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Are you a feminist, nationalist or both? A comparative case study of the intersectional struggle of Sahrawi and Kurdish female activists in the diaspora

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Preface

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people without whom I could not have achieved the result of this master thesis. First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the participating women in this study who have shared their time, as well as their personal opinions and stories with me. I would especially like to thank Orhan and Leila, who did everything they could to help me get in touch with these women. Without them, it would never have worked.

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This thesis is dedicated to all the women who strive for social justice, challenge inequality, and set an example for future generations.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis

NUSW = National Union of Sahrawi Women

PKK = Kurdistan Workers' Party

POLISARIO = Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro

SADR = Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

SWANA region = Southwest Asian/ North African region

TFN theoretical framework = transnational feminist theoretical framework

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1   Introduction

1.1   Research puzzle

Women taking the lead in the fight for their country: an image that is still unfamiliar to many. In particular, women from the SWANA (Southwest Asian/ North African) region. When they take up arms or play the leading role in an independence movement, it is still too often labelled as an exception (Chatty & Rabo, 2020). The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the opposite by means of a comparative case study. More specifically, this thesis will explore the intersectional relationship between national liberation movements and women's rights movements, within diasporas.

For the sake of this research, a comparative case study of two diaspora groups originating from the SWANA region will be performed. The two diaspora groups studied in this thesis are the Kurds and the Sahrawi. Until now both ethnic groups have fought for peace and freedom to break free from the oppression and non-recognition that they are suffering in their native nations. A qualitative research will be conducted by carrying out semi-structured interviews with Kurdish women in the Belgian diaspora and Sahrawi women in the Spanish diaspora. The purpose of these interviews is to examine how nationalist peace activism intersects with gender-based activism.

This thesis aims to break the stigma of the roles of women in national struggles as either passive actors or victims. Additionally, this research will emphasize the importance of acknowledging the various underlying intersectional political motivations of these women, that is still too often overlooked within social movement theories. This research intends to contribute to studies on third-world movements, diaspora and-social movements and transnational feminism.

1.2   Historical introduction

To set the scene for my research, a historical background of both ethnic groups will be given, with the intent of introducing the intersectional political struggle between national freedom movements and women's activism.

Since 1975, the Sahrawi, traditionally a nomadic people native to the western part of the Sahara desert, have lived dispersed across Algerian refugee camps. This was the result of an invasion by Morocco and Mauritania, following the unsuccessful withdrawal of the Spanish colonizer. To this day, the Sahrawi have been marginalized by the repressive state of Morocco, with most of them continuing to live in camps or in diasporas dispersed around the globe (Allan, 2010; Solana, 2021).

It was also during the 1970s that independence from the colonizer was explicitly declared for the first time. This was accompanied by the rise of the national Sahrawi liberation movement, which from then on went under the name 'POLISARIO'. The refugee camps, having been expanded with all kinds of facilities and infrastructures in the meantime, provided opportunities for the movement to develop and pursue its discourse more deeply (2010, 2014). The Sahrawi, a group that still enjoys far too little attention within the academic world, will form one of the two case studies of this research. After years of repression and marginalization by the colonizers, France, Spain, and ultimately Morocco, a discourse regarding their national independence struggle has evolved, which desired to be liberated of all oppressive notions (Allan, 2010; Solana, 2021).

Central to this was the idea of an egalitarian society, in which equality between women and men would be a necessary premise for the society within the newly imagined nation-state (Allan, 2010, 2014). Considering women as equal was a way for POLISARIO to oppose their greatest enemy. That is, 'backward' Morocco, where, according to them, women have no voice (Allan, 2014).

The Kurdish diaspora will form the second case study of this thesis. Consisting of 25 million people, the Kurds are the largest stateless group in the world (McDowall, 2007). They originally lived as tribal groups scattered over present-day Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and partly Iran. Since the beginning of modern times, they have been fighting against these countries that did not acknowledge their identity. They have been discriminated against and marginalized at all levels, partly due to the lack of established cultural elements such as Kurdish literature (McDowall, 2007). To understand the Kurds today, one must look at the two main issues that have preoccupied the entire Kurdish population for decades. The first is the battle for sovereignty of the Kurdish territories between the Kurdish people and the governments to which they are subjected, and the second involves the Kurds' struggle to transition from merely being a group with features often defined as "Kurdish" to being a cohesive community with the main values of nationhood (McDowall, 2007).

The Kurdish freedom movement and subsequent demand for an independent state began in the 1980s, along with the emergence of the Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK. They conducted their struggle against a political system in Turkey that considered minority groups to be unworthy of support. One of the founding students of the Kurdistan Workers Party was Abdullah Öcalan (Öcalan & Happel, 2011). He has been a political prisoner since 1988, sentenced to life by Turkey with the help of the United States. Since his imprisonment, Öcalan has written several books advocating for a democratic and peaceful solution to the conflict and is regarded as one of the most important revolutionary political leaders of Kurdish liberation (Öcalan & Happel, 2011). Öcalan asserts that the Kurds should strive for an extreme form of democracy, thus implying an egalitarian society, according to the book 'Building Free Life', edited by International Initiative: "Freedom for Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan" (Int.Init) (INTINIT, 2020). Furthermore, he sees how Palestinian women take up arms for their country and expects Kurdish women to do the same (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018).

The similarity in discourse and subsequent 'conditions' set by both movements, necessary to pursue an independent state, are striking. A renowned researcher who has conducted several studies on the Sahrawi writes the following: "The emancipation of women, therefore, became

one more (necessary) step in the process of national liberation" (Allan, 2010, p. 190). This sentence can be traced back to the discourse of the Kurdish freedom movement (INIT, 2020). The ideology of this movement is based on the ideas of Kurdish leader, Öcalan. Similar to the Sahrawi, the ideology gets its inspiration from Marxist theories, a school that was rather influential at the time (INTINIT, 2020).

With this brief introduction to the roots of both groups' national struggles, as well as the implied way in which the positions of women are understood inside their envisioned state, I hope to explain how these intersectional political conflicts are constructed. With this thesis, I aim to investigate how female activists in both revolutions see their national fight as a battle against the patriarchal system. Additionally, I would like to investigate how they situate their positioning toward the repressive state in a post-colonial context.

1.3   Research questions

This brings us to the following research question, which this research will attempt to answer: **"How do we understand the intersection of female liberation & national liberation? A comparative case study between Kurdish and Sahrawi female diaspora activism.".** The subsequent hypothesis is that women in both movements place their struggle for an independent state within certain ideologies of gender equality.

The Kurdish women's movement enjoys great attention within academic circles, in contrast to Sahrawi's women's movement. Therefore, it is necessary to gain more knowledge about this group through research. Additionally, women from the SWANA region are still often portrayed as powerless, veiled women who cannot have a role or influence within activist movements by the West (Chatty & Rabo, 2020). The purpose of this research is to emphasize the visibility of women's agency.

Based on the similarities between both movements, deductible in the foregoing outline, a comparative study was performed between these cases. Earlier research on women's movements never made a comparison between the Kurds and the Sahrawi. This analogy can

help us better comprehend the motivations of female diaspora activists who engage at the nexus of nationalism and feminism.

Through semi-structured interviews with women, part of the Kurdish or Sahrawi diaspora and who identify themselves as activists, an effort will be made to answer the main research question.

2 Literature Study

2.1 Conceptual design

The research question mentioned before already implied some terms that need more clarification, which will now briefly be defined and clarified. These terms and concepts will frequently recur throughout this thesis and therefore it is important to indicate how they should be interpreted.

The first term is intersectionality. It is derived from the Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research. The term is defined as follows: "intersectionality has been used to understand women's experiences at the intersections of a number of simultaneous oppressions including race, class, caste, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status, geographical location, religion, and so on." (Väyrynen et al., 2021, p. 5, as cited in Crenshaw, 1989). The term is also used by many researchers as a strategy to transcend traditional and abstract categorization by analyzing the structures that sustain violence and oppression in an intersectional manner (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2021, p. 5).

Within postcolonial studies, the use of words is extremely important, but also delicate, since language and words themselves can inherently reflect a colonial legacy. This way, words never questioned before are redefined and reinterpreted, thereby revealing potential inherent colonial structures that are hidden until today and reproduced through cultural expressions, such as language (Ashcroft et al., 2007).

For these reasons, I want to clarify the use of the word 'SWANA region' throughout this whole thesis. This term is a decolonial word that is used instead of, for example, Middle East, Arab World, or Islamic World, because these words have an inherent colonial and orientalist connotation. These words also devalue the diversity of the multiple communities present in the region. The term is also used regularly within transnational feminism (SWANA Alliance, n.d.). Since this research is written from a feminist postcolonial perspective, the use of words and

language are considered to be extremely important. For this reason, the word 'SWANA' was chosen.

The term diaspora appears in the research question and therefore requires a brief definition. The word 'diaspora' originates from Ancient Greece. It was originally used to refer to the exile of the Jewish people. Later, the term was also used to refer to other ethnic groups, such as the African or Armenian people that were displaced. This gave the term a broader meaning and referred no longer exclusively to Jewish people, but also included other migrant groups who were forced to leave their homeland (Féron, 2021, p. 428, as cited in Bruneau, 2004).

In the following literature review, these, and other concepts that play a role in this research will be further discussed and contextualized through a layout of the various debates surrounding them.

2.2 Literature review

This thesis is situated within the research domains of social movements, national movements, women's movements, diaspora groups and activism, and the various intersections that exist between them. In order to properly situate the topic, this literature review will attempt to introduce the most significant authors, theories, and associated controversies within each of these disciplines.

2.2.1 Women in national movements

A first theory that is explored more in-depth is that of third-world feminism, a concept which links women's movements to national struggles. Author Geraldine Heng (1996) identified its three main principles which together provide the meaning of this concept and therefore demonstrate how the two cases that will be explored in this thesis can be classified under this concept.

The first characteristic of third-world feminism described by Heng (1996) is that the movement is heavily influenced by its past. In addition, Heng (1996) argues that feminism in the third world has, almost without exception, always emerged in conjunction with a national struggle. These were anti-imperialist struggles, modernization movements, or the emergence of religious counter-movements. The second principle is based on the premise that the state itself has always played a role in this process, for example as an exploiter. A third component concerns the nation and the situation in which it finds itself since she claims that with the introduction of modernity, third-world nations have always suffered from significant ambivalence (Heng, 1996).

According to author Heng (1996), feminist movements in the Third World can take many different forms. They can be organized movements that have a lengthy history and comprise many networks or movements that develop in times of crisis, such as female guerrilla organizations that pick up guns and build a movement in a specific situation. Feminist groups that focus on local problems and exist only temporarily can also fall under third-world feminism. Additionally, it should be noted that some of these groups within third-world feminism refuse to call themselves feminists (Heng, 1996). The concept and the resulting theories on third-world feminism are particularly relevant to mention in this literature review, as the two research cases of this thesis can be placed under 'third-world feminism'.

When reviewing literature of women's movements regarding nationalism, a primary debate in this literature quickly becomes apparent. This revolves around how women's demands are often seen as secondary within national freedom movements, once the goal of independence is achieved (Chadya, 2003; Pratt, 2020; Ray & Korteweg, 1999). The other side of the debate revolves around how some researchers have been arguing how nationalism and feminism are inseparably linked (Allan, 2019). In fact, nationalism can reinforce the goals of feminist movements, especially in contexts of neo-colonialism (Allan, 2019, p. 96 as cited in West, 1997).

Just as nationalism can contribute to feminist goals, third-world feminists are also susceptible to manipulation by nationalists (Chadya, 2003; Allan, 2010). For example, author Heng (1996)

indicates that 'third-world feminism' is often used by nationalists to portray a progressive Western image of themselves, for various reasons from which they can benefit. Author Allan's (2010) work is clearly linked to this argument. She investigates the role and portrayal of gender in the discourse of POLISARIO, the Sahrawi independence movement. Her study forms one of the foundational studies for this thesis. She concludes that when one takes a first look at POLISARIO's discourse, it is presented as rather progressive (Allan, 2010). The emancipation of women within the Sahrawian society is of great importance and has its success. The next section will elaborate on Allan's research, but she claims that when one takes a closer look at the discourse and texts of the movement, a nuance needs to be made (Allan, 2010).

In this debate surrounding feminist and anti-colonial struggles, third-world feminists argue that breaking free from colonial domination without considering women's independence is unthinkable (Chadya, 2003). The classic example of Palestinian women is cited in several articles (Cárdenas & Hëdström, 2021; Ray & Korteweg, 1999). Specific research on this is from author Dajani (1994). He focuses on the social liberation of Palestinian women within their resistance effort against Israel. Authors Ray & Korteweg (1999) summarize Dajani's (1994) research as follows: "the struggle for women's rights and the struggle for socio-economic and national self-determination become one and the same" (Ray & Korteweg, 1999, p. 57). Also relevant to mention is the claim that movements, consisting only of women, with the main goal of national freedom, give them the possibility to be gender-aware of themselves and are therefore able to make demands centered around gender (Ray & Korteweg, 1999).

Also recurring within women's movements and social movements literature in general, are the political opportunity structures that enable and determine the continuation of a movement. When studying third world movements, there is an additional dimension that needs to be entertained, namely major changes in political structures that countries are experiencing (Ray & Korteweg, 1999). The authors Ray and Korteweg (1999) propose that the traditional theory of political opportunity structures, which assumes a "stable state," should give way to a theory in which a state undergoes changes, such as transitioning from colonialism to independence.

2.2.2 Women in armies/militias

The following discussion is derived from the chapter "Armed Resistance and Feminist Activism" from the Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research. This chapter, written by authors Cárdenas and Hëdström (2021), is an important component of this research because it analyzes the relationship between struggles regarding gender equality and how they can take shape during times of violence (Cárdenas & Hëdström, 2021).

An important point raised by the authors is the difference between 'women's activism' and 'feminist activism' (Cárdenas & Hëdström, 2021). The authors draw inspiration for the latter from author Basu (2018), who explains the difference between the two terms in her book. Author Basu describes women's activism as follows: "organized social movements to challenge gender inequality" (Basu, 2018, p. 5). She defines feminism, on the other hand, as: "struggles that have the same goals but need not to be organized as women's movements" (Basu, 2018, p. 5). This distinction thus assumes that not all women's movements have a feminist goal in mind. The definition that author Basu (2018) provides for women's activism is the one that will be used in this thesis. However, authors Cárdenas and Hëdström (2021) temper this statement by saying that these distinctions should not be regarded as absolutes: "women-led activism that is not overtly feminist in its objectives may indeed have unintended feminist effects by mobilizing women in public political spaces" (Cárdenas & Hëdström, 2021, p. 149).

A clear example given by Cárdenas and Hëdström for the aforementioned is from Angola, where in the 1960s women involved in the struggle for independence formed the basis for a women's movement that is contemporary seeking to challenge the patriarchal system (Mouzinho & Cutaia, 2017). This example is analogous to the two case studies of Sahrawi and Kurdish women, which both voluntarily entered an armed war for their country. Cárdenas and Hëdström (2021) consequently claim that women's participation in armed struggle is no longer an exception. As a result, women are no longer simply viewed as powerless victims in a war, but rather as individuals who are indeed capable of deciding for themselves whether to participate in the fight against the enemy. An additional similarity between the aforementioned example and the two case studies, as we will see later, is the lack of choice in structural

mobilization for women of Western Sahara, which in turn has led to a significant increase in female empowerment (Düzgün, 2016; Ferreira & Santiago, 2018; Solana, 2021; Tank, 2017).

2.2.3 Women and state

Here, I will introduce how women and the state, as well as state-building, relate to each other. Both groups being treated in this thesis are non-Western and located in the SWANA region, and will be taken into account.

Since the term 'state-building' will often recur throughout the thesis, the underlying theory will be explained in greater depth. The first definition for state-building is given by Richards and Smith: "A process that defies clear starts and stop points. It is a socio-political negotiation whereby the structures and practices of statehood are established in response to internal needs and external demands. In this process the state does not come into being overnight, its development takes place over decades. Declarations of independence for the unrecognized state do not end the process, with development continuing as states expand in scale and competence." (Richards & Smith, 2015, p. 1721).

Through the creation of institutions, the process of state-building is also being put in motion. This building of institutions would provide stability, security, development and peace. The process also involves external demands and agendas (Richards & Smith, 2015). According to the same authors, the starting point of this type of project often begins with a declaration of independence and an explicit statement of separation from the country in which the community is located. This was also the case with Kurdistan. The state-building process of the Kurds has been going on for decades and is an ongoing social-political process rather than a movement (Richards & Smith, 2015).

Before we delve deeper into the literature on the relationship between women and state, an important nuance is given by authors Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989). They argue that because of the complex relationship between women and their role within national processes, it is impossible to assume that there is one single group of women (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

Their class, ethnicity and life trajectories create a division, which in turn affects how they are treated by society, and, by extension, the different associated strategies of nation-building (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

The link between women and the state is extremely complex, to say the least. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) nevertheless managed to categorize the five ways in which women can play a role in the ethnic and national processes that contribute to state-building. The functions they identify, which are critical to the thesis's study goal, can be summarized as follows: Women are the key transmitters of their culture and play an important role in preserving and propagating the collective ethnic group. In addition, women's roles and expectations, as well as their engagement in national struggles, whether economic or military, are considered ideological and cultural markers that distinguish a collective from other ethnic groups (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) hereby emphasize that in all five manners, the cultural and historical context play a major role.

Authors Berkovitch and Moghadam (1999), review the literature on how women in the SWANA regions have abandoned their conventional roles in relation to nationalism. Building further on the arguments of Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), they conclude that Islam, colonial history and their difficult relations with the West are the main drivers of the cultural and historical context in which processes of state-building have emerged (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999).

Furthermore, the veiling or non-veiling of women became a key symbol within state-building processes (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999). It was used as a significant instrument of resistance against colonialism and westernization. At the same time, it represented a kind of national symbol that signified the modernization of the state and national struggles (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999). Women's education and their position in the public sphere also plays an important role in this process (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999). A changing revolution in both areas resulted in greater opportunities for women. But despite these shifts, their position remains very limited and political spheres are still mostly occupied by men. As a result, the

process of state-building and national struggle is seen as masculine and the role of women is barely recognized (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999).

2.2.4 Diaspora and Gender

Since the case studies of this research apply to diaspora groups, it is essential to provide a literary and conceptual framework. First, a few key concepts will be touched upon, followed by the main theories, and then the literature and debates that exist around diaspora and gender will be explored.

2.2.4.1 Diaspora

In section 2.1, an initial definition of "diaspora" was provided. A more comprehensive understanding will now be outlined. Since this term acquired an expanded understanding, it has found its way into the academic world and the first theoretical framework was formed by William Safran in 1991 (Gottschlich, 2008). Safran (1991) defines diasporas as "expatriate minority communities", characterized by six central aspects, including: "a history of dispersal, myths and memories about the homeland, alienation in the host country, a desire for eventual return, ongoing support for the homeland and a collective identity shaped by the homeland" (Safran, 1991, p. 83). This definition is highly relevant for this research, but a few important comments must be made.

The term has gained a lot of ground within academic circles in recent years, but this has also led to a certain vagueness regarding definitions. This can be situated within the larger debate of diaspora literature, which discusses whether diasporas have a constructed form of shared identity and affinity with each other or whether this is a more natural result of mass migration (Baser & Swain, 2010). Keeping this discussion in mind, the definition used for this thesis is derived from a study by authors Baser and Swain (2010), who extensively studied the theoretical evolution of the concept of 'diaspora'. They start from a constructivist perspective, which does not look at diasporic groups as a natural result of migration, but rather as a group that consciously maintains ties with its homeland and is actively engaged in the politics of the home country. They define diaspora as a "political project" (Baser & Swain, 2010, p. 40). Their

main aim is to influence decision-making, both in their host-and home country, through which they attempt to enhance the society of their homeland that they may potentially never return to, say Baser and Swain (2010). An essential point made by the same authors, that is of great relevance to this research, is that "diasporas are layered" (Baser & Swain, 2010, p. 40) and therefore can have various goals that cannot be reduced to one fixed goal.

Since this research is written from a feminist postcolonial perspective, it is essential to include a more critical explanation of diaspora as well. This definition is drawn by author Brah (1996). Brah explores the intersections that exist between race, gender, class, sex, ethnicity, and nationalism within different political contexts (Brah, 1996). She emphasizes the importance of deconstructing practices that prevailing political systems use to differentiate between diaspora groups. In other words, how groups are placed in different discourses, economic processes, policy strategies, and institutional practices, and consequently positioned by ruling politicians and governments. According to Brah (1996), the study of diasporas must therefore consider all the elements mentioned above, which will allow for a better study and understanding of diasporas and their complexity.

2.2.4.2 Stateless diaspora

It is very important to also include the concept of stateless diaspora, since this research will be focusing on the Sahrawi and Kurds, who are both ethnic groups without their own nation. It is argued that "stateless diaspora groups are not linked to a state, but have a collective identity based on mostly ethnicity if not a religion" (Baser & Swain, 2010, p.42). The authors argue that stateless diasporas are more prone to participate in political activities in the host nations, especially if they are fighting for independence in their home country (Baser & Swain, 2010).

2.2.4.3 Diaspora activism

A first insight into what diaspora groups precisely do will be discussed here. Based on this insight, a more detailed description will be included regarding what diaspora activism actually is. This is often difficult since academics usually only talk about social movements or diaspora movements, or rather focus on transnational political groups (Adamson, 2008). The latter is a

term that deals with migrant networks and communities and their political participation (Adamson, 2008). According to Adamson, the term transnationalism is often preferred to 'diaspora', because transnationalism or research on transnational communities also deals with cultural and social networks, in addition to mere political participation. Also, the term diaspora tends to homogenize and therefore does not acknowledge the diversity that exists within diaspora groups (Adamson, 2008).

Authors Baser and Swain (2010), demonstrate the similarities that exist between social movements and diaspora movements because, according to them, this can extract essential characteristics from diaspora movements and are thus very useful here. For example, the authors state that social movements are often seen as provocative, challenging groups that call on the state to bring about change. Political diaspora movements do this as well, but they tend to be directed towards another state (Baser & Swain, 2010).

The same authors also explain transnational advocacy activist groups. These can best be compared to diaspora activists and thus reflect the most appropriate description of what diaspora activists are (Baser & Swain, 2010). The aim of transnational advocacy activists is to put the rights of minority groups higher on the political agenda by making demands on those who do have a greater voice. Through persuasion, they try to convince politicians on issues such as climate justice or women's rights. Both transnational advocacy activists and diaspora activists use the same strategies to mobilize people. This includes organizing protests, campaigns, non-violent mass demonstrations, marches etc (Baser & Swain, 2010).

2.2.4.4   Transnational imagined communities

Diasporas can obviously be seen as transnational advocacy networks, as they work across state borders, aiming to influence both the politics of their host and home countries, but an additional important aspect of these groups is that they also have a shared identity (Baser & Swain, 2010). Having a 'shared identity can best be explained using Sökefeld's (2006) theory of transnational imagined communities. According to Sökefeld (2006), discourse around having a 'shared' identity is the important characteristic that distinguishes diaspora groups from other

transnational communities (Sökefeld, 2006). Here, diasporas are defined as 'transnational imagined communities'. The word 'imagined' then refers to an imaginary shared identity, although what this identity should be, is not to be defined. The identity is subject to discussion within the diaspora, but the fact that it is being discussed is precisely what demonstrates a shared imagined identity (Sökefeld, 2006).

One cannot speak of transnational imagined communities without referring to Benedict Anderson's 'Imagined Communities' theory. Anderson states that "nationality, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind" (Anderson, 2006, p. 4). In his book, he tries to demonstrate this assertion, by claiming that nationalism has emerged from our cultural systems, namely the 'religious community' and 'dynastic realm' (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). In that way, Anderson's definition of a nation is as follows: "it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6).

Now that we have discussed theories and associated concepts regarding diaspora, transnational communities, and imagined communities, it is important to briefly frame and summarize the literature on diaspora and feminist research in that regard for this research.

2.2.4.5 Diaspora studies within feminist research

It was already mentioned above how diasporas are often regarded as rather homogenous groups and thus fail to capture the diversity within them (Adamson, 2008). However, author Elise Féron (2021) indicates that it is precisely feminist studies that have changed this by exposing the diversity, complexity, and different power structures within diaspora groups.

A feminist perspective on diaspora studies has brought a lot of new insights as feminist research precisely deals with concepts such as diversity, intersectionality, hybridity, and queerness. Besides this, the perspective is also very relevant because diasporas go beyond fixed structures of nations and borders, by balancing between home and host country (Féron, 2021). In recent years, there has also been increased attention to an intersectional approach within diaspora

research, because looking at matters such as race and gender allows for a better understanding (Féron, 2021).

Furthermore, gender approaches have also played a role in diaspora studies dealing with nation-building and the state. For example, Yuval-Davis demonstrated how women play a crucial role in the maintenance of cultural and social identities within diaspora groups (Féron, 2021, as cited in Yuval-Davis, 1997). An important study related to the theme mentioned above and relevant for the purpose of this research is that of Paul Gilroy. He demonstrated how women in diasporas can have a positive influence in both the host and home country by raising awareness about their rights (Féron, 2021, p. 432, as cited in Gilroy, 2000). Féron (2021) also points out how women in diasporas unite in transnational organizations and help both host and home countries through, for example, education. This way, these women can be seen as role models and can call patriarchal traditions into question (Féron, 2021, p. 432, as cited in Schiller & Fouron, 2001).

The previous section has attempted to frame the most relevant literature and concepts surrounding diaspora. As the research will be conducted with regards to diasporas, these are very crucial to the pursuit of the research.

2.3   Introduction to Sahrawi and Kurdish political resistance & history

Understanding the ultimate purpose of my study requires an understanding of the historical context of the rise of the Sahrawi and Kurdish nationalist and women's movements. As a result, this second section of the literature study will focus on that historical backdrop, as well as a description of how gender is interpreted in both groups' political rhetoric. Hereafter, attention will be paid to how this is put into practice. Doing so corresponds to describing women's roles in both societies, as well as their participation in national resistance.

2.3.1 Western Sahara

The struggle of the Sahrawi population in Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania has been described as a 'forgotten conflict' (Isidoros, 2019, p. 5). Due to years of colonization by Spain, and their failed process of withdrawal, Morocco had the opportunity to occupy the Western part until today with a repressive and military policy (Isidoros, 2019). This explains why it is also called "the last colony in Africa" (Isidoros, 2019, p. 5).

In the 1960s, the term 'Sahrawi' was first used by the revolutionary leader, Mohamed Sidi Bassiri, who demanded the independence of the region from Spain in a peaceful manner (Solana, 2021). When this demand was brutally suppressed by Spain, this gave rise to the 'POLISARIO Front' movement. They believed that the chances of success in their struggle could only be increased through violence. In 1975, a fight between the POLISARIO Front and Moroccan army troops broke out, and thousands of Sahrawis fled to Algeria (Solana, 2021). Ever since then, the Sahrawi population has lived scattered in refugee camps in Algeria (Allan, 2014).

According to Allan (2010, 2014), the refugee camps, which had been developed with all types of services and infrastructures in the meantime, gave the opportunity for the movement to establish and advance its discourse in a more meaningful way. Algeria, to this day the greatest ally of the POLISARIO, allowed the Sahrawi to build a true society, with provinces, schools, hospitals, a parliament and ministers. These structures take the form of a state-in-exile, whereby the Sahrawi gave a new meaning to their type of society, namely one that strives to deconstruct and remove all previous forms of social oppression (Wilson, 2016).

This so-called 'state-in-exile' is called the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) (Wilson, 2016). Wilson (2016) describes in her book that the SADR was founded by POLISARIO, and both are thus strongly linked to each other but are not the same. SADR is a state that is partly internationally recognized by various bodies and POLISARIO, on the other hand, is a freedom movement (Wilson, 2016). The SADR, which executes and exercises its power from the refugee camps in Algeria, thus hovers somewhere between a state-in-exile and

a 'de facto state' (Wilson, 2016). Author Alice Wilson (2016) uses the term "state-movement", which, in her opinion, best describes the type of authority of this state. All these elements and characteristics are evidence of a unique form of statehood.

The discourse of POLISARIO, which is used as a basis for the process of Sahrawi nation-building, draws its inspiration from other anti-colonial nationalist revolutions of the 20th century, like the Palestinian and Vietnamese revolutions (Allan, 2010; Solana, 2021). According to Allan's (1976) own translation, POLISARIO's goal of the revolution was to "transport the people from the world of oppression, slavery, and colonialism, to the world of light, liberation, and democracy" (Allan, 2010, p. 190). The great influence of socialist revolutionary thinking, in which the will of the popular people always prevailed over individual demands, made the Sahrawi see their unfair treatment and discrimination as a kind of 'Moroccan Nazism', a term translated by Allan (2010; in 1976).

The different forms of discrimination to which the Sahrawi are subjected, include matters like the denial of access to education for women, discrimination against Sahrawi workers in the mines, and the way in which political participation for Sahrawi youth was made impossible by Moroccan rulers (Allan, 2010). For all these reasons, the Sahrawi strive toward a society within their own nation that is free from any form of repression or intolerance, with gender equality being an essential step in fulfilling this goal (Allan, 2010). The next section will elaborate on how they interpret their discourse on gender equality.

2.3.2 Role of women in Sahrawi discourse

The previous section dealt with the more 'general' discourse of the independence movement (POLISARIO). This section will take a closer look at the place of gender in this discourse and the way in which Sahrawi women personify in it.

One of the most important conditions for achieving this goal of national freedom, set by POLISARIO, is according to author Allan (2010), increasing gender equality and emancipating women. In the post-revolution situation, they were ruled by Islamic laws, tribalism and kinship

that sustained patriarchy. The Sahrawi tried to break away from this by prohibiting arranged marriages within the same family and marriage under the age of 16 (Allan, 2010).

For her research, Allan (2010) looked at the publications of the POLISARIO that they issued to spread and empower their state-making process. The language used by POLISARIO reflects gender equality. Allan (2010) gives the example of how 'brothers and sisters' is used to describe the 'people' and implies an egalitarian view between the two. Furthermore, an essential part of their discourse was the incitement of both men and women to be combative in the fight for their country, because only if everyone participated, the struggle could be successful (Allan, 2010).

Photographs from the refugee camps in Algeria also reveal a great deal about the power relations surrounding gender. For instance, a photo with a woman shouting into a megaphone and a baby on her back shows the image of "an independent, emancipated and determined woman, who is able to hold any traditionally 'masculine' position in society, even that of a freedom-fighting armed soldier." (Allan, 2010, p. 192). In addition to the previous examples that are a central part of the state-building process, and testify to a new revolutionary discourse in which gender equality is central, it is also literally stated that "the Saharawi woman has the same rights as the Saharawi man" and enjoys "all the freedom that she deserves" (Allan, 2010, p. 192, as cited in POLISARIO, 1976, p. 5).

Joanna Allan's publication attempts to explore the gender discourse of the POLISARIO, but through her work, she has encountered a very large contradiction within the movement (2010). She states that even if the Sahrawi claim to be a secular society, the Islam still forms the basis of the legal texts of the SADR. Its derived norms and values therefore still form the basis of the community (Allan, 2010). This maintains women-unfriendly practices such as polygamy, which the POLISARIO claims to be against (Allan, 2010). Altogether, a progressive gender policy can clearly be found in the discourse of the POLISARIO, yet many contradictions still exist, that need to be considered (Allan, 2010).

2.3.3 Sahrawi women activism

The actual situation of Sahrawi society with regard to women can be studied by having a closer look at the National Union of Sahrawi Women (NUSW). The NUSW came into being in 1974 and was partly created by women's self-consciousness, which had been encouraged by the struggle against the occupation of their land (Sánchez, 2016). Two important targets of the NUSW, the leading association of Sahrawi women, are: "sensitize women about their position in society and their role in national independence and educate women about their social and political rights to ensure their effective participation in the present and future" (Sánchez, 2016, p. 321).

According to author Sánchez (2016), the NUSW has played one of the main roles in the refugee camps when it comes to promoting gender equality and awareness. One of the most prominent examples to demonstrate this is education. The literacy rate of the Sahrawi population has gone from 90 percent being illiterate to almost the entire Sahrawi population now being able to read and write. The main reason for this success was the dedication of the women in the camps to construct schools and provide education for the children. The legal structure, as well as the health care services in the refugee camps, were also led by women (Sánchez, 2016). Sánchez (2016) concludes that the female leadership and establishment of the camps have clearly provided positive encouragement in their struggle toward empowerment strategies.

Despite the preceding claims, there is also a major concern about the gendered politics of the camps, the 'NUSW' and the 'gender equal' discourse of the POLISARIO. Author Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010) is one of the authors who questions these mainstream claims. She problematizes the international glorification of the NUSW and Sahrawi camps, in which the female refugee is set as the perfect example, "the ideal refugee" in contrast to other African or Asian freedom movements situated in camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010). She conducts her research from a post-colonial feminist perspective, investigating who ultimately benefits from this representation, and concludes that it perpetuates exclusion and marginalization of groups that do not fit into this "ideal refugee" group (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010).

Joanna Allan's research (2010), previously cited to make sense of the POLISARIO's discourse around gender equality, also forms a more critical perspective. Allan (2010) explores the underlying motivations of the POLISARIO to propagate a discourse of equality. She finds out that one of the main underlying motives of the POLISARIO to propagate this discourse is that they want to distance themselves from stereotypes made by the West about "backwards" Arab, and Islamic peoples. In addition, there is another main motive, which is to completely disassociate oneself from the main enemy, Morocco, where women are not granted equal opportunities at all, according to them (Allan, 2010). The latter exemplifies the argument that was already made by Heng (1996) (section 2.2.1), namely how third-world feminism can be used in a negative manner.

In spite of all these previous criticisms, a strong female nationalist consciousness of Sahrawi women that translates into activism, can be observed. Solana's (2021) publication generates a wonderful impression of this by interviewing six elderly Sahrawi women. By asking about their experiences on certain specific key events, it became possible to trace the type of nationalist thinking and struggles that had been forming the women over the years, back (Solana, 2021). She found great similarities between their stories and what they consider important, which allowed her to generalize the sentiments expressed by the women to a broader context (Solana, 2021).

Based on Solana's (2021) research, the period from 1958 to 1975, is when the seed of Sahrawi nationalism was planted. This period was marked by the violent policy of former colonial power Spain. One of Solana's interviews reveals how revolutionary ideas were felt in the households, but also how they became more widespread in society. One of the women, who was already a member of the female wing of Polisario at the time, testified to author Solana how she remembers spreading the movement's ideas by, for example, handing out flyers and sewing flags and clothes for the fighters. The episode that follows is indicated as the most decisive for their revolution (Solana, 2021). From 1975 onwards there was a mass flight to Algeria. Solana (2021) summarizes this period through her interviews as "While the Polisario's men resisted Western Sahara's re-occupation through armed combat, women assembled into political cells

and into specialized committees. They managed livelihoods and created the physical and social infrastructures of the newly proclaimed SADR" (Solana, 2021, p. 11-12).

This paper truly demonstrates how women, through the creation of new land structures, are creating and sustaining a collective consciousness of national values and norms.

2.3.4 Kurdistan

For a long time, the Kurds have been neglected and marginalized both geographically, politically, and economically. One of the primary reasons for this is that the lands they live on are located between the territories of ancient Persia, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia (McDowall, 2007). The people are thus spread across four different countries, namely Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey and today they represent one of the largest dispersed groups in the world (McDowall, 2007). The fall of the Ottoman Empire was one of the most moving moments for the Kurds. Because at that point, other states like Turkey and Syria gained independence, while the Kurds were not able to do so and instead became a minority group (McDowall, 2007; Schmidinger, 2018).

After that, the Kurds lived in fragmented tribes for years. As a result, even today, there is no such thing as a unified political freedom movement with a single purpose and direction, but rather various groups, each with their specific agendas, according to Schmidinger (2018). What all these fragmented Kurdish movements do have in common is that, like the Sahrawi, they draw their inspiration from Marxist progressive ideologies in which freedom and equality play a central role (Schmidinger, 2018).

One of the defining moments for the Kurdish movement was the rise of the 'Kurdistan Workers Party' (PKK) in the 1980s in Turkey. The PKK waged a struggle against a political system in Turkey that considered minority groups to be unworthy of support. One of the founding students of the Kurdistan Workers Party, was Abdullah Öcalan (Öcalan & Happel, 2011). He is regarded as one of the foundational revolutionary leaders of the Kurdish liberation movement. The existing Kurdish parties and ideological branches will not be addressed since there is no room

in this thesis, nor is it relevant to this work. However, because Öcalan's thoughts inspired women's movements, making them relevant for this research, a short introduction to his ideas will be included.

Öcalan sees the solution for the Kurds through reunification in a 'democratic confederalism'. He claims that this is the only alternative that exists against states that are based on hierarchy and tyranny, talking about a "hierarchical and dominated civilization" (Matthews & Jeffrey Miley, 2020, p. 67). He claims that nations that have been released from colonial authority have failed to implement human rights and democratic principles. These nations, he believes, should undergo a profound structural reform based on radical democratic concepts and taking into consideration their particular histories. Central to this is the dismantling of the hegemonic hierarchy and the institutionalized patriarchy. All this would enable the formation of an 'eco-democratic society' (Öcalan & Happel, 2011).

In the next chapter, one of the main points of Öcalan's theory will be discussed in greater detail, namely that of 'patriarchy' and the link between the oppression of women and the general oppression of people (Matthews & Miley, 2020).

2.3.5 Role of women in Kurdish discourse

In this section of the thesis, the role of women in the Kurdish freedom movement will be addressed. First, Öcalan's theory and his views on it will be presented. This also includes the Kurdish ideology 'Jineolojî'.

Authors Matthews and Miley (2020), contributors to the book 'Building Free Life', examine the first part of Öcalan's 'Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization'. They examine how Öcalan goes back in history to trace the roots of the problems that persist today in 'capitalist modernity' (Matthews & Miley, 2020, p. 68). One of the most important parts of this plea is his focus on patriarchy. He links the oppression of women to how the wider masses are oppressed. According to Öcalan, 'patriarchy' equals 'woman's slavery' and this is "the most profound and disguised social area where all types of slavery, oppression and colonization are realized."

(Matthews & Miley, 2020, p. 72, as cited in Öcalan, 2015). Capitalist modernity is marked by its constant desire for the subordination of everyone in the public domain (Matthews & Miley, 2020, p. 72, as cited in Öcalan, 2015).

For these reasons, Öcalan proposes a democratic alternative, where the current family system, nestled in oppressive and patriarchal traditions, must be replaced by a new system of values that prioritizes freedom and equality between men and women (Matthews & Miley, 2020, as cited in Öcalan, 2015). He concludes that capitalism, religion and the nation-state are all entrenched in structures designed for dominant masculinity. The destruction of these patriarchal structures is necessary to create a society that breaks away from the capitalist nation-state and its system of subjection (Matthews & Miley, 2020, as cited in Öcalan, 2015). Öcalan sees the liberation of women from the embedded system, and the emancipation and change that a woman can bring about in society, as the ultimate criteria from which can be deduced that society is liberated (Exo, 2020, p. 160). We can therefore conclude that the battle for gender equality is central to the Kurdish movement's vision of a just society.

Furthermore, Öcalan introduces a new science, 'jineolojî', in which both men and women must be aware of these structures and break free from them through education and reflection (Exo, 2020). The term 'Jineolojî' comes from the Kurdish word for 'woman' and is close to the word 'jîn' that stands for life. 'Lojî' is derived from the Greek word 'logos', meaning reasoning. Jineolojî can be seen as a kind of new science that investigates both the effects of patriarchal societal structures and their perception of it. It starts from the female point of view and produces an alternative kind of knowledge (Exo, 2020).

The science was born in the region of Southwestern Asia and is based on the experiences of the Kurdish women's movement and can therefore also be seen as the "science of and for the women's revolution" (Exo, 2020, p. 152, as cited in Ibid, p. 23). On the other hand, it is not bound by place or culture either, as it is also beginning to gain a foothold and is being thoroughly studied in South America and Europe. For example, several international conference days on Jineolojî have taken place in Europe. During these days, other European women's

movements discussed how they acquire their knowledge in society today and how forms of self-organization could break away from hegemonic structures (Exo, 2020). How this idea of self-organization can be put into practice can be observed in the revolutionary democratic process in northern Syria in Rojava. The next section discusses this in detail.

2.3.6 Kurdish Women activism

In this subsection, a short overview of the most prominent and largest Kurdish women's groups and movements will be provided. This is only to give the reader an idea of the different kinds of Kurdish groups and women movements' that are involved. Conclusions and possible discussions that previous authors have drawn from research on this subject will also be discussed. The case of Rojava will at the end then be examined in detail.

Kurdish women and their activism have been shaped by various forms of oppression, forced migration, war, or even genocide have taken place in the countries where they live. Differences in political representativeness or Kurdish autonomy have also strongly influenced the latter (Tank, 2017). This is exemplified by how women became the main wage earners in households as a result of the Turkish state's brutal large-scale incarceration of Kurdish men who joined the PKK. This system of oppression against Kurdish women therefore triggered their political mobilization (Tank, 2017).

Throughout the different countries ranging from Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq to the diasporas, Kurdish women managed to unite in different ways and tried to push the rights of Kurdish women higher on the agenda (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018; Grabolle-Çeliker, 2019). This included Kurdish women mobilizing demonstrations and marches in the 1990s against violence perpetrated against their communities, Kurdish women stepping into politics, the foundation of female party wings, Kurdish women's associations, and, finally, armed women's movements (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018; Grabolle-Çeliker, 2019). A more concrete example is how Kurdish women in Turkey were already active in the PKK from the 1990s onwards. On 8 March 1995, the first women's congress took place and by the end of the 1990s the female wing of the PKK was founded (Tank, 2017).

All separatist Kurdish movements have their ideology in common. Equality and freedom are the central elements. Slowly but surely, women have joined these various guerrilla organizations (Schmidinger, 2018). Eventually, this led to an all-female Kurdish army, which, apart from its ideology and purpose, is completely separate from the male movement. They are thus fighting in the name of freedom and their nation separately from men (Schmidinger, 2018). Examples of these all-women armed forces are the female military department of the PKK, the 'Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star' (YJA-Star) and the 'Women's Protection Units' (YPJ). The latter is the female wing of the army that protects the self-governing Kurdish part in Syria, Rojava (Düzgün, 2016).

It is essential to mention the underlying ideology and motives of these women fighter groups because this is precisely what this thesis is looking for. Namely, the different layers of inequality that these women have to deal with and how they are resisting and attempting to tackle both of these intersectional layers of inequality. The first and most obvious layer is the oppressive state they live under, which marginalizes them, discriminates against them and does not fully recognize them because of their ethnicity. The second layer consists of patriarchal and conservative values and norms that guide the society in which they live, as well as the unequal treatment they endure as a result of their feminine identity (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018). For them, this is not just about the misogynistic regimes of Erdogan or those of ISIS, but also the struggle against their own communities where rape culture is still ongoing (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018; Tank, 2017).

The women consider their involvement with these militant organizations as a step toward obtaining liberation and breaking established gender norms in their communities (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018; Tank, 2017). Rather than seeing themselves merely as an army, they see themselves as a social movement with revolution as their ultimate goal. They take Öcalan's idea of 'democratic federalism' as a reference for this (Düzgün, 2016; Tank, 2017). The following quote from a female YPJ commander of Afrin adequately illustrates what is meant here: "Our struggle is not just to defend our land. We as women, take part in all walks of life, whether fighting

against ISIS or combating discrimination and violence against women. We are trying to mobilize and be the authors of our own liberation." (Tank, 2017, as cited in Dirik, 2014, p. 418).

The YPJ also gained a lot of attention in the mainstream media, notably in the West, because it is these women's groups that fought the terrorist organisation, ISIS (Tank, 2017). The Western media praises the women for their resistance and struggle against ISIS. However, this struggle against ISIS is only a small part of a bigger picture, namely the resistance against a system that is deeply imbued with inequalities. Yet this is precisely what Western media overlook, placing the Kurdish women within a limited framework that does not take these elements into account (Tank, 2017). This is the conclusion drawn by author Tank (2017), who explores how media portray Kurdish women fighters.

Author Düzgün (2016) expands on framing by media. She describes how Kurdish warriors are upset that the West is suddenly so captivated by their battle and depicts it as something 'new,' despite the fact that all of this has been in their tradition for decades (Düzgün, 2016). Western media also place great emphasis on the female combatants' appearance, by describing their long hair or the clothes they wear, thereby once again misdirecting attention to the physical appearance of a woman rather than on their underlying motives and ideology (Düzgün, 2016).

On top of this, the activities of these women are classified as 'extraordinary' and 'astonishing', implying that this is not their regular position but deviates from the norm, and instead, they find themselves in a passive or victimized role (Tank, 2017). Here I would like to refer again to why conducting this thesis research is so important for the purpose of breaking this stigma. Another crucial element within this debate of Western media and their coverage is the observation by Al-Ali and Tas (2018) of how Kurdish women and their revolution received significant attention in Western media, but their inspiration derived from Öcalan's books was rarely referred to.

These debates dealing with the Western portrayal of Kurdish women are very much in line with the higher purpose of this thesis, which is to expose the different layers of power structures that

these women are denouncing and contesting yet are not acknowledged by the mainstream public. The ideology of the multiple types of Kurdish women's movements that were discussed earlier in this part already gives a notion of how these women's struggles consist of a complex intersectional structure that should not be viewed as one-sided.

Rojava revolution

The revolution in Rojava will now be briefly discussed as it is a practical exposition of the abovementioned theories.

Öcalan's concept of 'democratic federalism', in which gender equality is one of the central pillars, is being adopted in a very radical way in the Democratic Autonomy project in Rojava (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018). In the Northern region of Syria, called Rojava, democratic autonomy was declared in March 2016 (Grabolle-Çeliker, 2019; Schmidinger, 2018). This proclaimed revolution came after years of denial of Kurdish rights by both the Assad regime and other Islamist groups in the country. The YPG, which is co-led by the YPJ female army, took the lead in this. For them, there was no other option left, but to expel the present governments in the region and establish a state that takes its own ideology as a foundation (Grabolle-Çeliker, 2019).

The society in Rojava involves a system in which the emancipation and empowerment of women plays a central role, which is articulated by means of institutional solidarity (Dirik, 2021). In concrete terms, this translates into a society of autonomous, decentralized female-led communities and projects in various fields such as politics, health, education, culture, art, etc. All of this is overseen by Kongra star, the umbrella women's movement in Rojava, seeking to realize 'the feminine revolution' in their regions (Dirik, 2021).

Education plays one of the most crucial roles in this particular society. Through education, they are taught to develop a deep consciousness of their political autonomy and agency, which they believe is one of the ultimate mechanisms of resistance against an oppressive state. The focus is put on the deconstruction of existing knowledge that has emerged from the dominant colonial, patriarchal and capitalist structures. The concept of power and its origin is also very much

questioned (Dirik, 2021). Author Dilar Dirik (2021) illustrates this with a concrete example from her fieldwork, namely how the distinction between teacher and student in these academies is not strictly defined, nor enforced. The student is not placed in a position of subjection with regards to the teacher, but can also educate the teacher, for example (2021). This illustration shows us how the women's science, called Jineolojî, was put into practice in the revolution of Rojava.

2.4   Politically engaged transnational communities

To better situate both diasporas that form the subject of this research, a brief outline of both the history of the diaspora and its composition is provided in the following section.

2.4.1   Sahrawi Diaspora in Spain

The oppression by Morocco gave the Sahrawi people no choice but to flee and settle in refugee camps in southwestern Algeria. A turning point in their immigration history came after 1991. The ever-failing compromises towards a solution, prompted the Sahrawis to relocate themselves again (Omar, 2010). Many chose to stay under the rule of Morocco, some went back to the Nomad lifestyle and a third group migrated to the North, more specifically to Europe and to Spain (López Belloso, 2016).

The Sahrawi community in Spain is quite diverse, but the largest groups are mainly made up of people who came to Spain for a short period of time to work (Omar, 2010). In addition, thanks to exchange programs that the SADR has strongly promoted, many Sahrawi students have studied in Spain. Later, they were reunited with their families, who were then also given the opportunity to settle in Spain (Omar, 2010; Wilson, 2012).

This last group plays a very large part in the Sahrawi fight. That is the result of a study conducted with families and students by authors Chatty, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Crivello (Chatty et al., 2010). According to them, the Sahrawi youth quickly learned that due to the poor schooling in the refugee camps they had practically no choice except to abandon their homes at

a young age. Following their education and therefore staying with host families in other countries such as Spain, Italy, Cuba or Algeria gives them the opportunity to strengthen their national struggle (Chatty et al., 2010). In fact, the authors claim that the young people see this as their 'national duty' to see their independence become a reality. In this group of Sahrawis who have settled in other countries for educational reasons, their transnational identity plays a crucial role. Education elsewhere is thus a fact that is highly politicized for the national cause (Chatty et al., 2010).

2.4.2   Kurdish diaspora in Belgium

Kurdish migration to Europe began in the 1960s and was primarily motivated by economic and political factors (Başer, 2013). They were welcomed into Europe as labour migrants with Turkish nationality. Aside from that, numerous Kurdish natives moved to Europe to study (Başer, 2013). The most important factor was the Turkish governmental repression of Kurds, but political confrontations between Turkey and the PKK, as well as the state coup in Turkey in 1980, also had a crucial part in mass migration to Europe (Başer, 2013).

Most of the Kurds ended up in Germany, but also applied for asylum in other countries in Western Europe (Casier, 2010). According to 2010 figures, there are about 40,000 Kurds living in Belgium (Casier, 2010). Since there were many political asylum seekers among the Kurds who fled from Turkey, including journalists, party militants or lawyers, this resulted in a well-organized Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Belgium and especially Brussels are a very important capital for the Kurds (Casier, 2010). Brussels constitutes a real transnational political space due to the different European institutions that are located there. Brussels is also home to several large Kurdish federations, organizations, and associations. These organizations gather the attention of politicians by, for example, drawing up petitions and collecting signatures, organizing protests and demonstrations, going on hunger strikes to show support for other hunger-striking activists, but also by maintaining Kurdish websites and blogs (Casier, 2010).

After having addressed essential literature, concepts, history, and related controversies regarding both groups in order to have a comprehensive view on the research issue, we can now proceed to the methodology of this thesis.

3   Methodology

This section will describe and implement the chosen methodology. What follows is a description of the research approach guiding this thesis and how the data was collected and then subjected to analysis with the aim of providing an answer to the research questions. A description of the studied cases will also be given. The limitations of the chosen method and ethical reflections are also briefly addressed.

3.1   Research approach

Here, I will outline what framework was used that has guided the epistemological and ontological assumptions and reflections for this research.

First of all, this research was conducted using a feminist, postcolonial critical ontological approach. All previous ways of producing and acquiring knowledge based on Western ideas are deconstructed and challenged by this methodology. Academics conducting feminist research insist on this methodology, as previous epistemologies found the issue of gender and its function irrelevant. Questions about how power is created and exercised are central to feminist approaches (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2021).

This research also departs from a perspective that pays critical attention to the intersections between, gender, class, race and sexuality. In other words, this research incorporates an intersectional approach. Intersectionality is also used by many researchers as a strategy to transcend traditional and abstract categorization by analyzing the structures that sustain violence and oppression in an intersectional manner (Väyrynen et al., 2021).

To explain precisely what I mean by a critical postcolonial framework, I use authors Rutazibwa and Shilliam's work (2018). Postcolonial critique urges us to deconstruct the existing methods, methodologies, narratives, and frames of thought, as well as to enrich them with new insights in order to make sense of international politics (Rutazibwa & Shilliam, 2018). Through postcolonial critique, they disassociate themselves from any intellectual tradition. The aim of

all of this is to expose the legacy of every form of colonial and imperial ruling structure (Rutazibwa & Shilliam, 2018).

In an attempt to link these stances to the subject of this thesis, diaspora studies will now be contextualized within this critical feminist postcolonial framework. In the literature review, the different theories that exist on diaspora studies, and how postcolonial feminist studies have been able to bring about a shift in this field, were already presented (section 2.2.4.5). In addition, reference has also already been made to Brah's (1996) critical definition of diaspora, which fits within the critical feminist postcolonial perspective. Also relevant is the aforementioned argument about feminist studies researchers being more capable than others of comprehending complex phenomena within diasporas because they have always considered the complexity of power structures and intersections (Féron, 2021). This argument provides evidence for why this approach is most appropriate.

I would like to add the definition of author Shahrzad Mojab (2007). She refers to the diaspora as follows: "the dispersal and relocation of populations – to be the result of colonial relations in the historically specific context of capitalist accumulation on a global scale." (Mojab, 2007, p. 120). In addition, Brah elaborates on the triggers that eventually lead to departure, such as "acquisition and colonization, capture and removal; expulsion and persecution; flight from political strife; war resulting in a new state; and the flow of labor" (Brah, 1996, p. 182).

These elements, but also previously cited theories around diaspora studies, thus prove that a link can be made between diaspora studies and how it fits within postcolonial feminist research approaches.

3.2   Ethical reflection

Before going into detail about the methodology of this thesis, I would like to contextualize my own positionality within this research and ask myself why I am conducting this research.

Feminist methodology is critical of its own position. In traditional fields of research, this is not questioned; on the contrary, it is assumed that neutrality can be guaranteed. Feminist methodology, on the other hand, recognizes that complete neutrality in research can never be guaranteed and will always be influenced by the position of the researcher (Harding, 1993).

Since this thesis will be approached through a critical postcolonial feminist perspective, it is very important to start at the very beginning and ask myself (a white woman from a Western European country) as a first question, 'Why am I conducting this research?'. I would like to refer to the work of Saba Mahmood. She raises concern about how the kind of research conducted with this thesis runs the risk of reinforcing Western orientalist stereotypes (Allan, 2019, p. 16, as cited in Mahmood).

By conducting a comparative case study of two different cases, a broader and more comprehensive view is already present with regards to the very complex intersectional relationship between nationalism and feminism, which is very different for each situation and thus outweighs the above-mentioned concerns and prevents erroneous generalizations.

In addition to these assumptions, I also try to be as aware as possible of positions of power and how they affect vulnerable groups, including stateless diasporas. For this reason, I have tried to create a relationship with my participants that is based on mutual respect and trust. I am also aware of my privileged position, coming out of a majority and therefore continuously questioning my own position as a researcher.

3.3   Sahrawi & Kurdish females in Spanish & Belgian diaspora as two case-studies

A general description of the two cases and the reasons behind this choice will be discussed in this section. I would also first like to mention the obstacle I encountered during my research. The initial plan for this thesis was to interview both Sahrawi women and Kurdish women who are part of the diaspora in Belgium. After a long search, I finally got in touch with a Sahrawi woman who lives in Belgium. She told me that the Sahrawi community in Belgium is almost non-existent. According to her, finding activist Sahrawi women in Belgium was an impossible

task. Spain, on the other hand, would be better to focus on in her opinion. Many Sahrawis fled to Spain during the 1990s and several Sahrawi women groups and associations have been active there since then (Omar, 2010; Wilson, 2012). It is for this reason that the focus has shifted during the research process to activist Sahrawi women now living in Spain.

The first consequence of this was that the interviews could not take place in real life but had to take place online. Neither time nor resources were available to travel to Spain. Since the applied method in this research was a comparative case study, it would have been logical that two different cases would be studied, both situated in Belgium. For the reasons mentioned above, this did not work out, and the choice for Spain was made anyway since the country in which they find themselves living now does not play a decisive role in answering the research question. Ultimately, the activists' experiences of the intersection between feminism and nationalism are central to this thesis.

Earlier in this thesis, an outline was given of the composition of the diasporas, as well as a short history of both groups. This outline highlighted why the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium was chosen as the first group. Apart from the fact that Belgium today is home to many Kurds, and that Brussels in particular plays an important political role for Kurdish activists (Casier, 2010), it is also the place where I am based as a researcher. Therefore, contacting and meeting respondents could easily take place.

3.3.1 Time frame

Because the interviews in this study do not focus on the experience of specific events or occurrences, the time frame is of lesser relevance. However, one of the interview questions concerns the beginning of their activism. The interviewed women were all born after the 1970s. As such, they have experienced, some more consciously than others, the most recent pressing events. In an attempt to inquire about their recent personal experiences, a timeframe has been chosen that ranges from the year 2010 until today. The aim was to make it as recent as possible.

3.4 Comparative case study

In order to answer my research questions in the best possible way, I have conducted a comparative case study of the two cases outlined above. Because this thesis aims to make a comparison between two groups, a comparative case study was the most logical choice with regard to the research design; "this design entails studying two contrasting cases using more or less identical methods." (Bryman, 2012, p. 72). The main point of a comparative case study design is that it can generate a theory based on findings that may be contrasting due to differences in the examined cases. The term multi-case study is applied when more than one case is involved, which, for this research, is the case (Christensen et al., 2015).

Data in a multi-case study is collected from the two cases in the exact same way (Bryman, 2012) which, again, for this research was the case. The most obvious inquiry within the comparative design is cross-cultural or cross-national research. This type of design is used to carry out a comparison between countries to better understand certain social phenomena within the different cultural and social contexts of the compared countries (Bryman, 2012). Since this research was conducted with activists from different countries of origin, this design seemed most appropriate. That is because of the relevance of the kind of struggle they are waging and their location in other diasporas that differ in terms of socio-cultural setting.

Moreover, in recent years, the multi-case study design has been very much insisted upon by researchers, especially in organization studies. The reason for this encouragement is that it has stronger grounds for theory-building. By studying multiple cases, in this case two, the researcher is better placed to verify a theory concerning his research (Bryman, 2012). Besides the potential this design has for theory building, it also has a purpose in gaining a better understanding of social phenomena in different contexts (Bryman, 2012). However, comparative case studies prove to be rather limited in making generalizations since the investigated cases can produce biased results. (Christensen et al., 2015)

To conclude, since the ultimate aim of this thesis is to get a better sense of how women in the diaspora position their intersectional struggles, the comparative case study design was chosen.

3.5 Qualitative data collection and method of analysis

3.5.1 Data collection

The data collection for this research was done through semi-structured interviews. Within feminist research, semi-structured interviews have become an important and frequently used method of data collection (Bryman, 2012). An appropriate framework that should guide interviews within this research is provided by author Bryman (2012), which is the following: there should be both a good understanding between the interviewer and interviewee and a high degree of reciprocity from the one conducting the interview. In addition, an interview should expose the perspective of the interviewee and there should be a non-hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Bryman, 2012).

The choice to conduct interviews for this study is largely due to the fact that interviews allow the women to express their own views in their own words, which is crucial in order to understand the complexity of the subject matter. Furthermore, there is opted to conduct semi-structured interviews. The main reason for this is that it allows a certain degree of flexibility. This means that it is possible to deviate from the predefined questions by, for example, picking up on what the interviewee is saying or following a different order than the one that was set up, but with a guarantee that mostly all questions will be covered and answered (Bryman, 2012). The latter is especially important for making the comparison. Hence, a predetermined interview guide was used. This predefined script consists of a semi-structured interview with half-open questions. Because a comparative case-study design should use the same method, the same questions were asked in both cases. I developed the interview guide based on questions that emerged when reading the literature review and theories.

The interview was divided into three parts. The first part entailed introductory questions like their name, age, place of birth and how long they have lived in Spain or Belgium. The second part dealt with their activism; how long they have been involved in activism, whether they are part of a specific movement or organization and the ideology behind it. The next part consisted of questions about the Kurdish or Sahrawi women's movement in general, i.e. how it has played

a role in history, etc. These questions helped a lot with both the creation of a picture of how they see the role of women in the movement and what role they think they should best take, as well as opening the conversation around how this activism is perceived today in their community and by extension in the wider diaspora. Finally, questions were asked about their views on the intersection between activism that is mainly about independence and peace and activism that is mainly about gender rights. The full interview guide can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

The interviews took place both in real life at a location preferred by the interviewee, as well as online via a call, either via Microsoft Teams Meeting or a WhatsApp video call. The choice of online or face-to-face varied depending on the respondent in question, whether she was in Belgium or Spain and whether it was possible to meet up in person. The languages in which the interviews were conducted were English, French and Dutch, depending on the interviewee's preference. An interpreter was not needed for any of the interviews, as I have sufficient command of all three languages. All the exact details of the interviews can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

The participants for my research were not selected at random but through purposive sampling. The purpose of this is to ensure that the selected participants are relevant to answering the research question (Bryman, 2012). Consequently, the subjects that were eligible for this research had to identify themselves as women, be part of the Kurdish or Sahrawi diaspora and be activists in some way. The term activist refers to the fact that they stand up for their rights, being a minority oppressed by another state, or not having equal rights because of their gender, religion, ethnicity, or ideology. The latter is a definition I made up for myself to be able to select participants.

The interviewees were collected through snowball sampling. This method is especially recommended when networks of people are the subject of research or when it is rather difficult to reach this group (Bryman, 2018, p. 424). Both elements were the case for the individuals I was looking for. The respondents were allowed to choose whether they wanted to read my

interview guide beforehand because I felt that there was a demand for this. In doing so, they could indicate whether they considered themselves suitable for the interview, they could prepare themselves a bit, and it created a sense of trust. Finally, I essentially obtained informed consent prior to the interviews in order to record them. In the following part, the specific process per group will be further illustrated.

3.5.1.1   Introduction to Sahrawi & Kurdish activists

For each group, there was a considerable time lapse between the first contact and the actual interview. For example, some women were very busy at the time of first contact and could therefore only participate much later. All interviews eventually took place between April 20th and May 6th.

As clarified earlier, the initial plan was to look for Sahrawi women in Belgium. For several reasons, this was not possible, and the focus shifted to the diaspora in Spain. The search for Spanish activist women went very smoothly once a first contact was made. This person was able to bring me in touch with several women, whom she knew were activists. All the women I approached via WhatsApp for an interview very quickly agreed and were eager to have a conversation with me.

The process of gathering respondents within the group of Kurdish women was done through a contact that I had from a previous study that I had conducted on the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium. This person is the spokesperson for NavBel. NavBel is the Belgian Democratic League of communities from Kurdistan. That is the umbrella organization of Kurdish cultural associations in Brussels (NavBel, 2018). Because this person first informed the women about my research and could thus, in a certain sense, assure them of my credibility, this immediately created a more trust-based relationship. Further contact between me and the respondents also took place via WhatsApp.

Ultimately, a total of 6 interviews were conducted with 6 different women. Half of the women identify themselves as Sahrawi and live in Spain, and the other half as Kurdish and live in

Belgium. What follows are two small tables introducing the interviewees. In the table, their names, ages, and places of birth are indicated. I also decided to add a column with some notable facts about their activist work, for instance, which organization they belong to, to provide the reader with a better overview of what kind of activist work my respondents mainly engage in.

	NAME	AGE	PLACE OF BIRTH	EXTRA
S1	Tesh	27 (1995)	Refugee camp in Algeria	Founder of Asociacion Saharaui Comunidad de Madrid (ASCM) (Sahrawi Youth Organization)
S2	Emgaili	20 (2002)	Canary Islands	Founder of Instagram account about problem of machismo in their community and families.
S3	Nayua	22 (2000)	Basque country	Mother is activist, and father part of Polisario Front. Is associated and active member of anti-racist movement at her university.

Table 1: Sahrawi respondents

	NAME	AGE	PLACE OF BIRTH	
K1	Arife	52 (1970)	Turkey	Part of the Kurdish women's movement, spokesperson of the Kurdish women's movement in Brussels, co-president of the Kurdish association of Brussels.
K2	Aysel	34 (1988)	Turkey	

K3	Carine	54 (1968)	Yerevan, Armenia	Her father was a renowned Kurdish writer and activists. She is president of the Kurdish Federation in Belgium, volunteer at the 'Koerdische Bureau' in Brusssels and founder of the association 'keishibelgium'

Table 2: Kurdish respondents

The transcripts of my interviews will not be available in the annex of this thesis. This is because of the limited time frame, which did not allow me to translate all the interviews into English.

3.5.2 Method of data analysis

Data analysis within a comparative case study is first and foremost about comparing and contrasting the studied cases in order to identify differences and similarities. It is then referred to as a cross-case analysis (Christensen et al., 2015). To accomplish this in the best possible way, I employed a discourse analysis, more specifically **critical discourse analysis (CDA).** Critical discourse analysis is a way of analyzing language and texts, and therefore includes interviews (Bryman, 2012). Critical discourse analysis recognizes the role of power structures and how power is woven into language and thus affects socio-cultural change. CDA questions the production of how the text was created, by whom, in what context etc. (Bryman, 2012).

To make matters more clear, I quote this definition by the author Van Dijk: "Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). It is important to note that CDA does not

have one specific method, but that all interdisciplinary methods within discourse studies and social studies are applicable. To summarize, Van Dijk includes four characteristics:

1. "It focuses primarily on social problems and political issues rather than the mere study of discourse structures outside their social and political contexts." (2015, p. 467).

2. "This critical analysis of social problems is usually multidisciplinary." (2015, p. 467).

3. "Rather than merely describe discourse structures, it tries to explain them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure." (2015, p. 467).

4. "More specifically, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, con-firm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power abuse(dominance)in society." (2015, p. 467).

The concept of 'intertextuality' is also central to critical discourse analysis. It allows us to trace the historical and social context in which certain discourses emerged (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, social reality is shaped by discourse with the result that they cannot be seen in isolation from each other. I therefore consider CDA to be highly appropriate, as it draws attention to how power and oppression are acquired and sustained in language. CDA thus matches the research that has taken place from a critical feminist postcolonial approach.

3.6   Limitations

Of course, the methodology of this thesis entails several limitations that affect the validity of the research. First of all, I was unable to speak the interviewee's native tongue and could therefore not conduct the interviews in the language that they feel most comfortable in. Additionally, the interviews with the Sahrawi women were all conducted online, which reduced the confidential environment and hence the possibility of generating deeper responses.

Two more concerns need to be mentioned with regard to the interview format: first, snowball sampling was used to collect the activists. In other words, a single contact person was the starting point for both groups. As a result, the individuals that were questioned may originate from similar groups/environments and hence reflect similar opinions. Furthermore, the contact person may have picked more influential people with a more privileged position, which

potentially influences the responses. Second, because some of their thoughts are personal, several replies may not reflect the point of view of every member of the collective. In addition, the number of interviews has been limited owing to time and practical constraints. In the case of the Sahrawi, the reality that they live in exile in Spain adds to the cultural divide between me and the interviewee. This also highlights the diaspora divide, as one group lives in the Spanish diaspora while the other resides in the Belgian diaspora.

Another possible shortcoming is the research design. Comparing two groups may lead to a reduction, failing to sufficiently take the variety and distinctions into account. The comparative case study also required for example, that both respondents had to be presented with identical questions.

Another shortcoming of this thesis is that there were no age restrictions when selecting respondents. The fact that age was not considered was confirmed to be a shortcoming by the presence of a significant intergenerational tension among the Sahrawi diaspora that was found after the analysis of the interviews. These frictions consist primarily of intergenerational differences, as well as a significant disparity between the diaspora women's movement and that of the homeland. The three Sahrawi activists, all between the ages of 20 and 30, spoke about the generation gap they notice between themselves and their parents. They spoke about how the younger Sahrawi generation, many of them born and living in Spain, have a different idea about how the movement should take shape. This came up in every interview I conducted with Sahrawi women. The analysis also revealed a disparity between the diaspora and the homeland in terms of the positioning of women's rights activism. They attribute this difference between diaspora and homeland about how the feminist movement should take shape to their upbringing in a Western country. They claim that they were exposed to different values and norms. It could therefore be interesting for future studies to take these generational variances into account.

A comparative study between Sahrawi and Kurdish women has never been undertaken before. Research on the Kurdish diaspora is very extensive, but literature on intersectional Sahrawi activism in the diaspora is very limited. On the other hand, it shows the necessity of conducting

this research. Finally, as the Sahrawi conflict is a silenced conflict, it was difficult to find objective information about some events in diversified sources of information.

4 Theoretical Framework

The following chapter identifies the theoretical framework that will support the analysis of the topic at hand. The theory that was used is **transnational feminism (TFN)**. It can be placed within a broader framework of discourse and knowledge production, namely **critical postcolonial studies**. A broad definition is provided by the editors of the Handbook of Postcolonial Politics: "postcolonial critique impels us to pluralize, enrich and even rethink the methods, methodologies, concepts, actors and narratives we deploy in order to make sense of global politics." (Rutazibwa & Shilliam, 2018).

A first concise description of transnational feminist theory is written by Valentine Moghadam. She argues that "Transnational feminism is characterized by a critique of social and gender inequalities and a set of strategies to enhance women's rights within the family and society." (Moghadam, 2015, p. 77). Moreover, the fact that transnational feminist movements persist in a society characterised by neo-liberal capitalism, patriarchy and militarism relates to the kind of activity they carry out (Moghadam, 2015). The theory of 'transnational feminism' first came to prominence with American researchers in the '90s who conducted interdisciplinary studies on race, gender, and class in the United States (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015).

I would also like to mention the book 'Transnational feminism: a working agenda' by authors Martinsson and Mulinari, because in their introductory chapter they give a very clear explanation of what the theory is about. All the chapters in the book are thus consequently based on the transnational feminism theory (Martinsson & Mulinari, 2018).

Martinsson and Mulinari define transnational feminist work based on four important characteristics:

- First: "instead of focusing on global processes or nations, transnational feminists explore the shared location of specific categories of people – migrant female workers, LGBT communities etc. – across national frontiers and in contrast to a universal global community." (2018, p. 6).

- Secondly; "a transnational feminism is a theoretical framework, which makes it possible to study the becoming, reiteration, and transformation of colonial, racist and gendered positions beyond nations." (2018, p. 6).

- Thirdly: "transnational feminism theorizes gender and sexuality as social relations and classificatory systems, as well as the forms of identities and communities evolving from these categories in similar contexts across the world – in the floor-shops of neo-liberal globalization, within migratory movements, in on-going border-crossings and in diaspora communities." (2018, p. 6).

- Fourth: "transnational feminism is both a theoretical tradition and a commitment to political practice, which, while recognizing different locations and exploring privileges, emphasizes the need for and the possibility of building solidarity and shared communities of struggle." (2018, p. 6).

In addition, transnational feminism encourages reflection and the emergence of alternative possibilities around how the relationships between researcher and subject can influence knowledge production and distribution of resources (Oberhauser & Johnston-Anumonwo, 2014).

This theory, inspired by feminist and decolonial approaches, seeks to challenge traditional research models that depart from the Western, white perception. The ambiguity of borders and nation-states that TNF recognises, along with the consideration of complex power dynamics often shaped by colonial legacies, renders it the most adequate theory for this research (Martinsson & Mulinari, 2018). Specifically, TFN takes into account the intersections that exist between political struggles related to patriarchy, racism, capitalism and colonialism (Martinsson & Mulinari, 2018). Since the focus of this thesis concerns a transnational group that wages its struggle against all kinds of oppression, and this struggle addresses both diaspora and homeland, this theory is considered most appropriate for the analysis of this research.

Within Kurdish studies, there has been previous research situated within transnational feminism approaches (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018b; V. M. Moghadam, 2000). For example, Al-Ali and Käser's

research examines how Kurdish women in the Netherlands shape the concept of Jineolojî in their activism and the ideology behind it (Al-Ali & Käser, 2022). I couldn't identify any papers within research on Sahrawi that deviated from the TFN theoretical framework. However, past research on Sahrawi has been conducted within a postcolonial feminist paradigm.

In the last two parts, the various theories, frameworks and methods of data analysis have been presented with the aim of carrying out an actual analysis of the collected data in the most appropriate manner. All these explanatory theories and theoretical frames should not be seen in isolation from each other, but their combination is what will ensure the best possible interpretation of the answers from the interviews. The next section, which discusses the actual analysis, will further elaborate on the operationalization of the previous theories.

5 Analysis and discussion

This thesis aims to shed light on the underexplored role of stateless women's movements within diasporas. Interviews with activists from the two case studies have been conducted and examined in order to establish how the women situate their activism. This part will be structured according to the chosen frames in which the various responses and narratives from the interviews can be placed. The frames are based on the numerous subjects that arose throughout the interviews, linking interconnections across themes and theories that are based on the literature review, combined with the theoretical framework. This part ends with a brief comparison between both groups.

5.1 Operationalization of the theories

As previously mentioned, 'Critical Discourse Analysis' is the method that will be used to analyze the interviews. Within critical discourse analysis, there is no single guiding theory, nor do the leading academics within CDA agree on how to proceed from theory to discourse, to analysis and back (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The following figure, figure 1.3 was created by Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 24). This figure is an abstract manual on how theories within CDA should be implemented to successfully endorse the analysis of the collected data.
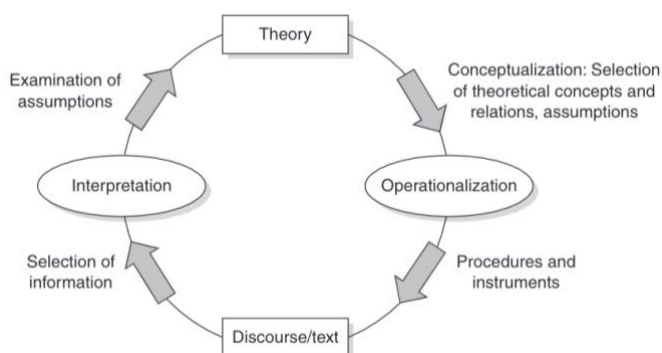

Figure 1: Methods of critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 24).

To recapitulate what was already mentioned in section 3.5.2, discourse within CDA is produced within certain socially constructed relationships located in social settings characterized by power and inequality (Van Dijk, 2015). One of the goals when practicing CDA is to find out in what circumstances discourse has emerged and in what social realities it is maintained (Van Dijk, 2015). To fully understand this point, it is essential to understand what precisely is meant by 'discourse' within CDA. Bryman (2012) has reduced it to the following characteristics: "discourse is based on and influences other discourses, discourse is produced by text and discourse gives meaning to all aspects of social life and specific actors use it to legitimize their own behaviour" (Bryman, 2012, p. 537).

A specific form of such discourses is narratives that emerge during the analysis of interviews (Alvarez, 2002). So, by critically analyzing the interviews, the aim is to find recurring narratives and classify them under certain themes. The following part contains an outline of the different narratives that arose throughout the data analysis, which are all related to the debates and concepts examined earlier in the literature review, as well as the theoretical framework.

5.2 Narratives found regarding the struggles of diaspora women

In the following section, the different narratives that have been found and therefore fit within a particular theme will be presented. These include 'state-building', 'colonialism', 'patriarchy', 'peace struggle' and 'women struggle'. The last two narratives, namely 'peace struggle' and 'women struggle' will be examined together because the interviewers portrayed them as inseparable from one another. But also, because by combining the two, the multilayered struggle of diaspora women is being clearly demonstrated.

Hence, this section attempts to group the various narratives that arose from the analysis of interviews into a single theme. It is crucial to highlight that they do not function as stand-alone, distinct themes, but may overlap. However, for the sake of simplicity and readability, they were sorted in this manner.

I will frequently include quotations of what the women have said to reinforce the previous finding. For the interviews conducted in French or Dutch, the quotes provided are a direct translation into English. The participant who has said it will be identified with their name at the end of each quotation. The letter *'S'* or *'K'* will also be used to differentiate between Sahrawi or Kurdish respondents. The letter S represents Sahrawi, and the letter K stands for Kurd.

5.2.1 State-building

To begin, we will look at how the respondents portrayed their involvement in activism in a broad sense. This includes questions like what they believe to be the objectives of their activism, how it is given substance, and what it is like for them to be an activist in their communities. These all are necessary to properly comprehend and contextualize the results that follow.

What immediately stands out from the analysis is the similarity of the responses from the interviews with the literature on women in state-building and diasporas earlier explored in this thesis's literature assessment. This is true for both cases. For example, the interviewees declare that they wish to raise awareness about what is happening to their people through their activism. They believe that by making their surroundings more aware of what is going on, more attention will be paid to it. The following quote illustrates this:

> "When I take part in these demonstrations, it is to sensitize the public opinion for the injustices which the Kurdish people undergo." (K: Aysel).

This is in line with the literature written by Baser & Swain (2010), who argued that transnational advocacy activists strive to put the rights of minority groups higher on the political agenda. When it comes to state-building theories, numerous authors argue that women play a significant role since they are the ones who pass on culture, language, and tradition to future generations in a potentially meaningful way (Berkovitch & Moghadam, 1999; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). In all interviews, the women spontaneously brought up that this also forms an important part of their activism:

"Let's build the platforms, the background to leave something to the new generations that will come after me to have some basis and it's really hard to build up. But I'm on my way." (S: Tesh).

> "We say '*when he doesn't know his past, he can't create a future'* and this is why you can't forget your history and culture and we try to educate that as well." (K: Arife).

Finally, I would like to revisit Féron's study. This study demonstrated how women in diaspora movements may have a major positive impact in both the host and home country (Féron, 2021). Without making any reference to it, a Kurdish interviewee mentioned the following:

> "The diaspora was influenced by the movement first. But now today, it is also the diaspora that influences the movement in Rojava to further emancipate women." (K: Aysel).

The activist's comment thus suggests that Kurdish women's emancipation has been affected in two ways. Both the diaspora and the Rojava movement have learned from one another.

This section demonstrates how women activists are of tremendous importance within their diaspora, not just as conscious makers, but also in passing on their culture and beliefs to the next generation. The conversations thus demonstrate the major role the women play within processes of state-building. Also,, the narratives that emerged from the interviews are consistent with the research on the role of women in diaspora covered in the literature review.

The next two sections will examine colonial narratives, anti-capitalist narratives and patriarchy-related narratives. Anti-capitalist and anti-western narratives will also be covered under the theme of 'colonialism'. In-depth discussion of these topics will follow since both the literature research and the interviews revealed the importance of these topics within womens' struggles.

5.2.2 Colonialism

The analysis demonstrates how decolonization narratives are prominent in all interviews. As previously discussed, these also form a fundamental pillar within the Kurdish and Sahrawi movements. This part will also cover anti-Western and anti-capitalist narratives. In addition to the fact that these were nearly always presented alongside anti-colonial discourses by the interviewees, it can also be shown through previous research how colonialism and anti-capitalist and anti-Western discourses usually go hand in hand and can reinforce one another (Haroon Akram-Lodhi, 2020).

The previously touched upon argument by Moghadam and Berkovitch (1999) in the literature study about how the events that contribute to nation-building, should be considered throughout this whole section. They contend that Islam, colonial history, and the region's complex entanglements with the West are the primary drivers of the cultural and historical context inside which nation-building processes evolved (Moghadam & Berkovitch, 1999). This argument is definitely reflected in the interviews with the women.

All the interviews revealed that the women blame the capitalist system that is prevalent in their home countries but is also prominent in the diasporas with the lack of independence and equal rights. They ascribe the latter to the patriarchal system, which is characterized by capitalism. As a result, they spend a significant portion of their activity opposing these repressive regimes. One Sahrawi activist explained to me that her engagement is mostly focused on how the capitalist system abuses her nation economically. She stated the following about it:

> "There will be no occupation if there wouldn't be a capitalistic system that supports
> the plunder of our natural sources. So I try to focus on that." (S: Nayua).

She then emphasizes this by saying that she considers herself an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, besides Sahrawi and feminist. Tesh, an activist with rather outstanding stances, spoke about how she believes women must educate themselves and 'decolonize' their own minds before true liberation can be considered.

These narratives also strongly emerged in the interviews with Kurdish women. They mostly focused on how the capitalist system is characterized by individualism. Because, according to them, the core of a well-functioning society is a strong sense of community. But if this breaks down, owing to the capitalist system that encourages people to become more individualistic, it will no longer function properly. One of them even went a step further by claiming that capitalism is actually the greatest enemy to their people:

> "The worst is capitalism because it forces people into this individual system." (K: Aysel),

> "A family is the rock of a population that is healthy but without a family or that hardly exists, how do you want a population in harmony?" (K: Carine),

> "we must not forget our culture and how to avoid becoming part of capitalism because capital is our first enemy of the population" (K: Arife).

Arife, the oldest Kurdish activists, also mentioned how the existing system of nation-states does not function. According to her, this entails racism and fascism. She is referencing the theory of Öcalan here, which was brought up earlier in this thesis:

> "What we want is confederalism, confederalism without borders where everyone can look after themselves locally. For the people to continue to live, hierarchies are important, but not a dictatorial hierarchy or oppression." (K: Arife).

The same woman expressed nostalgia for her birth village, where there was no system in place and where everything revolved around money. According to her, this is what capitalism entails. In the same manner, she stresses that being an activist in the diaspora in Belgium is much more challenging because there is a capitalist system in place. This is demonstrated by the following quote:

"Here in the diaspora, it is even more difficult because on the one hand there is capitalism and on the other hand there is patriarchism which is very strong in the family and Islam. But in the country of origin, you don't have to fight against capitalism." (K: Arife).

The disappointment with the Western capitalist system can also clearly be felt when the three Kurdish women, for example, explain to me that they do not understand why the Kurdish group PKK is still on the European terrorist list. Especially after so many Kurds devoted their lives fighting alongside the West against IS. The analysis forms a witness for a kind of anti-Western sentiment towards the political structures.

5.2.3 Patriarchy

The narratives that were mentioned in the interviews concerning society's patriarchal system formed the basis for the theme that will be presented here. The Sahrawi women argue that patriarchy is deeply embedded in their thinking and society, both among men and women. According to them, women are 'brainwashed' from a young age with the sense that they are inferior to men. The following quotes from the Sahrawi women indicate what is meant here:

"A lot of women don't rule in the world because they are afraid of failing. They put something in our brain, since we are kids, as a woman, that you're gonna fail or something else." (S: Tesh),

"We are obsessed with liberating women, but we need to liberate a man of his mind more than to liberate a woman." (S: Tesh),

"And as I told you before like patriarchy is around the whole world like a, you know, patriarchy is a system which its goal is to keep existing." (S: Emgaili).

As a result, they see this as one of the biggest obstacles to conducting their activist work and achieving their goals. Because many believe that society already has equal rights for men and women, most people still do not consider the activist work on women's rights as necessary.

Furthermore, campaigning for women's rights is still viewed as quite rebellious in their community, breaching the norm and hence having consequences in regard to their personal life:

> "I can have these speeches in public only with people that I trust. You know sometimes breaking the patriarchal rules, means like stop talking to you." (S: Nayua),

> "I presented here a very huge gala, in Madrid and I was the first woman without Melfa presenting something for thousands of people. That is a very huge step in our society to normalize it. Of course, there were a lot of women saying 'she has no melfa' and blah blah." (S: Tesh).

The second quote comes from Tesh, who is a known public figure within Sahrawi activism. She discusses how her community still looks down on her for not wearing a Melfa in public. Melfa is the traditional clothing worn by women in Western Sahara, it is a type of traditional veil for women, she explained.

In the interviews with the Kurdish women, one also mentions how difficult it is for her to perform her activist work in the diaspora as woman from the SWANA region:

> "For the West, it's not very big, but for a woman who grew up in the Middle East and in Islamic culture, to go out in the street shouting and doing activism, it's a very big thing." (K:Arife).

The fact that women themselves often do not realize that they are being subjected to a patriarchal system thus emerges as a kind of frustration of the Sahrawi women from the analysis. The following example shows what is meant here. It is argued that the Sahrawi women still believe that they are free today since they played such an important part during the start of the revolution and still retain positions inside the government institutions. However, one of the respondents clearly indicated that in her opinion, this is all a façade and that the truth today is that men still make the last decisions:

> "The women romanticized that they build the refugee camps. Yeah, they build it, but
> we need to move a step forward. Like, OK, what's next? And yes, they are, the mayors
> of most of the districts, but who is the Governator or who is the president?" (S: Tesh).

The argument cited at the very beginning of this part indicates that Islam too plays a major role in the nationalistic struggle of women. Islam is still very much ingrained in the Sahrawi community, and therefore also has consequences for how the position of women is defined. One of the Sahrawi girls refers repeatedly to 'machismo'. She is the girl who made op an Instagram account on these issues. She thinks it is still too present, and she sees the prominent presence of Islam within her community, but also her family, as one of the main reasons why this 'machismo' is maintained:

> "I come from a Muslim house and Arabic house and it's like, so religious and they
> don't talk about women's rights. And I'm always the girl, who is like, no, but 'We have
> to try this and we talk about this' and my family is always like 'you have to be more
> silent and quieter'." (S: Emgaili).

The aspect of religion is very interesting because this can be linked back to the research of Allan (2010), which was discussed in the literature review. In this research, Allan studies the gender discourse of the Polisario and concludes that Islam forms the foundations of the SADR (Allan, 2010). The role of Islam within the Sahrawi women's movement should thus certainly also be taken into account.

To summarize, the contributions of the Sahrawi and Kurdish women highlight the significance of incorporating a decolonizing, counter-hegemonic perspective into the dynamics and underlying purposes of their advocacy work, which they believe perpetuates gender inequity. After dealing with three recurring narratives that are important for a comprehensive answer to the research question, a closer look will now be taken at how they give meaning to their activism that lies at the intersection of nationalism and feminism.

5.2.4 The intersection of a peace struggle & female struggle

This last theme, which will address narratives concerning "peace-struggle" and "women-struggle," should be seen as an understanding of the three previous narratives. In particular, this part will pay attention to certain quotes and hence narratives, that clearly demonstrate the intersectional struggles of women from the diaspora. There will be many similarities to the preceding narratives throughout this section, but the main focus is on what the women had to say about their activism and how it is tied to various levels of inequality.

Essentially, to make the intersection as understandable as possible, we looked for narratives around their activism for independence and peace in their home country, as well as activism for a more equal society between men and women, and the interplay between those two. Yet again, the narratives in the following part coincide strongly with the other narratives. However, the distinction is created for clarifying purposes and to make sense of the thesis topic. In addition, there is also the fact that the national struggle and gender struggle are taken together, as it would feel very artificial to discuss them separately when they are often presented by the activists themselves as inseparable.

In order to have a more comprehensive of their views on it, all the respondents were questioned about their perceptions of women's roles in the national movement throughout history, as well as currently in the diaspora. This yielded some very interesting responses that also help to understand the research question. It is noteworthy how all the Sahrawi women speak about a positive change in their surroundings, as they now see an increasing number of women and girls who are speaking out about the injustices that occur in Western Sahara, as well as the discrimination they face as a result of their gender. Some examples that testify this from the Sahrawi women:

> "Well, lately I'm pretty proud because I feel like there have been more women in the
> Sahrawi movement and those women represent different identities" (S: Nayua),

"But now, thanks to this empowerment, collective empowerment of women, I know that there are thousands like me in Spain. A lot of girls are coming up and showing themselves and normalizing a lot of things." (S: Tesh).

One narrative emerges strongly after analyzing the conversations with Kurdish activists. Specifically, how women have been participating in the Kurdish nationalism fight since its start, resulting in a wave of liberation that is still felt today. They also talk of huge emancipation of women among the Kurdish community in the diaspora:

"The PKK is the first to give so many roles to women and that's the difference between the PKK and other revolutionary movements." (K: Arife).

Kurdish activist Carine provides a tangible example of how the equality concept is implemented among the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium. She claims that Kurds in Belgium organize themselves in 'associés' and that the notion of 'co-presidency' prevails there. As a result, the association must be led by both a man and a woman.

To get to the essence of this thesis, I asked all my participants to compare the agendas of peace activists versus gender-focused activists. Later, I presented them with a statement arguing that in both academic circles and society, women who struggle for equality while simultaneously advocating for more nationalistic ideals, such as independence or peace, are too frequently perceived as hostile to one another. This question stems in part from the discussion mentioned in the literature study about how women's rights recede into the background once independence is attained (Pratt Nicola, 2020; Ray & Korteweg, 1999). The most revealing answers from the Sahrawi women on this issue will be addressed first.

One of the first striking statements of one of the activists, in this regard is that she links the underlying explanation for the discussion, to the patriarchal society:

"People love clashing things because our minds as humans don't want to have two things at the same time. That is human behaviour. So I would say it's human behavior. And as well it is a patriarchal method." (S: Tesh).

Emgaili, who is the youngest of all activists, expressed her dismay when people would fight for the oppression and independence of the Sahrawis, preach for liberty, yet neglect women's rights. She even refers to this as hypocrisy. Overall, it can be argued that Sahrawi activists are convinced that the two movements can find common ground perfectly. Another compelling reason is that two out of three Sahrawi women identify as both Sahrawi and feminist:

"Sahrawi and Feminist are my two ways of identifying myself" (S: Nayua).

However, I would like to point out that Tesh, the oldest and the one that is most strongly engaged in activism actually stated that she does not consider herself to be a feminist. She claims this term has acquired an overly negative connotation, which in her opinion detracts from the actual goals of her activist work. Regarding the goals of her activist work, the following quote can be given:

"make understand my civil society that they need to fight in a lot of fronts" (S: Tesh).

This comment also demonstrates how she does not limit her battle to a single aim, but rather challenges several oppressive systems. In the same respect, the following remark reveals that the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara is not the activists' exclusive struggle:

"But I feel like, being occupied isn't an excuse for us to forget about the other kind of oppression." (S: Nayua).

The previously noted discussion regarding women's rights fading into the background after independence is attained (Pratt Nicola, 2020; Ray & Korteweg, 1999; Chadya, 2003, Varynnen et al) is consistent with the analysis Nayua makes:

> "When there are those liberation movements like you stop being a woman to become a militant of the liberation movement. Even above your human rights. I think we should, support our independence, be against the occupation. But also, prioritize our rights as women. The patriarchy exists in the whole world, so I feel like the role that we should have should be like 'yes I love my country, I want independence, but I also want my own independence'." (S: Nayua).

According to the analysis of the interviews, the Sahrawi women consider equality between men and women as a requirement for achieving the objective of an independent democratic society. What stands out in both case studies is that all women highlight not just the necessity of peace with the state and between men and women, but also the procedures of establishing peace with the state and across ethnic groups. For instance, Aysel, a Kurdish woman, provides an example of a Kurdish associé in Brussels, where other ethnic groups such as Armenians, Syrians, and Assyrians are also being actively involved.

When questioning the Kurdish women about how they place themselves at the intersection, it became clear that they regard their advocacy for gender equality to be self-evident within their peace activism. They ascribe this to their ideology, as well as the long history of women's leadership roles in the Kurdish cause. During the interviews, it became obvious that the ideology that was presented in the literature research is embraced by the women activists:

> "What is put forward by the Kurdish movement is the paradigm of women's liberation, ecology, and equality" (K: Aysel).

A woman believes that the PKK's strength stems from the fact that women were involved from the beginning:

> "If there were only men in the PKK, we would be fighting wars with chemical weapons, but that's why we are so strong. First, it is the will and then the women who have organized themselves, who have been able to stand together." (K: Arife).

One activist also refers to her campaign as a single struggle, rather than a two-sided one. She views it as a fight that she feels must be undertaken against an intrinsically unfair system that affects both men and women:

> "It is a struggle between women and men but at the same time a struggle against the system. The people we work with are also in the system. There is only one struggle, against the system, for me." (K: Arife).

The interviews reveal that the Kurdish liberation movement's ideology has long been anchored in women's rights. This leads to the interviewed women, having a deep understanding of the subject, as well as adopting and translating it into their activity. The examination of the interviews with the Kurdish women also strongly reveals that a society cannot function for them until equal men's and women's rights are first pursued.

> "We need equality, we need not only peace, we can conclude peace agreements, but in society, if there is no change in mentality, even if there is peace, there will not be a good functioning of society." (K: Carine),

> "Women's rights have been so violated, so women have to free themselves. And then once they are free, they start to free society as well." (K: Aysel).

To recap, all respondents emphasized that they saw their commitment to gender-based justice as a prerequisite for long-term peace. It was more obvious for Kurdish women who have grown to regard gender equality as important to their struggle, but the same tendency could be found in the study of the Sahrawi women's conversations.

5.2.5 Comparison

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how women in the diaspora position their intersectional struggles. A comparison of both case studies is utilized to get a grasp on this. To conclude, a summarizing comparison will be presented here, highlighting the most noteworthy differences and similarities between the two groups of women. It is important

here, to highlight that answering the research question is mostly descriptive in nature. It is not intended to pinpoint specific differences and similarities. It is intended to gain a better view on how the activists shape and interpret their intersectional fight.

During the interviews with the Sahrawi women, the tensions between their feminism advocacy and how their surroundings perceive it immediately surfaced. They frequently blame it on patriarchy, which is according to them deeply embedded in the mentality of their community. The gap between diaspora and homeland was also much more visible among Sahrawi women. Furthermore, the importance of religion in their community and family, as well as how this affects how their outspoken engagement is seen, emerged considerably stronger.

The political ideology behind the liberation struggle was far more visible among Kurdish women. It is apparent that their responses, and hence their understanding of the Kurdish revolutionary struggle, form the basis of their involvement. Anti-colonial, and occasionally anti-Western, discourses were prevalent in both groups. Many saw this as the most significant cause for the persecution they endure today, whether as women, Kurds, or Sahrawis.

Furthermore, challenging patriarchal and masculine behaviours is an essential aspect among both groups. Nonetheless, they consider fighting for and raising awareness about injustices done against them in their native country as an important component of their mission. Both groups, in fact, consider these as inextricably intertwined. An independent society will never be able to operate if there is no striving for equal democratic cooperation between men and women and other ethnic groups.

6 Conclusion

In the context of the understudied intersectional role of female diaspora activists, this thesis tried to uncover how women situate their intersectional struggle. To clarify, their activism is built on different 'layers'. These layers consist of a struggle for national independence, peace, female liberation, as well as breaking away from Western capitalist systems, which are historically imperialist and essentially patriarchal. On this foundation, the following research question was formulated: **"How do we understand the intersection of female liberation & national liberation? A comparative case study between Kurdish and Sahrawi female diaspora activism."**.

To find an answer to this question, a comparative case study was undertaken involving the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium and the Sahrawi diaspora in Spain. These two stateless ethnic minority groups have many common denominators, allowing for a comparative study. To quickly recapitulate, they are both marked by non-recognition, which means that until today, they have been marginalized and discriminated against by repressive policies. For both groups, this has been carried out by repressive policies from the states into which they have been divided. This is one of the main reasons why Kurds and Sahrawis today find themselves in transnational communes, or rather diasporas, all over the world.

The discourse of both national independence movements, which abominates all these forms of oppression endeavors to distance itself from these repressing entities and ideologies. The promotion and upholding of gender equality are therefore one of the central components. How this translates for both movements became apparent in the thesis by examining both the texts of the Sahrawi nationalistic movement POLISARIO, as well as the ideas of Öcalan. The literature review then delved into the debates that exist within academic literature on women's emancipation within the Kurdish and Sahrawi communities. The main female Sahrawi and Kurdish organizations, such as the NUSW, were also described. Among the Kurds, Jineolojî was also explored. All this literature made it possible to formulate the methodology of this thesis, in order to create a comprehensive answer to the research question.

Furthermore, the literature research revealed that bringing together national liberation movements and feminist movements is not self-evident. Women's interests generally drift into the background after independence is achieved and nationalists are accused of using women's rights for personal gain that has nothing to do with gender equality. (Pratt Nicola, 2020; Ray & Korteweg, 1999; Chadya, 2003, Varynnen et al). In addition, the role of women in nationalist efforts is frequently overlooked, and women, particularly in the SWANA area, are portrayed as passive or victims in national struggles (Tank, 2017).

The purpose of this thesis is to deconstruct these misconceptions and reveal the agency of diaspora women from the SWANA area in relation to their homelands. Furthermore, the Sahrawi struggle is still referred to as the "forgotten" or "silent" battle (Isidoros, 2019, p. 5). For this reason, there has been very limited research on it, particularly on the Sahrawi women's movement in the diaspora. As a result, further studies are necessary, and a comparison of two diaspora groups, which has never been done before, allows us to demonstrate the diversity that exists as well as the distinctions in how women activists in the diaspora shape the intersection of gender activism and national activism.

To achieve this goal, this entire thesis was contextualized within larger transnational and decolonial feminist methods. This allowed a better understanding of the complexity that diaspora activists face. These approaches also involve a critical examination of postcolonial systems, which continue to impact the context in which the Sahrawi and Kurdish activists operate today. This research's critical approach might be found in how I viewed my own position as a researcher towards the group being examined, but also explored a critical definition of diaspora, among other notions such as the 'SWANA' region and the emphasis on the heterogeneity of women's groups.

Six semi-structured interviews were performed to find an answer to the research question. Three Sahrawi women from the Spanish diaspora and three Kurdish women from the Belgian diaspora participated in the interviews. The initial aim was to compare the Kurdish and Sahrawi

diasporas in Belgium, however, upon closer study, the Sahrawi diaspora was almost non-existent in Belgium, rendering this impossible.

In this thesis, there was a special focus on comprehending the narratives told by the activists who are interested in establishing and advocating activism around gender equality, national independence, and peace to end their people's oppression. Hence, the narratives were found during the analysis of the interviews and confirmed by the literature study. Furthermore, implementing a transnational feminist theoretical framework was the best method to capture the various tendencies. Additionally, by using critical discourse analysis, the recurring narratives in the interviews were categorized into four major themes. These were the following: **state-building**, **colonialism**, **patriarchy and the intersection of a national/peace struggle and gender struggle.** The last theme stands out because it combines the three preceding themes. It's also crucial to keep in mind that there is overlap between all the themes, so they shouldn't be seen as strictly distinct entities but rather as being all interconnected.

The first theme - state-building - focused on how they carry out their activism and how their major objective is to limit the oppressive systems they face and create awareness of this among the broader public. There was also a strong emphasis on leaving an impression on the following generation, which was related to not losing their history and culture in order to never forget their people's fight.

Second, a decolonial viewpoint underpinning their activism's ideology came to the fore. Their resistance is focused on Western power structures, which they perceive as intrinsically capitalist and individualist.

The third theme revolved around how the women viewed the patriarchal system as a major obstacle to their greater aims for an egalitarian society in both the diaspora and their homeland. The role of Islam also played a major part within this theme among the Sahrawi group.

Finally, the two narratives dealing with the battle for aspirations as a member of an oppressed ethnic minority group were linked to the struggle for gender equality and how they give it substance. The conclusion that can be derived from this is that the activists, even though their surroundings may not always perceive it this way, are able to see these as compatible with each other. Their activism is a living demonstration of this. They argue that the battle for independence cannot be won without taking female rights into account. Other ethnic minority rights must also be taken into consideration.

To sum up, the activists themselves identified the types of oppression they are struggling against and the inequities around which their activism is centered throughout the interviews. They highlighted the patriarchal system's fundamental connections to the heritage of the colonial system and the repressive Western capitalist system as their main obstacles. To conclude, this study has uncovered several interconnected power imbalances and conflicts, as well as a more radical recognition that these various power configurations are mutually constitutive of one another.

I couldn't limit myself to seek for activists of a certain age, however I think it would be interesting to do research that stresses this. Especially considering the Sahrawi women's responses revealed an age gap. I also believe that bringing both groups together in real life would be quite intriguing. The discussions that would arise could help us better comprehend the experiences of stateless diaspora activists. In addition, this study also underlines the value that diaspora women might play in peace processes. The role of diaspora women in peacebuilding should be investigated further as a form of baseline research to inspire political dialogue among the various involved parties.

Because there has been little research on female diaspora activists, particularly the largely unexplored Sahrawi minority, I hope that this thesis will stimulate more research to bring greater attention to both struggles. On a final note, a quote from a Sahrawi activist grasps the answer to the research question of this thesis excellently:

"Being occupied isn't an excuse for us to forget about the other kind of oppressions."

7 Appendix

Appendix 1: Interviews information

Name	*Date*	*Online/Real life*	*Duration*	*Language*
Sidi Hamudi Teslem	26/04/2022	Online: Teams Meeting	1:02:45'	English
Nayua	26/04/2022	Online: WhatsApp call	55:03:25'	English
Emgaili Ahmed Salem	28/04/2022	Online: Teams Meeting	1:00:13	English
Arife Soysuren	20/04/2022	RL: Coffee bar (Rocket's) Forest	1:14:40	French
Aysel	04/05/2022	Online: Teams Meeting	50:05:53	French
Carine Rashidova	06/05/2022	RL: at her home in Zellik, Flanders	1:10:27	Dutch

Appendix 2: Interview guide

INTRODUCTION
1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself?
   a. Can you mention your name, age, place of birth, and place of stay today
   b. How long have you been in the country you live in today? When did you come to Belgium/Spain
   c. Do you often return to your country of origin

ACTIVIST WORK

2. How long have you been engaged in activism-related activities?
3. Can you briefly describe the kind of activist work you do?
   a. Are you associated with a specific social movement? Can you describe briefly the organization/movement?
   b. Can you give a few concrete examples of your activist work?
4. Can you tell us why you mainly do this activist work?
   a. What are your main goals of it?
5. Do you associate a certain underlying ideology behind your activist work?

     a.   Can you explain concretely how this ideology translates into your actions?

6. How do your close surrounding in your community perceive your activism?

HISTORY

7. Can you give us your own perspective on how women have come to play a larger role in the national movement throughout the Sahrawi/Kurdish history?
8. Do you notice this seemingly stronger role of women that they have played throughout history also today in your closer community/society/more everyday things?
   a. Do you feel that your activism has changed something in regard to more gender based-equality? Or that gender-based activism has brought about a greater awareness of the role of women and the need for gender equality?
   b. Can you give an example of this?

INTERSECTION

9. How would you describe the relationship between the agenda's, so the goals of women activists, and the agendas of nationalistic activists?
   a. Could you compare them?
   b. Do you see this rather clashing or rather compatible with each other?
   c. Do you think independence/peace is a condition to have an equal society for men and women of rather the other way around?
   d. Are there things you can think of that have been holding this back?
   e. *"The wider society, but also academia still to much sees these two agenda's; the feminist and nationalist agendas, in conflict with each other"* What do you think of this statement?
   f. Where do your place your own activism?

10. What is your greatest hope for the future?
11. Would you like to add anything to the conversation that was not covered in the interview? Or would you just like to say something else?

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