

## Memory Through Sahrawi Oral Poetry: The Path to Cultural Emancipation in Morocco

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### Abstract

*This paper examines Sahrawi Hassani oral poetry as a vital site for negotiating cultural memory, identity, and resistance in Morocco's Saharan regions. Drawing on memory studies and border-poetics theory, it argues that Hassani's verse operates as a living cultural archive that challenges colonial narratives portraying the Sahara as separate from Morocco. The study situates Hassani poetry within its nomadic origins—performances under the khaima (tent) that transmitted genealogies, moral codes, and heroic histories—and shows how these verses historically resisted Spanish colonial strategies that exploited local customs to legitimize territorial separation in Rio de Oro and Sidi-Ifni. The paper reviews existing scholarship (Deubel, Lopez Martin, Bubrik, among others) and highlights its own contribution by foregrounding the shared cultural heritage and political bordering processes that shape Sahrawi identity. It further analyzes the digital transformation of this oral tradition, demonstrating how YouTube festivals, such as Khaymat al-Shi'r and Layali Azawan al-Sahra, reterritorialize memory in virtual space and expand their audience to diasporic and global communities. The findings reveal that Sahrawi oral poetry remains a dynamic instrument of cultural emancipation, linking past and present, reclaiming historical continuity, and offering insights into the resilience of nomadic traditions in the digital age.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Memory, identity, and belonging are complex and contentious in contemporary social, cultural, and human studies. These notions are pivotal in understanding how communities shape their identities and maintain their cultural heritage. This article examines the intricate relationship between memory and history, primarily through the lens of Sahrawi oral poetry, to explore its significance for cultural emancipation in Morocco. Specifically, it examines how recalling the past in Sahrawi oral poetry has fostered cultural awareness and preserved Sahrawi cultural heritage in the Moroccan context.

Across generations and different geographical spaces, the Sahrawi<sup>1</sup>oral artistic tradition has experienced wide divergences between the older generation that keeps an active memory of nomadic livelihoods and pre-national tribal organisation, the middle generation influenced by

<sup>1</sup> Also spelt Sahrawi in English, Sahraoui in French, it is used to refer to *Hassaniya*-speaking communities, and the Amazigh (Berber) communities living in the Sahara in the south of Morocco, southwestern Algeria, and the people originating from those areas. The term emerged as a distinct ethnic subdivision during the struggle for independence from Spanish colonial rule in the 1960s and early 1970s (Du Puigaudeau, Odette. *Mémoire du Pays Maure*, 1934-60. Ibis Press, 2000).

the radical change to an urban residence and emerging postcolonial nationalism since the independence of Morocco in 1956 and, the younger generations raised in urban environments and the southwest of neighbouring Algeria. Considering this point, this research article falls within the realm of oral literature studies. It aims to discuss the cultural discourses emerging from a dislocated and artistic oral tradition that has continuously operated within the shared cultural heritage of Sahrawi communities in the Saharan Maghreb. In this regard, this research article examines how Sahrawi oral forms of performed poetry and songs have contributed to the preservation of Sahrawi historical memory and the construction of a cultural diversity fabric in the present-day Kingdom of Morocco.

Early studies on Sahrawi culture often viewed poetry as a folkloric curiosity rather than a cultural and political text. Voisset (1989) documented Mauritanian literary forms, while Miské (1970) provided a historical overview of early twentieth-century Mauritania. These works preserved valuable material but rarely examined poetry as a dynamic site of identity and resistance. Other studies, such as those by Tara Deubel (2010, 2012), have highlighted themes of exile, diaspora, and gendered voices in Sahrawi poetry. Her ethnographic research underscored how women's songs sustain community in the face of displacement. Suarez (2016) investigated the link between poetry and nationalist identity, and Alberto López Martín (2020) explored emotional expression in the "Ver Sahara" (See the Sahara) anthology, emphasizing affective resistance.

While these studies reveal important aspects of Sahrawi oral traditions, they seldom foreground the shared cultural heritage and the political bordering processes that have historically fragmented the Saharan regions from the Moroccan state. This paper builds on their insights but shifts the focus to oral poetry as a way of negotiating collective memory across imposed borders. It argues that memory-rich verses express both a cultural continuity with Morocco's Saharan provinces and resistance to colonial discourses that depicted these territories as geographically and culturally separate. Furthermore, these studies, and many others, most often ignore the existence of a shared cultural heritage element of "*Al-Bidan*" communities, which occupy a large expanse of territory called *Trab-al-Bidan*, encompassing the present-day regions of *Oued Drâa* and *Oued-noun* in Morocco, in the north, and extending to the Senegal River in the South. Therefore, it is not rational to treat Sahrawi communities in Morocco and Algeria as unique and distinctive cultural groups different from their counterparts in the vast territory of *trab-al-bidan*.

The creative aspect of *hassani* poetry is also linked to the historical collective memory of the Sahrawi communities. Their poetry serves to preserve and transmit their cultural heritage and history from one generation to the next. The poems are often recited in ceremonies and hearings, such as weddings and religious services, serving as a means of communal expression and communication.

Sahrawi poetry celebrates life, love, and the natural world's beauty. The poets often use humor and wit to convey their messages, and their verses are infused with a profound sense of spirituality and mysticism. The creative aspect of Sahrawi poetry is a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of people who have faced tremendous adversity. Their poetry conveys their profound connection to the land and cultural heritage, serving as a powerful tool for social and political transformation. Through their verses, the Sahrawi poets have created a vibrant literary tradition that inspires and captivates audiences across North Africa.

The data for this research project on Sahrawi oral poetry were gathered through internet-based ethnography, with YouTube channels serving as the primary source. This approach provides access to a rich repository of oral poetry performances and cultural expressions that Sahrawi communities in Morocco and abroad have shared and preserved digitally. Internet-based ethnography, also known as virtual ethnography, involves the systematic observation, recording, and analysis of social interactions and cultural practices within online environments (Dhiraj, 2008). By utilising YouTube channels, this article explores a diverse array of orally performed poems to gain insights into contemporary Sahrawi cultural practices and understand how this oral poetry is maintained and adapted in the digital age. This method also enables the study of audience engagement and community dynamics surrounding this cultural artefact, providing a comprehensive view of the role of oral poetry in preserving the collective memory of the Sahrawi communities in the Maghreb. The data collected from Sahrawi oral performances of poetry will be interpreted using practice theory and social memory dynamics to account for the roles of private and public versions in negotiating and reconstructing past experiences (David, 1994, pp. 41-60). Theoretical frameworks of constructivism and postcolonialism provide alternative explanations for the role of border stories in negotiating identity and belonging. The study also uses postcolonial perspectives to examine Sahrawi oral poetry as a form of cultural resistance against dominant historical narratives of colonial cultural hegemony and the Polisario Separatist discourse.

### **1.1. Historical Background of Hassani Oral Poetry**

In the historical period of the Moroccan *Marinide* sultanate, by the mid-13th to the 15th century in the present-day region of southern Morocco and Mauritania, the *hassaniya* Arabic oral poetic tradition arose as a distinct trans-Saharan genre, merging stylistic aspects of classical Arabic poetry with the musical heritage and griot traditions of neighbouring sub-Saharan and Amazigh (Berber) tribes. *Hassani's* poetry is accessible to a wide range of social classes, as it is a popular musical art form performed in a colloquial dialect. Mastery in composition signifies linguistic competence and social prestige. This section explores the origins of oral poetry in *hassaniya*-speaking communities in northwest Africa. The Hassani poetic tradition arose in a nomadic setting where verse served multiple functions: narrating tribal migrations, guiding moral conduct, and expressing the aesthetics of desert life. Performances under the tent (*al-khaima*) embodied communal memory, recounting heroic battles, honouring ancestors, and preserving genealogies.

Classical Arabic poetry, the *mawal*, and *amargue*, the famous Arabic and Amazigh genres of vocal music traditions in the south and north regions of Morocco, have historically influenced the Hassaniya Arabic poetic tradition (Baaik, 2006). *Hassaniya* speakers distinguish between two styles of poetry: *al-shi'r*, composed in Classical or Modern Standard Arabic, and *l-ghna*, composed in *hassaniya* and frequently sung with musical accompaniment. With its use of the vernacular *Hassaniya language and popular musical styles*, *l-ghna* is generally accessible to different socioeconomic strata, unlike the more elite art of *al-sh'ir*, which requires classical Arabic literacy. Knowledge of this genre is essential to the Hassani tribes' broader 'Al-Bidan' cultural history, which began migrating across northwest Africa by the 12th century.

The standard form of *l-ghna*, derived from classical poetry, was most likely brought by early Saharan bards, or griots, who defied strict Arabic literary standards and infused the popular form with their own Berber (Amazigh) styles from Sub-Saharan and North Africa. Norris (1968, 1986) discusses the prevalent belief that *l-ghna* originated in the seventeenth century in the region of *Awlil*, a town in southwestern Mauritania near the Senegalese border, which is

home to a famed band of musicians (Smith, 1969). Otherwise, he demonstrates the *hassaniya* words: *Iggiw* (pl. *iggawn*) is a *hassaniya* term for a singer. At the same time, the *tidinit* (lute) and *ardin* (lap harp) are *hassaniya* terms for traditional accompaniment instruments. Norris demonstrates that these terms, along with many others, have either Amazigh (Berber) or sub-Saharan linguistic origins. These linguistic borrowings suggest the presence of other non-Arab musical traditions that were absorbed into the Arabo-Maure culture as it spread (Norris, 1968, p. 115). The importance of musician caste groups in neighbouring societies south of the Sahara, particularly the Soninke, Bambara, Wolof, and Pular, backs up this theory. Before the sixteenth century, the Mali and Songhay Kingdoms ruled over parts of modern-day Mauritania, which may have contributed to the region's widely syncretic musical legacy (Norris, 1968, p. 120). According to Norris (1968), Popular *Hassani* poetry was loosely defined as a genre until *Seddoum Ould Ndjartou*, a famous poet and singer from Mauritania, helped standardise it through his prolific and renowned compositions in the mid-eighteenth century. Seddoum's approach was noteworthy because it merged the classic *qasida*<sup>2</sup> form with a new musical style with two main modes. The white mode (*l-byād*) is based on Arab music and is associated with tenderness and subtle musical nuances; the black mode (*l-khāl*) is based on sub-Saharan music south of the Senegal River and uses strong, aggressive musical phrasing.

“*Al-wasit fi taraji9m udaba' shingit*” is the most comprehensive written anthology of *Hassani* poetry to date; it was assembled in the early twentieth century by *Ahmad Ibn al-Amin al-Shingitti*, a Maure scholar and poet from the well-known oasis of *Chinguetti* on the Saharan caravan route (Khalifa, 1998). This cherished anthology of oral traditions, along with its accompanying description of pre-colonial *Hassani* society, represents the most famous example of early poetry from *bilād Shingit*, a name referring to the area that constituted pre-colonial Mauritania (Miské, 1970). Many European explorers and missionaries who travelled through the Sahara from the late 16th century onward have reported direct encounters with *Hassani*'s poetry recitals (Norris, 1968). For example, Odette Du Puigaudeau, a visual artist and traveller from the Brittany region of France, documented the nomadic way of life among Saharan Berber groups in the Brakna and Trarza regions of Mauritania from 1934 to 1960, including descriptions of memorable *Hassani* poetry performances she witnessed in the field in the mid-twentieth century (Du Puigaudeau, Vérité, & Sénones, 2000).

### 1.2. Poetic Form and Structure

In the pre-colonial Northwest African region, the *Hassaniya oral poetic tradition emerged as a distinct trans-Saharan genre, blending* stylistic aspects of classical Arabic poetry with the musical heritage and griot traditions of neighbouring sub-Saharan tribes. Performed in a colloquial dialect, mastery of *hassani* poetry in composition signifies linguistic competence and social prestige. This section discusses current alterations in the mechanisms of performance, lyrical content, and transmission. Even though the abundance of new media has reduced the apprenticeship of newer poets, *Hassani*'s poetry has maintained its popularity and has a devoted following among people of all ages. The genre has gained fresh attention as part of more extensive national programs to promote Sahrawi cultural heritage in Morocco, while simultaneously pursuing conflicting political goals within the doctrine of the Polisario separatist movement in southwest Algeria. Examples from Sahrawi poets in southern Morocco

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<sup>2</sup>The term refers to the poem in Arabic.

and abroad demonstrate how the genre can be utilised to critique modern urban society, mobilise social capital, and support the political discourse of nationalist organisations.

Hassani's poetry is composed to be sung and associated with music. It has specific poetic measurements. Moreover, when poetry is mixed with music and singing, it is called "*l-hawl*." The poet is called "*lāmghānni*." The singer is called "*īguīw*." "*Ālhawl*" is based on eight fundamental elements: "*āzhār*" is the poetic genre, "*āl jānba*" is the accompanying musical mode. "*Ālbath*" is a poetic measurement. "*Āl-shur*": Poetic improvisation. "*Nāhya*": the song. "*Ātṣayfita*": dance. "*Ālgāf*": the basic verse couplet. "*Tāl'a*": the poem. The four basic poetic genres are called "*āzhurt lhawl*," the plural of the word "*āzhār*," and they are named "*Kārr*," "*fāghu*," "*sinnīma*," and "*ālbātīt*." These genres can be translated as different navigable "seas of literature." They are organised into seven poetic meters that establish the rules for composing poetry. Each one possesses its divisions that operate according to the name of the accompanying musical mode, meter variation, and the white or black designation (Baaik, 2006). The term "scale" clarifies the close link between music and poetry, indicating that a poem can be recited and then sung or accompanied by music (Deubel, 2012). The seven poetic meter scales are known as "*āmrāymīdā*," "*bu'amran*," "*fāghu*," "*tāhrār*," "*āsghayār*," "*la-bb'yār*" and "*lbtāt ān-nāqqās*."

The *gāf* (plural: *gifān*), an introductory couplet with four hemistichs (sing. *tafelwit*; pl. *tifelwitan*) and an A-B/A-B rhyme scheme, and the *tal'a*, a longer poem with numerous *gifan* couplets, form the foundation of Hassani poetry. A hemistich refers to half of a line of poetry, and each hemistich in a line of poetry has a specific number of short or long-metered units of syllables and pauses at the beginning of the word<sup>3</sup>. The following is an example of a *gāf* from the *kārr* poetic meter within the measurement scale of "*āmrāymīdā*" with a black designation of both short and long-metered units:

lā' bād fārzāq atqānāt == ūrzāq dāmnū mūlānā  
mākāt mūlānā gānāt == mājāb rāhmā 'ḡlānā

<sup>4</sup>People worry about the cost of livelihood, but Allah guarantees this.

Furthermore, Allah is always merciful and compassionate.

Also, another *gāf* example from the *kārr* poetic meter, within the measurement scale of *mrāymīdā* with a white designation:

yā anās al-haūl lī yabghīh == lāyktār dūnū lḥbār  
Ṭām' adnya māhū fīh == ūlā yajārr mālī lnār

Ah, people who love *l-hawl*, do not prejudge its moral feasibility.

It is not related to the greed of life and does not lead to hell, either.

During a performance, four standard poetic meters and their corresponding musical modes follow one another in sequence (Voisset, 1989). Therefore, the poet's ability to properly manage meter progression is seen as a mark of artistic competence and bestows substantial social respect. Additionally, mastering this intricate meter system requires years of dedicated effort. A master musician can switch between modes fluidly while keeping the performance

<sup>3</sup>a short-metered unit is composed of one syllable and one pause, and a long unit consists of one syllable and two pauses.

<sup>4</sup>[My Translation: The interpretation and translation in this thesis are provided with a general understanding of Arabic and Hassani poetry, as well as the cultural context of the Sahrawi communities in the Saharan Maghreb. Specific nuances and deeper insights were thus illuminated by our efforts, resulting in direct experience in Sahrawi culture and the Hassaniya dialect.



flowing. Each meter has a unique musical accompaniment that reflects the poem's theme and tone.

Modern instruments, such as electric guitars, keyboards, and drum sets, have largely supplanted the traditional *tīdīnīt* and *ardin* instrumentation that is still often played in Mauritania and regions like Morocco and southern Algeria. *L-hawl* is the collective term for the social environment that poets, musicians, and singers create when they perform together. It also describes the interaction with audience members who express their appreciation through both verbal and nonverbal cues, such as vocalisations to praise particularly clever or beautiful verses, and body language, such as reclining on a mat or carpet on the ground with one's body resting comfortably on a bent elbow (*yatamarfag*).

### 1.3. Lyrical Themes and Content

The Sahrawi poet, Baaik Moloud from Assa, has explained that composing poetry used to be an everyday ritual in the Sahara; he emphasises poetry's underlying moral value and style of life by citing a stanza from a famous poem told by the poet Boushab Jghagha (TV Laayoune, 2013):

لغن ماهو توزن لكلام == الفارغ للناس وتحكيه

Translation: Poetry does not only rhyme with empty words that people recite.

Interpretation: True poetry is not about merely assembling words; it is about something more profound and more substantial.

لغن قناعة والتزام == أركاج مع مباديئو

Translation: Poetry is the conviction and commitment of a person to his principles.

Interpretation: True poetry embodies conviction and a steadfast adherence to principles.

لغن ماه بلد النفاق == والطمع والإسترزاق

Translation: Poetry is not a site of hypocrisy, greed, and profit.

Interpretation: Authentic song is far removed from hypocrisy, greed, and the pursuit of profit.

ولا أدعيات فلبواق == حد إگول يطمع بيه

Translation: Nor are public broadcasts with loudspeakers to be said by someone for greed.

Interpretation: True poetry does not harbour any pretensions or desires for baseless claims.

لغن فكر وقيم وأخلاق == حد بعقل زين يواسيه

Translation: Poetry is a way of thinking, values, and morals used by someone with reason.

These lines illustrate the author's belief that poetry can influence people to uphold moral standards. Thus, poetry serves two purposes: moral instruction and calming enjoyment. Other poets of his time largely agreed with Hammadi's view that a true poet is compensated via his commitment to social values rather than through monetary gain. The fall in the artistic worth and public appreciation of poetry has frequently been attributed to the rise of "fake" poets who perform for payment. Poets have historically been paid materially for their works of art, often in hospitality (gifts, food, and lodging) or financial support from noble families.

Traditional Sahrawi poetry in Hassaniya is still performed orally, from mouth to mouth, and preserved in the prodigious memories of bards, singers, and poetry lovers. However, in recent years, attempts have been made to write and archive it to prevent its eventual disappearance, along with its authors (Lopez Martin, 2020). For centuries, Sahrawi poetry has consistently revealed essential dimensions of a communal cultural identity characteristic of *Ahel Esahel*, a term in *Hassaniya* that refers to the groups of people living along the West coast of the African continent. *Uld Emreizig*, one of the prominent classic poets of *Hassania* Bedouin literature, left a precise account of the nomad way of life, celebrating its geographical and cultural environment (Abdelfatah Ebnu, 2003):

In the Sahara, my life is joy == Milk, and dates and anish flowers<sup>5</sup>,

ودهن اريش وافاك المراززي -- بالقي الكمح

I have barely Poultry fat == And the scent of afaag<sup>6</sup> el mazazia<sup>7</sup>

الكبلي كيف ذناس عايش -- بلعيش اولاً انصيف

I do not spend my summer eating elaish<sup>8</sup> == like the people of the south,

حكاك النبان شور الوديان-- وانبك اولاً انشرك

Nor do I search in the rivers of the East == With enbig<sup>9</sup> between my teeth

اعفي نوكلو ريطات -- اجمال وادرار الاحرث

And the Adraar<sup>10</sup> ploughed by dromedaries == I eat fresh tender herbs,

والعرك واقتاسا -- ومكيم البيل للمطلان

Wandering with dromedaries == Towards El Mutlan, Aftasa, and El Erguia.”

The classic Sahrawi poets have consistently been tied to their social, geographic, and cultural surroundings. Memory is preserved through these verses in hassaniya. In *Hassani's poetry*, poems are expected to be titled; sometimes, they are written by unknown authors. For example, in the following short poem, the poet, faced with the distance of his land, seeks to say that his *séjour* time in another region outside the Sahara was to his liking and recalls that he would not change his habitat for that region where, for various circumstances, he had temporarily settled. Thus, the poet announces his attachment to the Sahrawi nomadic space:

لكسر واكلاّب وعندو == عندو لعلاّب وذسبوع

Of these dunes of this week == And this oasis and its hills

نختير نشوف اسبوع == بواعليب ونشوف اعلاّب

I choose the week<sup>11</sup> == of Bu Aleiba and its portentous dunes

Bu Aleiba is an admired hill with a long history among the nomadic inhabitants of the Sahrawi region of *Tiris*, a land of legends evoked by many classics of hassaniya oral tradition.

#### 1.4.Contexts of Performance in Morocco

Oral poetry has become essential in Sahrawi culture, particularly in light of the shifting societal and economic trends over the past few decades. While urbanisation and modern technologies have made poetry less prominent, it inspires an active following and plays a significant role in spreading information, voicing opinions, and participating in political struggles.

Wedding celebrations remain the most common venue for contemporary poetry performances, where poetry and music are incorporated throughout the reception, which can last from one to three days. Political events and local award ceremonies are also occasions where poets perform publicly. However, the transmission of the requisite skills and knowledge of composition and performance to younger generations is declining, as more young people prefer composing in free verse rather than adhering to the traditional, rule-bound meters that structure *Hassani* poetry.

<sup>5</sup> Acacia flowers, edible, with a very pleasant taste and scent

<sup>6</sup> Afaag is the urine of the dromedary and even has a pleasant smell when mixed with the plants the animals feed on. In Sahrawi culture, the word *elboul*, urine, is a word that must be avoided out of respect to elders, as it refers to that of humans. However, the equivalents for dromedaries are *afaag* and *lebaar*.

<sup>7</sup> El mazazia is the denomination given to an esteemed female dromedary.

<sup>8</sup> kind of cereal food usually eaten by shepherds in the south of Morocco, and in Mauritania

<sup>9</sup> Zizyphus lotus, orange-coloured fruit of a desert shrub called sder, with a pleasant taste. It is eaten ripe and dry and is highly appreciated by the nomads.

<sup>10</sup> Area in the southern region of the Sahara cited by poets in Tiris, usual setting of Bedouin nomadism.

<sup>11</sup> Play on words, as in *Hassaniya* “week” sounds the same as “lions”.

Contemporary Sahrawi poets, especially those educated abroad, now write free poems entirely in Spanish or foreign languages, threatening *Hassaniyya's* linguistic and cultural richness. Despite these challenges, innovations in form have opened new avenues of expression, and Sahrawi youth have not abandoned their poetic traditions. Poetry remains an essential cultural practice that allows individuals to express themselves and connect with their roots.

Deubel (2010) states that the Moroccan state employs various means, including media, public education, and sponsorship of collective cultural events, to promote the image of a unified, postcolonial nation with inclusive ethnic identities. This has included a focus on preserving national heritage, as reflected in annual folk festivals, or "moussems," which are popular with Moroccans and foreign tourists. The state appropriation of local cultural heritage is evident in government patronage symbols that emphasise national belonging and bonds with the Moroccan monarchy. Similar festivals, such as music, song, Hassani poetry performances, food preparation, crafts, and the construction of nomadic tents, have also recently developed in Sahrawi communities. The payment for performances has sparked controversy over poets' motivations and loyalties. These cultural festivals serve as a means for the state to promote a unified image of the nation and its diverse, pluralistic culture. Still, they have received mixed reviews from the Sahrawi communities and poets.

### **1.5. The Influence of Social Media on Traditional Genres of Oral Poetry and Music**

The Sahrawi communities have a vibrant oral poetry and music tradition that has been passed down through generations. This cultural heritage serves to preserve history, express emotions, and connect with one's roots. However, the advent of social media has brought about significant changes in how Sahrawi poetry and music are created, disseminated, and appreciated. This section examines the profound impact of social media on traditional genres of Sahrawi oral poetry and music.

For centuries, oral Sahrawi poetry and music have played a crucial role in preserving the cultural identity of the Sahrawi people. These oral traditions have served as a repository of historical knowledge, recounting tales of their nomadic heritage, struggles for independence, and the beauty of the desert landscape. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, have become essential tools for Sahrawi poets and musicians to reach a global audience and preserve their cultural heritage.

One of social media's most significant advantages is its ability to transcend geographical boundaries. Sahrawi poets and musicians can now share their work with a global audience, connecting with Sahrawi communities and people worldwide who are interested in their culture. This international reach has enabled Sahrawi artists to engage with a broader, more diverse audience, fostering a sense of solidarity and understanding across cultures (Deubel, 2012).

Social media platforms have enabled Sahrawi poets and musicians to document and share their oral traditions digitally. Traditional oral poetry and music can now be recorded, preserved, and shared with future generations, ensuring that the rich cultural tapestry of the Sahrawi communities continues to thrive. This digital documentation is also valuable for researchers and scholars interested in Sahrawi culture. Social media has also facilitated collaboration among Sahrawi artists and artists from other cultures. Maliki (2020) discusses that the fusion of traditional Sahrawi poetry and music with contemporary elements has given rise to innovative and exciting new forms of expression. Collaborations with musicians and poets from diverse backgrounds have given rise to a vibrant and evolving cultural scene that resonates with both traditional and modern audiences.



## **2. HISTORY, MEMORY, AND NARRATIVE**

Historians have attempted to distinguish between history and memory by examining their functions and methods, and by seeking connections between them. To better understand these concepts and their specificities in this research, we can refer to the work of Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White, who explore the complex relationships among historiography, narrative, and memory. Additionally, the views of Maurice Halbwachs (1992) and Pierre Nora (1989) on the relationship between memory and history can provide further insight. Through this discussion, we can explore the role, impact, and power of oral narratives concerning memory and history, and how this relates to the Sahrawis' historical and collective memory.

Ricoeur (1984) emphasises the interconnectedness of time, narrative, history, memory, and forgetting. He argues that temporality and narrativity are reciprocal, meaning human experiences of time are inherently narrative. Narratives reveal temporal experiences and are essential for understanding historical events. Ricoeur discusses the interaction between historical texts and readers, noting that narrative gives life and meaning to historical experiences. He introduces the idea of "pre-narrative elements" in human experience, suggesting that life inherently has a story-like quality. Ricoeur also addresses the complexities of representation and narration in historical memory, emphasising the interplay between remembering and forgetting.

White challenges the idea that narratives naturally reflect human experiences of time. He argues that historical narratives are constructed to fit contemporary norms and serve specific purposes. Along with Louis Mink, White contends that narratives impose order on human behaviour and influence interpretation and anticipation. White highlights the role of narrative in constructing form and meaning rather than merely reflecting lived experiences.

The convergence between memory and history is reminiscent of Pierre Nora's concept of "lieux de mémoire" (French: sites of memory), in which habitual practices and commemorative rituals serve as explicit signs that embody and are not necessarily experienced by individuals (Nora, 1989, p. 10). Considering this interpretation, this study will also focus on historical events and memory trace sites (places) registered as consecrated sites in Saharan history and space.

On the other hand, Halbwachs used the term "collective memory" to refer to the active past that shapes people's identities and to emphasise the shared social frameworks of individual memories and recollections (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 37). Halbwachs argued that history is a "dead memory," preserving the past and no longer part of people's present experiences. He also distinguished between history and historical memory, whose experiences and traditions are preserved by the state's social institutions to strengthen the power of emerging democratic states amid rapidly changing political and economic structures in late 19th- and 20th-century Europe. Invented traditions, or historical memory in Halbwachs' terms, are "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Anderson (1991) interpreted these traditions as their essential role "to foster social cohesion in 'imagined communities,' establish or legitimise the authority of institutions and to instil beliefs, values, and behaviour in the population." (P.6). In contrast to the interpretations of memory within the state's traditions and ideology, critics of popular memory have maintained the role of personal agency in the recalling process and used narrative theory to examine the personal

articulation of memories and the interaction between the private and public senses of the past phenomenon. Popular memory tradition mainly covers, .... the relation between dominant memory and oppositional forms across the whole public field ... and the ties between public discourses ... and the more privatised sense of the past generated within a lived culture (Popular Memory Group, 1982, p. 210).

### 2.1. The Sahrawi Historical Memory and Narrative in the Sahrawi Context

The article applies these theoretical perspectives to the Sahrawi context, exploring how poetry's oral narrative functions as a tool for preserving and challenging historical memory. Sahrawi oral poetry plays a vital role in sustaining collective memory and cultural identity, especially amidst the shifting borders in the Saharan region. The relationship between historical memory, narrative, and identity is analysed, emphasising the political and social consequences of how memory is represented and utilised.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Spanish colonial authorities and European Orientalists exploited the region's distinct dress, artefacts, and oral customs to argue that the Saharan provinces were culturally separate from Morocco. The historical figures of prominent tribes were often reinterpreted as autonomous to legitimise colonial dominance in Rio de Oro (Oued-Dahab) and Sidi-Ifni. *Hassani* poetry opposed such narratives by reaffirming connections to the Moroccan Sultanate and celebrating cross-regional kinship. By expressing a collective memory that transcended colonial borders, oral poetry became a form of cultural liberation—asserting a historical continuity displaced by colonial boundaries (Pennell, 2000). Today and for over forty years, the Sahrawi people have endured the devastating political turmoil that has caused their division and dispersion. The historical memory in the Sahara has witnessed a process of social disintegration due to the burden of decolonisation and the confrontations between different groups within the same society. Also, it is worth noting that the Sahrawi historical memory did not rely on the popular and collective memory but on the narratives published by historians, journalists, and political authorities that resulted in the construction of two representing images of identifying patterns and thus two different collective memories that are still serving for the present time, and thus representing the past in a society that usually tolerates different models of identity belongings (Moreno, 2003). Also, according to George Orwell (1949), “the manipulation tactic” of building memories is one of the main characteristics of historical memory; he states, “Who controls the past, controls the present, and who controls the present will control the future” (P.37). In this sense, Jacques Le Goff has emphasised the crucial role of state control of the memory pattern in dealing with the problem of manipulating it and in understanding the writers of history, the reason for using memory constructions as “*instruments*,” adding to what should be done to tackle this problem ((Le Goff, 1992).

Historical writings on the Moroccan Sahara have, since the 19th century, produced two trends that have employed all available methods as enduring tools to identify or reconstruct the historical discourse in the region. Jacques Le Goff emphasised the vital importance of state control over memory patterns in addressing manipulation and understanding historians, which is why memory constructions are utilised. This maintains two different perceptions of the Sahrawi historical memory. The first is that the official discourse of the Kingdom of Morocco is founded on the historical processes of state sovereignty and shared cultural and civilisational identity within the Moroccan nation. One of the significant tasks of successive Moroccan governments since independence has been to complete the liberation of the southern Saharan provinces from Spanish occupation because these territories have historically been a

geographical, historical, and humanistic extension of the middle and northern regions of the Moroccan state and nation, dating back to the Almoravid dynasty, which established the famous trade caravan routes and fostered various economic resources along with the Saharan northwest Africa. Subsequently, the Saadian and Alaouite dynasties legitimised their sovereignty in the Saharan region by leading resistance against colonial attempts by Spain and Portugal to occupy the region between the 16th and 19th centuries. In the last half of the 19th century, French and Spanish colonial plans to divide the Sahara heightened the collective awareness among Sahrawi communities, prompting them to unite and organise their groups not based on tribal or territorial origins but through a shared collective assembly committed to defending and liberating the colonised Saharan territories under the sovereignty and allegiance to the Sultan of Morocco. This significant historical event became a foundational element of shared historical memory and collective cultural identity within Morocco.

The second historical discourse is derived from the image formed by the Spanish colonial regime since the first half of the 19th century. Based on reports from Western orientalist who depicted the region as remote and separate from the northern provinces under the Sultan's authority, the colonists managed to negotiate various informal agreements with influential tribal leaders to legitimise and implement their hegemonic plans for establishing independent entities, especially in the regions of Oued Dahab (Rio de Oro) and Sidi-Ifni (*Santa Cruz de Mar Pequeña*) (Hodges, 1983).

Furthermore, within the discursive colonial framework mentioned above, some elements of racial origin, oral tradition, way of dressing, and artefacts, adding to the natural and geographical location of the Sahara, were all used as instruments for maintaining the argument that the Saharan provinces constitute a separate geographical and cultural entity of a distinctive nature and history. This historical discourse also attempted to present some historical forefathers of influential tribes as an alternative to the official Moroccan narrative, which asserts the reality of existing historical ties with the region as a natural and cultural extension of the Moroccan kingdom (Pennell, C. R. (2000)). This historical discourse of colonial background led to the construction of a new Sahrawi identity model, in that some of the above-mentioned cultural elements of the ancient *Bidani* Tradition were used as manipulative instruments that would serve, in the long run, as an incentive to the ideological mythologies of the Polisario separatist movement. Consequently, two historical versions of memory have been constructed; the first endorses national unity and living in a multicultural society, and the second is of an ethnic-nationalist, independent and popular orientation. Both historical memory conceptions use their arguments and imaginaries to transform history into a stable reality and do not accept the process of change within these mobilised historical narratives. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Spanish colonial authorities and European Orientalists exploited the region's distinct dress, artefacts, and oral customs to argue that the Saharan provinces were culturally separate from Morocco. The historical figures of prominent tribes were often reinterpreted as autonomous to legitimise colonial dominance in Rio de Oro (Oued-Dahab) and Sidi-Ifni. *Hassani's* poetry opposed such narratives by reaffirming connections to the Moroccan Sultanate and celebrating cross-regional kinship. By expressing a collective memory that transcended colonial borders, oral poetry became a form of cultural liberation—asserting a historical continuity displaced by colonial boundaries.

### **3. SAHRAWI ORAL POETRY AND MEMORY PRESERVATION**

The Sahrawi communities and the *Touareg* tribes were originally nomadic groups that inhabited the vast Sahara region of North Africa. Their rich cultural heritage has been passed down through generations through oral poetry, which serves to preserve their history and traditions. The poetry of the Sahrawi communities reflects the importance of memory in their culture and its role in preserving that memory. Sahrawi's oral poetry is characterised by rhyme, rhythm, and repetition, often accompanied by music and dance. The poems are highly structured, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. They usually tell stories of historical events, heroic deeds, and essential figures in the Sahrawi Maghreb's history, serving as a means of passing down cultural values and beliefs.

One of the most critical aspects of Sahrawi's oral poetry is its role in preserving the memory of past events. Many poems are dedicated to remembering critical historical figures who fought against French and Spanish colonial rule in the early 20th century. These poems serve to preserve the memory of these figures and pass down their stories to future generations.

Another way Sahrawi oral poetry preserves memory is through its use of repetition. Many of the poems contain repeated phrases and lines that reinforce the important messages and values they convey. This repetition also helps the listener remember the poem and its content, ensuring that it is passed down accurately through the generations.

Sahrawi oral poetry also preserves the memory of important cultural traditions and practices. Many poems celebrate the unique aspects of Sahrawi culture, including traditional dress, cuisine, and music. By capturing these traditions in poetry, the Sahrawi communities ensure that they are not forgotten over time and continue to be passed down from one generation to the next.

### 3.1. *Al Badiya* is the site of MEMORY and Identity

"*Al Badiya*" refers to the vast Saharan countryside, which is significant to the Sahrawi communities for shaping their collective memory and identity. *Al Badiya* represents a shared cultural space where the Sahrawis have built their traditions and beliefs, including music, poetry, and storytelling. These artistic expressions are essential for the Sahrawi communities to preserve their history and pass it down to future generations. Additionally, *Al Badiya* is a site of resistance against colonialism and a symbol of the Sahrawi way of life and cultural heritage.

Sahrawi poetry is renowned for its distinctive creative aspect, closely tied to the place and the memories associated with it. For example, the following poem expresses a deep reliance on God's providence and a humble submission to His will, evoking memories of the days he spent in Tiris. In this beautiful place, he lived with his beloved.

This poem expresses deep supplication and longing for the *Tiris* region as a place of memory, addressing God as the Creator who controls all affairs.

"ياربي ياخالق لعباد == ولجان بيدك محسوبة"

Translation: "Oh my Lord, the Creator of servants == And the affairs are all in your hands, accounted for."

Interpretation: The poet addresses God, acknowledging Him as the Creator and the one who oversees and manages all matters.

"لا لحكت نارك فيا زاد == ياربي هاه المكتوبة"

Translation: "If Your fire ignites upon me, increase == Oh my Lord, this is what is decreed."

Interpretation: The poet submits to God's will, expressing readiness to endure any trial or hardship that may come their way, as God decrees it.

"ذي النوبة بالجواد == تيرس فأخلاكي لحكت كد الي"

Translation: "As much as You decide, oh Generous == I miss *Tirs* a lot this time."

Interpretation: The poet acknowledges God's generosity and asks for His abundant provision by His decree.

"ف تيرس ماهو فبلد لي == تعرف عن خالك أشويا"

Translation: "You know a little about Your servant == So provide, for he is not in his land."

Interpretation: The poet appeals to God's knowledge of their situation, asking for provision as they are in a foreign land and reliant on God's support.

"تشرح لكلوبة ياخي == شوفتها ما خلا هاتيرس"

Translation: "*Tirs* is empty and abandoned, oh my brother == You see how it soothes the hearts."

Interpretation: The poet implores the emptiness of *Tirs* and asks God's provision to bring comfort and solace to the heart.

"من شي كامل حي == فيها والدمعة مصبوبة ولخالك"

Translation: "And that is completely devoid of anything alive == In it, tears are shed."

Interpretation: The poet acknowledges their life is incomplete without God's provision, and tears are shed in longing and supplication for His mercy and assistance.

(Deye, 2014, 1:45)

In the same way, another poet paints a picture of a serene and untouched sanctuary sought after by wanderers throughout time, offering solace, beauty, and hope to those who find it, and finally occupied by other new families of nomads:

This poem describes tranquil, idyllic places as symbolic representations of an idealised homeland, Bir Anzarane. Overall, the poem paints a picture of a serene, untouched sanctuary sought after by wanderers throughout time, offering solace, beauty, and hope to those who find it, and is finally occupied by new families of nomads.

"يلالي مخلا ذو لوطان == ومخلا بئر انزران الكان"

Translation: "Oh my God, devoid places are these villages, and *Bir Nazarene* is devoid of the chaos of life."

Interpretation: The poet describes the place of Bir Anzarane, characterising it and its neighbouring villages as desolate and abandoned.

"أعلى طول الدهر والزمان == البيضان اتجيه و تبغيه"

Translation: "Throughout time and ages == The wanderers seek and desire it."

Interpretation: The described place remains sought after and desired by wanderers throughout different periods.

"اخلى من لهل و من فرگان == دَبَل امنازلهم راعيه"

Translation: "More spacious than the valleys and plains == Where their dwellings, their shepherd."

Interpretation: The described place is vaster and more spacious than the valleys and plains. It serves as a dwelling place for its inhabitants, who are cared for by their shepherd.

"إنسان == ولا هو حد اتليت تلاقيه خالي ما فيه اتلا"

Translation: "Empty of any human being == And there is no limit to finding it."

Interpretation: This place appears uninhabited by humans, yet it remains open and accessible to anyone who seeks it.

"اكنانيه دَ من شي كان == ينشاف الفوگا اعلى والطلح اخلا"

Translation: "And the trees of *Talh* (*Acacia trees*) are lusher than anything seen before == Its branches brushing the highest heavens."



Interpretation: The acacia trees in this place are described as incredibly lush, reaching up to the heavens, emphasising their beauty and abundance.

"اعشوش لكهولة غربان== تقطنت لهم ماهم فيه"

Translation: "a 'šūš lkhūl' grīān == I have found what they are in."

Interpretation: Even a 'šūš lkhūl' grīān, as a famous place, is devoid of its people and life

"فيه وخلي من لحسان ولمان== ماهو مجبور ايه اتلي"

Translation: "And empty of goodness and peace. It has not forced anyone to come to it."

Interpretation: This place is described as neutral, devoid of good and evil, and no one needs to seek it.

"وعادو فيه ألمي سكان== ماهم ذوك الا كانوا فيه"

Translation: "And there, return other people to this place == They are not the ones who resided there before."

Interpretation: Despite the absence of human presence, hope dwells in this place when it welcomes new residents.

(Boujdour, 2019, 2:15)

The Sahrawi tribes, indigenous to the Sahara Desert, have a rich history of poetry and oral storytelling. Their poetry is deeply rooted in their community's culture, traditions, and experiences. Here is another poem from Mauritania that reflects a deep attachment to a specific *badiya* place and community, as well as a yearning for its natural beauty and way of life. It conveys a sense of longing and nostalgia for familiar surroundings and the belonging they provide.

This poem evokes longing and attachment to a specific place —a rural, desert area —while also celebrating al-*haūl* al-*ḥsānī* (singing Hassani poetry).

"الهول باغي فأخلاكي== من هون ساكن المنيا"

Translation: "al-*haūl* is staying in my heart == From here resides my dwelling."

Interpretation: The poet expresses a deep connection to singing and the rural *Lamnia*, indicating that she resides there.

"الهول لي كبضو باغي== لولاد حاسي ثريا"

Translation: "al-*hūl* is still haunting me == For the children of *Hassi Thria*."

Interpretation: The poet refers to the longing to visit the place of *Hassi Thria*. This place holds significance for the descendants of *Hassi Thria*, indicating a shared ancestral heritage and historical connection.

"البال متمني ديما== فاريف يجبر للحية"

Translation: "The mind is constantly yearning == in the countryside, I find livestock

Interpretation: The poet's heart constantly yearns for the familiar surroundings of the rural place, which have a comforting, soothing effect on the soul.

"وأهل البادية واغراد== الخضار والماء وخويم"

Translation: "For the greenery, water, and tents == And the hills and the people of the wilderness."

Interpretation: The poet lists elements of the natural environment and lifestyle associated with the wilderness, including greenery, water sources, tents, hills, and the inhabitants of such areas. These elements evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing for the rural or desert landscape.

(Tairanti, 2011, 1:32)

One of the defining characteristics of Sahrawi poetry is its strong connection to the natural world. The poets draw inspiration from the Sahara Desert and its landscapes, as well as the

region's flora and fauna. They often use metaphors and analogies to describe the beauty and power of the desert environment. For example, the dunes are frequently compared to waves on the ocean, and the harsh winds are likened to the howling of wolves.

### 3.2. Al-khaima as a Symbolic Space

*Alkhaima*, or the traditional Sahrawi tent, holds immense symbolic significance in Sahrawi culture and history. The Sahrawi communities have a long history of nomadic life, and *Al Khaimah* represents their traditional way of living. It embodies their connection to the land, resilience in harsh environments, and ability to adapt to changing conditions.

Today, in Morocco, the number of nomadic groups has decreased, and these tents are also known as "*Bayt al-Sha'ar*," which are used to organise poetry recitals during social evenings on festival days in the south of Morocco. These tents are made from goat hair or sheep wool, which is traditionally spun and woven to create durable, weather-resistant fabrics. These fabrics are then attached to simple wooden poles to form the tent's structure, with openings left for ventilation and light. *Al-khaima* emphasises the Sahrawi tribes' deep connection to the desert environment, symbolising harmony with nature and sustainable resource use.

This poem, for example, reflects on the nomadic lifestyle and the significance of tents (*lakhaim*) in Sahrawi culture's interpretation:

"الثاني فازريه لعليب اللي ظهر == لعليب"

Literally: "The first *La'leeb* has appeared == The second *La'leeb* is behind."

Interpretation: *La'leeb* is a small hill that marks the location before arriving at the camp.

"ملهيه افزرو لخيام == اشوي امن اصدر اعليه"

Literally: "covered with *seder* (Lote-tree) == the tents are just behind."

Interpretation: This is for adapting or preparing to locate and represent the camp as a fascinating shelter.

"إشوف وليختير للسمع == خيمة لاجيال اللي إنكال"

Literally: "A tent for the generations == for those who hear and choose what to see."

Interpretation: The stanza emphasises the importance of listening and observing, suggesting the wisdom passed down through generations about *Lkhaima* as a symbolic space.

"فحق الضيوف فحق العيال == ولا تلتام ماتلتام"

Literally: "Do not offend the family members' gatherings == nor violate the right of guests."

Interpretation: This highlights the hospitality and generosity ingrained in Sahrawi culture, where mere accommodation is insufficient for family or guests.

"إجيني التخمام == كل وقيت افلخيام"

Literally: "In the tent thoughts every time they come to me."

Interpretation: *Takhmam* refers to specific thoughts. The stanza evokes a sense of familiarity and comfort associated with the arrival of these tents and the memories they evoke.

"حانيني ياللي واعد لخيام == لاتعجل"

Literally: "Oh, you who are going to the camp, do not rush, wait for me."

The last stanza mentions "الفريگ" (*Alfriig*), a collective term for a group of tents. It speaks of their movement between settlements and the exchange of goods.

"يا يوك زاد لأفريگ == نازل بين المنازل"

Literally: "Oh, happy visitors of the camp, descending between the houses."

"إتي من ما ياسنكيك == وتي من ما نازل"

"Come from what pleases you == and go to what place you want."

Interpretation: This stanza emphasises the tents' mobility, adaptability, and reciprocal trade and hospitality among settlements.

(Abah, 2021, 1:05)

Overall, the poem captures elements of Sahrawi nomadic life, emphasising themes of transition, hospitality, tradition, and the significance of tents (Alfriig) in their culture.

Al-Khaima serves as a shelter and gathering place for family and community members. It symbolises unity, solidarity, and the importance of communal ties. Hospitality is a fundamental value in Sahrawi culture, and the tent serves as a space where guests are warmly welcomed and treated with care (Bubrik, 2021, pp. 6-9). The following *Hassani* poem describes the attributes and qualities of a big family or clan tent, depicting it as a symbol of comfort, hospitality, and security.

"خيمة من قديم الزمان == ماكط وعسر منها شان"

"A tent from ancient times == No weariness or difficulty from it."

This line emphasises the tent's durability and strength, suggesting it has withstood the test of time without showing signs of wear or weakness.

"حد اقصدها ماه كسحان == مطامع فاشح الظروف"

"Whoever approaches it does not feel tired == Aspirations beyond the grasp of circumstances."

Here, the poem suggests that those seeking refuge in the tent find rejuvenation and relief from exhaustion, symbolising aspirations that transcend the limitations imposed by life's circumstances.

"رويان == فوك أشعت ولا أدهم زفوف امطرنش اتمشيه"

"You walk under it without feeling thirsty == Above its beams, there is neither sun rays nor dense clouds."

This line highlights the tent's ability to provide shelter from the elements, ensuring those beneath it do not suffer from thirst or extreme weather.

"لولوف ولعشار سرحان == ولخبط سرحان امخليه"

"You leave it at ease, and it leaves you at ease == whether you leave it or stay, it remains calm."

The tent is depicted as a source of tranquillity and peace, offering comfort and relaxation to its occupants and those who depart.

"وعيان == الطيب اللي تبغي لولوف والسكر والوركة"

"And the sugar, the tea, and the entertainment == The goodness you desire is found within it."

This line lists the pleasures and delights in the tent, including pleasant aromas, delicious food, and enjoyable activities, suggesting that everything one desires can be found under its shelter.

"ما فيها مكشوف وجمايح == وسرب تتخالف والبجوان"

"And groups gather, and the songs are sung == And everything within it is concealed."

The poet portrays the tent as a place where people gather to enjoy music and festivities, with its enclosed space offering privacy and intimacy.

"بالمعروف العرض ولا فيها ديسان == الحكم وتامر"

"There is neither disdain nor arrogance within it == It embodies justice and commands good deeds."

The tent is depicted as devoid of negative attitudes or behaviours, embodying the principles of fairness and righteousness and promoting virtuous actions.

"لحم اخروف امع لحسان == للخطار وطبالي تكدم"

"And the drums beat for joy == For the hosts, there is meat of sheep."

This line suggests that celebrations and feasts are held in the tent, with special provisions made for courageous individuals, such as the offering of lamb meat.

"ولا لحم الغزلان أحيان == ولبن من كيف أنو مدفوف"

"Or sometimes there is the meat of gazelles == and milk as if it were flowing from its source."  
(Qanat al-Naqoura al-Jadida, 2024, 1 :45)

The poem describes the variety of food available in the tent, including game meat like gazelle and fresh milk, symbolising abundance and nourishment. It ends by stating that disputes and uncertainties are resolved within the tent as evidence and truth become clear and undisputed. Also, the poem celebrates the tent as a place of refuge, joy, and communal gathering, where people find solace, entertainment, and camaraderie amid life's challenges. Furthermore, the design and decoration of *Alkhaima* often reflect Sahrawi cultural motifs, patterns, and colours. It serves as a tangible expression of Sahrawi identity, preserving and transmitting their cultural heritage from one generation to the next. As a portable structure, *Alkhaima* embodies the mobility and adaptability of Sahrawi culture, as it can be easily assembled and disassembled, allowing Sahrawi nomadic groups to move with their herds and maintain their way of life across vast desert territories.

*Khaimah* is a multifaceted symbol in Sahrawi culture and history, embodying the values of community, resilience, cultural identity, and connection to the land.

In addition to preserving memory, Sahrawi's oral poetry also serves as a means of resistance and political expression. For example, in the southwestern region of Algeria, where the Polisario separatist movement is based, the poetic genre expresses opposition to the Moroccan state's sovereignty over the provinces of the Sahara, which were historically part of the Moroccan kingdom. Through poetry, the Sahrawi people can express their political beliefs and mobilise support for their cause in Morocco or in *Tindouf*, in support of the separatist group.

As Mohamed Dahman says:

The texts of Hassani's "*L-ghna*" demonstrate the richness of its semantic content and make it a living document of the relationship with the place. They reveal the nomadic journey undertaken by the "camel rider" between Lower Draa (Rk Haram) and Tichitt and Azouf (in present-day Mauritania). Here, the French linguistic researcher Catherine Taine-Le Cheikh remarks, "We can say that the poet is in harmony with this traveller, as through his verses, we witness the landscapes he crosses, describing and naming them as if he is inviting us to relive his journey, even to relive his encounters"(Dahman, 2012, p. 281).

The poet is deeply connected to the region as a space for living and travelling. Therefore, when he moves away from this environment, he feels nostalgia and a longing for it, drawing on his memories in his creativity. He even hopes to return to where he came from, comparing his original environment to the new circumstances that brought him there.

However, the presence of the Saharan region in "*L-ghna*" does not only mean residency or roaming within a geographical area. It can also signify a relationship with others, such as a beloved. It is noteworthy that attachment to a single beloved was uncommon, as *Hassani* poets, like sailors, often had multiple beloveds, depending on the ports they visited. Thus, we observe a correlation between the beloved woman and the place in "*L-ghna*," as the singer mentions her by name and the places he stayed in or passed through. Various emotions and sentiments are projected onto the place rather than being addressed directly to the beloved, showcasing the indirect discourse characteristic of Hassani culture. This makes it a heritage rich in implications

and symbolic gestures, a source of rich memory and a catalyst for further research and scientific inquiry, which will never be short of richness and subtlety (Nkaidi, 2012, p. 25).

In the Saharan region, there are places of memory that are strongly present in literary and artistic production, as well as in social, cultural, and imaginary history. For example, the Tiris region is considered a place of memory. In this context, Hassani poets assigned utmost importance to their social memory and inspiration in the face of the rapid changes in behaviour, values, and pastoral wealth. It is a kind of lamentation and mourning for the past —roaming, Bedouin camps, and delicate social ties. Therefore, plenty of *Hassani's* poems provide insight into the relationship between the place and the other, both the individual and the collective. They also carry a rich linguistic lexicon that illustrates the region's topography and place names, reflecting a cultural mix of Sanhaja Berber, classical Arabic, and *Hassaniya*. Moreover, they involve comparisons made by the Hassani folk poet across distant spaces regarding topography, pasture fertility, and natural scenery.

Here, the poet *Mohamed Weld Ahmed* describes areas stretching from the Wadi Nun (Tiskanen, Qasr Abidine, and Dahman) to Lower Draa (Ifindane, Lahmamida), towards the southern Moroccan Sahara (Hakkouniya, Ad-Dawra, Izik), passing through Tiris (Lask, Adramane, Bouloutad, Iniyane) until reaching the northern Adrar region in Mauritania. It maps the most critical areas of human settlements, caravan routes, grazing lands, and the most significant memory locations in northern "*trab Al-Bidan*".

يلال مبعد تيسكنان == واكصر عابدين ودحمان

Translation: "Oh my God, far from *Tisguanen* == And *Qasr Abidine* and *Dahman*."

Interpretation: The poet expresses a longing for distant places, such as Tiskanen, Abidine, and Dahman, which may be places of significance or personal connection.

"الطارف والنطفية إيسك والخنك والوديان == راص"

Translation: "And *Isk*, *Alkhank*, and the valleys == Along with the borders of *Taref* and *Ntifiya*."

Interpretation: The poem mentions specific geographic features and locations, including Isk, Alkhank, valleys, and the borders of Taref and Ntifiya, highlighting their importance or beauty.

"المعيطية والركن ومغادر سلطان == وأكجكال"

Translation: "And *Arkan*, *Mghader*, and *Sultan* == And *Akjal Almayatia*."

Interpretation: The poem lists various places and landmarks, such as *Arkan*, *Mghader*, *Sultan*, and *Akjal Almayatia*, which hold significance within the context of the poet's memories or experiences.

"منبت بوشامية الغزلان == واذريع واذراع عظم الابل"

Translation: "‘*zm al-ābl wādrā’ al-ḡzlān* == And the ridges of the Bushamia forest."

Interpretation: Here, the poet evokes imagery through the names of the local landscape.

"ولحميدية ويفندان == واذريع منبت تيلمسان"

Translation: "And the valleys of *Tilimsan* == And *Yefendan* and *Lahmiedia*."

Interpretation: The poem continues to mention valleys and locations such as Tilimsan, Yefendan, and Lahmiedia, further vividly portraying the landscape and its features.

"وكرب الشيلان == والكعدة والحكونية أخنيفيس"

Translation: "And *Akhnifis* and *Kurb Alshilan* == And *Alkada* and *Al Hagoniah*."

Interpretation: The poem enumerates additional locations, including *Akhnifis*, *Kurb Alshilan*, *Alkada*, and *Al Hagoniah*, thereby further enriching the description of the region.

"الحيثية أذك عثمان == إزيك الدورة واحويس"



Translation: "And *Adora* and *Ahwes Osman* ==*Izik Aidik Elhaithia*."

(Tairtantani, 2012, 3:15)

Interpretation: The poem concludes by mentioning places like Adora and Ahwes Osman while also inquiring about Haithia's well-being, suggesting a personal connection to these locations. The poem vividly depicts various places and landmarks, evoking a sense of longing and nostalgia for the landscapes and associated memories.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Sahrawi poets embed memory as a living archive, narrating displacements, heroic deeds, and environmental struggles. Their verses recall caravan routes, sacred sites, and tribal alliances, providing counter-histories to colonial documentation. Identity is negotiated through poetic metaphors of the tent, the camel, and the desert wind—symbols that connect Sahrawis to their ancestral land and to Morocco's Saharan heritage. Resistance appears in satirical praise-blame poems that challenge colonial authority and condemn injustices. In doing so, Hassani's oral poetry exemplifies what Ricoeur (1984) described as the reciprocity of temporality and narrativity: the experience of time becomes understandable through narrative, and narrative, in turn, reveals temporal and historical consciousness.

In recent decades, Sahrawi oral poetry has shifted from the tent to the digital realm. Performances once limited to local festivals—such as (Khaymat al-Shi'r li-Mawsim Tanṭan) and (Layali Azawan al-Sahra) —and community recitals are now streamed on YouTube channels (e.g., TV Laayoune, Qanat al-Naqoura al-Jadida). This digital shift has expanded access, allowing the diaspora and global audiences to engage with the tradition. It has also changed the role of poetry, transforming it from a fleeting performance into a lasting, searchable cultural record. Such online visibility redefines collective memory, permitting Sahrawi communities to curate their heritage and resist cultural marginalisation in virtual spaces.

Nowadays, Sahrawi oral poetry is a vital cultural tool for preserving collective memory and identity. The country fosters inclusivity and unity by integrating Sahrawi traditions into Morocco's national narrative through education, festivals, and artisanal initiatives. This recognition honours the Sahrawi heritage while enriching the broader Moroccan cultural landscape. Social media and digital platforms have ensured the survival and global dissemination of these traditions, enhancing the fusion of Sahrawi oral poetry with contemporary forms and contributing to the nation's vibrant cultural tapestry. This study demonstrates that Sahrawi Hassani oral poetry is not merely a folkloric artefact but a cultural archive through which communities negotiate memory, assert identity, and resist-imposed borders.

By examining historical foundations, literary texts, and their digital manifestations, this paper has demonstrated that poetry serves as a connective tissue, binding Sahrawi culture to its Moroccan heritage while challenging colonial discourses of separation. The analysis addressed the research questions posed in the introduction by revealing how memory and identity are inscribed in poetic narratives and how these narratives serve as tools of resistance and sustainability.

Furthermore, the paper highlights that the digital transformation of oral poetry—through platforms such as YouTube—has amplified Sahrawi voices, preserving fleeting performances and enabling new forms of cultural agency. It is therefore essential to acquaint individuals with their local cultural heritage and its contribution to national and human heritage. Understanding

Morocco's historical and cultural identity is incomplete without recognising the local cultural values of the Saharan regions and space.

To conclude, the words of Ibrahim al-Koni, who said that “the desert does not forget those who honour its memory” (Ahl al-Mudun Ashqiyaa, 2024, 3:20), remind us that memory anchored in place can be a force of cultural survival. This insight suggests future research on digital cultural resilience—how nomadic traditions adapt to virtual terrains—offering a promising direction for scholars of oral heritage, memory studies, and border poetics. By embracing and preserving these values, we can foster a deeper appreciation of Morocco's rich cultural tapestry and address broader developmental challenges.

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