



AMINATAOU EDDAH

85-year old Aminatou was the backbone of a very successful protest by her daughters against the Moroccan occupation, a protest that lasted for one year and seven months. But first, Mintu's own story is a heart-rending example of the many untold stories of Saharawis who suffered from occupation, and separation from their families.

Her entire Family fled to the Refugee Camps

Mintu's entire family fled to the Saharawi refugee camps because of the Moroccan invasion of Western Sahara. In the occupied territories there was only her left, together with two other siblings. One of those siblings passed away, and Mintu became the main provider for the seven children her dead brother had left behind. She did not have any contact with her mother and her other siblings until the time when it became possible to exchange letters and exchange recorded cassettes. All these letters were written by Mintu's son, who passed away in 1992. To this day she has kept these letters to keep the memory of her son alive.

Her second oldest child joined Polisario in the Refugee Camps

It had a lasting impact on Mintu that she never got a chance to say goodbye to her son Babi, who joined the Polisario front in the Saharawi refugee camps. The next time she saw him, he was in a coffin at his burial in his hometown Boujdour.

It was very common that people who wanted to join the Polisario did not inform anyone that they were leaving, not even their families. The time that Babi joined the Polisario in the refugee camps was a period under which human rights suffered greatly both in occupied Western Sahara and in Morocco under the Moroccan king Hassan II.

Babi was an important figure in the educational system in the Saharawi refugee camps. He taught many generations of children, and trained more than a hundred teachers in the refugee camps. All the letters that Mintu received from

her mother, and siblings in the camps were handwritten by her son. Sadly, Babi was diagnosed with blood cancer. He traveled to Spain for treatment, and at the same time some of his siblings, and his father traveled from the occupied territories to Spain to donate blood. Despite this, he passed shortly after.

Receiving her Martyr son in a Coffin

The ululations in the Saharawi culture is a sign of happy moments like weddings. It is also used as a powerful expression of pride, and resistance. When Mintu saw the coffin of her son lowered from the car at the cemetery she was about to ululate to honor him. For her he was a martyr, and hero who sacrificed his life for the cause, and for educating many generations in the refugee camps. Mintu suddenly became aware of the dozens of security forces that were stationed there to make sure Babi's burial did not become a symbol or the beginning of any protest.

Mintu, the Mother of one of Western Sahara most well Known Human Rights Defenders

Mintu is the mother of the well-known human rights activist Sultana Khaya. Without the 85 years old mother, her and her sister's protest could never have been maintained for such a long period of time. For the one year and seven months that her daughters' protest took place, Mintu smuggled flags, posters, banners, cameras and electronics. On a daily basis, the 85-year old was subjected to physical and verbal violence. She was forced by security agents to watch while her daughters were beaten up, violated, and raped. Today, she has been forced into exile in another city, and had to abandon the house where she spent a happy life with her now deceased husband, and where all her eight children grew up.

The Siege on Mintus House

In November 2020, the Moroccan security forces imposed a de facto house arrest on Sultana Khaya. The Moroccan occupation forbade anyone to visit the two sisters, and their old mother. People who tried to bring food, or show solidarity were beaten up, and sent back. People who showed sympathy with the three activists were punished financially by cutting their salaries.

Under this house arrest the occupation security forces broke into the house, destroyed, and stole all the house belongings. They sprayed the house with a smelly toxic substance leaving the house unfit for living in. They poisoned the water tank of her house. They cut the electricity, and in total stole thirty-five phones. Dozens of security forces were stationed on their doorstep.

The two sisters challenged this house arrest, and isolation by organizing a daily protest on the roof of their house raising Saharawi flags, holding political speeches, and hanging banners with slogans, and pictures of political prisoners. The daughters filmed their protest, and sent it live on social media from the roof of their house.

You are reading now, and you are perhaps wondering how they managed to keep raising Saharawi flags for a period of one year and seven months. How they kept recording, and sharing their protest live via social media. How they got food, and water?

Keeping the Protest Alive: Smuggling phones and flags

Mintu would daily pretend to take out the leftovers of the food to her neighbor for their sheep. Saharawis generally feed leftovers to their sheep and goats. She would in addition carry phones, and power banks to charge at her neighbor's house. As their water tank had been poisoned she had to bring water daily to her daughters from the neighbor's house. Sometimes she only carried a 5-gallon water dispenser. Other times, with the help of neighbors, she brought a 20 liters' barrel. In the bottom of this barrel other activists like her grandson had wrapped banners and posters in plastic, and hidden it inside.

Mintu, during all this period, would take the phones to the neighbors during the night, and bring them back in the morning for her daughters to use. The security forces broke into her house several times in the middle of the night, and stole everything. They stole anything, but especially phones, power banks, flashlights, and speakers. Mintu would find clever ways to smuggle new ones into the house.

The Physical and Psychological torture

In the course of the siege, the security forces raided Mintu's house several times in the middle of the night. The security forces would handcuff the three women. They would blindfold the daughters, and keep the mother watching while they raped her daughters front of her. She witnessed the security forces penetrating them with their fingers, shoes, zip ties, and broomsticks. The old mother would helplessly scream stop.

Mintu's House: an open Space for Activist and their Activities

During peaceful demonstrations, activists being chased by the police would seek refuge at random houses in the streets. Most people would close their doors afraid of the repercussions of helping an activist in front of the police. Mintu would open her house door, and stand in front of her house letting activists come into her house to seek safety.

The abandoned House and a life Exile: a Symbol of Resistance



At the age of 85, Mintu was forced to move from her city Boujdour to the capital of Western Sahara. From owning a house with three floors, to renting from a Moroccan settler. Her house in Boujdour is not livable anymore. The front walls of the house were destroyed by a truck brought by security forces. The house stinks as a result of the constant spraying of toxics. Everything must be renovated and changed including the water tank which was poisoned. The family has requested permission to renovate the house, but it was denied.

Mintu has suffered from high blood pressure due to the constant stress, and sleepless nights during the time of the house arrest. Today, she suffers from several health problems, and the 85-year old mother has developed a phobia of the sound of police cars.

Mintu's bravery, her generosity in offering her house for the Saharawi cause, and her constant support of her activist daughters illustrate not only a supportive mother. It shows that activism does not know any age, and that you do not need to have military tanks to keep the enemy up at night. All you need is a courageous and stubborn old lady who is willing to give everything for her cause.

Interviewed and written by Asria Mohamed