

THE ‘AMINATOU HAIDAR’ AFFAIR: IS THIS SOMETHING MANIPULATED BY THE ALGERIAN SPECIAL SERVICES?

By way of introduction

For many weeks now, the image of the pro-Polisario Moroccan militant Aminatou Haidar observing a hunger strike in Lanzarote (Canaries) has embarrassed Spanish diplomats and occupies the media stage. Many organisations defending human rights and, recently, a handful of deputies to the European Parliament have taken up the ‘Aminatou Haidar’ affair and the case of 7 persons, citizens of the South of Morocco, who are presently being held in this country on charges of attacking the internal and external security of the State.

The affairs and the campaigns of disinformation which are widely disseminated in the media following them undermine the process of direct negotiations under the aegis of the United Nations which began two years ago when Morocco put on the table its proposal of autonomy which was hailed by most of the influential capitals in the region. They also contribute to keeping alive the fantasy of a conflict between the NPA (National Popular Army of Algeria) and the RAF (Royal Moroccan Armed Forces), an illusion widely held in Algiers which permits the generals of the ANP to over-equip their army and, very likely, on the way to pocket secret commissions which generally accompany this type of contract. They draw the attention of international opinion away from the real problems and issues of the Western Sahara and, more particularly, from the situation of the people being held in the camps of Tindouf in south-west Algeria.

This is why it seemed to us important to publish this briefing which puts things in their proper place.

1) The affair of the 7 Sahraoui Moroccan citizens and the case of Aminatou Haidar

a. The group of 7 activists

In July 2009, a group of 7 Sahraoui activists of Moroccan nationality went to Algeria, where they were met by the Algerian military security service. According to certain sources, this group fomented operations of provocation and planned violent acts within the Western Sahara with a view to keeping the situation there tense.¹ From the end of September to the beginning of the month of October 2009, these same individuals were received by officials of the Polisario Front in the camps of Tindouf where they attended a military parade and political demonstrations hostile to the sovereignty of Morocco.

Upon returning to Morocco, the group was apprehended and made to appear before the permanent military tribunal of the Royal Armed Forces on charges of: *‘an attack on the internal and external security of the State, sharing intelligence with the enemy and receiving gifts from a foreign organisation in order to conduct propaganda tending to attack the national territorial integrity.’*

A posteriori, it appears that Morocco has for a long time shown very great patience with regard to the nature of actions directed by these activists. Their latest actions ordered by the

¹ It was established that for many years now the Polisario Front and its sympathisers have manipulated groups of young Sahraouis, notably in Laâyoune, with a view to supporting street disturbances which are later presented by propaganda as a *‘Saharouie Intifada.’*

Polisario Front and by Algeria are deeds of high treason which very likely cannot be likened to humanitarian activities as described by their defenders during their campaign of support.

b. The case of Aminatou Haidar

Mme Aminatou Haidar has been on hunger strike since 16 November at the airport of Lanzarote, two days after she was expelled from Morocco (from the airport of Laâyoune) for refusing to follow the legal formalities of entry into Moroccan territory. In the event, **she had renounced her citizenship in writing though she was traveling on a Moroccan passport which she turned over to the authorities and on the police form necessary for debarkation gave her nationality as Sahraoui, which has no international recognition since the state of Sahraoui does not exist.**

A campaign of disinformation, supported by Algeria, was immediately implemented. In particular attention was directed to the poor treatment inflicted by Moroccan authorities on both Mme Aminatou Haidar and the 7 other aforementioned activists.

In fact the entire procedure of the expulsion of Mme Madame Aminatou Haidar played out in the presence of the Moroccan Royal Prosecutor. Moreover, persons close to the Sahraoui activist who were present at the airport of Laâyoune have testified that she was treated with respect during the course of the procedure. Following the example of all other states, Morocco simply applied the legal rules governing entry into its territory. Formalities are applied both to Moroccan citizens and to foreign nationals.

The pacifist image of Mme Aminatou Haidar, who has a lot of support, is a new reference point for the 'Sahraoui cause,' since she is differentiated from the warrior posture of the Polisario Front and she focuses her action on the situation of human rights in the Western Sahara. Though it is true that part of her work has been hailed by various foundations and organisations overtly identified as pro-Polisario in Europe and in the United States, it is no less true that Mme Aminatou Haidar is not the Sahraoui 'Gandhi' as some would like to depict her.

Defense of human rights has repeatedly been in the past and continues to be a pretext which Mme Aminatou Haidar uses to maintain close contacts with the Polisario Front as well as with those giving her orders and providing funds, namely the Algerian intelligence services. We note that, **while the fate of the Sahraoui people seems to be main preoccupation of this pro-Polisario defender, the dramatic situation of human rights in the Tindouf camps in Algeria, criticized for years by many NGOs, has never brought a reaction from her.**

It is also interesting to note that **Mme Aminatou Haidar has always made full use of the rights linked to her Moroccan nationality, which she nonetheless renounces today.** In 1999, she filed a request with the Independent Arbitration with a view to be compensated for '*material and moral damages experienced by the victims of a disappearance policy and arbitrary detention.*' The request was accepted, and on this basis **she received nearly 500 000 Dirhams (around 44,000 Euros).** **Mme Haidar was later an official in the municipality of Boujdour, from 2000 to 2005,** before undertaking her activities at the head of the Collective Organisation of Defenders of the Human Rights of the Sahraouis, for whose benefit she began an international campaign in 2006.

2) Algerian involvement

The Polisario Front, with Algerian support, has never stopped torpedoing the process of negotiations desired by the Sharif kingdom in order to find a way out of the impasse over the Western Sahara. Though there was a favourable reception by all intergovernmental organs, the Moroccan initiative of autonomy in the Western Sahara has encountered only limited

success. This is so despite **resolution 1871 of the UN Security Council adopted in April 2009 which backs up the Moroccan position.** On the contrary, the Algerian diplomatic apparatus and its media friends have supported the separatist claims and criticise to the hilt the behaviour of Morocco towards the Sahraoui population.

In Algeria, support of the Polisario Front long allowed the regime of Houari Boumediene to push Morocco into a long and costly war against the Independence fighters. Today, the possibility of a confrontation between Morocco and Algeria allows the latter to modernise its army. Used as a tool for domestic political purposes, the conflict of the Western Sahara nonetheless does not really interest the Algerians. In fact, the fate of the Sahraoui people and especially the fate of the refugees in the camps of Tindouf, has never truly moved Algerian public opinion, which is otherwise very sensitive to the Palestinian cause. For the past year, riots and disturbances have multiplied in Algeria, where misery is becoming more and more vivid and where the results of the government do not line up with and social or economic successes. By supporting tensions with its neighbour, Algeria is trying to save what it still can and to raise a semblance of 'national feeling.' Neither the repeated appeals of Morocco, nor international pressure in favour of a solution to the Sahraoui problem has been listened to in Algiers till now.

Conclusions

If Algiers and Rabat come to an understanding to resolve this conflict, then the two countries could begin to dream of an economic union which would see their respective countries advance as well as free movement of people and goods, the transfer of competences from one country to another, etc. This is the kind of progress that would unquestionably serve these two great countries of the Maghreb.

Algiers is not merely content to turn a deaf ear to the good will of Morocco. The regime continually poisons the situation in the Western Sahara, where the 'cause of human rights' is excessively used as a tool by intermediation of the Polisario Front. Campaigns of disinformation follow one another and resemble one another. Sometimes they enjoy a certain success in Europe. By criticising the situation of 'human rights' in the Western Sahara while neither Algeria nor the Polisario Front respect them, the two allies have managed to pull off a fine conjurer's trick !