzing and describing the women's perceived access to resources and attitudes and in what way these factors play a role for their active citizenship. I then move on to describe the result and answer my questions to be able to fulfill the aim of the study. To conclude, I present a future outlook.

5.1 Human Capital

Reading- and Writing Abilities & Capacity

“The education helps women in their daily life. By learning how to read and write, they can read and take part of information and news.” (Higga Hadi Mohammed Bolla - Principle of AFAD in Auserd)

I begin this analysis by presenting and analyzing explicit and implicit information showing different dimension of the existence and significance of the Westsaharian women's resources. Higga Hadi Mohammed Bolla is the principle of the AFAD women's school in Auserd. In her quote above she emphasizes that reading- and writing abilities is a resource that allows women to obtain knowledge and take part of information in society. What her claim shows is that education is an important resource that does not only help women in the daily life in the camps, but it also enables them to be active and stay updated as citizens. Like she claims, a woman's reading- and writing abilities enables her to collect information and become involved with questions that are related to society.

After performing interviews with women who are active at institutional levels in the refugee camps, I have come to understand that reading- and writing abilities is a resource that these women today have access to, after having developed them during their time in exile:

“When I came to the camps I was not able to neither read nor write, but between 1979 and 1984 I participated in reading- and writing courses in Smara during the youth camps, where young women that had been studying abroad were teaching us.” (Ngiya Mohammed Salim – Member of a cell in Smara)

“I did not know how to read and write when I came to the camps. When I was 26 years old I participated in a six months long course, where we were given lessons in Arabic and administration.” (Raaba Mohammed Said – President of NUSW’s Executive Council in Smara)

As seen from the examples above, by taking part of a minor course upon their arrival to the camps both of these women have learned how to read and write and today possess this knowledge. Ngiya participated in a summer course that was given to illiterate women by literate ones at the beginning of the creation of the refugee camps, whereas Raaba took part of a more advanced course that not only included Arabic lessons but also classes in administration. These different ways that have provided the women with this knowledge, and enabled them to read and write, varies further:

“I went to Koranic school”. (Zagouna Al-Athmani Mahjoub – Responsible for a Cell in a Hay in Smara)

“I went to primary and secondary school in Libya, but I did my high school studies in Algeria [...] When I returned to the camps the same year I started to participate in a teachers’ training course that lasted two years .” (Fatma Mehdi – President of the NUSW National Council)

Unlike Raaba and Ngiya, Zagouna and Fatma’s descriptions of themselves and their education, express to have participated in a longer educational program that have provided them with knowledge and the ability to read and write. When comparing these four women active at different levels and looking at their level of education, we can perceive that there is not necessarily a direct relation between their level of education and their level of responsibility. Compared to Fatma, Ngiya, Raaba and Zagouna all three of them have a lower level of education. However, Raaba, like Fatma, is responsible at a higher level, unlike Ngiya and Zagouna who are working on local levels. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that there is a relevant connection between education and involvement, since all of these four active women do have some kind of education, whether it is of a lower or higher level. However, to what extent these two interrelate with each other is impossible to say.

If we look more closely at the interviewed women's level of education and their level of involvement, the relation between them becomes clearer. Khadija, Minettou, Salaka, Fatou, Mumna, and Meriam are six women who work in a minor women's cooperation that they started in 2003 where they weave carpets and other handicrafts. Among them, only one woman has a practical education that she received at one of the women's schools in the camps:

“Only Minettou has an education from the Olof Palme School. The rest of us have learnt by studying her work and by watching her when she does it.”
(Khadija, Minettou, Salaka, Fatou, Mumna and Meriam - Members of a Women's Cooperative in El-Ajoun)

What can be perceived above is that not all women that were interviewed know how to read and write, and that illiteracy still exists among women. However, what can also be seen is that these women have access to another type of education, a practical one. Minetto learned how to weave at the Olof Palme School in El-Ajoun, whereas the others are self-educated women, having learned from their colleagues by watching them exercising their knowledge. Although these women do not possess reading- and writing abilities, they are all active women. This shows that there is a strong will to learn, and that women cooperate and share knowledge in order for others to have access to it as well. From their quotes it is therefore possible to conclude that reading- and writing abilities does not necessarily have to be a resource that a woman needs to have access to in order to be active as a citizen. Instead, it shows that it is important to have access to an education of some kind, should this be practical or theoretical. However, looking at the relation between the level of education and the level of the working domain that they are active at, one can claim that a lower education has an influence on what kind of level in society a citizen is able to be active in.

Nevertheless, the majority of the interviewed women has access to education and knows how to read and write. Many women have however described that they due to

different reasons have had to interrupt their studies, and therefore do not have a complete education:

“I had to stop my studies and go home because of family problems. After I started reading the one year education in couture here at AFAD.” (Najat Omar Basali – Student at AFAD in Auserd)

“Between 1977 and 1984 I was studying in Libya, but due to trouble between Libya and Polisario most Westsaharian students were transferred to Algeria.” (Khadouga Ahmed Salim Brahim – Principle of a Primary School in Auserd)

Two conclusions can be drawn from Najat and Khadouga’s stories that describe why they had to interrupt their studies. Due to both private and political contextual reasons, both of these women at a point had to interrupt their studies, and move elsewhere to study. Najat returned to the camps with an unfinished education, but later had the opportunity to attend a practical course in the camps and received her degree after a year. Unlike her, Khadouga had the chance to go to Algeria and finish the studies she had begun in Libya. Women’s social responsibility and the fact that they are citizens that belong to a society that is subjected to a conflict, can therefore here clearly be seen as factors that have an inhibiting effect on their access to education, especially for Najat who had to change her educational direction. However, to what extent this has had an inhibiting effect on them as active citizens in the long run is hard to say. What can still be said is that despite the interruption in their studies, they have still come to be active women. Najat is still studying and Khadouga is working as a principle for a primary school in Auserd. It is clear that access to reading- and writing abilities and education plays a role for women’s active citizenship, a statement that is further confirmed by Dahba, a student at Olof Palme School and Mumna, member of a cell in El-Ajoun:

“I have always wanted to continue my studies, but due to family problems I have not been able to do so. Being part of this administration program gives me hope to fulfill my dreams. I am a young woman that needs to develop and I want to become independent”. (Dahba Takiyo Mohammed - Student at the Olof Palme School in Administration and Information in El-Ajoun)

“If I would not have received my education in Algeria, I would have been home taking care of the house and my children.” (Mumna Mohammed Mehdi - Member of a Cell in El-Ajoun)

For both Dahba and Mumna, the chance to educate themselves has not only made it possible for them to read and write, but also, as their quotes mainly show, is that this access have provided them with a tool to change their life situation. For Mumna, this access has allowed her to not only be active within the private sphere but also the public one, and Dahba's access to education has raised her belief in herself to one day become an independent woman. What can therefore be perceived in Dahba's case is that with her increased knowledge by participating in a course and her raised confidence, her capacity to actively practice her citizenship is also growing.

Access to capacity implies that a woman should have enough confidence and knowledge (ability) in order to be an active citizen who participates in public activities, where she can defend and make herself heard by communicating with others. Going through my interviews I found that the women in many different ways expressed this perception:

“As responsible for a cell I inform the members in the cell about new directives from the wilaya and the दौरا about for example the cleaning of the दौरا, count if there are women missing in the work, and check that everything works as it should.” (Zagouna Al-Athmani Mahjoub - Responsible for a Cell in a Hay in Smara)

Zagouna Al-Athmani Mahjoub is responsible for a cell in a दौरا. As responsible for a cell, she is the person who makes sure that political directives that are delegated to the camps regarding various activities are implemented at the local level. As can be perceived from her description, in her work Zagouna not only interacts with people within her cell that she is responsible for, but she also interacts with people from other institutional levels (wilaya and दौरا), reassuring that the information is received and forwarded. Her work illustrates that she not only has enough confidence to be an active working citizen, but also that she can make herself heard. Therefore, it can be gleaned that Zagouna's faith in herself and her ability to take responsibility and participate in work that demands interaction and communication with others, is that this clearly encourages her and plays an important role for her active citizenship.

The interviews further demonstrate that to be able to be an active citizen, despite limited reading- and writing abilities and education, some women find ways to overcome this problem and still be active. Their participation is possible due to the women's strong belief in themselves and a determination to stay active and influence policy:

“[...] the old women in responsible positions always find younger women to assist them because of their illiteracy. They read their mail and write letters. They know what they want and have experience, but lack knowledge.” (Selma Cheikh - President of NUSW's Executive Council in El-Ajoun)

What this quote illustrates is that theoretical knowledge is not necessarily a condition for the capacity to act and practice one's active citizenship, but experience and confidence is enough for a woman to stay politically active. However, since a responsible position demands access to education in order to communicate, cooperation and solidarity are important factors for women who lack education in order to be able to be active at a higher level.

In conclusion of this section, the interviews however show that certain present inhibiting contextual factors seem to have a restrictive effect on the women's ability to be active in their daily work, despite their access to knowledge and confidence:

“As a working woman, I find it hard to find a balance between family, children and home; and my work, and have the time to do the things that needs to be done.” (Mumna Mohammed Mehdi - Member of a Cell in El-Ajoun)

“My husband goes to work in Mauritania to earn some money for the family. He is always gone 1-2 months at a time, leaving me to take care of the children and the household. I am very lucky though because I have my family that helps me a lot.” (Khadgetto Mohammed Salim Liman – Member of NUSW's Executive Council in Smara)

“The waiting, the weather circumstances, and the heat makes it harder for us to work. There is a lack of money, and we are dependent on external aid. However, we try to stay active.” (Fatou Mohammed - Member of Executive Council of NUSW in Auserd)

What can be perceived from the quotes above is that there are both internal and external factors that burden the women mentally, forcing them to struggle and find solutions in

order to stay active and strong citizens, despite living under harsh conditions and having to carry the social responsibility within the family. What the quotes further show is that the women manage to stay active due to a strong will and determination to exercise their citizenship, and due to the solidarity between women and flexibility in finding a balance between work and social responsibility.

It is clear that access to capacity play an important role for women in order to stay active. However what has also been apparent is that determination, will, solidarity, and cooperation constitute important factors that enable women to use their capacity to continue to work and participate in society.

Dignity & Independence

“We came to claim our rights as Westsaharians, to show that the Westsaharian people are united and to inform our dairas about what happened during the demonstration.” (Mbarka, Fatma, Mumna and Fattou – Students demonstrating at The Wall of Shame)

To start the analysis of the interviewed women’s access and their perceived access to dignity and independence, the above quote is a very good starting-point. I met Mbarka, Fatma, Mumna, and Fattou during a demonstration organized by Polisario and Spanish solidarity organizations at The Wall of Shame in the liberated areas during my first stay in the camps. It illustrates their thoughts and views of themselves as equal citizens in a clear and distinct way, and that they have the right to practice their citizenship like everyone else. What the quote further shows is that by participating in the demonstration, these women do not only venture to act and express their thoughts about the political dilemma that they are exposed to, without the human right to land and recognition as a sovereign civic group. Further, being the person who is responsible to report back to their दौरا with political updates, it can be perceived that they portray themselves as being highly active and that they have a strong belief in themselves, and in the question that they are fighting for. This tendency can in itself be understood as a sign of their access to both independence and dignity, and that these values contribute to their participation in society and to their active citizenship.

As I continue to analyze the women's access to dignity and how this plays a role for the women's civic involvement, an important aspect that have been described in relation to this is that dignity is viewed as a resource that comes from within a woman:

“The will to become active has to come from inside oneself, for example if a new centre opens it is my responsibility to turn in my application to the centre.”
(Allouma Ibrahim Bati - Responsible for the Workers Union in Auserd)

“We have to be aware about our real positions. But this is knowledge that has to be found inside the woman.” (Aiza Abdallah - President of NUSW's Executive Council in Auserd)

What both Allouma and Aiza describe and express is not only that they believe that a woman on her own has to develop the will and feeling of being able to practice her citizenship, but that the awareness of her rights also has to come from within. Empowerment theory emphasizes and claims that will is a precondition that has to originate inside the woman in order for her to become and remain active, as well for her to gain continued access to a resource⁹³. However, I find that the claim that knowledge about one's rights also is a resource that has to be found inside a woman show of a stressed personal responsibility, that, somehow, it is up to the woman to develop and get access to information/become aware on her own. Knowledge, like education, is a resource obtained from external factors, situations, and impressions that provide the citizen with a tool that she later on her own further can develop. To think that knowledge comes from within can to my belief be perceived as an attitude that can limit women's possibilities to gain access to dignity. In addition, in the long run, it can restrict them from becoming citizens who participate in activities with the aim of mutually reinforce the civic group that one is a part of. To my belief, in order for a woman to be a citizen who wants to change her situation in society, a precondition is to know what rights and possibilities she has. Therefore, the perception that it is up to the woman to internally develop her knowledge about her rights can be seen to limit women's opportunities to be active, since all responsibility is put upon her alone and is not encouraged from the outside. Some women might be able to develop and carry this

⁹³ See chapter 3.1.3.1.

through on their own, however there are also women that do not, and where external input plays an important role in them becoming aware and active citizens.

Among the interviewed women, several have expressed that they are very independent women, having made decisions concerning themselves that have affected their lives:

“[...] First year in high school I dropped out of school because of social problems. I then heard in the daira that the Olof Palme’s school was seeking students, so I signed up, took the test and got in.” (Dahba Takiyo Mohammed - Student at the Olof Palme School in Administration and Information in El-Ajoun)

“[...] I found that it is much more easy to be active if you live in the 27th February School compared to living in the wilayas because they are too far away from all the offices that are situated here and in Rabouni.” (Mahfoudha Mohammed Rahal – Secretary of State for Social Affairs)

“[...] I divorced my husband in 1991 and since then I am self-supporting and finance my family by producing clothes and couscous colander that I sell at the market.” (Meriam Abdallah Masi – Member of a Women’s Cooperative in the 27th February School)

“I have two children and I don not want to have any more. Today it is enough with two. It is not like in the old days when women gave birth to 6-10 children for the war, the survival of the people, and because she needed help at home.” (Yemen Abdallah – Member of a Cell in Auserd)

What these four women express is that they have the confidence and faith in themselves to independently make a decision that concerns them. In addition, their quotes show that women’s possibility to do this stretches across both the private and public sphere. For Dahba and Mahfoudha, they both made decisions that enabled them to be active and participate in institutional activities. Dahba applied to one of the existing women’s school in the camps, which enabled her to begin an educational program and study in order to get a degree. As for Mahfoudha, she moved from one camp to another in order for her to more easily work and be politically active, with all the offices that she interacts with, such as Secretary of State for Social Affairs, closer to her home. Unlike them, Meriam and Yemen made decisions that were related to their civil rights, in the case of Meriam to divorce her husband and become a self-working and financially independent citizen, and in the case of Yemen, she decided that two children was more than enough, which, in

comparison to the elder generations of women's amount of children is a great difference⁹⁴. Whether she was able to make this decision because the view of women's role in society in relation to birth giving has changed or because having few children has become a socially accepted tendency in the camps is difficult to speculate about. Nevertheless, it can be seen in the case of Yemen that women are capable to influence their own reproduction and freely express her thoughts about this issue.

Political Competence, Develop a Political Interest & Wish to Exercise Political Influence

In continuing my analysis about the Westsaharian women's perceived access to resources and attitudes, and what role they play for their active citizenship, in this section, I move on to describe and discuss how their access to political competence, political interest, and wish to exercise political influence is perceived.

Access to political competence, political interest, and wish to exercise political influence are three factors that strongly depend on each other and interrelate, all constituting a precondition for exercising political activity. Political knowledge is a resource that is highly present among the Westsaharian women that I interviewed and that they demonstrated in several different ways. What has been striking when analyzing the women's perceived access to this resource is that their contextual situation as marginalized citizens in exile and with the experience of armed conflict, have played a vital role for them in becoming politically aware women:

“Our situation raises the political awareness among us.” (Nebkhoulou Idda Hamou – Member of a Hay in El-Ajoun)

“The war has contributed to a great change and awareness among women. If I compare myself and my mother with my grandmother who had no knowledge about politics, my mother and I know so much because of the access to news.” (Fatimettou Mohammed Maoloud - Teacher at AFAD in Auserd)

⁹⁴ During the war women in average gave birth to 6-12 children. (Aiza Abdallah, President of NUSW's Executive Council in Auserd)

What can be seen from Nebkhoula and Fatimettou's personal descriptions above is not only that they describe how they became and are politically aware women due to the contextual situations that have and still characterize their everyday life, but also that they by claiming this clearly express that they are politically aware citizens with knowledge about their political situation and what the war that they fought has contributed with. Furthermore, Nebkhoula also relates her political awareness to the access of news that she, unlike her grandmother, has access to which has raised her own awareness as well as her mother's. Looking at their descriptions of themselves, one can glean that in the case of these Westsaharian women, despite the fact that they have suffered from a war and live as marginalized citizens in exile, these factors have had and continue to have an encouraging affect on the women's access to political competence, thus also contributing to a raised political awareness among them. To what extent it has and continues to do so is impossible to say but that there is a relation between their lives' context and their political competence is clear.

Continuing the discussion about the impact that the Westsaharian women's contextual situation has upon them, it can be perceived that this also concerns their access to political interest and wish to exercise political influence. However, the interviews also show that the women have access to these attitudes due to other reasons, where education is the most outstanding reason:

"I was a member of a cell and helped the soldiers with food and clothes. Two year later, in 1975, I joined an education for illiterate and did military training. We were a total of 20 women. I then became responsible for a union that received all the refugees that arrived. [...] between 1978 and 1984 I was teaching at the 27th of February school, giving political classes. [...] the courses were given to raise awareness about the conflict, history and the relations between external and internal political actors." (Houn Mohammed – Member of a Cell in Auserd)

"When I was young, after having finished school, I participated in a youth summer camp in the camp Smara. I then participated in activities that had political aims in view. In the beginning I was not politically interested, but after having taken part in a political course my awareness and interest started to grow [...] today I am head of दौरا." (Azza Brahim Babi – Head of Daira in Smara)

Houn and Azza here describe how they, by having participated in an educational activity, came to develop political knowledge, skills, and interest, and how the possession of these attitudes in the end led to both of them becoming women who exercise political influence within an institution. What separates them is that they gained access to these factors in various ways, which also made them start practicing their active citizenship differently. Houn became politically aware by participating in a course for illiterate during the armed conflict. Having gained access to a minor education, but also being influenced by the political situation at this time, she with this knowledge and experience not only started to become involved with political work, becoming responsible for a union and later started giving political classes to other women, but she also seems to have reached an understanding that the only way that she could influence her surroundings and what was happening in her society at this time and others, was to become a politically active woman. One can therefore claim that in her case, similar to Nebkhoula and Fatimettou cited in the beginning of this section, the contextual situation had an encouraging effect on her gaining access to political competence, interest, and wish to exercise political influence. What can also be claimed is that in Houn's case, like in the case of Azza, education can be perceived to have played a vital role for their active citizenship. Azza, unlike Houn, took part in a youth summer camp in the camps of Smara while still young. She clearly describes that her experience in the summer camp influenced her and made her become more aware and interested. What can also be understood is that in the long run these experiences influenced her further, making her continue to involve herself with political questions and she is now responsible at local level in the camps.

It can further be seen that there is a strong wish to exercise political influence when looking at the interviewed women's personal stories:

"I don't want to be at home taking care of the children. I want to be active and work for our rights. I have three children and I only stayed at home for a month with each and every one of them, then leaving them with my mother who helps me to take care of them." (Khadgetto Mohammed Salim Liman - Member of NUSW's Executive Council in Smara)

"I got to experience the colonization which made me want to resist and try to liberate our country. This is something that I still work for today and will do until

the day that I die, or until we have liberated our country.” (Aiza Abdallah - President of NUSW’s Executive Council in Auserd)

“Morocco is a severe enemy while we continuously are trying to find a solution. We have released prisoners, but they have not; only 66 people in 1996. If I could choose I would like for a demonstration to take place every day [...]” (Dahba Takiyo Mohammed - Student at the Olof Palme School in Administration and Information in El-Ajoun)

Here three women’s distinct expressions related to their private life or their life context, point to their firm determination and wish to be active and work, with the aim to fight for their rights as women but also as citizens, as a part of the struggle of the Westsaharian population. To conclude this section, it is possible to claim that the women’s perceptions of their life context play a vital role for them becoming active citizens. Furthermore, having the wish and will to exercise political influence, the women work to be and stay active.

Sense of Agency, Self-confidence, and Self-esteem

To finish the analysis of the Westsaharian women’s human capital, I now move on to look at the women’s access to a sense of agency, self-confidence, and self-esteem, three attitudes that, like the factors in the previous section, interrelate with each other, since they are all related to women’s faith in themselves and belief in being able to be participate, interact, and be active citizens.

Since 2002 Azza Brahim Babi is head of a *daira*. She is the only female head of *daira* of all 26 *dairas* that exist altogether in the camps. However, becoming head of *daira* was not an easy task. Before becoming elected, she for several years ran for the administrative chief position, as she firmly believed that there was a need for women

representatives there. After having been a candidate for a total of 10 years, she in the end got elected:

“In the *daira* elections in 1992 I decided to run for head of *daira*. I got three out of three thousand votes! But I was determined not to give up, because we need women representatives. Between 1992 and 2002 in total I ran seven times, before I in 2002 was elected with 76% of the votes becoming head of *daira* Beer El-Hlou. Shortly after, I was informed that I was going to be transferred to be head of another *daira*, the *daira* Tfariti, not the one I had been elected in. “A change within the administration” my boss told me.” (Azza Brahim Babi - Head of *Daira* in Smara)

The struggle she describes that she had to go through to reach her present position, to my belief, strongly demonstrates her persistence and determination to become elected and thereby using her right to run for political office, a right that she has as a citizen with equal political rights in the camps. What can also be seen is that she is an example of a woman who believes that she *can* interact with others and her surroundings, having faith in her ability to be a representative and therefore also make her voice heard and influence the policy and decision making that is carried out in the *daira*. These are signs of not only a sense of agency and self-esteem, but also of self-confidence, attitudes that not only are perceived to play a role for being an active citizen herself, but that also makes her try to transfer these attitudes to other women by showing them that women are individuals who have the same capacities and right to the access of these positions as men:

“Being a head of *daira*, I try to show women that women can be politically responsible and represent others, that women are as politically competent as men.” (Azza Brahim Babi - Head of *Daira* in Smara)

What can be assumed from her quote and the effort that she makes to strengthen women’s belief in themselves, is that she believes that there is a need for such a reinforcement among women. It also shows that within this civic group there is a lack and/or varied level of access to sense of agency, self-esteem, and self-confidence, and that many women do not have the confidence in themselves to interact with others in a political dimension, or to exercise political policy at higher levels. This phenomenon can be traced to a low level of education among women:

“Women here are suffering from low self-confidence. It is something that I cannot deny. [...] If a woman has a low education, this is an obstacle and can

lead to her not wanting to become responsible, because this includes responsibilities for rights and duties which some women fear.” (Aiza Abdallah - President of NUSW’s Executive Council in Auserd)

Another reason to the lack of a sense of agency, self-esteem, and self-confidence is the presence of a patriarchal system in the camps:

“When I was working in the दौरا as vice head, there were ordinary men working in the dairas that were saying that women did not have enough capacity to be head of dairas, and that we were not able to be active, which of course affected me.” (Azza Brahim Babi - Head of दौरا in Smara)

What these quotes show is that due to the existence of these inhibiting contextual problems, women’s access to self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of agency is restricted and limit women’s possibilities to political participation at a higher level as well as to be active citizens.

It is clear that education has a significant encouraging influence on women’s ability to believe in them selves, to interact with others and have access to these attitudes. If one looks at how views of the importance of education are described, one can see that education has and does play a vital role for women’s sense of self and their ability:

“The studies have made my life easier. When one obtains an education it makes you want to use this and try to reach higher positions, just like it did for me.” (Meriam Omar Mohammed - Member of a Cell in Auserd)

“When my mother was my age she had a traditional mentality. She wanted to learn traditional things like how to make goat milk, butter, milk reservoir, tents etc. but I want something different. I want to work in the दौरا, but there are no computers there so I hope that they have a typewriter because I want to work within this area, not something else. If I will not be able to find something there I will apply for work at the police station’s administrative office, because I do not want to stay at home after I finish my studies.” (Dahba Takiyo Mohammed - Student at the Olof Palme School in Administration and Information in El-Ajoun)

Both these women have had the possibility to access education. Their quotes express that access to education have made them women who possess a feeling of confidence in themselves, thinking that they have the equal right to attend areas of work, but also that

they consider themselves have the ability to be active and work within the domain where they wish to work. Furthermore, what can be perceived is that this faith in themselves has developed a strong will and determination within them, making them want to try to reach their goal by being active citizens and work toward an achievement. I can therefore conclude this section by stating that not only do the women's access to a sense of agency, self-esteem, and also self-confidence play a perceived vital role for the women's active citizenship, but they also encourage them to fight for what they want and think that they have the right to, by developing a will and determination to be active. These attitudes also encourage the women to want to be more active, and can thus also be gleaned as factors that play a vital role for their active citizenship.

5.2 Social Capital

Gender-Awareness & Dignity

According to women's empowerment theory, access to gender-awareness implies that a woman should have knowledge about injustices and hierarchal power structures in both the private and public sphere that prevent her from exercising her citizenship and to be treated like an equal citizen. Closely linked to this is dignity, relating to women realizing that they have the right to be treated like equal citizens and not accept to be treated like a marginalized civic group.

Khadgetto Mohammed Salim Liman during our interview described her perception of how she as a woman has become more aware of her rights:

“Access to education has made it possible for us women to listen to the radio and watch TV, getting information, and becoming women that are aware of their rights.” (Khadgetto Mohammed Salim Liman - Member of NUSW's Executive Council in Smara)

What can be seen here is that according to Khadgetto, her access to education has played a significant role for her in becoming more aware of her rights to be treated like

an equal citizen. In my mind, what is especially interesting about her quote is whether Khadgetto when claiming to be more aware of her rights as a woman, refers to her civic rights as a woman in the camps, or if she refers to her human rights as a Westsaharian refugee. It is difficult to distinguish what she refers to, and therefore it also makes it complicated to distinguish whether her raised awareness can be related to gender-awareness or if it relates more to awareness about the rights that she as a marginalized Westsaharian citizen should have access to. Consequently, I believe that this also shows that it can be difficult in distinguishing the injustices that she suffers from as a woman from the injustices that she suffers from as a refugee. This is due to the fact that in the case of conflict women's violated rights tend to be overlooked, since they are put in comparison with the population's violated human rights.

It can nevertheless be seen that there is a gender-awareness about inhibiting factors that prevent women from accessing their equal rights, and about their right to exercise equal rights:

“Certain women believe that the high positions are sacred and that they do not have the right to these nor can reach them if they do not have a high education and lots of experience.” (Fatma Mehdi - President of the NUSW National Council)

“Many women have a lack of confidence because they are used to men taking all the responsibility outside the home and that women have all the social responsibility. [...] The social responsibility prevents women from reaching higher positions. We try to make women understand that our men can and must help us. For example, if my husband loves me, he has to help me with the cooking, cleaning, children, washing clothes etc.” (Fatma Mehdi - President of the NUSW National Council)

Fatma Mehdi's quote clearly shows that she is a woman who is highly aware of the contextual inhibiting factors that prevent women from working in higher political positions in the camps, by claiming that her fellow women citizens suffer from lack of knowledge about their rights to be active on higher political levels, a right that they have regardless of their level of education and experience. She also expresses that women's social responsibility restricts women's level of civic involvement. Fatma also seems to have realized that they as women have the equal right to access these higher

political positions. Further, she is aware that women, like herself, should not accept the social injustices and unequal share of responsibility, but rather that she has the equal right to exercise her democratic citizenship to the same extent as men do. Finally, it can also be seen how her awareness of these obstacles plays a role in her being an active citizen and in trying to make women understand their rights and their right to demand these within their private sphere.

The same level of awareness and how access to this resource plays a significant role for women being active within society/ her work can also be seen in Higga Hadi Mohammed Bolla's description of how she as the principle of the AFAD women's school in the camps Auserd works to increase the number of women in higher political positions by raising awareness among women that young women can and have the capacity to be political representatives:

“We try to raise awareness among women that they should vote for young women, because they, unlike the old women, have an education, as well as making them understand that women in a better way than men represent the women and know what is needed in society for the woman to be able to develop, what she needs etc.” (Higga Hadi Mohammed Bolla - Principle of AFAD in Auserd)

According to her, it is a problem that women vote for men and not younger women at the time of elections, considering that the younger women have knowledge and in a better way than men can represent the women and understand women's needs in order for women to be and stay an active civic group. By sharing her view of this problem Higga demonstrates how she has realized that young women should have equal possibilities to access higher political positions like the old women do. She also shows that she is aware of what constitutes an obstacle for political representation among women and for young women to exercise their democratic citizenship by being politically active in the camps. Furthermore, Higga also asserts that by having access to these resources, she has come to disapprove with the present situation, and she also describes the necessary work that she and other women try to carry out. Their work includes activities that attempt to try and raise awareness among other women, to raise trust among women, but also in the long run to try and change the situation regarding low representation among women. Her

views show how important her access to gender-awareness and dignity is for her to be an active woman/citizen who is trying to influence not only her surroundings but also strengthen women as a civic group in society.

Institutionalized Networks, Coordinated Actions, and Self-organizations & Management

The Westsaharian women have access to several institutionalized networks through which they can spread knowledge, perform activities, and cooperate in order to be recognized in society, such as The National Union of Sahraoui Women (NUSW) and the women's schools.

Firstly I will describe NUSW, which is a political organization that represents all the women in the camps and that the majority of the women are members of. NUSW is the only political representation of questions related to women, and they are well established and represented at the national, regional, and local level in all four camps. It is an organization that mainly works to improve women's situation in the camps by raising awareness and knowledge among them and to improve their rights as equal citizens.

In regard to NUSW's role as an institutional network for women's active citizenship in the camps, I believe that the way Selma Cheikh describes how the organization has advanced in a good way shows their role:

“In addition to NUSW, before we had a department of elderly care. Before the congress we were united, but our responsible claimed that we needed to separate it into two, and today it is a ministry on its own with a responsible. This has made our work easier and we can focus more on other important questions now.”
(Selma Cheikh - President of NUSW's Executive Council in El-Ajoun)

According to Selma, president of the NUSW executive council in El-Ajoun, NUSW was earlier responsible for the elderly care in the camps, but through lobbying work and cooperation with the government they succeeded in making this become a separate governmental department. This change shows not only that their achievement has come

to relieve the NUSW's working area, making it possible for them to continue to work with other questions with the aim of improving to improve the Westsaharian women's situation, but also that they managed to get women's social responsibility to be officially recognized as a governmental social question. This accomplishment clearly shows that NUSW plays an important political role in the camps for women's active citizenship since they constitute a network through which women are able to carry out work with the aim to improve their rights and the conditions for their democratic citizenship.

If we continue to look at NUSW's work and organization, it is possible to see that NUSW is a well self-organized organization, and an organization that sets up campaigns, delegates and carries out activities with the aim to raise awareness among women by informing them about their rights as equal citizens:

“We get campaign directions from the national executive office that we forward to the dairas. This can be about that men are not allowed to do everything or take over certain domains, and that women have to stay active and continue to increase the high representation. This can happen through official meetings in the daira but also in the women's home, where an ordinary woman with experience go to talk and discuss with them and drink tea.” (Selma Cheikh - President of NUSW's Executive Council in El-Ajoun)

Selma Cheikh's description illustrates that the NUSW's decentralized system with communication between the organization's national, regional and local councils enables women in the camps to be active and act together as a unit. Women can thus perform activities in both the public but also the private sphere in order to not only nurture the groups' civic interests, but also to mutually reinforce the group in the camps. This indicates how important the organization is for women as active citizens, since it provides them with an institution through which they can be active. However, it is also an institution that by carrying out different activities tries to make other women understand the importance of being active in society and be represented on higher political positions in the camps.

The interviews also further point to the fact that the NUSW through their work has had and still has an encouraging impact on women's ability to be active citizens on a personal level, in the way that small groups of women during recent years have started to set up self-organized cooperatives that act outside the organization, and that perform activities on their own:

“[...] it was an idea that was launched in the NUSW's 4th congress in 2002, where they encouraged women to do this if they had spare time in the evenings, in addition to their daily work in the *daira*.” (Khadija Mohammed Ahmed – Member of a Women's Cooperative in El-Ajoun)

Khadija Mohammed is a member of a women's cooperative that she started in October 2003 along with three other women in the *daira* Amgala in El-Ajoun, after having been encouraged to do so by NUSW. What their quote illustrates is that NUSW plays a significant role for women as active citizens since their work have made women become active outside their regular work duties, in order to try and become as economically independent as possible, by producing merchandises on their own that they try to sell at the markets⁹⁵.

The NUSW does however not only work for women in order to mutually reinforce the group that they are representing. They also work to change men's attitudes, trying to make them understand that women and men need to work together in order for them to continue to develop as citizens and for the women to continue to be active citizens as they today are:

“Last year at the NUSW's yearly conference we invited men to participate but there was only very few men that came [...]. We have realized that we have to share the responsibility and the development with the men to be able to develop more in our society. Only with the participation of the men can we develop in harmony and without conflicts. We need unity and not two separate ways where we work on our own [...].” (Mahfoudha Mohammed Rahal - Secretary of State for Social Affairs)

⁹⁵ Observations that were further done during my time in the camps.

Mahfoudha Mohammed Rahal's quote above demonstrates the NUSW women's will to cooperate with men, in order for them to be able to work more efficiently, and in order for them to develop as women in the Westsaharian society. However, men showed little interest. Mahfoudha's and NUSW's effort clearly shows that the women are aware of existing power structures in their society. In addition, in order to try to overcome these injustices that prevent women from being more present than they are in the political arena, they are trying to find a way to overcome these problems. Their efforts further demonstrates that women not only have the responsibility to raise awareness among themselves, but also among men, in order to make men understand the importance of cooperation not only for the women to develop as a civic group, but also for the Westsaharian population to develop as a whole. In consequence, the low awareness and interest shown for their work can be understood as an inhibiting factor that makes it difficult for the women in the NUSW to continue and develop themselves and their work. The women's access to the organization and its activities remain, however as women are not able to develop their work the way they want to can be seen to have a restrictive effect on the women as active citizens.

Another important institutional network that exists in the camps and that the women have access to are the women schools. The women's schools are present in all camps and provide women that have interrupted their studies with the possibility to get a minor practical or theoretical degree⁹⁶. If we look at how the interviewees have described their perceptions of the women's schools, it can be seen that they play a vital role for the women as active citizens in various ways:

“For the women studying here at the women's school, it also gives them access to a meeting place, where they can meet, discuss, and take part of information from others, contributing to more women becoming active in the dairas.” (Higga Hadi Mohammed Bolla - Principle of AFAD in Auserd)

“Before I always wanted to go to Algeria to continue my studies, but now I do not need to. I feel relieved and being able to study here suits me better since it is close to home, and should I need to be away I can be granted an exemption from the school for a few days. [...] The centre has given me hope to be able to develop like I wish to. There is a great respect between the teachers and the

⁹⁶For example, Administration, Information, Arabic, Couture and Weaving.

students, and we have a very understanding principle.” (Dahba Takiyo Mohammed - Student at the Olof Palme School in Administration and Information in El-Ajoun)

As can be perceived both Higga Hadi Mohammed Bolla and Dahba Takiyo Mohammed in their quotes above describe the importance of the presence of the women’s school in the camps. Higga describes, from an educational and political point of view, that what the female students gain access to is not only an education, but moreover they gain access to an official meeting place where they can get and exchange information, discuss questions, and become more aware women. Unlike Higga, Dahba in view of the school’s importance describes a more practical reason: she claims that the closeness of the school to home allowed her to easily participate in class and get an education. What can be seen from her statement is that the closeness of the school is a necessity for her, as well as for women in the camps, because she has duties to fulfill at home. She would not be able to carry out these responsibilities if she would be away, and therefore the schools constitutes an important resource that makes it possible for her to be active and participate in this societal activity. When Dahba describes that should she need to be away from school for a couple of days, this would not cause any trouble because those responsible at the school are understanding of the women’s life situation clearly demonstrates that the school play a significant role as a solution for women to find a balance between social responsibility and personal development. This shows that the schools are not only important from a distance perspective but that they are tolerant and aware of the contextual situation that characterizes women’s daily lives. The schools’ approach makes it possible for the women to have access to the institution and its activities, and be active women despite their social responsibilities.

To conclude this section, following the analysis that shows that the women have access to different institutional networks (the NUSW and the women’s schools) that provide them with resources and attitudes enabling them to be active citizens, gain access to information and to some extent be self-organized etc., I now move on to look at the women’s access to the social attitude ‘collective agency’ and to see in what way this attitude plays a role for the Westsaharian women as active citizens.

Collective Agency

Women's access to collective agency makes women feel that they are a group that can interact with other groups, with faith in their own ability to manage and organize actions, make their voices heard, and influence policy.

During my interview with the NUSW's executive council in El-Ajoun, the youngest member, Mamia, described how important the present period (the period after the fire seize) is for her and other women, and how this have made them develop and become the active women that they are today:

“We call this period ‘the period without war or peace’. [...] it's an important period for us women because many things need to be developed, like for example political participation. Women like me have only during the last couple of years reached higher positions. For me this period of waiting has encouraged me to fight even more.” (Mamia - Member of the Executive Council in El-Ajoun)

To my belief, here one can see that Mamia expresses a feeling of being a woman who together with several other ones, due to the time of waiting in the camps, has been strengthened and more active as a citizen the last couple of years. As she mentions herself as an example of one of these women, she is today a person who believes in herself and has a wish to fight for an increased political representation of women in the Westsaharian society. She believes that she is able to influence policy and interact with others as a political representative. Her views show that by having access to this attitude she, along with other women, feels that they can and have the ability to be more politically active. In addition, it shows that their contextual situation plays an important role in their access to this attitude. In a time of waiting between a ceased armed conflict and a time where a peaceful solution is awaited, women like Mamia are seizing the moment to try to reach higher political positions and exercise political influence. One can therefore conclude in this case that this period of waiting encourages the women, and provides them with the possibility to develop and be active.

I also found the feeling of collective agency in other women's perceptions of

themselves and their role/duty as active citizens in the refugee camps:

“The hard thing about my work is that everything takes such a long time, since women’s causes can’t be developed quickly. Quick results often lead to forced results, due to dissatisfaction and weak development. We therefore have to work with a longer timeframe, which is more demanding.” (Fatma Mehdi - President of the NUSW National Council)

“We have to work together and strengthen each other, to get knowledge about how to work and meet the society. [...] participate in meetings where we can make our voices heard. Even within law and legislation we have to modify our rights by putting pressure on representatives within institutions.” (Meriam Mohammed Omar - Teacher at Olof Palmes School in El-Ajoun)

“Women are more aware of the importance of women’s representation in dairas [...]. In the coming दौरا elections in November 2004, I hope that we’ll be able to see a change.” (Ngiya Mohammed Salim – Member of a cell in Smara)

What can be perceived above is that all three of these women express a feeling of being part of a group that can, want to, and hopes to change and/or improve the situation for the women in the camps. Further, one can observe that they all transfer a feeling of determination that women together, by being active citizens and working for a development, will be able to see a change for women if they continue to stay active and exercise their citizenship in the public sphere where policy is exercised. With faith and strong determination in themselves of being a group that can progress by organizing activities and influencing policy, Fatma Mehdi, Meriam Mohammed Omar and Ngiya Mohammed Salim quotes’ show that by having access to this attitude, they have the intention and wish to exercise political influence and be active women. Their strong will can be traced to their access to these attitudes, which shows that in their case, this access have had an encouraging influence on their citizenship.

What the collected material however shows is that existing inhibiting factors limit women’s feeling of having the ability to interact with others and her surroundings, and influencing policy, factors that are of both internal and external contextual character:

“One of our problems is the long time of waiting. This results in women becoming less active, since they feel tired and want to rest after having worked so hard.” (Alouma Ibrahim Bati)

“I, we Westsaharian women, prefer if the woman takes care of her children. If she doesn't have any children, we vote for her [...]” (Zagouna Al-Athmani Mahjoub – Responsible for a Cell in a Hay in Smara)

Here Alouma Ibrahim Bati in her perception of the women's situation in the camps describes that fatigue is a present problem that makes the women passive and makes them lose the feeling of being able to interact with others because of the long waiting. Earlier in this section, we have been able to see that for some of the interviewed women, the time of waiting has an encouraging effect on them as active citizens. I can here see that the same contextual value at the same time for other women tend to have the opposite influence. This shows that the women's contextual situation tend to vary women's access to collective agency. Unlike her, Zagouna Al-Athmani Mahjoub in her description of women's role in society above, illustrates that due to a perception among women that their primary social responsibility is the family, women are deprived from possibilities to reach political responsible seats, by not having other women voting for them. In consequence, this perception may itself have an inhibiting effect on the women as a group, thus making it difficult to develop a feeling of being a group that can interact and influence policy, since this mentality restricts the group's possibility to gain access to this attitude.

Group Identity, Trust, and Solidarity

In the last section of this analysis about the Westsaharian women's perceived access to resources and attitudes and in what way these factors play a role for their active citizenship, I will now focus on their access to group identity, trust, and solidarity. These three attitudes interrelate in many ways, all relating to the feeling of belonging to a group where trust, affinity, and spirit of community exist and strengthen the group in itself and society.

If we look at group identity, I have been able to perceive that there are different kinds of group identities that the women have access to and that they identify with: feelings of

kinship that exist amongst women, but also amongst Muslim citizens where women are part of this group. These are two kinds of kinship that are perceived to play an important role for the women as active citizens and their ability to continue to be active:

“I help my sisters with their children and to clean in the morning before she and I go to work.” (Fatimettou Mohammed Maoloud – Teacher at AFAD in Auserd)

“[...] during mother’s day one can go and write in the dairas’ encouraging and commendatory letter to women in the occupied territories for their work and strength in the struggle against the Moroccan occupation.” (Selma Cheikh - President of NUSW’s Executive Council in El-Ajoun)

“We believe a lot in our God. Even if I live in misery, I strongly believe in his help regarding our situation. The belief gives us strength, hope to one day receive justice and fight for a goal, a common goal – our freedom and independence.” (Najat Omar Basali – Student at AFAD in Auserd)

“We have a religious belief that we have to work together to be able to succeed and make good things for other people.” (Mamia - Member of the Executive Council in El-Ajoun)

What can be seen from the quotes above is that the kinship and affinity amongst women does not only exist amongst women in the camps, it is also a feeling that exists between Westsaharian women in the camps and women living in occupied Western Sahara. If we look at Fatimettou Mohammed Maoloud’s description of herself and how she helps her sister in the morning with the children and household duties before work, this signals a bond of solidarity between her and her sister, a bond that makes them help each other in order to ease the social responsibility that they have as women. What it also shows is that, in the case of Fatimettou, she seems to identify herself with her sister in the way that she recognizes the obligations that she and her sister have as women, resulting in her helping her out before they both go to work. This kind of unity that exists among the two of them is also described by Selma Cheikh. However, in her view of Westsaharian women’s solidarity, she describes that the unity is between all Westsaharian women, those women who live in the camps and those women who live in the occupied territories. However, the level of unity that exists amongst women continues even beyond that, as can be understood from Najat Omar Basali and Mamia’s quotes which both describe that amongst women there exists a feeling of kinship on a

spiritual level that plays an important role for them as active citizens. By having a common and firm belief in God, whom they believe in the end will help them from their miserable situation as refugees in exile, gives them hope and strength to continue to be active and fight for their rights. It is therefore possible to conclude and claim that access to solidarity and group identity within different groups plays a significant role for the women, since it encourages them and their ability to be active and work for an improved civic situation.

In continuing to analyze the women's access to solidarity, the women's perceptions show that there is a presence of activities that are carried out by women in order to make other women become more active citizens. Zaina Mohammed Salim gives examples of this type of civic work when describing the work that she does in order to educate young women:

“I give Spanish lessons to younger women at home as a volunteer. I have done it for two years, and teach women that do not have the possibility to study in the women's school for various reasons. [...] We start with the letters but the learning goes very slowly because of the lack of material. I only have one book, and therefore I have to write everything on the blackboard, which the students then copy. [...] My course is organized and supported by the NUSW who provides me with my material.” (Zaina Mohammed Salim - Volunteer Teacher in Auserd)

Zaina is a woman who works as a volunteer in the camp Auserd. With the support of the NUSW, she gives Spanish lessons in her home to young women that do not have or have not had the possibility to study in the women's school that exists in the camp. What her and NUSW's involvement in this question shows is that not only are they aware of the illiteracy that women suffer from, but also that due to the existence of a feeling of kinship among women, activities are carried out in order to help and strengthen other women who lack access to resources. Zaina further describes that what constituted an obstacle in her solidarity work is the lack of material which slows down the process of learning. Despite this she however carries on her work, using the little material she has. From the description of her work premises, one can perceive that behind the feeling of kinship among women, there is a firm determination to not let

their activities be held up by their poor situation. This determination together with solidarity, enables her to be active and work to improve the civic situation for other women.

Moving on to look at the women's access to trust, I have however been able to perceive that there is a lack of access to this attitude among women which has been described by some of the interviewees:

“We need to organize more meetings where we inform other women that they have to have faith in other women, because they fight more for women's rights, and because they have the knowledge and can exercise politics, like men. We must get women to vote for other women.” (Khadgetto Mohammed Salim Liman - Member of NUSW's Executive Council in Smara)

“Most of today's young women are educated in a foreign country and have in many cases brought along traditions and thoughts with them from these cultures. Many women fear that they want to try and implement these in Westsaharian society, which is why they are not elected.” (Najat Omar Basali – Student at AFAD in Auserd)

Khadgetto Mohammed Salim Liman and Najat Omar Basali's quotes above demonstrate the different dimensions of the lack of trust that exists amongst women in the camps. Khadgetto describes that women do not have faith in each other because there is a lack of information and awareness of the fact that women are as capable as men to exercise political influence and that women need to vote for women who run in elections because they, to a greater extent than male representatives, work for women's common interest and development. Khadgetto's claim clarifies that the lack of trust that exists amongst women and towards their ability to act can be seen to have an inhibiting effect on not only women's possibility to access higher political positions, but also on women's possibilities to nurture their common civic interest on a political level. This lack of trust that women's have does however not seem to be as high towards male representatives and their ability to act, since it from Khadgetto's quote is possible to perceive that women to a greater extent vote for men and not for women at times of election.

It is further confirmed that there is a lack of trust within the women's own group when we look at how Najat Omar Basali describes this problem. Her quote nevertheless shows that within the group, the lack of confidence to a greater extent specifically seems to be towards young women and their ability to be suitable political representatives. According to Najat, many women fear that the young women, who most of them were educated abroad, might try to implement values and traditions that they developed and brought along from these countries (a problem that should also concern young men that return from their studies abroad, however this is only something that I can speculate about). From Najat's claim, it is possible to perceive that, like in Khagdetto's quote, due to the lack of confidence amongst women, women are not able to advance politically. It is further most difficult for young women to do so. In addition, what can be seen is that culture-conservatism is a contextual value that has an inhibiting effect upon the women's access to trust, since it makes women fear young women's intentions. In consequence, this prevents young women to be active citizens within the Westsaharian establishment. To conclude, it is therefore possible to see that there is a relevant relation between women's lack of trust toward each other and women's ability to be active citizens on a higher political level.

In ending this chapter of analysis where I have described the Westsaharian women's perceived access to resources and attitudes within human and social capital and how these factors play a role for their active citizenship, I will now move on to present the study's results. With the support of the information that the analysis has been able to provide, I will in the following chapter answer the questions that were posed at the beginning of this study.

6. Result and Conclusion

Which resources and attitudes are by the Westsaharian women perceived to play a significant role for their active citizenship?

In theory, empowerment of women's democratic citizenship has been described as a complex phenomenon. It includes both resources and attitudes within human and social capital that women should have access to in order to be empowered democratic citizens. After having studied the Westsaharian women's perceptions of themselves and their lives, I have been able to distinguish that there are several individual and collective resources and attitudes that they perceive to play a significant role for their active citizenship. The results also show that there is an attitude that has an inhibiting role on it.

Human Capital:

Human Resources:

What the study shows is that among all the individual resources that are included in the theoretical framework, the women perceive all of them to play an important role for their active citizenship. Starting with *reading- and writing abilities*, it has been seen that access to this resource allows women to gain access to information in society, further and/or higher education, and be updated citizens involved within societal questions/work. The result is interesting since it shows the relevancy of this resource in relation to women's empowerment as citizens. Many written reports about empowerment of women's civic participation emphasize that reading- and writing abilities is a relevant resource⁹⁷. However, in their theories neither Rowlands nor Hadenius mention this resource as an important factor for citizens to have access to.

Another resource that is perceived to have the same relevancy is *practical knowledge/education*. This is also a factor that neither Hadenius nor Rowlands in their theories point out, but that the study has shown to be of significance for women's active citizenship, since it enables them to participate in societal activities/work and perform

⁹⁷ The complete discussion can be found in chapter 3.5.

coordinated activities on their own. A third resource that neither Hadenius nor Rowlands mention to be of importance to have access to is *determination*. The study however shows that this resource is of significance for the women as active citizens. It is a factor that, according to the women's perceptions, can be seen to have an encouraging effect on women's will and wish to be active, to involve themselves within societal activities/work, and to try and make other women become aware and active.

Nonetheless, *political competence* is a significant resource in order for a citizen to act with capacity which is in line with Hadenius' and Rowlands' theories. This study confirms the above claim, since it shows that the Westsaharian women's perceived access to political awareness has made them take part in activities to exercise political influence. The study also shows that *independence* and *capacity* are two resources that play important roles for the women as active citizens. By having access to them, women think that they have enough ability to act, and make decision that concerns themselves and their work/role within both the public and the private sphere which has made it possible for them to be and stay active, a result that can be related to Hadenius and Rowlands, who also emphasize that these are important factors to have access to.

Human Attitudes:

Looking at human attitudes, the study shows that like in the case of human resources, the women perceive all the individual attitudes that are included in the theoretical framework to play an important role for their active citizenship. This result therefore confirms Hadenius' claim about the importance to include these as factors within research related to the democratic citizenship, and that one should not only focus on resources.

What the study shows is that *development of a political interest* and *wish to exercise political influence* play a perceived significant role for the women as active citizens in the way that access to them enables women to be involved within political institutions at both the local, regional, and national level in the camps. This involvement makes it possible for them to influence their surroundings and situation not only as women but also as Westsaharian citizens. These are two attitudes that Hadenius emphasizes as important,

although not Rowlands. She instead claims that the attitudes *sense of agency*, *self-esteem*, *self-confidence*, and *dignity* are important for women to have access to in order to be empowered. Her claim corresponds with the study's result that shows that all four factors are attitudes that the women perceive to have an important encouraging effect on them as active individuals. With access to the aforementioned four factors, the women think that they have the right to be treated like equal citizens, with the same possibilities as men to be elected in as representatives on political positions, developed faith that they can and have the ability to be active, which has made them fight for their rights and involve themselves in societal activities in the camps.

Social Capital:

Social Resources:

Moving on to look at which social resources that the Westsaharian women perceive to play a significant role for their active citizenship, the study shows that *gender-awareness* along with *dignity* are important factors to have access to, a claim also made by Rowlands in her theory. With access to these attitudes, thinking that they have the right to be treated like equal citizens and being aware of injustices that are present in society, this have made the women fight for equal premises to exercise their democratic citizenship and not accept the existing power structures. Further, in conformity with both Rowlands and Hadenius, the study shows that access to *institutionalized networks*, *coordinated activities*, and *self-organization & management* are also perceived to play an important role for the women as active citizens. They have not only made it possible for women to be a part of an organizations (NUSW and the women's schools) where they can practice their citizenship and participate in activities, but they have also enabled women to on their own act as a unit in order to improve their and other women's situation in society. All collective resources within the theoretical framework can therefore be seen to play a relevant role for the Westsaharian women as active citizens.

Social Attitudes:

Unlike social resources, women do not perceive all collective attitudes to play a significant role for them as active citizens. If we look at *trust*, the study shows that due to

a lack of trust among women, this attitude does not have an encouraging role for the women's active citizenship. Instead, distrust restricts the women's ability to act and have access to higher political positions. Unlike trust, *group identity* and *solidarity* are however attitudes that, according to the women, play an important role for them as an active civic group. Both Rowlands and Hadenius point out these two attitudes in their theories. *Group identity* and *solidarity* can be seen to be of importance since the study not only shows that access to a feeling of kinship makes women help other women for them to be able to be active and gain access to resources, but also since it makes them continue to be active and fight for their rights as Westsaharian citizens. Unlike Hadenius, Rowlands also stresses *collective agency* as an important factor to have access to in order for women to be empowered. In the case of the Westsaharian women, collective agency can be perceived to have a significant role for their active citizenship, since the access to this attitude makes women feel that they can and have the ability to act and be politically active.

Finally, a resource that neither Rowlands nor Hadenius point out in their theories but that this study has come to show is of significance for the women's active citizenship, is *unity*. This is an attitude that makes women support each other to be able to stay active and work for the group's common interest as women, but also as Westsaharian citizens. It is therefore a relevant factor that plays an important role for them as active citizens.

Summary

To summarize the answer of the posed question, it is possible to see that there are several resources and attitudes within both human and social capital that the Westsaharian women perceive to play an important role for them as active citizens. These are factors that are emphasized in the general theories used in this study, but also factors that are not pointed out in them. Using the theoretical framework in this study and modifying it from the result that has been presented above, the factors that play a perceived significant role

for the women’s active citizenship can be summarized in the following way:

	HUMAN CAPITAL	SOCIAL CAPITAL
R E S O U R C E	Reading- and writing abilities Practical education Capacity Independence Political competence Determination	Gender-awareness Dignity Institutionalized networks Coordinated actions Self-organization & management
A T T I T U D E	Dignity Sense of agency Self-esteem Self-confidence Develop a political interest Wish to exercise political influence	Collective agency Group identity Solidarity Unity

As can be seen, the individual resources ‘practical education’ and ‘determination’ have been added to human capital, showing all human factors that the women perceive to play an important role for them as active citizens. Based on the same principle, ‘trust’ have been removed and replaced by ‘unity’ within social capital. This provides a clear summarized picture of the resources and attitudes that play a significant role for the Westsaharian women’s empowered democratic citizenship in the refugee camps.

Which inhibiting and encouraging factors are perceived to affect the women's resources and attitudes that play a significant role for their active citizenship?

In relation to the analysis of women's access to resources and attitudes and how these factors are perceived to play a role for their active citizenship, I have been able to identify contextual factors that the women perceive to have an inhibiting or encouraging effect on their resources and attitudes.

If we begin to look at encouraging contextual factors, that the women perceive to positively affect their access to resources and attitudes, *the war* and *the fact that they live in a conflict as refugees in exile*, can be seen as such factors. What the study shows is that this historical and environmental factor influences the women to become and be aware of their political situation and to want to change and try to influence it. One can therefore see that contextual factors raise the women's political competence, political interest, and wish to exercise political influence. Their *situation as refugees in exile* including *the long wait for a peaceful solution* and *the weather circumstances* can nevertheless also be seen to have an inhibiting effect on the women's access to resources and attitudes. The women's views show that due to their difficult situation, women are becoming tired and risk becoming politically inactive citizens (capacity). Another contextual factor in the analysis that can be seen to have an inhibiting effect on the women's capacity is the women's *social responsibility*. The women's perceptions demonstrates that due to women being the primary caretakers of the family and household, this makes it difficult for them to be active to the extent that many wish to be. Since there is a need for them to fulfill this demand and try and find a balance between work and family, women have to struggle to continue to be active on a professional level.

Finally, the women's perceptions show that *the presence of a patriarchal system* in the camps has an inhibiting effect on the women's access to sense-of agency, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Men dominate political positions at national and regional levels, and view themselves as more capable than women to work as a responsible in political positions. This view that they also share with women that they encounter in their

work, make women believe that they do not have the needed capacity and ability to be politically active citizens at a higher level.

To summarize, it can be seen that there are various contextual factors of different nature that the interviewed Westsaharian women perceive to have either an inhibiting or an encouraging effect on their access to resources and attitudes that play a significant role for their active citizenship. Among the identified contextual factors, the inhibiting factors dominate.

7. Concluding Words

The Westsaharian women's active civic presence in the Westsaharian refugee camps made me become interested in studying which characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes that characterize their democratic citizenship. Before I began to work on this study, my knowledge about empowerment of women's democratic citizenship and resources and attitudes that can be related to it was limited. What the analysis shows is that empowerment of women's democratic citizenship is indeed a complex phenomenon. It is thus to my belief that this study have provided good insight into which characteristics in terms of resources and attitudes that can characterize women's empowered citizenship. I find it important to claim that I have only enlightened this social problem by looking at one case, and that other cases would probably give a differentiated result since the empowerment of women's democratic citizenship is a highly individual process. The aim of this study was however not to generalize but instead to describe a specific case in order to show which resources that are significant for women to be active citizens. I believe I have fulfilled this aim by describing the Westsaharian women's access to resources and attitudes and which of these factors that they perceive to play an important role for them as active citizens.

This study has focused on active women in the camps and their characteristics. In the future it would be interesting to study which resources and attitudes that other categories of women perceive are significant for their citizenship, and see how and if the result would differ from the result of this study. Another interesting question to dig deeper into, also relating to the Westsaharian women's citizenship, would be the women's access to factors and their significance for them as active citizens after their independence and return to their country. This is a future development that I hope will take place and further strengthen the women's as citizens.

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2 May 2004, Fatma Mehdi – President of the NUSW's National Council.

Group:

12 April 2004, The NUSW's Executive Council in Smara.

13 April 2004, Two Nurses at the Hospital in Smara.

19 April 2004, The NUSW's Executive Council in Auserd.

21 April 2004, Women's Cooperative in Auserd.

24 April 2004, Student at the Wall of Shame in the Liberated Areas.

27 April 2004, Members in a Hay in El-Ajoun.

27 April 2004, The NUSW's Executive Council in El-Ajoun.

28 April 2004, Women's Cooperative in El-Ajoun.

Other Sources:

Naafa Mohammed Salem, Polisario's Nordic Representative in Stockholm/ Sweden.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1: Acronyms

ABF: The Workers Education Association (Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund)

AFAD: Association des Femmes Algeriennes de Developpement

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

IDP: Internally Displaced People

GEM: Gender Empowerment Measure

HEGOA: Instituto de Estudios sobre Desarrollo y Cooperación Internacional Nazioarteko
Lankidetzeta eta Garapenari Buruzko Ikasketa Institutua Universidad del País Vasco

NGO: Non Governmental Organization

NUSW: The National Union of the Sahraoui Women

OAU: The Organization of African Unity

SADR: The Sahraoui Arab Democratic Republic

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Appendix 2: Questions of Coding

1. Which resource/ attitude does the woman have access to? (both from the theory but also other ones – these can also be prerequisite ones)
2. Which resource/ attitude does the woman describe to have access to?
3. In what way does this resource/ attitude play a role for her as an active citizen?
4. In what way does the woman describe this resource/ attitude to play a role for her as an active citizen?
5. Which contextual value has an inhibiting or encouraging effect on her resource/ attitude?
6. Which contextual value does the woman describe to have an inhibiting or encouraging effect on her resource/ attitude?
7. How does this contextual value have an inhibiting or encouraging effect on her resource/ attitude?
8. How does the woman describe this contextual value to have an inhibiting or encouraging effect on her resource/ attitude?

Appendix 3: Some Important Historical Dates

- 1884 The Berlin conference. Western Sahara is assigned to Spain.
- 1912 The borders of Western Sahara are drawn by France and Spain.
- 1934 Spanish and French troops occupy inner Western Sahara by crushing Westsaharian resistance.
- 1947 A Spanish geologist discovers phosphate resources in Western Sahara.
- 1956 Spanish-French troops crush Westsaharian resistance again.
- 1960 The United Nations adopt the “decolonization declaration”.
- 1966 The United Nations urges/ encourages Spain to leave Western Sahara.
- 17 June 1970 Spanish military fires at Westsaharian demonstration in El Ajoun.
- 10 May 1973 Polisario Front is founded.
- 1974 Spain conducts a census of population in Western Sahara. The Westsaharian population is estimated to be 73 497 persons.
- May 1975 A UN commission pays a visit to Western Sahara.
- 16 Oct. 1975 The International Court in Hague rejects Morocco’s and Mauritania’s claim on Westsaharian territory.
- 06 Nov. 1975 Morocco performs the “Green Marsh” moving Moroccan settlers into Westsaharian territory.
- 14 Nov. 1975 The Madrid agreement between Morocco, Mauritania and Spain about Western Sahara is signed.
- Nov. 1975 Mauritanian and Moroccan troops invade Western Sahara.
- Nov. 1975 &
- March 1976 Westsaharians flee eastwards into Algeria.
- 26 Feb. 1976 Spain officially leaves Western Sahara.
- 26 Feb. 1976 Polisario proclaims the new republic SADR.
- Feb. 1976 The UN’s envoy pays a visit to Western Sahara.
- 09 June 1976 Polisario’s leader El Ouali dies during an attack against Nouakchott
- 1976-1979 War between Polisario’s armed branch and Morocco/ Mauritanian armies.
- 1979 Mauritania proclaims peace with Polisario, after a coup d’etat in the country.

- 1979-1991 War between Polisario's armed branch and Moroccan army.
- 1981-1991 The "Wall of Shame" of build by Morocco, splitting Western Sahara into two parts.
- 1984 SADR becomes a member of OAU
- 1988 Morocco and Polisario accept OAU/ UN's peace suggestion
- 1990 The UN adopts a peace plan
- 29 Apr. 1991 The UN troop Minurso is created
- June 1991 King Hassan in Morocco presents a new list with 120.000 names that he wants to add to the census of population made in 1974.
- Aug. 1991 Morocco bombs liberated parts in Western Sahara
- 06 Sept. 1991 Fire truce between Polisario and Morocco
- Sept. 1991 A second "Green Marsh" is performed into Western Sahara by Morocco
- 19 Dec. 1991 The UN's general secretary Perez de Cuellar presents new criteria for entitled to vote.
- 20 Dec. 1991 The UN representative Johannes Manz resigns in protest.
- June 1993 A third "Green Marsh"
- June 1994 A fourth "Green Marsh"
- 25 Jan. 1995 Frank Ruddy, an official within Minurso, reports that Minurso has turned into a Moroccan instrument.
- Feb. 1995 A fifth "Green Marsh"
- 19 Nov. 1995 The Moroccan prisoners that were released by Polisario in 1989 are given permission to return to their country.
- May 1996 The UN Security Council decide to postpone the identification process and reduce the Minurso troops.
- March 1997 James Baker is appointed to the UN general secretary's special official in Western Sahara.
- Sept. 1997 Houston agreement between Morocco and Polisario. The referendum is set to December 7, 1998.
- Dec. 1997 The identification commission resumes its work.
- Spring 1998 Morocco delays the identification process

- June 1998 Sweden sends 75 men to participate in Minurso's mine removal in Western Sahara. Morocco prevents them from doing their work.
- May 2001 James Baker III presents a draft "Framework agreement on the status of Western Sahara" to the Polisario Front and Algerian government.
- 2002 The UN decides to keep its force in the Western Sahara as the Moroccan king claims Morocco will never concede the territory.
- 2003 Polisario Front releases 550 Moroccan prisoners, some detained over twenty years. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) repatriates them to Morocco.
- May 2003 The Secretary-General proposes a new "Peace plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara".
- July 2003 Polisario Front announces its acceptance of the UN Peace Plan. The Plan would make Western Sahara a semi-autonomous part of Morocco for a transition period of up to five years, before a referendum would allow voters to choose between independence, continued self-autonomy or integration with Morocco.
- 31 July 2003 Morocco rejects UN Peace Plan.
- Aug. 2003 The UN Secretary General designates Alvaro De Soto as his Special Representative for the Western Sahara.
- June 2004 James Baker resigns as Personal Envoy of the Secretary General to the Western Sahara.
- Sept. 2004 South Africa officially recognizes SADR as a state.
- 28 Oct. 2004 The Security Council extends the MINURSO mandate until April 30 2005.
- Oct. 2004 Moroccan Government unveiled a five-year \$800 million development program for all its 'southern provinces', including the territory of Western Sahara.
- 30 April 2005 Minurso's mandate finishes.

Appendix 4: Map of Western Sahara

