***Old Dominion University***

***College of Arts and Letters***

***The Graduate Program in International Studies***

**Thesis Defense**

***Nika Khmolovska***

**THE ROLE OF THE DOCUMENTARY FILM IN THE PRESENTATION OF THE NORTH AFRICAN PEOPLES’STRUGGLE FOR THEIR CIVIL RIGHTS.**

**THE SAHARAWI PEOPLE CASE STUDY.**

The Western Sahara conflict has been unresolved and kept away from the attention of the global civil society for decades. The Saharawis, who are fighting for the independence from Morocco, have been using only non-violent techniques of resistance since the United Nations (UN) brokered ceasefire. This work talks about these non-violent methods of resistance developed by the oppressed people, with a focus on documentary film. This qualitative study is based on the analysis of the scholarly literature on the Western Sahara conflict, the most recent entries in the press, and a variety of online media resources in English, French, and Spanish. Two documentary films, *Sons of the Clouds* and *Stolen*, are used as case studies. Highly influential role of the documentary film in the struggle of the Saharawi people is reiterated throughout the work. Based on the study cases the author argues that: 1) Saharawis have to be given their right to vote for the independent state, 2) documentary film is the most efficient among other non-violent methods of the Saharawi resistance, 3) Saharawis have to use all available resources to let the world know about the mistreatment that they are experiencing. The overall goal of this thesis is to accentuate the urgency of solving the multidimensional Western Sahara problem by bringing to the attention of the reader horrific realities that the Saharawis are facing.

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