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Victims or victors?
Women's political empowerment during Yemen's crises, 2011-2018

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(Translation of Arabic on cover: “Women are half of society”)

Abstract

Since 2011, Yemen has been torn apart by two subsequent crises: the 2011 uprisings which sought to overthrow the Saleh-government, and the current conflict between the Houthis and the government of president Hadi. Although women are often portrayed as primary victims of these crises, such moments of profound change can also offer possible positive changes for women. In this thesis, I analyse the impact of these two crises – the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict – on women's political empowerment in Yemen. Did women get more opportunities to participate in politics due to these crises? Two important conclusions follow from this research. Firstly, there is a notable difference between women's participation in informal politics and formal politics during and after crises; although women might be empowered in informal politics, this does not necessarily lead to empowerment in formal politics. And secondly, different crises have different impacts on women's political participation. The nature of the subsequent formal political process determines the likelihood of women's formal political empowerment.

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Acronyms

CDC	Constitution Drafting Committee
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
OSESGY	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General to Yemen
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

Introduction

> The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis'. One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger but recognise the opportunity.
>
> - John F. Kennedy (Former US President, 1961-1963)

When searching for images of Yemen on the internet, one encounters two types of images: one of men fighting and one of women and children suffering from the consequences of the fighting. These pictures mirror the traditional gendered way we perceive crises; women are seen as the primary victims of social and political upheaval. However, notwithstanding the horrors they face during crises, such crises can also be moments of positive change for women. When, for example, men are off to war, women get more responsibilities and get a chance to enter the public space (Hughes 2009, 180; Kumar 2001, 7). As counterintuitive as it may seem, crises may work 'empowering' for women, particularly in terms of politics, it is argued (Arostegui 2013, 536; Hughes 2009, 175). In this thesis, I analyse this counterintuitive idea of crises as moments of positive change for women in politics, focusing on Yemen.

Since 2011, Yemen has experienced two major crises with subsequent peace processes. In early 2011, people went out on the streets to protest against the regime of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh (1947-2017) and this period of upheaval was concluded with the transitional process of 2012-2014. Shortly after, the conflict between the Houthis and the government of president 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (1945-) commenced and this is still ongoing. Despite several rounds of peace negotiations, peace has not yet returned to Yemen. Because of these enduring crises and its historically bad position of women (see Chapter 2 – Yemen's History), Yemen provides an interesting case study to scrutinise the idea of crises being 'empowering' for women. Analysing two different crises within the same country and in a similar time period – i.e. the 2011 uprising and the current conflict – I seek to broaden our understanding of the different impact different crises have on women's political empowerment.

In academic literature on women's political empowerment during crises, little distinction is made between different sorts of crises. Moghadam (1997) focuses for instance on revolutions and Arostegui (2013), Bauer & Britton (2006) and Hughes (2009) analyse the impact of armed conflicts on women's political empowerment, yet all conclude crises *in general* may have positive effects on women's political participation (Arostegui 2013, 536; Bauer & Britton 2006, 11; Hughes 2009, 178; Moghadam 1997, 152-157). Although one might expect different outcomes with different crises – a revolution might for instance be less violent

than an armed conflict and hence has different effects on women and their political participation – there is little theoretical understanding of the different impact different crises have on women's political empowerment and what causes this difference. As I show in this thesis, the 2011 uprisings indeed had a different outcome in terms of women's political empowerment than the current conflict in Yemen. The main question of this thesis is therefore: how can we explain the different outcomes in women's political empowerment between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict in Yemen? After having argued how these two crises are similar in crucial variables, I show how their outcomes on women's political empowerment are different. Both were empowering for women in informal politics, but this did not automatically translate in empowerment in formal politics. I argue the crucial difference between the two crises – the uprisings and the current conflict – which caused the different outcomes is the nature and circumstances of the subsequent transitional process.

The position of women in crises is a difficult and challenging matter, but also one of great importance in current-day societies. With this thesis, I seek to contribute to the knowledge of women's problems, possibilities and potential during crises. My underlying personal interest is in looking how we can improve women's position and is thus a rather subjective stance. Although my own position is normative, this thesis is an analytic exercise, not a normative one. It is an old mistake to think women in other cultures are 'oppressed' or 'subjugated' by men or their culture/politics/religion. Western feminists often argued for the need to 'save' Muslim women from this oppression (Abu-Lughod 2013). Writing as a Western feminist about empowerment of women in Yemen is thus a dangerous exercise, liable to many prejudices, mistakes and false sentiments. I am aware of the risk of wishful thinking on the one hand – seeing things that did not happen – or downplaying agency on the other hand – arguing something is not empowerment because it does not meet my personal standards. Being aware of this and using a combination of objective and subjective methodologies (see Methodology section), helps me neutralise my own partiality.

1. Definitions: crisis and political empowerment

For this research, two concepts are of central importance: 'crisis' and 'political empowerment'. In this thesis, I analyse how two crises – the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict in Yemen – have impacted women's position in politics and I seek to explain the different outcomes. *Prima facie*, these crises might seem rather different in nature yet they both fit the definition of 'mass violent conflicts' by Brück & Schindler (2009). They argue crises have three dimensions: there must be 1.) Action that is destructive, non-cooperative, widespread and persistent. Non-

cooperative here must be understood as not willing to cooperate with the government or actively opposing it; 2.) Actual or perceived violation of property rights over assets, persons or institutions; and 3.) Instigation through some degree of group activity (Brück & Schindler 2009, 292). Both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict fulfil these criteria: in 2011 large masses took the streets, blocked roads and camped in public spaces. People from all over the country participated in these protests lasting for several months. The protests were non-cooperative towards the government, destructive towards the working of people's property rights and instigated through group activity. The current conflict fulfils these criteria as well: the conflict started in 2014 and is still enduring, the entire country is affected by its consequences, property rights are almost absent, different groups are fighting each other and economic and political life has been destroyed. Both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict thus fit the broad definition of 'crisis' and hence are comparable. In Chapter 1 – Literature review, I further elaborate on the similarities to show these crises are similar in crucial variables. For now, it is important both can be defined as 'crisis'.

Political empowerment is the second central concept on which this thesis builds. There is great academic debate on how to define empowerment and whether it can be defined at all (see Chapter 1 – Literature Review). One of the most often-used definitions is that by Naila Kabeer, Professor of Gender & Development at the London School of Economics, who defined empowerment as "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer 1999, 437). In this thesis I focus on political empowerment: the process of gaining the ability to make *political* choices and act upon them. People who were formerly excluded from politics, such as women, now gain access to politics. This empowerment has three dimensions: women's civil liberties and rights, women's civil society participation and women's political participation (Mosedale 2005, 250). The first refers to the extent to which women's (human) rights, and women's issues specifically, are honoured by political institutions and law. It means that women have equal civil and political rights to men, but also that women's specific interests, such as for instance regulations on maternal leave, are represented. My focus in this thesis is, however, primarily on the other two dimensions: women's civil society participation, or informal political participation, and women's political participation, or formal political participation. Formal political participation means the inclusion of women in official political structures, such as parliament and peace processes. Informal political participation entails women voicing their demands outside of the official political structures, for instance in civil society, i.e. social movements and organisations. In this thesis I focus on both formal and informal political participation of women during the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict. However, for political empowerment mere participation in

politics (informal or formal) is not sufficient. As Kabeer's definition stated, one must have the ability to make choices. Hence, it is about *meaningful* participation. Women have to be able to think and act independently in the process and be able to influence the decision-making process substantially (Al Naami & Moodley 2017, 12). Simply put, an increase in meaningful (informal or formal) political participation thus points at political empowerment.

2. Methodology

This thesis takes the form of a most-similar-systems comparison. The 2011 uprisings and the current conflict are similar in crucial variables (as explained in Chapter 1 – Literature Review) yet have different outcomes. The different outcomes can be explained by the one dependent variable which is different in the two cases. In order to be able to make this comparison, I first have to argue how these two crises are similar. Subsequently, I have to show their different impacts on women's political empowerment. When researching (political) empowerment, the main question is: how to 'measure' it? In her seminal 1999 article 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', Kabeer argued three factors facilitate empowerment: the access to human and social resources, the agency to think independently and act upon one's decisions, and the achievements of these two factors combined (Kabeer 1999, 437-439). To be able to 'measure' the process of empowerment, one would thus have to look at these factors.

Richardson (2018) argues it is best to look at agency. Resources only show the possibilities women have and what they might possibly do with these resources, but do not show whether they have made decisions independently. Women can also be hindered in using these resources by structural factors or decide not to act to empower themselves at all (Richardson 2018, 546). Resources thus only show the possibilities and not the process of decision-making. Achievements, on the other hand, only show the outcomes but do not show whether this outcome is a result of actual empowerment or of for instance external pressure, luck or coincidence. Richardson therefore argues agency, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them, is the crucial factor in measuring empowerment (Richardson 2018, 542).

In my definition of political empowerment, women are empowered politically when they are able to participate in (informal and/or formal) politics. Focusing on agency in political empowerment would imply women can be politically empowered by internally thinking political things without necessarily showing this to the outer world by participating in politics. This would not be helpful in analysing political empowerment as I defined it. Achievements, i.e. being present in politics, on the other hand, can provide direct evidence of women's political

empowerment. When women are not active in politics, there is no political empowerment and vice versa. Therefore, in this research, I focus on the achievements-factor in empowerment.

Furthermore, there are two ways of conceptualising progress in women's political participation (Kabeer 2017, 650), the what I call 'outsider perspective' and 'insider perspective'. The insider perspective looks at changes in women's lives and the value women themselves attach to these. The merit of this approach is that it limits – though not completely eliminates – bias from the side of the researcher. If the women in question experience something as progress, it can be seen as empowerment; women themselves determine what empowerment means. The problem, however, is that women sometimes have incorporated their own subjugation: they might consider a certain state of affairs unproblematic whereas it is in fact a state of disempowerment (Kabeer 2017, 650). The outsider perspective, on the other hand, takes an externally developed framework about empowerment and tests whether women's experiences match this framework. Whether something is empowerment or not is not determined by women's own experiences of the change, but by its match with the developed framework. This approach solves the problem of internalised subjugation, but it also tends to discount women's own experiences about change and progress (Kabeer 2017, 650). In this research, I combine these two approaches, using a dual perspective. In formal politics, there are certain national and international standards which bind Yemen. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) states, for instance, that women should be included in all stages of the peace process (UN Security Council 2000). Since Yemen is signatory to this Resolution, this can be used as an outsider perspective to test whether Yemen fulfils its duties in women's political participation and whether women are empowered in formal politics. By looking at what women's movements and individual women have wished to achieve and what they have achieved in the end, I analyse what women themselves value and hence use the insider perspective. This dual perspective allows me to use both objective standards of women's political participation and subjective experiences of this participation.

Due to the still ongoing war in Yemen and the accompanying travel restrictions (both by Leiden University and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), I was not able to travel to Yemen for this research. This thesis is thus based on qualitative desk-based research. For the outsider perspective, the main data is extracted from policy documents from both the Yemeni government and the United Nations (UN). Security Council Resolutions on Yemen, reports of the Office of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General to Yemen (referred to as OSESGY) and documents of the Yemeni government help explain the official structures and aims of the formal political processes, both in 2011 and in the current peace attempts. These documents give insight in the role officially attributed to women in formal politics.

This image is however sometimes contradicted by women's lived experiences, the insider perspective. For this insider perspective – which is used for both informal and formal politics – getting access to women's experiences was crucial. Blogs and social media proved to be an important source, where women could express themselves free of government censorship. The main blogs I have used are from Afrah Nasser (blog called 'afrahnasser'), Atiaf Alwazir (blog initially called 'womenfromyemen' and when moved to a new website 'atiafalwazir') and Noon Arabia (blog called 'notesbynoon'). All three women were occupied with the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict; Afrah Nasser and Atiaf Alwazir lived in Sana'a during the 2011 uprisings but now live in respectively Sweden and France. Noon Arabia – which is a pseudonym – has lived in the Yemeni diaspora during both the 2011 uprisings and the current war but has been occupied with the Yemeni women's movements from a distance. Besides these three much-read blogs, I have analysed some smaller ones from Rasha Jarhum, Safa Mubgar (blog called 'saphsaf') and Sam Waddah (blog called 'proudyemeni'). In addition to this, I have conducted five interviews with Yemeni women who have been occupied with either the 2011 uprisings, the current war or both. These women were selected based on their experience with one or both of these crises. All women come from different places in Yemen – spread over North and South Yemen – and together they give a rather complete picture of the situation in Yemen. These interviews were conducted either via phone in a semi-structured manner and lasted for about an hour or were done via email correspondence with written questions and answers.[1] These women's experiences serve as anecdotal evidence for the insider perspective for both informal and formal politics. Lastly, I used secondary sources such as newspaper articles, speeches and interviews done by others (both written and on video) to broaden the scope of this research.

3. Structure of thesis

This thesis is organised in six chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of existing literature and debates on the topics of (political) empowerment, women, crises and Yemen. This chapter elaborates on the theory that crises are empowering for women. In the literature contradicting arguments are given why crises may or may not work politically empowering for women. Causal mechanisms which would facilitate women's informal and formal political empowerment during crises are mentioned, yet they are not sufficiently tested in different situations. Consequently, there is little accurate knowledge which are determining factors for

[1] All the interviewees were offered anonymity, but they declined it in a written statement and consented their names be used in this thesis, even in case of publication.

women's political empowerment during crises and what different effects different sorts of crises may have on women. Therefore, in the second section of this chapter, I build a theoretical framework which I use to research political empowerment of women during the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict in Yemen. In this theoretical framework, I show how the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict are similar and comparable in crucial variables, arguing for the possibility of a most-similar-systems comparison. Chapter two gives a short history of Yemen. Pinpointing the central themes throughout Yemen's history which play an important role in the researched crises, this chapter serves as background for the following chapters.

Chapter three to five form the core of the research. Chapter three and four discuss respectively the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict. In these chapters I use the theoretical framework to analyse factors that contribute to or hinder women's political empowerment. I show how the 2011 uprisings worked politically empowering for women in informal politics but how an automatic translation of this to formal politics was lacking. When women were included, however, women's participation in formal politics was meaningful and empowering. In chapter four, I show that although women are still active in informal politics, the current conflict has less opportunities for women in formal politics; women are mere 'token women' and are hindered in their meaningful participation. In chapter five, I analyse the variables that may cause the differences in outcome between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict. Why were the 2011 uprisings politically empowering for women and is the current conflict not? I conclude by arguing that the presence of democracy is the determining dependent variable that causes the difference in formal political empowerment between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict.

1.
Literature review: empowerment, women and crises

The main question of this thesis is how the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict have impacted women's political empowerment and how the different outcomes between these two crises can be explained. Central in this research is the concept of 'empowerment', but what is empowerment? In the first part of this literature review, I elaborate on the concept of empowerment and the current academic debates on it. Following these debates, I explain the theoretical framework I use in this thesis. In the third part, I analyse academic debates on politics, women and empowerment in Yemen, showing the relevance of my research.

1. Empowerment: definitions and debates

The concept of empowerment was first coined in the 1980s by feminists from the Global South who wanted to challenge the dominance of women from the Global North in feminist debates (Elliott 2008b, 6). They demanded to be able to participate in the debates; they wanted to be 'empowered'. Ever since, the concept has become a topic of much contention. Although it has become a central feature in foreign policy and development aid, in academic circles there is still no consensus on the meaning of empowerment.

Academic debates: (political) empowerment

In academia, many different definitions of empowerment are used. One of the most influential definitions is that of Kabeer who defines empowerment as the "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer 1999, 437). Although this definition is often used in academic and policy circles, many other definitions have been offered as well. Batliwala (1994) defines empowerment for instance as the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over sources of power (Batliwala 1994, 130). Elliott (2008b) focuses more on the individual, arguing it is about an individual's capacity to take control over her life and resources (Elliott 2008b, 7). Definitions on empowerment thus have a slightly different emphasis, but they agree on three elements. First of all, it is a process of change: one must first be disempowered before one can be empowered. Empowerment means a positive change in one's position and abilities and hence is an ongoing dynamic process without a definite end-goal (Chopra & Müller 2016, 1; Cornwall 2016, 344; Elliott 2008b, 7; Kabeer 1999, 437; Mosedale 2005, 244; Richardson 2018, 541). Secondly,

power is a central feature of empowerment: it is about gaining more power and challenging and changing power relations. An often-used notion of power is again one of Kabeer, who defined it as the "ability to make choices" (Kabeer 1999, 436). Important is that these choices are not mere luxury choices, but so-called strategic life choices: choices that are crucial to be able to live the life you want to live. Empowerment is about the ability of people to make decisions on matters which are important to them and to carry these out (Batliwala 1994, 130; Elliott 2008b, 7; Kabeer 1999, 437; Mosedale 2005, 244). The third common aspect in definitions of empowerment is that it is an internal process. True empowerment is about a change in an individual's thinking and consequently in their behaviour. Third parties can help facilitate this empowerment by for instance providing resources and creating favourable conditions, but they cannot bestow empowerment. It is an individual, internal process. Consequently, when outcomes seem to point to empowerment, but no change within individuals has happened, there is no empowerment, it is argued (Cornwall 2016, 343; Elliott 2008b, 8; Mosedale 2005, 244). Considering these three crucial aspects present in almost all definitions of empowerment, we can draft a general definition most would agree on: empowerment is an ongoing, internal process that gives someone who did not have it before the power to independently make decisions and act upon them.

This definition is a general definition of empowerment, encompassing its most crucial aspects. Yet it is unspecified for scope and specific areas of life. Kabeer's definition of power focuses on the ability to make strategic life choices, but does not specify which strategic life choices: personal, political, economic? Individual, within the community or at larger scales? Different areas of life – economic, social, political life – demand different strategic life choices and hence have different kinds of power and empowerment (Mosedale 2005). In this thesis, I focus on political empowerment, which necessarily involves political power. Lukes (2005) has an influential three-fold account of political power (Lukes 2005). Firstly, power means decision-making power. A has power over B insofar as A is able to influence B's decision against B's will. This 'power over' can be understood as A dominating B, but also as A simply participating in decision-making. This latter is the way I understand it in this thesis. Secondly, power means agenda-setting. A has power over B insofar as A is able to influence which issues come up for decision to begin with and decides who gets to make decisions. Agenda-setting thus means one is able to push issues forward and trigger a discussion about it. Thirdly, power means consciousness-shaping. A has power over B insofar as A is able to shape how B perceives his own preferences and possibilities. This form of power means B simply has no possibility of thinking otherwise. When discussing political power and empowerment in the context of this thesis, particularly the first two forms of power are important. Political power

means being able to participate in decision-making and agenda-setting. Hence, political empowerment can be defined as an ongoing, internal process that gives someone who did not have it before the power to participate in decision-making and agenda-setting.

Empowerment of women

Empowerment is thus a process for all disempowered groups in order to gain power. In this thesis I focus specifically on Yemeni women as such a disempowered group in politics. One crucial question that comes to mind when discussing women's empowerment is: why does it matter? There are two categories of answers to this question: the feminist perspective and the instrumentalist perspective.

The concept of empowerment originated from a feminist perspective, which argues women gaining greater control over their lives and decisions is a matter of mere social justice. It is a rights-based argument: women are equal to men and hence should have equal rights and opportunities. From this perspective, empowerment demands a thorough revision of existing power structures (Elliott 2008b, 2; Kabeer 1999, 442). The instrumentalist perspective, on the other hand, tends to dominate current debates on empowerment. It argues women's empowerment is crucial because it has desirable multiplier effects. In poverty reduction empowerment of women is for instance seen as an effective strategy because of the relation between poverty and disempowerment (Elliott 2008a, x; Elliott 2008b, 6-7; Kabeer 1999, 437; Richardson 2018, 540). In current-day development and policy circles, women's empowerment is presented as 'smart economics': it is a rational investment because it leads to effective development outcomes (Beaman et al 2012; Chant & Sweetman 2012; Cockburn 2010; Duflo 2012; Klasen & Lamanna 2009).

Although often used, the instrumental perspective on women's (political) empowerment is also heavily criticised. Presenting women's empowerment as a tool to a different end, tends to undermine the strength of the claim because it overlooks the fundamental causes of women's disempowerment and the need of thoroughly revising existing power structures (Elliott 2008b, 7; Kabeer 1999, 436, 442). More importantly, Olivius (2014) argues the instrumentalist perspective reinforces stereotypes of women and thereby potentially perpetuates their subjugated position (Olivius 2014). In development aid, women are for instance often targeted because they are in charge of nursing the children and hence are assumed to allocate the aid to the benefit of their children. As true as this may be, it also reinforces the stereotype of women as caring, nursing and attributes women their place as mothers and wives in the household (Olivius 2014). The instrumental use of women's empowerment might thus be attractive for development and policy actors, but it does not necessarily benefit the women in question.

When questioning the importance of women's *political* empowerment, these same two perspectives occur. Philips (1998) formulated four reasons for the importance of women's political empowerment. Firstly, successful women politicians offer a role model for women which can contribute to greater gender equality in society. Secondly, equal representation is a matter of social justice. Thirdly, particular interests of women are better represented when women are represented and, lastly, when women participate in politics, democracy is improved and strengthened (Bauer & Britton 2006, 3; Philips 1998, 228-238; Pospieszna 2015, 1252). These four arguments entail both feminist and instrumental perspectives: women's political participation is just (the feminist perspective) and useful (the instrumental perspective). In contexts of conflict and crises, the empowerment of women is attributed an additional instrumental role, namely that women bring qualities to peace negotiations that men do not have and otherwise would be lacking. Because women are thought to be more peaceful and willing to compromise by nature, they are assumed to be good peacemakers and hence should be incorporated in peace negotiations, it is often argued (Arostegui 2013, 535; Pospieszna 2015, 1251-1252). In this case, the instrumental argument for women's inclusion in politics, is to the benefit of women (they are included after all), but it might also harm them since they are only included *qua* women and for the sake of certain qualities they are assumed to have. As Olivius (2014) argues, if they turn out not to have these qualities or are otherwise undermining the assumptions, they are quickly removed from the negotiation table (Olivius 2014, 5). In Yemen's crises, both the instrumentalist and feminist perspective occur as well to argue for women's inclusion in politics.

Empowerment during and after crises

One of the elements of empowerment is, as stated above, that it is an internal process. Nevertheless, it is also showed this process can be facilitated and furthered (or halted) by third parties and circumstances. Crises are often argued to be such a moment of profound change for the position of women (Arostegui 2013, 536; Bauer & Britton 2006, 11; Genovese 1993, 211; Hughes 2009, 175; Kumar 2001, 19). There is however no consensus in academia whether this change is positive or negative; are women during and after crises empowered or disempowered?

There are some factors that are showed to contribute to women's empowerment during crises. Movements seeking to overthrow existing governments often have new visions on society which profoundly differ from existing ones and might be positive for women (Hughes 2009, 178-179). Also, in this movement for change, formerly excluded people – such as women – are perceived as great partners for change and their political utility increases (Hughes 2009, 178). By contributing to the struggle on either side in the conflict, women can gain a positive

image; their utility and efforts are recognised (Bauer & Britton 2006, 11; Hughes 2009, 179). The most important factor, however, that influences women's position in society during crises is the change of gender norms. Some argue gender norms loosen during crises. Men are often away from home to fight or have died and consequently women have taken over the head of household duties. This way, women get access to the public space and gendered conceptions of duties and jobs erode, which may work empowering for women (Arostegui 2013, 536; Bauer & Britton 2006, 11; Hughes 2009, 175; Kumar 2001, 19, 21). However, this increase in responsibilities is not necessarily experienced as positive by women themselves. In addition to their usual responsibilities of amongst others taking care of children, women now also have to bear the burden of survival. Often this is experienced more as a burden than a benefit of crises (Chant 2008, 176; Kumar 2001, 13). Yet when there is actively pushed for changing gender norms – instead of them changing out of sheer necessity – the erosion of gender norms may also have positive effects. Women can enter the public space more freely, which may facilitate their political activities and consequently their political empowerment (Arostegui 2013, 536; Hughes 2009, 178; Kumar 2001, 22).

Afshar (2007) and Elliott (2008), on the other hand, state the contrary, arguing gender norms do not loosen but instead become stricter during crises. Women are used as symbols of national and cultural integrity and as a consequence, gender norms become stricter. This has severe negative impacts on women: they are confined to the roles of wives and mothers of heroes and the dignity of a movement/society/country is directly related to the adherence to these strict gender norms (Afshar 2007, 238; Elliott 2008a, xi; Elliott 2008b, 6, 15). During crises, women thus have less possibilities and are increasingly constrained, Afshar and Elliott argue. Moghadam (1997) takes a middle way between these two opposites – whether crises loosen or restrict gender norms – arguing it depends on the nature of the revolution. She argues there are two kind of revolutions, each with its own consequences for women. On the one hand, there are so-called 'women-in-the-family'-revolutions, which indeed confine women to the realm of the household and often adopt negative laws concerning women's position in society. On the other hand, there are the 'women's emancipation'-movements in which women's emancipation and empowerment is a central component. According to Moghadam, the negative consequences for women are not universal to crises, but just characteristic for one specific type of revolution (Moghadam 1997).

As these debates show, there is no consensus on the impact of crises on women's empowerment. There are empowering factors of for instance having women's political utility recognised, but gender norms may also become stricter and women bear the burden of survival. More importantly, there is little understanding of the differences in impact on women's

empowerment between different sorts of crises. Moghadam distinguished two types of revolutions, but she did not expand this distinction to for instance armed conflicts. In this thesis I seek to fill this gap in knowledge. Analysing the impact on women's political empowerment of two different crises, the 2011 uprisings (equivalent of a revolution) and the current conflict (which can be characterised as a non-international armed conflict[2]), I argue the nature of the subsequent formal political process is crucial in determining women's political empowerment.

2. Theoretical Framework

In analysing women's political empowerment during Yemen's crises, I use two 'tools': the causal mechanisms translating informal political participation in formal political participation, and the meaningfulness of women's participation in formal politics. The latter is about the way in which women are able to participate in formal political processes. In order to participate meaningfully, women have to be able to think and act independently in the process and be able to influence decision-making processes substantially (Al Naami & Moodley 2017, 12). They should for instance not be mere 'token women' who are present for the sake of being present but be able to address and push for specific women's issues if they think these important. Meaningful participation is a crucial element of political participation; when women are not able to participate meaningfully in the political processes, there is little political empowerment.

The second tool are the causal mechanisms which may come into play during a crisis and – when present – contribute to women's political participation. Reviewing debates on women's empowerment during crises, Hughes (2009) developed a framework of seven causal mechanisms that translate women's informal political participation in formal political participation. If some of these causal mechanisms are present in informal politics, she argues, this will lead to women's inclusion in formal politics (Hughes 2009, 180). In Figure 1, the seven causal mechanisms are specified. In this thesis, I test these causal mechanisms for both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict. Did these causal mechanisms occur? Did they indeed lead to inclusion of women in formal political processes? Why (not)?

In the following two chapters, I use these tools – the presence of causal mechanisms and the meaningfulness of women's political participation – to analyse women's political

[2] Following the standards of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Yemeni conflict can be characterised as a Non-International Armed Conflict. For this, there must be an armed conflict with a minimum level of intensity, all parties to the conflict must be organised and at least one of the parties must be a non-state actor. The main warring parties in the Yemeni conflict are the Houthis, which is a non-state actor, and the Hadi-government, which is a state actor. Although both parties are supported by other international actors, these international actors are not an active party to the conflict and hence the conflict remains non-international (International Committee of the Red Cross 2008).

Structural factors:

1. Influx of qualified female candidates. Women are politicised and more eligible, politically active candidates due to their activities and 'political awakening' during the crisis. They were for instance active as combatants, in women's organisations or social movements.
2. Demographic change. During the crisis, many men were killed or have left home. This has led to women outnumbering men and hence women being more likely and eligible to enter public office.

Political factors:

3. Regime change. Former politicians are pushed out of office, the regime changes and the new regime might create space for women's participation.
4. Overhaul of the political system. Internal or external pressure creates profound regime changes, leading to more open politics and chances for women.
5. Progressive revolution. A 'women's emancipation'-revolution can empower women politically. Any revolution seeks to tell a new story, opposite to the story of the former regime and hence might improve women's position.

Cultural factors:

6. Changing gender roles. During the crisis, women have taken on new responsibilities as head of the household and political actors. This challenges perceptions on women's roles and capabilities.
7. Political utility of women increases. Political actors place greater value on women's perceived characteristics.

Figure 1 (Hughes 2009, 180)

empowerment. Using a most-similar-systems comparison, I show which dependent variable determines the different outcome of the two crises. But first, I must show the similarity between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict. In the Introduction, I already argued both fulfil the criteria for 'crisis' as formulated by Brück & Schindler (2009). Both can thus be labelled 'crisis' and hence can be distinguished from mere local upheavals or low-profile demonstrations. Furthermore, the two crises are similar in four variables which determine the nature of crises and their similarity: time, contestation, size and internationality (Hughes 2009, 181). Time

refers to the time period in which a crisis occurs; a conflict in the 1930s differs in its effects on women's position from a conflict in the 2000s because the moment of crisis and the global circumstances are profoundly different. The 2011 uprisings and the current conflict happened in a condensed time period, namely the last decade. Even more, the current conflict started while the transitional process following the 2011 uprisings had not even ended yet. Little has changed in the time between these two crises and hence they are similar in this respect. The variable of contestation holds what the dispute concerns. Hughes argues there is a difference between governmental disputes and territorial disputes. The latter tend to be about cases of secession and autonomy and hence are not very fundamental nor involve grand changes for women. Governmental disputes, on the other hand, often seek to replace an existing government, draw new constitutions and change the public space. These kinds of disputes involve a new vision on society and tend to be more influential on women's position in society (Hughes 2009, 181). Although secessionist sentiments play a role in the current conflict (see Chapter 2 – Yemen's History), both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict can be characterised as governmental disputes. In both crises, the existing government was challenged and fundamental reforms and new visions on society played an important role. Again, the crises are similar in this variable. The third factor in play is size. Large-scale internationalised wars have different effects on women and their political empowerment than smaller-scale conflicts. Political mobilisation, military activity, ideological change and changes to government structure are factors that are likely to affect women's outcomes and these things are more likely to happen in a larger war (Hughes 2009, 181). Hence, size matters. Size is a factor that *prima facie* may distinguish the 2011 uprisings from the current conflict. The 2011 uprisings were an internal conflict, of the population against the government, whereas in the current conflict international actors are more actively involved. Nevertheless, both crises remain non-international crises since the international actors involved in the current conflict are no actual parties to the conflict but merely supporting the parties (International Committee of the Red Cross 2008). Also, in both crises the aforementioned factors such as political mobilisation, military activity, ideological change and government change occurred. Both crises thus have a similar size in this respect. In addition to this, for both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict it is the case that the subsequent peace/transitional processes were large-scale and included international actors. The size of the crises and the peace processes are thus comparable. Lastly, the existence of international linkages such as treaty ratification or the presence of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) is an important variable. Integration in international systems changes the environment and circumstances in which a crisis takes place. During both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict Yemen was integrated

in international systems: it is for instance signatory to treaties concerning women's empowerment (for instance UNSCR 1325 (2000)) and many INGOs are working in Yemen on the topic of Women, Peace and Security (UN OCHA 2018b). The environment of international linkages has remained the same in the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict.

The 2011 uprisings and the current conflict both fulfil the criteria of 'crisis' as formulated by Brück & Schindler (2009) and, in addition to this, they are similar in the four variables of time, contestation, size and internationality. A difference in the outcome of women's political empowerment thus cannot be caused by a difference in one of these variables. Therefore, I will argue this difference is caused by the dependent variable of democracy. The circumstances and nature of the formal political process is the determining factor for women's political empowerment.

3. Women in Yemen: empowerment during crises

In the previous sections, I have discussed the debates concerning empowerment of women in crises in general. In this section, I focus on debates on these issues in Yemen specifically. Interestingly, compared with surrounding countries, there is relatively little research on Yemen. Moreover, existing literature on Yemen focuses primarily on its instability from a top-down perspective, looking at for instance corruption and political elites (For instance: Bonnefoy 2018; Juneau 2013; Lackner 2017; Philips 2011). Less is written from a bottom-up perspective, focusing on women and civil society. One might argue this is because of their limited role in Yemen's history and the current crises. However, this is simply not true.

The ancient Queen of Sheba was the famous first female ruler of Yemen. And after that, throughout Yemen's history, women have played important roles in crises and uprisings, both as instigators and peacemakers. In her extensive work on women in Yemen, Maxine Molyneux (1979) shows for instance the role of women's organisations in the 1967 anti-colonisation independence struggles in South Yemen (Molyneux 1979). Carla Makhlouf (1979) adds to this a similar perspective from North Yemen (Makhlouf 1979). Since the unification of North and South Yemen in the 1990s, women's legal, social and political position in society has been a topic of political contention (Molyneux 1995). The multiparty competition between Northern and Southern political parties has led to limited roles attributed to women in the public and political sphere (Yadav & Clark 2010), yet still women such as human rights activist Amal Basha remained active in politics (Nasser 17 June 2011) – both in informal and formal spheres. The argument of women's limited role in Yemen's history is thus not valid, but it certainly does not work for the 2011 uprisings, since women throughout the Arab world played a pivotal role

in these uprisings. For the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict, this thesis adds a bottom-up perspective for Yemen, looking at how these crises have impacted women's political participation.

Because the current conflict is still ongoing, it is rather 'fresh' and 'untouched' in academic literature. Recent literature of for instance Lackner (2017), Heinze (2018) and Bonnefoy (2018) focuses primarily on the international relations of the war, the Houthi movement and security issues. These topics are relatively easy to research from a distance and do not require much fieldwork. Little is written on the role of women in war, primarily because of the difficulties – or even impossibility – of doing field research during this conflict. The information on women in war available comes from development agencies working on the ground. Using reports of these development agencies combined with blogs and interviews as sources, with this thesis I seek to contribute to the understanding of the current war by focusing on women's roles in war. Touching upon a new debate within the Yemeni context and building on longstanding debates of women in war, this thesis offers new insights on the relation between crises and women's political empowerment.

As little as there is written on the current Yemeni conflict, as much is written on the 2011 uprisings. There is general agreement in academia that women had pivotal roles in the uprisings throughout the Arab world. Women were among the instigators of the protests and often developed into leaders and spokesmen of the various movements (Shalaby & Moghadam 2016). One of the most well-known women participants in the uprisings is the Yemeni Tawakkol Karman, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her "non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights" (The Nobel Peace Prize 2011). Fraihat (2016) argues that the omnipresence of women in the uprisings furthered the uprisings; with all these women out on the streets protesting, men could not lag behind and felt compelled to support the protests (Fraihat 2016, 206). Despite women's important roles during the uprisings, there is however also consensus that this did not translate in actual improvements for women's political, social and legal positions in society. Finn (2015) argues that after the 2011 uprisings the need for women's political empowerment is greater than ever before: women have gone out on the streets, have showed their willingness to participate, now it is important they are enabled to actually participate (Finn 2015). After an extensive analysis of women's positions after the uprisings, Shalaby & Moghadam (2016) also emphasised the need of empowerment (Shalaby & Moghadam 2016).

Interestingly however, although Shalaby & Moghadam (2016) claim to focus on the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring' in general, Yemen is barely mentioned. This is a common feature in academic literature on the 2011 uprisings; this literature often focuses on the uprisings in

Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, and Yemen is mentioned only little or even left out altogether. This lack of attention for Yemen is interesting for two reasons. First of all, Yemen is the only so-called 'Arab Spring' country in which the army did not act as a unified entity during the 2011 uprisings. Instead, an intra-elite struggle emerged between loyalists and critics of the Saleh-regime. When the regime staggered due to the uprisings, many in the military thought it wise to abandon Saleh and chose for themselves in order to safeguard their future (Seitz 2014, 64). This fracturing of the military makes Yemen a unique case among countries that experienced the 2011 uprisings. Secondly, Yemen is considered to be the only country which came out of the uprisings through negotiations and which started a democratic transition to solve the problems that caused the uprisings (Alley 2013a, 74; Benomar 2013, 202; International Crisis Group 2012, I; Lackner 2014, 13). Much literature on Yemen's uprising focuses on this democratic transition and specifically on the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a large-scale inclusive democratic conference aimed at restructuring the Yemeni state and society. At the beginning and during the NDC, the process was much-heralded. The fact Yemen attempted a peaceful transition was thought to be praiseworthy. However, soon after the NDC ended much criticism came out on the proceedings and outcomes (Alley 2013a, 78; Durac 2012, 168, 173; Hamidi 2015, 30). A central question in literature on the Yemeni uprisings and the subsequent NDC is why it 'failed'.

The degree of inclusiveness is the most contested aspect of the NDC: it is both praised and criticised for its (supposed lack of) inclusiveness. As stated in the transition agreement as drafted by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the NDC was to provide an opportunity for representatives from all walks of life and from all parts of Yemen to voice their concerns (Implementation Mechanism 2011, 7). Among the 565 delegates, there were 30% women, 15% youth and 7% civil society activists, which was an unprecedented inclusion of formerly excluded groups (Fraihat 2016, 206; Heinze 2018, 12; Lackner 2014, 13). Also, the NDC provided chances of participation for other marginalised groups such as the Houthis from the North and the Hiraak from the South (Hamidi 2015, 18). However, others argue this inclusiveness was merely superficial. Alley (2013a/b) states for instance the southern movement was not really represented since the southern representatives were close allies of president Hadi himself, did not represent the full range of opinions in the south and hence could not create any support for NDC decisions (Alley 2013a, 75; Alley 2013b, 725). The second problem of inclusion was the extent to which these formerly marginalised groups actually had a say in these political negotiations, to what extent their participation was meaningful. Alley (2013a) argues the NDC was merely a reshuffling of old political elites. Of course, new political actors were admitted to the negotiations, but they did not have the political clout to actually

establish something. Their inclusion was a mere ticking of boxes by the elite, Alley argues (Alley 2013a, 78; Heinze 2018, 10).

Inclusiveness and the NDC is thus a much-debated topic: it was inclusive in the sense that formerly excluded people could participate but it is not clear whether this inclusiveness was meaningful and changed the political status of these marginalised groups. Many authors mention the (lack of) inclusiveness in the NDC as an accomplishment and failing. However, most literature focuses on the (lack of) inclusiveness of the Houthi and Hiraak movements (Clausen 2015; Durac 2012; Hamidi 2015) probably because these two groups are major players in the subsequent current war. The inclusion of women is mentioned as something special (Lackner 2017, 46) yet little research is done on the actual involvement of women in the NDC. To what extent did they have a say and were their voices heard? Al-Sakkaf (2018) wrote on women's participation in the NDC yet focuses solely on one working group of which she herself was part (Al-Sakkaf 2018). A broad in-depth view on women's participation in the uprisings and subsequent transitional process and what this meant for their political empowerment is needed.

In this thesis I analyse women's participation in the 2011 uprisings and its subsequent transitional process, and in the current conflict and its attempted peace negotiations. With this, I add a bottom-up perspective on Yemeni politics and give a broad in-depth view on women's roles in both informal and formal politics. Explaining the different outcomes of the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict for women's political empowerment, I contribute to the knowledge of the impact of crises on women's political participation. In the following chapter, I first give some essential background to Yemen, its history, politics and the position of women.

2.
Yemen's History

Yemen's recent history is characterised by instability, caused by structural factors, which also play important roles in the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict. In this chapter, I discuss Yemen's recent history, focusing on these factors: its internal divisions, the political system, Islam and poverty. In the last section, I discuss the (historical) position of women in Yemeni society.

1. Divided: North versus South and Houthis versus government

Yemen is a country deeply divided along all possible lines: geographical, political, cultural, religiously. One of the most visible divisions is that between North and South Yemen. After decolonisation in the 1960s, Yemen was split in two separate countries: Northern Yemen, later known as the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and Southern Yemen, later named the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). While Northern Yemen was Western-oriented, the PDRY, supported by the Soviet Union (USSR), adopted communism and became the only socialist state in the Arab world (Lackner 2014, 4-8). The two states did not recognise each other, and the relations were regularly hostile (Bonnefoy 2018, 45). When the Cold War ended in 1989 and consequently the support of the former USSR to Southern Yemen stopped, the two Yemen's decided on unification. In 1990 the YAR and PDRY merged in the Republic of Yemen. It was decided there would be a transition period of two years after which elections would be held. In these elections, southern political parties were overwhelmingly defeated and the northern General People's Congress (GPC) with Saleh as leader won. This led to unrest among southerners and in 1994 a short secessionist civil war commenced, which was lost by the southern separatists (Lackner 2014, 4-8). As a consequence, the GPC became the ruling party and Saleh the head of state. All rebelling southerners were removed from politics and the military. What was meant to be an egalitarian unification turned out to be more like an absorption, Bonnefoy argues: northerners dominated Yemen's political and economic life (Bonnefoy 2018, 46).

Since unification, feelings of frustration and oppression have been present in Yemen's southern parts. In 2007, a group of southern military leaders who had been fired after the 1994 civil war regrouped and started a protest, demanding reinstatement in their military positions or full payment of their pensions. This started as small-scale economic protests but soon turned

into a widespread protest movement against the perceived oppressive regime of northerners ruling Yemen (Heinze 2018, 5; Lackner 2014, 10). This movement, known as Hiraak, has been protesting since and has played an important role in politics: in 2011, they stirred the protests in the South against Saleh, they refused to participate in the NDC and eventually they rejected the outcomes of it (Alley 2013b, 725; Hamidi 2015, 21, 26; Heinze 2018, 14). Now, in the turmoil of the current conflict, they seek to achieve independence again (Brehony et al 2015, 11). This North-South division remains a determining factor in current-day Yemeni politics. However, the north of Yemen is not as unified as it seems either.

In the upmost northern part of the country, in the Sa'da governorate bordering Saudi Arabia, the Houthi movement has caused unrest for a long time. The Houthis are a Shi'a community which has gained much political influence in the northern region since the 1990s. This influence and their autonomy are however not recognised by the central government. Moreover, the largely Sunni dominated government, backed by Sunni Saudi Arabia, fears the Shi'a influence of the Houthis (Heinze 2018, 4). Between 2004 and 2010, the Houthis and the Saleh-regime have fought each other in six subsequent conflicts, known as the Sa'da Wars. In 2010, a ceasefire was established although peace negotiations never succeeded (Lackner 2014, 9). The Houthis participated in the 2011 uprisings and the NDC, but, just as the Hiraak movement, they rejected the outcomes of the NDC arguing it did not do justice to their role, influence and independence in the north. In 2014, the Houthis formed a coalition with the resigned president Saleh and seized the capital Sana'a, with which, it is generally argued, the current conflict commenced (Heinze 2018, 18). The Houthi movement is one of the main players in the current conflict opposing the internationally recognised Yemeni government, and is supported by Iran in this (Fraihat 2016, 49).

2. Politics: patronage, elites and military

Since unification in 1990, Yemen's government has largely been made up of northerners and led by Saleh. Although much is to say about actual practice, in its official state structure, Yemen is the only democratic republican regime at the Arabian Peninsula with regular elections and some degree of pluralism (Durac 2012, 163; Lackner 2014, 2; Steinbeiser 2015). However, since the 1994 civil war, political freedoms have been narrowed and the degree of democracy diminished (Lackner 2014, 9). Officially, Yemen has for instance an independent judiciary and a multi-party system, but in practice the judiciary had become an extension of Saleh and

(European Council on Foreign Relations, N.D.)

the political system is characterised by patronage (Steinbeiser 2015). Saleh had maintained his power for over thirty years through his extensive system of patronage and corruption. The most trusted officials – often family members or fellow tribesmen – were given the most important and sensitive positions in politics and military. This created a political system dominated by a very small elite, barely representing the Yemeni people (Rabi 2015, 197). In 2002, the main opposition parties merged in the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), dominated by the Islamist Hizb al-Islah (the Islah party). Yet this opposition coalition had not been able to achieve much until the 2011 uprisings where they supported the protests and subsequently became part of the transitional government. It is however argued that although these opposition parties opposed Saleh, they are still made up of a very small elite and hence fundamentally nothing has really changed in Yemeni politics since the 2011 uprisings (Alley 2013a, 78; Heinze 2018, 10).

Besides patronage and elitism, two other important factors determine Yemeni politics: the military and the country's relationship with Saudi Arabia. For the past two decades, Yemen has de facto been ruled by a military government. Careers were made in the military and the security apparatus was the backbone of the government (Lackner 2014, 13). In the 2011 uprisings, the military defected; some important generals such as General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar (1945-) aligned themselves with the protesters, creating cleavages in the ruling elite (Seitz 2014, 64). In the current conflict, the Hadi-government does not have sufficient military power to combat the Houthis. Hence, it has called for help from the other fundament of Yemeni government: Saudi Arabia (Lackner 2017, 73). Since the foundation of the Saudi kingdom in 1932, allegedly its aim has been to keep Yemen's politics as weak and as strong as to not be a threat to Saudi Arabia (Lackner 2017, 71). Saudi Arabia fears the democratic sentiments, poverty and Shi'a tendencies of Yemen to influence its own stability. By actively mingling in Yemeni politics, Saudi Arabia ensures the stability of Yemen in its own interest. Saleh's regime was closely aligned with Saudi Arabia, some even argue almost to the extent of being a puppet-regime (Bonnefoy 2018, 58; Fraihat 2016, 52) and politicians who advocate for policies favouring Saudi interests are for instance rewarded with stipends from Saudi Arabia (Bonnefoy 2018, 55). During the 2011 uprisings, Saudi Arabia initiated the GCC Agreement resulting in the removal of Saleh, the NDC and the transitional process. After the Houthis seized Sana'a in 2014, Saudi Arabia was ready to intervene even before president Hadi officially requested intervention (Lackner 2017, 54). In the current conflict, Saudi Arabia, as initiator, leader and main financer of the international coalition backing the Hadi-government, is seen as the most important international actor in the conflict (Lackner 2017, 54).

3. Poverty and Islam

Poverty and Islam are two other important factors in Yemen's recent history. Yemen became widely known in the Western world primarily by the bombing of the American marine ship *USS Cole* in 2000 in Aden harbour (Bonnefoy 2018, 61). After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, Yemen appeared to be hosting members of Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is perceived to be the most dangerous branch of Al-Qaeda and hence is in Western discourse often equated with radical Islam and terrorism (Bonnefoy 2018, 61). As a consequence, foreign policy of Western countries towards Yemen has focused particularly on anti-terrorism; Yemen has turned into a battlefield of the global War on Terror (Carapico 2014, 48; Lackner 2017, 25). However, the 'jihadi threat' of Yemen is in reality limited. Most Yemenis subscribe to a conservative interpretation of Islam, but this does

not automatically translate into terrorism. As Lackner (2017) states: poverty is far more dangerous for Yemenis themselves and the outer world than the assumed terrorism (Lackner 2017, 26).

Poverty is a salient aspect of Yemen; it is the poorest country in the Middle East and one of the poorest in the world (UN Development Programme 2018, 24). Yet before the discovery of large oil fields in neighbouring countries, Yemen was richer and more developed compared to them. In the 1960s, Aden was the most modern city in the region (Lackner 2014, 14), but the oil-boom has had negative impacts on Yemen. Yemen could not catch up and descended into poverty, caused by a combination of political crises, limited natural resources and worsening climate conditions (Lackner 2014, 15; Lackner 2017, 25). Due to climate change, Yemen is for instance not able to produce its own food and hence is for about 70% of its food needs dependent on imports. Add to this low education standards and a percentage of 70% of the population being under 25 years of age, and one sees the dangers and prevalence of poverty in Yemen (Lackner 2017, 34, 36). In the current conflict, the situation has even worsened. The largest cholera outbreak in human history occurred in Yemen and about 24 million people (80% of the population) is in need of acute humanitarian aid (UN OCHA 2018a, 4).

4. Women in Yemen

What consequences have these factors causing Yemen's instability for Yemeni women? What is the position of women in Yemen? Since the start of measuring gender equality by the Global Gender Gap Index in 2006, Yemen has ranked as one of the lowest countries (World Economic Forum 2018, 295). Gender equality in Yemen seems to be a difficult matter. However, this has not always been the case. In the former PDRY, women's rights were well-served. The 1974 Family Law of the PDRY was one of the Arab World's strongest pro-women legislations (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 148). It is often argued by southerners that their progress in gender equality has been wiped of the table by the North during unification (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 149). The 1994 unification constitution does guarantee equality for all, men and women, but reality has been different. Women in Yemen are often perceived and treated as inferior to men in many spheres of society; they have limited access to healthcare, economic opportunities and education and are regularly sexually harassed (Nasser 5 March 2011; Noon Arabia 28 December 2012). Generally, there is a strong gendered division of labour, with men providing for the family and entering the public space, and women being confined to the house (Al Naami & Moodley 2017, 7). Politically, this conception of gender roles leads to women's marginalisation in politics.

Women live in seclusion, are excluded from the public space and are not expected to voice their opinions publicly. Women do have active and passive voting rights, yet women are mainly seen as electorate and not as candidates (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 140). During Saleh's regime, only one of the 301 members of parliament and two out of 34 ministers was female (Al-Omari 2010). These gender roles are partly determined by the prevalent conservative interpretation of Islam, accepting patriarchal structures and confining women to the house (Lackner 2014, 21). More importantly, however, are cultural attitudes perceiving politics to be a place for aged male elitist politicians. These patriarchal attitudes are thus not solely reserved for women, but also extend to young people; both women and youth have long been kept out of politics in Yemen (Lackner 2016, 28). Notwithstanding these barriers, there have always been women in politics. In the ancient times, Queen Sheba reigned over Yemen. In the 1960s independence struggles and in the 1994 civil war, women played important roles in protests against the regime (International Federation of Human Rights 2012, 4; Makhlouf 1979; Molyneux 1979/1995). During the 2011 uprisings and the current war, women have taken on similar roles, leading to their political empowerment.

Although the position of Yemen in the Global Gender Gap Index has been consistently low, much has changed for women in the past decades. Unification has brought changes, but particularly the last years since the 2011 uprisings have caused changes for women. Despite the horrific effects these crises had on women's lives, in terms of political participation they may have provided opportunities as well. In the following chapter, I discuss the impact of the 2011 uprisings on women's participation in both formal and informal politics.

3.
The 2011 uprisings

In late 2010, protests demanding political and economic change erupted in Tunisia and spread all over the Arab world to Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen. These uprisings are sometimes called the 'Twitter/Facebook revolution' because of the use of social media in the demonstrations (Musa 2014; Shaerlaw 2016). Similarly, these protests can be called 'women's revolution' because of the omnipresence of women in the protests. In this chapter, I analyse the role of women in the Yemeni 2011 uprisings and the subsequent transitional process. Using Hughes' theoretical framework of structural, political and cultural factors, I analyse how these factors have come into play in the 2011 uprisings. Were women politically empowered during the 2011 uprisings? Did this empowerment in informal politics lead to women's inclusion in formal politics during the transitional process? Were they able to participate meaningfully in the transitional process and hence is there formal political empowerment?

1. The uprisings: women in informal politics

The 2011 uprisings were a tumultuous time of change for Yemeni women. In the first phase of the uprisings, they went out on the streets and became politically active. Gender norms eroded, women's political utility increased, and progressive tendencies dominated the uprisings. All these factors – structural, political and cultural – led initially to women's political empowerment. After a couple of weeks, however, the nature of the protests changed and with that women's role in it. Gender norms became stricter again, progressive tendencies faded, and women's issues were used as a convenient political tool. Nevertheless, the process of women's empowerment had irreversibly begun. In this section I analyse the empowering factors in the 2011 uprisings. The first section gives a short background of the 2011 uprisings and subsequently I focus on the relevant causal mechanisms: the influx of eligible female candidates, eroding gender norms and women's political utility.

Background

11 February 2011, the day of the fall of president Hosni Mubarak (1928-) of Egypt, is generally thought to be the start of the Yemeni uprisings (Heinze 2018, 3). After this, mass protests erupted, and the regime of president Saleh started its last days. Yemeni people went out on the streets protesting against the regime for all sorts of reasons such as economic malaise, lack of

social services, corruption and so on. But Saleh's proposal to amend the constitution to remove the presidential term limits, thereby allowing himself to remain in power, was the decisive trigger for the protests (Lackner 2017, 35; Rabi 2015, 194).

Just as in other countries experiencing the 2011 uprisings, youth and women were at the forefront of the protest movement in Yemen. They camped at squares in city centres and held demonstrations against the regime. Soon after the protests started in Yemen, the youth and women were joined by the Houthi movement and the Hiraak movement, both disenfranchised groups as well. Together, they carried forward the revolution aiming for a democratic state in which human rights and social justice would be promoted and long-lasting development encouraged (Heinze 2018, 4-6; Lackner 2017, 37; Strzelecka 2018, 50). They demanded the resignation of the Saleh government, but, in addition to this, they sought a complete social and cultural revolution (Strzelecka 2018, 51).

Friday 18 March 2011 was a turning point in the so-far peaceful uprisings in Yemen. During the regular demonstrations after Friday-prayer, a mass-killing of protesters was committed by the Saleh-regime, resulting in at least 45 dead and hundreds wounded (Human Rights Watch 2013). This unlawful violence against peaceful protesters eliminated any remaining legitimacy of the Saleh-regime in the eyes of the protesters (Rabi 2015, 198) and led to a split in the ruling political elite and the defection of the military (Heinze 2018, 6-7). After this "Friday of Dignity" (Jum'a al-Karama), the opposition coalition JMP and important tribal elites joined the protests. General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, one of the most influential military leaders in Yemen and a former ally of Saleh, vowed to use his military power to protect the protesters (Heinze 2018, 6-7). The protesters thus gained more support for their cause, but at the same time they felt as if their protests were hijacked by the political elite which they sought to topple in the first place (Heinze 2018, 8; Strzelecka 2018, 52). The JMP took over the uprisings and their agenda became dominant, wiping out the interests of women and youth. This change in the nature of the uprisings had important consequences for women's roles in it.

Women's 'political awakening': an influx of eligible candidates

One of the important effects of the 2011 uprisings for women was their increased political awareness and activity. Before, women were generally not actively occupied with politics, which was considered to be a man's business. Women were not supposed to speak in public, feared to voice their demands and were confined to the home (Alwazir, 19 March 2011; Lackner 2016, 28). This changed during the uprisings: women were among the principal instigators of the uprisings and demanded their voices to be heard. All kinds of women joined in the protests

and this way became politically active. This led to an influx of eligible female political candidates; women wanted to participate in politics, both formally and informally.

Even before the 'official' start of the uprisings in February 2011, groups of women organised protests against the regime. In the final weeks of 2010, a group of women, led by Nobel Prize laureate Tawakkol Karman and her fellow members of the activist group Women Journalists without Chains, protested weekly against the regime, demanding more press freedom and a release of imprisoned journalists (Lackner 2017, 35; Rabi 2015, 194). In January 2011, female students of Sana'a University took a leading role in organising demonstrations against the regime, in solidarity with their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts (International Federation of Human Rights 2012, 3). In these initial stages leading up to the mass protests in February 2011, women already played a pivotal role and this role was to become bigger after the uprisings took off. Samia Al-Aghbari, a journalist and activist who was present at the squares, told how women camped at the squares during the uprisings, functioned as security guards at entrances, worked as doctors treating the wounded, mobilised others to participate and provided protesters with food and other supplies (Interview Al-Aghbari). They supported the demonstrations through fundraising and prayer (Shakir et al 2012, 19) and, most strikingly, they led demonstrations and spoke to crowds of people (Alwazir 14 February 2012; Comra Films 2012; Noon Arabia 28 March 2012). This presence of women in the squares was considered by many as something unprecedented and extraordinary for Yemen. An anonymous Yemeni woman present at the squares stated:

> In the past, you were not used at having a woman standing on a stage, saying what she feels and men under the stage just supporting her and clapping for her. For us, this is a very very very wonderful thing (Comra Films 2012).

Afrah Nasser – blogger, journalist and activist – adds to this that women's presence exemplified true social change. In a country where women's freedoms are restricted and women are usually confined to the house, women's overwhelming presence at the demonstrations was truly new (Nasser 2011b).

Women were thus present at the squares and played significant roles, which was an important change from the past. What made this change even more striking, was that it was not only educated elite women who joined the protests, but that women from all strata of society were present. As Sam Waddah – blogger and activist – states on his blog ProudYemeni: "thousands of women from different ages, classes, regions, sects and professions have fearlessly and bravely taken to the streets to support the revolution (Waddah 15 December 2011). At the

start of the protests, there were only a dozen women, particularly students and journalists (Interview Al-Aghbari; Nasser 2011a). Yet every day the number multiplied because female protesters took their sisters, cousins and friends (Nasser 2011a) and male protesters brought their wives and daughters (Interview Almotawakel; Raja 2013, 6). Thousands of women were present at demonstrations throughout the country, (Nasser 2011b) as is also visible from video recordings of the protests (see for instance: Women from Yemen, 18 March 2011, 17 April 2011).

The majority of women present and those leading the demonstrations were well-educated, middle-class women from the urban centres. They were the ones aware of the political situation and occupied with change. They often were relatives of the educated, relatively progressive male elite and could afford it (socially and financially) to stay away from home (Lackner 2016, 28; Raja 2013, 7). Nevertheless, although these women were educated and already occupied with politics, it was a novelty they actually participated in informal politics by going out on the streets. The empowerment of these middle-class women consisted in their acting upon their independent thinking; instead of merely having political convictions yet staying at home, they went out on the streets and voiced their demands in the public sphere. Noon Arabia – a blogger writing under this pseudonym – describes this process of change, stating that before the uprisings the priority in her life was her family and being a mother, but this changed during the uprisings: "I decided to assume another role, besides that of wife and fulltime mother. I became an online activist" (Noon Arabia 28 June 2013). Even women part of the Yemeni diaspora, such as Noon Arabia, were influenced in this way by the uprisings.

Besides these educated, middle-class women, there were also formerly politically inactive women from lower strata of society participating in the uprisings. Through Arab talk shows, where the uprisings and women's roles in these were highlighted, even illiterate women from outside the urban centres became aware of the political situation and joined the protests (Raja 2013, 5). Atiaf Alwazir – journalist and activist present at the demonstrations – wrote for instance about Umm Hashim, a 45-year-old woman who saw images of injured protesters at Change Square on television and therefore decided to join the protests (Alwazir 14 February 2012). For women, the 2011 revolution did not only happen in the squares, as Nasser puts it, but was also a revolution at home: women went out without a guardian, defied their parents' prohibition to go to the squares and, contrary to what was thought to be acceptable, spoke up for themselves (Alwazir 14 February 2012; Nasser 9 March 2015). Nadia, a 22-year-old volunteer at Change Square, ignored for instance her father's prohibition not to go to Change Square, sneaked out unnoticed and became one of the many important female volunteers in the uprisings (Alwazir 14 February 2012). These women who had not been occupied with politics

before became politically 'awakened'. They started to think politically and, when possible, joined protests and act politically.

With all these kinds of women present in the squares or supporting the uprisings in other ways, women as a group discovered their power and influence. Now, they were prepared to develop independent political opinions and to act upon these ideas (Shakir et al 2012, 9). Albeit of course not reaching all women in Yemen, women's participation in the 2011 uprisings led to political empowerment of women from different strata of society. Educated women started to act upon their political convictions and formerly politically inactive women became occupied with politics. Raghda Gamal – poet and part of the independent youth during the uprisings – declared:

> For the first time in years women could take a leading role with men crowds in a traditional society such as Yemen. As for my personal experience, it was unforgettable. […] I felt for the first time in my life that I can raise my voice and say what I want bravely (Interview Gamal).

The 2011 uprisings thus led to an influx of eligible female candidates – such as for instance Samia Al-Aghbari who started as an activist and eventually participated in the NDC, or Hurriya Mashhour who was to become the new Minister of Human Rights in the transitional government (International Federation of Human Rights 2012, 42) – who had both the experience and the ambition to participate in formal politics.

Progressive tendencies and erosion of gender norms

In the first phase of the uprisings, until the 'Friday of Dignity' and the subsequent joining of the JMP, women thus played an important role. This led to an influx of women with political experience and ambitions and consequently to women's political empowerment. Another important consequence of women's participation was the changing perception of women in society. Gender norms eroded and women's possibilities in the public sphere increased. After the 'Friday of Dignity' these initial liberalisations in gender relations and progressive tendencies were reversed. Nevertheless, women's experiences of looser gender norms could not be reversed, and this experience contributed to women's political empowerment.

Women's participation in the protests was remarkable considering women's traditional role in Yemeni society, which confined them to the house and excluded them from public spaces. Because the protesters sought a cultural revolution in order to redefine existing norms upon which the elite had built its rule (Heinze 2018, 4; Strzelecka 2018, 60), they had a new

vision on society entailing a rather lenient view towards women's roles, which allowed women to participate in the uprisings. In addition to this, the initial absence of elderly and elites who generally adhered to stricter gender norms allowed for these progressive gender norms (Heinze 2018, 4). These looser gender norms allowed women and men to protest together. As one of the protesters commented: "We feel that for the first time, men and women are coming together – we participate as Yemenis first, with our gender being secondary" (Semlali 2013). Consequently, the whole ever-dominant system of strict gender norms was turned upside down. Men and women in the squares broke taboos by protesting and camping together during the uprisings (Alwazir 14 February 2012); Nasser describes how she marches together with men (Nasser 13 April 2011) and even drank a cup of tea with women in a 'man's café' (Nasser 4 May 2011), things that were impossible to even think of before the uprisings. Due to these changing gender norms, the life of women in the squares was also rather pleasant at first. Nasser regularly emphasises how there was – contrary to what is common in Yemen – no harassment of women in the squares: "It is common knowledge that Yemeni women suffer harassment in the streets of Yemen all the time, but I have never experienced harassment in Change Square" (Nasser 11 April 2011; Nasser 24 February 2011; Nasser 2011a).

Interestingly, this change of gender norms was welcomed by both men and women. All women mention the praise and respect they received from men in the squares (Alwazir 14 February 2012; Interview Gamal; Nasser 8 March 2011; Nasser 24 March 2011; Nasser 13 april 2011). Even the father of the 22-year-old Nadia, who defied him by going to the squares, eventually supported her participation in the uprisings (Alwazir 14 February 2012). Waddah, a man himself, talks about the "brave and heroic women" of the uprisings (Waddah 15 December 2011) and a man in the squares stated he "would even vote for a woman president" (Antelava 2011). Nasser describes the honour with which she was received by men on International Women's Day in 2011:

> Once I entered the area [Change Square], I felt like a VIP. Men were literally moving men in front of me aside to let me in and have an easy access for me to get to the centre spot where I found thousands of Yemeni females gathered. Small girls, teenage girls, ladies, old women and all kinds of females were there. It was remarkable to be there surrounded by males who came to celebrate women's participation and importance in making change for Yemen. It was amazing to see all the men looking at women with respect and adoration for their presence at the square (Nasser 8 March 2011).

In the squares, women initially were thus freed from gender discrimination and pre-defined roles (Heinze 2018, 4; Strzelecka 2018, 50). They could act on equal footing with their fellow male protesters and were respected by them.

After the 'Friday of Dignity' on 18 March 2011, the opposition coalition JMP and General Ali Mohsen joined the uprisings and changed the dynamics of the protests. Elderly and elites rejecting social and cultural change soon dominated the protests and reversed these initial liberalisations of gender relations (Heinze 2018, 8; Strzelecka 2018, 51). Alwazir feared this joining of elites might result in "the exact opposite of what the majority of youth in the square wants, which is a civic state which respects individual rights and freedoms" (Alwazir 21 March 2011). And for women, it did indeed. Islah, the main opposition party in the JMP and an Islamist party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, pushed for its own agenda which consisted of political change without cultural change. Not only did they prevent the independent initiators of the uprisings from speaking, they also marginalised women's interests and eventually excluded women from the public space (Lackner 2017, 37; Strzelecka 2018, 52). While at first women and men were mixed during protests at the squares, after the joining of the JMP they were separated by first a rope, then a blue curtain and eventually a wooden wall (Alwazir 14 February 2012; Nasser 27 May 2012). Moreover, women were actively scared away from the squares by the JMP. Several violent attacks on women joining the protests were reported (Nasser 17 June 2011, Noon Arabia 18 October 2011; United Press International 2011). However, because of gender norms dictating not to physically attack women, violence towards women was relatively limited (Nasser 6 June 2011; Raja 2013, 8; Shakir et al 2012, 6).[3]
What was more common, was psychological and social pressure to get women to return to their homes (Nasser 27 May 2012). In this, strict conservative gender norms were used as a weapon against the protesters. It was argued women who did participate in the protests and entered the public space were women of bad reputation (Strzelecka 2018, 55). Smearing campaigns, attacking women's honour and reputation, were used to scare women off (Nasser 16 December 2012). Hind Al-Eryani – a prominent journalist and women's rights activist – stated that Islah "send us booklets and pamphlets in which it says that a woman's place is in the home, and that if a woman lives an independent life, her children are probably illegitimate, and God will burn her face" (Nasser 15 August 2012). After the JMP joined the protests, gender norms were thus

[3] To illustrate the taboo of violently attacking women: when on 16 October 2011 the first female protester was killed by a sniper (as opposed to female victims by a non-specific bombardment), mass demonstrations erupted against the Saleh regime. Noon Arabia stated: "Nobody is safe in Yemen, even the women are not spared from Saleh's forces, snipers and thugs who kill peaceful protesters with cold blood. Azizah Othman [the killed woman] might be the first woman killed in the revolution, but many fear she might not be the last" (Noon Arabia 18 October 2011).

reversed: instead of encouraging women to go out and voice their demands, they were scared away from the squares and confined to the homes again.

In only the first six weeks of the protests, gender norms loosened substantially and were straitened again in the squares: at first, progressive tendencies resulting in the erosion of gender norms were prevalent among demonstrators, but after the joining of the JMP, gender norms became stricter and were eventually even used to attack women. At the end of the uprisings, gender norms were thus back where they were at the beginning. Nevertheless, this period of eroding gender norms and the subsequent straitening of them turned out to be a crucial experience for women. Women now had tasted from the fruits of gender equality and knew this was a crucial element of their vision for a new society. Although the gains in terms of gender norms were minimal in the end, the short period of freedom empowered women and encouraged them to continue their struggle.

Women's political utility

A third causal mechanism as mentioned by Hughes that came into play during the 2011 uprisings, was the increased political utility of women: women were increasingly regarded as useful in politics. Just as with gender norms, this was primarily during the first phase of the uprisings, until the 'Friday of Dignity'. After that, women's issues were still used as a convenient political tool but no longer at the benefit of women themselves. Rather, it was used by the Saleh-regime to divide the protesters.

Women's presence at the protests was unprecedented in Yemen and therefore also recognised by the protesters as a useful political tool against the regime and towards the outer world. Since women were less likely to be violently attacked (Alwazir 6 June 2011; Nasser 17 June 2011), they sometimes marched in the frontlines of the demonstrations in order to protect their fellow male protesters from violence (Raja 2013, 8; Shakir et al 2012, 6). Towards the outer world, women were used strategically as spokesmen to the media to increase international attention and support for the uprisings; the protests became much more interesting for the (Western) world if it also entailed a women's emancipating aspect (Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig 2017). And indeed, the uprisings became known, lauded and supported for the emancipating effects it had on women (Karman 2016; Rice et al 2011). Tawakkol Karman even became the first Arab woman to get a Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts of peaceful protest and women's rights (The Nobel Peace Prize 2011). Women's presence was thus used strategically by the protesters to gain support and to challenge the Saleh-regime. However, the joining of the JMP changed this dynamic.

As previously stated, the joining of the JMP caused a reversal in gender norms; women were barred from the demonstrations and harassed if they were present anyway (Nasser 27 May 2012; Nasser 16 December 2012). With this, a split occurred among the protesters, between the independent protesters on the one hand and the conservatives of the JMP (particularly of Islah) on the other hand (Nasser 27 May 2012). Women's presence became a contested and dividing issue: the independent protesters who started the uprisings, were in favour of women's presence and had a more lenient stance towards women's roles in society, whereas Islah regularly sought to bar women from the protests (Nasser 15 August 2012). The Saleh-regime used this disagreement among the protesters to weaken the protests. In April, Saleh declared in a speech Islam forbids the mixing of men and women in public (International Federation of Human Rights 2012, 4) and argued women who mixed with men (particularly in public places) were not good Muslims (Strzelecka 2018, 55). With this, he condemned the protests for allowing men and women to mix, suggested they were acting against Islam and, this way, hoped to turn liberals against conservatives in the squares (Alwazir 16 April 2011). And indeed, he partly succeeded in causing unrest. Some protesters – particularly members of Islah – denied there was mixing in the squares (Alwazir 14 February 2012) thereby denying reality. Others were proud of this mixing, condemned Saleh's "false interpretation of Islam" and organised mixed marches in response to show nothing is wrong with mixing (Alwazir 14 February 2012; Kasinof 2011; Rice et al 2011). These latter were however attacked during their mixed marches by forces of Islah (Alwazir 14 February 2012; Nasser 13 March 2015). Because women's presence in the squares had become a contested issue among the protesters, women's issues faded from the agenda (Strzelecka 2018, 58).

Although at the start of the protests some protesters called specifically for gender equality (Strzelecka 2018, 50), generally, women's issues were not listed in the principal protesters' demands. As Al-Aghbari states: "There were no demands on women in the revolution. The demands were made for all Yemenis" (Interview Al-Aghbari). Nasser emphasises this on her blog as well, stating:

> The main slogan is for a free country, a real democracy. […] There are no demands specifically about women, but a true democracy would necessarily mean equal rights and equal participation for men and women" (Nasser 17 June 2011).

It was thought that establishing a true democracy would mean equal rights for all, including women, and hence there would be no necessity to push for women's issues specifically. Women assumed their leading roles in the uprisings would bring them equal rights and would ensure

their position as equal political partners (Haddad & Rogers 2011, 7; International Federation of Human Rights 2012, 40; Raja 2013, 6; Shakir et al 2012, 5). At first it did, but with the joining of the JMP this changed.

With women's presence becoming contested, women's political utility was increasingly recognised, but not necessarily to the benefit of women themselves. At first, the JMP supported women's presence in the squares as a means to have a great number of people at the demonstrations. But when sufficient male JMP-members joined the protests, women were not necessary anymore and were side-lined (Antaleva 2011; Nasser 13 March 2015; Shakir et al 2012, 7) Similarly, as Alwazir states, while Islah barred women from the demonstrations, it also used Tawakkol Karman's winning of the Nobel Peace Prize as a means to show their support for women's rights (Alwazir 14 February 2012). Nasser argues that

> different political and anti-Saleh parties used women these days as a decorative tool to serve the parties' political agenda. However, many of the non-partisan and politically independent women, as I was myself, believed that bringing about a drastic political change would benefit women's rights in one way or another (Nasser 9 March 2018; similar statements in Nasser 13 March 2015; Nasser 9 March 2015).

At the start of the uprisings, women's issues were not mentioned specifically but they were aimed for inherent in the other aims of the protesters: women's value and utility were openly recognised. When the uprisings became dominated by conservative political parties, women's presence was again used as a convenient political tool, but no longer for the benefit of the women themselves. Women's presence and women's issues became a topic of contestation among the protesters, each using it whenever it suited them.

Informal political empowerment?

The 2011 uprisings were thus a tumultuous time for Yemeni women: much changed yet many changes were also soon reversed. As shown in this section, structural, cultural as well as political factors as mentioned by Hughes have come into play, contributing to women's informal political empowerment. First of all, many women became conscious of the political situation and discovered their potential power. They got experience in politics and were more eager to participate in this. The uprisings thus caused an influx of eligible female candidates for formal politics. Secondly, gender norms eroded and progressive tendencies envisioning gender equality were present. There was a new vision on society in which gender equality played an important role; women were treated as equals among the protesters and their participation was

encouraged. Lastly, women's political utility was recognised during the uprisings. Women's presence was used strategically by the protesters, albeit in the end to the disadvantage of women themselves. From a political perspective, women lost the initially gained rights and opportunities of political participation when gender norms became stricter again and women were side-lined in the protests. Nevertheless, women were increasingly perceived as a political force to reckon with. And, more importantly, women now recognised themselves as capable political actors.

Although the gains for women concerning gender norms and equality in politics were minimal in the end, the 2011 uprisings did work politically empowering for women in informal politics. They had gained power over things they did not have power over before. They could participate in informal politics whereas they could not (or only minimally) before. Nevertheless, the applicable causal mechanisms which Hughes argued lead to inclusion in formal politics – the influx of eligible female candidates, changing gender roles, progressive tendencies and increased political utility – did not result in automatic inclusion of women in formal politics, in this case the transitional process. In the next section, I analyse women's formal political empowerment: could women participate in an independent, meaningful way?

2. The transitional process: women in formal politics

Contrary to many other 'Arab Spring'-countries, such as Libya and Syria, Yemen did not descend into a civil war following the uprisings. It is the only country which came out of the uprisings in an initially peaceful manner, through a negotiated transition (Alley 2013a, 74; Benomar 2013, 202; International Crisis Group 2012, I). In this section, I analyse this transitional process and women's participation in it. I show how the causal mechanisms that worked empowering for women during the uprisings, did not translate automatically in their inclusion in formal politics. Nevertheless, when they were included, their participation was meaningful: they could influence the decision-making process and could press issues on the agenda. All in all, the transitional process worked politically empowering for women; they gained access to positions they had not access to before and could participate in a meaningful way in formal politics.

Background

During the uprisings, the political elites regularly sought solutions for the protests; the deal proposed by Saleh to resign when his term ended was for instance rejected by all protesters, including the JMP, because Saleh's immediate resignation was a non-negotiable demand for

them (Noon Arabia 1 May 2011). In April, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, intermingled in the protests by starting to negotiate a peaceful transition. On 21 April 2011, this deal, the so-called 'GCC Agreement', was signed by all opposition parties (Lackner 2017, 38; Rabi 2015, 198) and on 23 November 2011 Saleh accepted it as well (Lackner 2017, 39).

This democratic transition brokered by the GCC was divided in two subsequent steps. First, a transitional government of national unity was sworn in on 7 December 2011, Saleh resigned on 21 January 2012 and on that same day Saleh's former vice-president Hadi was elected as new president. After this change of government, the second phase of the transitional process commenced, consisting of a restructuring of the military and security sectors, and the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which was at the heart of the transition (Implementation Mechanism 2011). The NDC started in March 2013 and lasted until January 2014. 565 delegates of all political factions, including women, were divided in nine working groups to discuss the restructuring of Yemeni state and society (NDC, N.D.a).[4] When the NDC came to an end, 1800 recommendations – not all consistent with each other – were at the table. The Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), established in March 2014 by president Hadi, was tasked with transforming these recommendations in one coherent constitution. This draft constitution was presented in January 2015 but was never adopted as official constitution (Heinze 2018, 16). At the moment of presenting, the Houthi uprising had already started, and the Hadi-government was forced to resign (See Chapter 4 – The Current Conflict). In the end, no recommendations of the NDC were implemented.

Women's inclusion in the transitional process

Yemen's transitional process thus consisted of three pillars: the formation of a new transitional government, restructuring the military and security apparatus, and the National Dialogue Conference. Literature on women in Yemen's transition focuses particularly on this last aspect, stating an "unprecedented number of women, youth and civil society" was included in the NDC (Gaston 2014, 3; Hamidi 2015, 18; Heinze 2018, 12). In the next section, I analyse this participation in the NDC more in-depth, but first I look at the way women were included (or rather, excluded) in the other pillars of the transitional process.

The transitional process started with the drafting of the GCC Agreement in April 2011. Although it was meant to be a solution for the mass protests, the protesters themselves,

[4] The working groups were on the following issues: the Sa'da Issue (i.e. Houthi autonomy in Yemen's northern parts); the Southern issue; matters relating to transitional justice; state-building; good governance; reform of the military and security forces; questions of special entities (i.e. the rights of minorities and marginalised groups); rights and freedoms; development-related issues (NDC, N.D.a).

including women, were not included in the drafting of the Agreement (Alwazir 30 November 2011; Noon Arabia 11 February 2013). The Agreement solely addressed the formal political parties, including the opposition, and forced this Agreement on the independent protesters who were excluded (Alwazir 30 November 2011; Day 2012, 284). Consequently, it was seen by the independent protesters as an elite deal, trying to diminish the revolutionary potential of the uprisings and protecting the interests of the established political actors (Alwazir 11 February 2013; Interview Gamal; Mubgar 17 May 2011; Noon Arabia 1 May 2011). The main aim of the Agreement, it was thought, was to return the country to peace and quiet (Carapico 2014, 39; International Crisis Group 2012, 9; Schmitz 2014, 5; Steinbeiser 2015) and to prevent the revolutionary tendencies from transferring to any GCC country (Alwazir 30 November 2011; Mubgar 17 May 2011). And indeed, the first aim as stated in the Agreement is to "preserve the unity, security and stability of Yemen" (OSESGY 2011, 2). In the second aim it is, however, stated the Agreement "shall fulfil the aspirations of the Yemeni people for change and reform" (OSESGY 2011, 2). Yet notwithstanding this second aim, the GCC Agreement was experienced as "the biggest blowback and the stab in the back" of the uprisings (Alwazir 11 February 2013). Raghda Gamal states:

> We considered it as a victory of Saleh's regime. We felt that we disappointed our fellow martyrs! At the moment of the broadcast of the signing of the GCC Initiative, my colleagues were literally crying inside the tents (Interview Gamal).

The people who started the protests and aimed for reform, including women, were thus excluded from deciding how to approach this reform and felt their revolution was hijacked by the political establishment (Heinze 2018, 8; Strzelecka 2018, 52).

Although women were not included in the drafting of the GCC Agreement, the importance of their inclusion in the actual transition was recognised from the start. Pushed for by the UN (OSESGY N.D.), the Implementation Mechanism accompanying the GCC Agreement included a provision stating that "women shall appropriately be represented in all of the institutions referred to in this mechanism" (Implementation Mechanism 2011, 8). However, it was not specified in the Implementation Mechanism what this 'appropriate' would entail. And it turned out to be not too much. In the transitional government – the first pillar of the transition –3 out of 32 ministers were female, which was progress of only one minister compared with the former Saleh-government (Al-Omari 2010). Moreover, these women headed the ministries of Human Rights, Social Affairs and Cabinet Affairs, which are generally thought to be soft issues, not constituting the core of the government, which can easily be side-lined

(International Federation of Human Rights 2012, 38, 42). When Hurriya Mashhour, the Minister of Human Rights, actually sought to expose corruption and human rights violations within the government, she became a victim of smearing campaigns, trying to silence her (Nasser 15 July 2012). The progress for women in the transitional government was nihil. In the Military Affairs Committee for Achieving Security and Stability – which was tasked with the second pillar of the transition: the restructuring of the military and security sectors – and in the President's Advisory Committee, no women were included at all (Raja 2013, 13).

After this first phase of the transitional process, women feared their 'appropriate' representation might be at risk; what was considered 'appropriate' was not specified in the Implementation Mechanism and few women were involved in the transition so far. As Alwazir states:

> The vagueness of the term 'appropriate' will create widespread debate, and of course, the interpretation will differ from group to group. Women's groups need to push for real representation at the decision-making level and to be part of all the important committees, including the constitutional committees (Alwazir 30 November 2011).

In March 2012, there were therefore two conferences of women on women's political representation in order to bundle their powers and ensure their participation in the coming NDC (Strzelecka 2018, 63). This bundling of powers proved to be difficult since women were increasingly defined by their background and political affiliation and lost their initial unity as women. Nasser describes women even started throwing shoes at each other after a political disagreement at the conference (Nasser 27 May 2012). Notwithstanding these difficulties, women succeeded in their aim: they were included in the Preparation Committee and Technical Committee which prepared the NDC and eventually established a quota of 30% of women representatives in the NDC (Hamidi 2015, 17; Lackner 2016, 42).

Women's inclusion in Yemen's transitional process thus had a slow start; their empowerment in informal politics had not led to automatic inclusion in formal politics. The GCC Agreement was drafted without women and in two of the three pillars of the transitional process – i.e. the transitional government and the military restructuring – women were barely included. Nevertheless, women were present at the NDC and could participate in a meaningful way.

Women in the NDC

At the NDC, women were for the first time in Yemen's history allowed to negotiate with men on equal footing in a formal political process (Strzelecka 2018, 64). In this section, I analyse the meaningfulness of women's participation in the process; were women able to voice their demands, push issues on the agenda and influence decision-making? I show how, despite difficulties, women succeeded in participating in the decision-making process in a meaningful way.

In the Implementation Mechanism, it was stated women should be appropriately represented in the NDC (Implementation Mechanism 2011, 8). Preparing the NDC, the Technical Committee gave substantiation to this provision by establishing a quota of 30% of women for all political parties and, in addition to this, the selection of 40 independent women representatives (NDC N.D.c.). This quota provided women with the opportunity to let their voices be heard and press for their own agenda in formal politics. It was, as Nasser stated, "an opportunity for women in Yemen to translate their demands into constitutional texts and laws guaranteeing their political representation" (Nasser 4 February 2014). However, women's participation in the NDC was not as easy as it seemed. During the NDC, women's participation was regularly opposed by male politicians. Rashad Union, a Salafi political party supporting the implementation of Islamic law in Yemen, opposed for instance the 30% quota all together (AlJazeera 2014; Interview Almotawakel). Others accepted the quota but refused to participate in debates because of women's presence. One elderly male politician stated he could not enter into meaningful debates with "all these women and civil society around" (Gaston 2014, 6) and others withdrew from negotiations because they refused to be led by women chairing the committee (Interview Al-Aghbari). In addition to this, women participating in the NDC were harassed both physically (Nasser 16 November 2013) and verbally by tainting their reputation with smearing campaigns (Nasser 9 February 2014). With a quota of 30% of women, women were ensured of a seat at the table during the NDC. Yet the extent to which their participation was meaningful, was less ensured. Besides these above-mentioned obvious attempts to hinder women's participation, two other factors thwarted their meaningful participation: the use of token women and women's representation solely for women's issues.

When establishing quota, one risks parties will use women to fulfil the quota but deny them actual meaningful participation; women might be present but cannot act independently or influence decision-making processes (Dahlerup 2006). This use of so-called 'token women' occurred during the NDC as well. Political parties could select their own representatives for the NDC, provided that they abided by the quota as established by the Technical Committee (NDC, N.D.b.). They were obliged to include 30% women among their representatives, yet there were no mechanisms to check whether these women could participate independently. Al-Sakkaf

(2018) describes how women in the 'rights and liberties'-working group were excluded from negotiations on party lines but were subsequently forced to vote according to these party lines (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 153). Even on issues vital for women's interests, they were not allowed to vote independently, which led to situations in which some women voted against the raising of the minimum legal age of marriage for girls because that was their party position, whereas they themselves might have wanted to vote otherwise (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 139, 153). Women who were representatives of political parties thus could not press their own agenda or act independently but were forced to abide by party lines. In addition to this, due to having to reckon with a just geographical representation (NDC N.D.b), politically inexperienced women from rural areas could participate as well besides well-educated urban elite women. These women without much political experience tended to follow more experienced representatives (men or women) or their party line instead of their own personal (women's) interests (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 135). Both elements – the use of token women and inexperienced women following party lines – question the extent to which non-independent women could participate meaningfully in the NDC; they could barely set the agenda and had limited influence on decision-making processes.

For independent women, the selection criteria, as formulated by the Technical Committee, explicitly state they cannot be affiliated with any political party (NDC, N.D.b). The meaningfulness of their participation was thus not jeopardised by for instance being forced to follow party lines. Yet their meaningful participation was problematised exactly by this selection mechanism, which held that women had to be politically active, and had to be able to demonstrate competence, engagement and knowledge of the issues for women (NDC N.D.b.). These criteria had two important consequences for the meaningful participation of women. First of all, only already politically active women could gain a seat at the table. This led to a marginalisation of politically inexperienced yet ambitious women and a fairly high representation of educated, urban, well-to-do women in the independent section. It is questionable whether these independent women were representative for women all over the country.

Secondly, because women had to be engaged with women's issues, women were selected *as* women *because* they were women to have a say about *women's issues*. This use of women for women's issues resonated UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2014 (2011) on Yemen, which stated that women should be included in order to represent women (UN Security Council 2011, 2). However, being a woman does not necessarily imply being a women's rights activist. A woman with a vision on a new Yemeni state, who was not aligned with an established political party (and hence could not be one of their representatives) and who

did not give much for women's issues, could thus not be selected as independent woman and could not participate in the NDC. Women apparently were considered only relevant for women's issues. In this light, the attribution of the Ministry of Human Rights to a woman is revealing. Also, the 'rights and liberties'-working group had the highest percentage of women in the conference (48%) and was chaired by a woman (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 136). Women seem to not have been selected as equal citizens, but as women to have a say about women (and preferably be silent about other issues). The independent women could thus participate in the NDC, but – following the selection criteria – they were intended to participate primarily on women's issues.

Despite these hindrances, women could eventually participate in the NDC in a meaningful way: they succeeded in setting the agenda and influencing decision-making processes. As Al-Thaibani states:

> Women have managed to head many sensitive committees, like Sa'da committee, which is the very difficult and sensitive issue in Yemen. They have been massively leading, which has resulted in the nation-wide agreement with the most important issues for Yemen's future […] and a very gender-friendly constitution (Interview Al-Thaibani).

Women could substantially influence decision-making processes primarily because of the voting mechanisms. For a proposal to be adopted, it had to have 90% of the votes of a working group and of the general assembly (O'Reilly 2015, 15). Since women made up more than 10% of each working group and 30% of the general assembly, resolutions could not be pressed through, neglecting women's opinions. As a Southern female NDC representative stated, she "would cancel all those laws which discriminate against women" (Nasser 30 April 2013). Almotawakel adds to this that women were better in attending sessions than men and hence could influence decision-making by simply outnumbering and therewith outweighing men in the process (Interview Almotawakel). More importantly, women could set the agenda during the NDC. Although, as Gamal states, "all NDC attention was focused on two issues: the Southern issue and the Sa'da issue" (Interview Gamal), women succeeded in pressing for women's issues as well. At the NDC, it was the first time that women's issues were on the table and being discussed by top-level politicians (Interview Almotawakel).

It is often argued women's presence led to the adoption of many gender-sensitive and women empowering resolutions (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 155; Interview Al-Aghbari; Strzelecka 2018, 64). It is true that the debates on women's issues were ignited by women who set the agenda, but since women constituted only 30% of the representatives at the NDC and some women

voted against women's issues, resolutions concerning women's issues could never be pressed through without the support of a substantial number of men. Of great interest in this respect is the support women gained from Hiraak and Houthi representatives. Because women had always had a good position in the South and the current inferior position of women was perceived to be northern imposition, for Hiraak representatives women's rights were a natural cause to support (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 155). The Houthis, on the other hand, did not consider women's issues an important topic at all, yet they used their positive attitude towards women in a strategic manner to win support for their own cause (Al-Sakkaf 2018, 154-155). This way, women were able to influence the current of the NDC by influencing decision-making processes and setting the agenda. Their participation in formal politics was thus meaningful and they established important gains in women's position.

After the NDC, the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) had to make a coherent constitution of the 1800 recommendations of the NDC. The CDC consisted of 19 members of whom 4 were women. Despite not reaching the 30% quota in the CDC, the female members did succeed in influencing the outcomes of the constitution drafting process. Almotawakel, member of the CDC, stated it was difficult for women to make their voices heard in the CDC because the higher you get in decision-making levels the more difficult it becomes:

> When you come to the squares, women's participation was accepted, and everybody was happy. Then at the NDC you see the participation getting less. But when you go to the CDC, we are with few, and you can see how difficult it is actually. When you go up on the decision-making it gets more difficult (Interview Almotawakel).

Nevertheless, they were being listened to and they did succeed in getting women's issues in the constitution. Equality between men and women and the government's obligation to support this, is explicitly mentioned in the Draft Constitution of 2015, the legal minimum age of marriage has been set to 18 for girls and the 30% quota of women in all political bodies has been maintained (Constitution Drafting Committee 2015 Art. 76, Art. 124, Art. 128). Almotawakel herself states they did not succeed in getting all women's issues in the constitution as strong as they would have liked them to be, yet it is a very good constitution for women, she argues (Interview Almotawakel).

Formal political empowerment?

The transitional process following the 2011 uprisings turned out to be an important experience for Yemen. Not only was it the only country that came out of the uprisings in a peaceful manner,

but this transition was also highly inclusive. In this section I analysed women's role in the transitional process. Although they initially were barely included in the process, significant gains have been made in the end. Women have made significant gains in terms of constitutional rights, but more importantly they have been able to participate in the process establishing those rights. The transitional process was the first time that women were in large numbers included in a high-level formal political process in Yemen. With this, women gained political experience and could make their voices be heard. In the outcomes of the NDC and the Draft Constitution of 2015, the importance of women in politics have been explicitly recognised. Although they have never been implemented, the NDC and the Draft Constitution remain important benchmarks for Yemen's future. They will most likely be the foundation of peace negotiations and the rebuilding of the Yemeni state. The question remains, however, whether women's roles in these will then still be recognised and continued. In the next chapter, I discuss this.

3. Conclusion: political empowerment?

How have the 2011 uprisings and the subsequent transitional process influenced women's political participation and empowerment? As shown in this chapter, much has changed for women in Yemen due to the uprisings and transition. During the 2011 uprisings, women became politically active, their utility was recognised and visions of gender equality permeated society. Women were an important factor in the uprisings, were recognised as such by outsiders and discovered their own political power. In this respect, the uprisings worked empowering for women in informal politics. Nevertheless, this empowerment did not translate automatically in empowerment in formal politics as well. Women's inclusion in the formal transitional process had a slow start but was eventually substantial. Women were included and could, despite some barriers, participate in a meaningful way: they succeeded to influence decision-making processes and pressed for their own agenda. All in all, the 2011 uprisings and the transition process gave Yemeni women valuable experience in both informal and formal politics and changed the perception of women in society. It made both society and women themselves aware women are a political power they have to reckon with. As Al-Sakkaf stated just before she became Minister of Information in the transitional government:

> The political parties, even in the opposition, have created a monster that they cannot control anymore. So even now, now they want the Yemeni woman to go back to their houses. That is not possible anymore. If there is one thing we managed to get from the Arab Spring, it is that we empowered public opinion, we empowered civil society, groups that did not think

> they could make a difference, such as youth or women, realised that they can. And this is something nobody can take away from us (Women in the World 2014).

However, as soon as the transition process came to an end, the current conflict started and none of the gains made had time to stabilise and take root. In the next chapter, I analyse how the current conflict has influenced women's political participation and empowerment. Are the gains of the 2011 uprisings and transition reversed or have they developed in something new? How have women responded to this new crisis and have they been able to secure and sustain their political participation?

4.
The Current Conflict

While the transitional process following the 2011 uprisings was not finished yet, Yemen entered a new crisis. In the summer of 2014, the Houthis committed a coup against the Hadi-government. They seized the capital Sana'a, made the Hadi-government resign and with this, the current conflict commenced. In this chapter, I analyse women's roles in this conflict and the still on-going peace negotiations; how has this conflict impacted women's political empowerment in both informal and formal politics? Although this thesis focuses on the opportunities for women during crises, one cannot neglect the severe negative impact this conflict has on women. As Al-Aghbari states:

> When we talk about the role played by women, it is only the role of the activist […] and the role of working in the relief field. And these are important roles. But the woman victim has to be a victim as well, only no one hears her voice and whines when he hears it (Interview Al-Aghbari).

Therefore, I first analyse how the conflict has impacted women socially and economically. Subsequently, I discuss women's roles in both informal and formal politics. I show that despite women's presence and participation in informal politics, they are not included in formal political processes.

1. Background

While the Constitution Drafting Committee was still working on turning the outcomes of the NDC into a comprehensive constitution, the Houthi movement lost faith in the transitional process and decided to push for its own agenda. Their main point of discontent was the federal structure of the new Yemeni state as decided in the NDC. They feared their independence and power in the North would not be recognised and the new structure would still subject them to the central government in Sana'a (Heinze 2018, 16-18; Lackner 2017, 43).

During the transitional process, the Houthis had already stirred unrest among the population in the Sa'da governorates, playing on people's concerns of poverty and lack of prospects. Yet in the summer of 2014, they pushed their uprisings from the North to the capital Sana'a and seized the city (Lackner 2017, 52). To maintain peace in the country, the Hadi-government and Houthi movement negotiated the Peace and National Partnership Agreement

(PNPA). This agreement established the removal of the transitional government in favour of a technocratic consensus government in which the Houthis would be substantially represented (OSESGY 2014). More importantly, it was decided that the federal regions as established in the NDC would be renegotiated in accordance with the demands of the Houthis (OSESGY 2014).

However, when the Draft Constitution was presented in January 2015, the federal division as established by the NDC was sustained; the demands of the Houthis and the agreements of the PNPA were not honoured (Heinze 2018, 19). Consequently, the Houthis continued their uprisings, occupied the presidential palace and on 22 January 2015 they made the Hadi-government resign (Heinze 2018, 19). A month later, Hadi escaped from his house arrest and fled to Aden in the South. There, he rescinded his resignation, formed an interim government and demanded to be recognised as the legitimate president of Yemen (Heinze 2018, 20). The international community recognised Hadi as such but he lacked the military force to combat the Houthis and to re-establish his power and presidency (Lackner 2017, 53). On 25 March 2015, an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened at the request of Hadi to support him in re-establishing his government (Fraihat 2016, 49; Lackner 2017, 53). With this, international actors started to intermingle in the so-far internal conflict. The Hadi-government is backed by this international coalition, the Houthis are supported by Iran and the United Arab Emirates quietly support southern separatists (Fraihat 2016, 49). Now, four years later, the war has still not ended. In the meantime, many attempts to peace negotiations have occurred, of which the most important were in Riyadh and Geneva in 2015, in Kuwait in 2016 and in Stockholm in 2018.

2. Consequences of the conflict: women as victims

After the 2011 uprisings and transitional process, women had a relatively good position in Yemeni society. During the uprisings and the NDC, women gained valuable political experience and could let their voices be heard. Their political power was recognised, and women's political efforts were respected in society. With the NDC outcomes, they had established equal constitutional rights and specific women's rights, such as the 30% quota for women in all political institutions. These gains of political empowerment made in the 2011 transitional process are however at risk in the current conflict: the 2015 Draft Constitution has never been implemented and the conflict has severe consequences for women and their position in society. In this section, I discuss how the current conflict has affected the position of women in society.

Both men and women suffer from the current conflict in Yemen yet whereas men are direct victims of conflict, dying in combat, women are indirect victims, dying of malnutrition and diseases (UN OCHA 2018a). The UN office for humanitarian aid (UN OCHA) stated women suffer more from malnutrition (UN OCHA 2018a, 39) and hence are more vulnerable to diseases such as cholera (UN OCHA 2018a, 26). Because women also have less access to health services, they are more likely to die of the consequences of famine and disease (UN Security Council 2017a; WILPF 2019, 8). In addition to this, the conflict creates social insecurity for women. About 76% of the internally displaced persons are women, 21% of the households in Yemen are headed by a woman under the age of 18, and an increasingly number of girls are married off while barely in their teens (UN OCHA 2018a, 17-18).[5] Women have always been vulnerable in Yemen (see Chapter 2 – Yemen's History), yet this vulnerability increased with the current conflict. Rasha Jarhum – a Yemeni women's rights activists – summarises women's position in the current Yemeni society:

> Yemen, even before the war, was a hostile country towards women's rights. There was violence against women embedded in the laws, in institutions and social norms. With the war, everything has magnified. Women who want to travel for medical evacuation are not able because they have to seek permission of the guardian. Women are more prone to famine because they eat less. […] Women are prone to diseases such as cholera because they are caregivers. Women are walking for long distances in besieged areas because they try to feed their families and bring the basic necessities (France 24 English, Twitter Post, 12 December 2018).

In this quote, Jarhum mentions two contradicting tendencies defining women's position in society: on the one hand, they need a guardian to accompany them to medical services, yet on the other hand, women seek to provide for their families and bring them the basic necessities. These two contradicting dynamics hold both the loosening and restricting of gender norms.

First of all, due to the war, Yemeni women get more responsibilities in the household and in society in general. With men off to war or having lost their jobs, women become responsible for providing for the family; they have to keep the household running and have to work to sustain the family (Middle East Eye, Twitter Post, 5 December 2018; WILPF 2019, 11). Consequently, women enter the public space and do jobs that were previously reserved for men (Heinze & Baabbad 2017, 2). With this, women have been able, according to Al-Thaibani,

[5] Child marriages are often used as a negative survival strategy; by marrying off a girl of the household, there is one mouth less to feed. When poverty increases, the number of child marriages is also likely to increase (Jarhum 2015; UN Security Council 2017a).

to break stereotypes concerning a gendered division of labour and women's capacities of working (Interview Al-Thaibani). Women are empowered in this sense because they gain possibilities and power they did not have before. As was stated on Middle East Eye, an independent journalist news platform: "Women are now leading the entire household, domestically and financially alone, and many times for the first time, in a country where its basic service-delivery system is collapsing" (Middle East Eye, Twitter Post, 5 December 2018). This crucial role women play during the conflict in keeping the society running is also recognised. Thana Faroq – a Yemeni photographer currently living in The Netherlands – stated: "[Yemen] is still standing because of these women who are very busy gluing the broken pieces together" (Faroq 2018). And the former Special Envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, emphasised the hardships women face and their resilience:

> For years, Yemeni women were the strong part of the structure of Yemen and played an effective role in building generations. However, the situation of Yemeni women today is not much different than the situation of the country itself (OSESGY 2016).

Yemeni women thus gain more possibilities during the conflict and are able to break stereotypes. However, these possibilities they gain are often not experienced by women as a benefit but rather as a burden. In addition to all the usual tasks of substance and the challenges of war, women are now also responsible for the family's survival (UN OCHA 2018a, 17; WILPF 2019, 6).

The second tendency concerning women's position in society is contradictory to the former. Instead of having more responsibilities and opportunities, some women are due to the war more confined to the house. With the conflict, gender-based violence increased with 70% compared to before and insecurity on the streets prevails (UN OCHA 2018a, 45; United Nations in Yemen 2017; WILPF 2019, 6, 10). Out of protection, women are thus more confined to the house (Heinze & Baabbad 2017, 8, 20; Oxfam et al 2017, 6). Moreover, the Houthis have established rules concerning women's presence in public spaces. As Al-Aghbari emphasises, "the Houthis restrict women completely" (Interview Al-Aghbari): women are again obliged to be accompanied by a guardian at all times, have to wear closely circumscribed clothing and are not allowed to speak freely (France 24 English, Twitter Post, 12 December 2018). As Nasser states:

> Since the coup by the Houthis, it feels like the status of women has gone back to the dark ages. We hear about these new imposed codes of conduct like no going out after 7pm and music not being allowed (Nasser 9 March 2015).

Women are thus severely restricted in their freedoms by the Houthis. They report they feel like they "live in a big prison" in which their freedom of speech and movement is restricted (OSESGY 2018a). Al-Thaibani argues a similar tendency happens in the South where certain Salafist groups are supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates:

> There are some conservative views on women, particularly in the South and this has been supported by the Saudis. It is a Salafist point of view and they determine the clothes, what women should wear (Interview Al-Thaibani; supported by Oxfam et al 2017, 6, 15).

In the current conflict in Yemen, the position of women is thus changing in two contradicting ways. On the one hand, they gain more possibilities whereas on the other hand they are more restricted in their freedoms. Where the former – i.e. gaining possibilities – is done out of sheer necessity (Marwah 2018), the latter – i.e. restricting women – is a conscious effort to restrict gender norms. Al-Thaibani argues this restricting attitude of both the southern Salafists and the Houthis is alarming because

> When you have a conservative environment such as this, this creates future resistance to women's rights that we have been fighting for for a long time (Interview Al-Thaibani).

According to Al-Aghbari this change in women's roles is primarily negative: "Yes, the Yemeni woman changed, but changed to the worse. Her situation is catastrophic" (Interview Al-Aghbari). In the following section, I analyse how these dynamics concerning women's roles in society influences their participation in informal politics.

3. Present in protests: women in informal politics

In the previous section, I discussed how women are negatively affected by the current conflict in Yemen; they shoulder the burdens of war, physically, economically and socially. However, there is also another side to the story: besides mere victims, women are also active participants in the conflict, both for war and for peace. In this section, I analyse women's roles in informal politics; has the current conflict increased opportunities for women in informal politics? I argue

that, just as in the 2011 uprisings, three causal mechanisms come into play: the change of gender norms, increase of women's political utility and an influx of eligible female candidates.

Defying gender norms in protests

Just as in the 2011 uprisings, women are among the most vocal activists lobbying for peace (Al Naami & Moodley 2017). In her speech to the UN General Assembly in 2018, Jarhum states that since women are most affected by the consequences of war (as shown in the previous section), they also have the greatest interest in peace (Jarhum 2018). In Yemen, women are the ones having to live with the consequences of the conflict and hence lobby with the greatest fervour to change the status quo for the better. Nasser states that "while they bear the brunt of war, many are still managing political activism" (Nasser 26 September 2016). Women in Yemen continue demonstrations demanding democracy in the midst of the conflict, they serve as mediators between opposing parties at a local level and they expose crimes committed by either warring party (Heinze & Baabbad 2017, 18; Interview Al-Aghbari; OSESGY 2018b). An example of this female activism in informal politics are The Mothers of Abductees Sons. They demonstrate weekly for the release of unlawfully detained people and they succeeded in getting several dozens of them released (Jarhum 2018; WILPF 2019, 14).

By going out on the streets and demanding their voices to be heard, women again actively defy gender norms and advocate for a change of these norms. Similar to the 2011 uprisings, they reject being confined to the house and take up the responsibility for change. It is important to note, however, that the current efforts of women in informal politics are not as massive and large of scope as those in the 2011 uprisings. Less people in general and hence less women participate in the current protests and demonstrations. People, and women in particular, are occupied with survival and less with politics. Only few spend their precious time on protests and politics (Heinze & Baabbad 2017, 18). Yet even though in limited numbers, women are still participating in informal politics. Even more, as Karman states, "*only* women hold protest demonstrations and take part in sit-ins", which is, according to her, "a clear indication that they have decided to continue the struggle for freedom" (Karman 2016).

The active participation of women in informal politics leads to a changing perception of women in society. Again, their political power is recognised and respected by some (Heinze & Baabbad 2017, 20). However, just as in the 2011 uprisings, these women's demands for changing gender norms and democracy are also met with resistance by others. Female activists are harassed, both online and offline. Online they receive death threats and are victims of smearing campaigns seeking to taint their reputations (Nasser 2017). On the street, women face physical harassment and attacks, aimed at deterring them from demonstrations (OSESGY

2018a; Women Solidarity Network 2016). Nasser reported how "one Houthi man was pointing a gun at a female protester asking her to go away and calling her a whore" (Nasser 11 February 2015). What is particularly interesting in this, is an apparent change of gender norms concerning women's inviolability. During the 2011 uprisings, women could function as a protecting shield for fellow male protesters because women were less likely to be attacked (see Chapter 3 – The 2011 uprisings) yet in the current conflict, this norm of not attacking women has disappeared (Oxfam et al 2017, 14; Women4Yemen 2019). Whereas during the 2011 uprisings, the short detainment of Tawakkol Karman ignited mass protests (Finn 2011), women now are regularly detained without explanation, of which the latest example is the imprisonment of women's rights activists Awfa Al-Na'ami and Alhassen Al-Qawtari on 28 January 2019 (Gulf Centre for Human Rights 2019; International Crisis Group 2019).[6]

In the current conflict, there is, generally speaking, limited space for women to express themselves freely and to work for peace. Notwithstanding these difficulties, women are still active in informal politics working for peace, despite being harassed. They actively seek to change gender norms by going out on the streets. In the next section I analyse how these activities of women in informal politics lead to the recognition of their political utility.

Political utility: both a burden and a benefit

Women's active participation in informal politics thus leads to a changing perception of women in society; their efforts are recognised and respected. Yet there are also movements seeking to restrict women and deter them from engaging with politics. In this section, I show how women's political utility is recognised in the current conflict. It is recognised by the Houthis, which use women as a convenient political tool, and by the UN, which tries to support women's political empowerment.

In the previous section, I argued women are active in the conflict working for peace and trying to change gender norms. Al-Thaibani states women indeed work primarily for peace during the conflict; although "you will see them used in war as tools, women are not the main insurgents of war" (Interview Al-Thaibani). Nevertheless, women are active in war efforts as well and support these in many ways; they prepare and deliver food for fighters, encourage husbands and sons to fight, smuggle arms, provide medical aid and man checkpoints (Heinze & Baabbad 2017, 19; Nasser 14 June 2017; Nobel Women's Initiative 2017; Oxfam et al 2017, 14; WILPF 2018). The most striking example of this is however the Houthi female militia,

[6] After pressure by the UN and (international) women's organisations, Al-Qawtari was released after a few days. On 16 February 2019, Al-Na'ami was released as well following an intense social media campaign with #FreeAwfa (Aldroubi 2019).

called ‘Zainabeat’ (Habtoor 2018; Middle East Monitor 2017). Ghaidaa Al-Absi describes this militia as “a group of women who […] are deployed during a demonstration to beat the demonstrators” (Interview Al-Absi). Since men attacking women is considered culturally inappropriate, this special female militia is trained to take up this task of attacking women who do not align with the Houthis (Nasser 21 November 2018). These Zainabeat actively act to scare women off who digress from the Houthi line. Both Al-Aghbari and Jarhum report how these militias went to Sana’a University to beat, electrocute and arrest female students and release them only “on the condition to refrain from engaging in activism” (Al-Aghbari 2018; Interview Al-Aghbari; Jarhum 2018).

This example of the Zainabeat not only shows how women actively support the war effort, but more importantly, it shows the Houthi attitude towards women. In the NDC, the Houthis held a rather opportunistic view concerning women’s issues; they voted for women’s issues in order to gain support for their own cause (see Chapter 3 – The 2011 uprisings). In the current conflict, the Houthis again use women as a convenient political tool which is not necessarily to the benefit of women themselves. Despite the strict gender norms they uphold, the Houthis allow women to enter the public space when it suits them. The Zainabeat can participate in the war effort because the Houthis need these women in order to suppress demonstrations, since women are present there and men cannot attack women. Women’s political utility is thus to a certain extent recognised by the Houthis, yet it does not benefit women themselves.

During the current conflict, women are active in informal politics, but this activity is limited to a local level. The scope of the demonstrations is not as large as during the 2011 uprisings and hence it is more difficult for women to translate their local protests into nation-wide recognition and inclusion in formal politics. The weekly demonstrations of a dozen of women from the Mothers of Abductees Sons does for instance not automatically lead to a nation-wide recognition of this problem and the inclusion of these women in formal political negotiations. Al-Thaibani states this gap between informal and formal politics is problematic:

> The grassroots are growing stronger, but at the high political level it [i.e. women’s participation] remains very weak. And this is so alarming, because those local women’s voices cannot be amplified without women in the senior positions, in the decision-making positions. There are some good feminist movements that start to amplify those local women’s voices, but unfortunately it is not enough (Interview Al-Thaibani).

Women’s political utility is thus not automatically recognised at higher levels of formal politics (Al Naami & Moodley 2017; Jarhum N.D.). As Al-Thaibani states, women’s organisations

form one way of bridging this gap between women's local efforts and nation-wide (or international) political efforts. Organisations such as Women4Yemen, Women's Solidarity Network and Peace Track Initiative work both from within Yemen and from the diaspora to structure local women's demands and translate these to higher political levels. A group of 140 women leaders from Yemen sent for instance a letter to the UN Special Envoy to demand recognition of women's local efforts and their inclusion in formal politics (WILPF 2018). Jarhum – founder of the Peace Track Initiative – held a statement in the UN General Assembly in September 2018 on behalf of Yemeni women, emphasising the important roles women play in the conflict and asking for recognition of this (Jarhum 2018). Unitedly, these women's organisations aim for increasing women's participation in the formal peace process (WILPF 2018; Women Solidarity Network 2016). Though they have not yet succeeded in this (as I will show in the next section) they have succeeded in getting women's political utility recognised by the UN.

In multiple statements, the UN emphasises women's importance in both informal and formal politics and presses for their inclusion in peace processes (OSESGY 2018b; UN Security Council 2016; UN Security Council 2017a). Former UN Special Envoy Ahmed recognised:

> The role of women is pivotal at the times of armed conflicts and deteriorated social conditions. Women work relentlessly to maintain the social fabric (OSESGY 2016).

Women are the ones keeping society going during the conflict, he argues (OSESGY 2016). Even more, women should be included in the peace process because:

> They are the true voices of Yemen, far removed from personal concerns and considerations. They convey the suffering of the people from the farthest corners of the country (OSESGY 2017a).

The UN thus acknowledges women are the ones suffering from the war, keeping society going and having a great interest in peace. Therefore, it argues, women's efforts for peace should be supported and the gap between informal and formal politics should be bridged (OSESGY 2016; OSESGY 2017a).

In order to bridge this gap between local women and high-level political processes, the UN Special Envoy regularly consults women's organisations and local women to hear their concerns and demands (OSESGY 2018b). In addition to this, the UN has established the so-called 'Women's Pact for Peace and Security'. This Pact consists of about sixty women of diverse backgrounds, coming together to discuss the future of Yemen, aiming for peace (Jarhum

N.D., 2; OSESGY 2017a). Their work goes two ways; on the one hand, they amplify the voices of local women. The women of the Pact are representatives of Yemeni women in general, representing all political parties and independent standpoints. As the Special Envoy stated, they convey "the real sentiment of Yemeni people" (OSESGY 2017b). The Women's Pact is supposed to transfer the concerns of local women to the higher-level political negotiations. On the other hand, they actively support local initiatives for peace (UN Women 2015; UN Security Council 2017a). The Women's Pact thus seeks to bridge the gap between local and (inter)national peace attempts by consulting local women and advising the Special Envoy. However, it is disputed to what extent this Women's Pact is really helpful in this. It is a clear example of the UN's recognition of women's political utility, but does it help women? Gamal believes "it is a great thing and I am sure it will help women's political empowerment somehow" (Interview Gamal). This 'somehow' is however the crucial part, because it is not clear how the Women's Pact helps women's political participation. Al-Absi argues:

> This pact consists of elite women who many of them live abroad and are disconnected from the needs of women on the ground. I sometimes ask people and women in particular if they know anything about the Women's Pact and they all respond negatively. Only the people who work on gender know about this pact. So, I do not believe it helps in women's political empowerment (Interview Al-Absi).

According to her, the Women's Pact is too far removed from the local women on the ground and thus only helps the already politically active elite women. This criticism is partly valid since only women who have been politically active are included in the Pact (UN Women 2015). Many women participating in the Women's Pact, such as Antalek Almotawakel, have also previously participated in the NDC or have been politically active otherwise. Almotawakel rejects however Al-Absi's criticism that the Pact is elitist, stating: "it is a unique chance bringing women from different backgrounds from all the governorates together" (Interview Almotawakel). She argues the women participating in the Women's Pact are diverse and are all connected to local women on the ground (Interview Almotawakel). However, she also acknowledges the Women's Pact does not yet fully fulfil its role:

> The Pact helps if it is given really good support. But it is not given that support yet. […] It can be a chance and an opportunity that can be used, but it is not done well yet (Interview Almotawakel).

The Pact is thus one effort of the UN to amplify local women's voices and to include women in the realm of formal politics. However, it is not yet entirely successful and, as we will see in the next section, it also does not contribute to women's inclusion in formal politics.

Informal political empowerment?

In informal politics, women are thus present and actively working for peace. They continue the protests and demand to be heard by for instance the UN Special Envoy. Despite the negative consequences of the war for women, there are still empowering causal mechanisms present. Because the realm of informal politics, and with that women's participation in it, is smaller in scope than the 2011 uprisings, the causal mechanisms are less explicitly visible, yet they are there. First of all, gender norms change as a consequence of women's continuous pushing for participation in the public sphere. These changes of gender norms are not welcomed by everyone and women are regularly attacked, but women continue their struggle for equality. Secondly, women's political utility is recognised. The Houthis use women to further their war efforts, yet this is not necessarily to the benefit of women themselves. The recognition of their political utility by the UN helps women however to amplify local women's concerns and demands. Through women's organisations and the Women's Pact for Peace and Security, women can voice their demands at a higher political level. Lastly, their participation in informal politics and women's organisations leads to an influx of eligible female candidates. After the 2011 uprisings, eligible female candidates did not fade[7] but in the current conflict there are new opportunities for women to gain experience in politics and to present themselves as capable and eligible candidates for formal politics. Nevertheless, despite the presence of these three causal mechanisms – changing gender norms, increasing political utility and the influx of eligible female candidates – women are not included in the formal peace negotiations. In the next section, I discuss (the lack of) women's inclusion in formal politics.

4. Absence and tokenism: women in formal politics

So far, we have seen two tendencies for women in the current conflict in Yemen. On the one hand, they are the primary victims and suffer from the consequences of war. On the other hand, they are active agents of change, working to establish peace and are recognised as such by for instance the UN. Yet as I show in this section, this recognition and respect does not lead to women's inclusion in the formal peace negotiations. Despite the causal mechanisms being

[7] There was even a website, www.yemeniwomenleaders.org, made where many capable women were listed in order to weaken the claim that there were no eligible female candidates. This website is currently down.

present and notwithstanding severe pressure by the UN and women's organisations, women have not been meaningfully included in formal peace negotiations so far. There have been four important rounds of peace negotiations: Riyadh and Geneva in 2015, Kuwait in 2016 and Stockholm in 2018. In this section, I show the attempts to include women and the failure to do so.

Arguments used for women's inclusion

In the attempted peace negotiations so far, there is an important difference between the intentions and reality of women's inclusion. The UN, which leads the peace negotiations, recognises women's political utility and consequently expresses the intention to include them in the process (OSESGY 2018b; UN Security Council 2016; UN Security Council 2017a). It aims for a peace process that is "as inclusive as possible" (OSESGY 2018b) and stresses the importance of the "full inclusion of women and civil society in the peace process" (UN Security Council 2016). The UN and women's organisations who are pressing for women's inclusion give two arguments why women must be included in the peace negotiations: the obligation under (international) law and commitments, and the necessity for the sustenance of peace.

First of all, it is argued women's inclusion is vital for reaching a peace agreement that will be representative and will last. Politics is considered to be the only way to end the war in Yemen, and inclusive politics is the only way to sustainable peace, it is regularly argued (Al Naami & Moodley 2017, 11; OSESGY 2015; OSESGY 2018d; UN Security Council 2013; UN Security Council 2017b). The UN stated in Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013) that "women and girl's empowerment and gender equality are critical efforts to maintain international peace and security" (UN Security Council 2013). For a peace agreement to have lasting power in Yemen, everyone subjected to it, including women, must agree to the conditions of peace and must therefore be included in the drafting of the agreement. As the UN Special Envoy stated at the opening of peace talks in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2015:

> Peace-making is an essential condition for the reconstruction of Yemen. In order to achieve it, there must be consensus among all the political and social components that guarantee the return of Yemen to order and peace. This must include women, young persons and civil society […] to forge a comprehensive political agreement that reflects the aspirations of Yemeni women and Yemeni society (OSESGY 2015).

For a peace agreement to be reached at all, the process must be inclusive and therefore must include women, it is argued. Nasser summarised this argument eloquently after the Geneva negotiations where only one woman was present, stating:

> Keep on excluding women, 'half' of the society, and you'll end up with 'half' peace, idiot patriarchal male politicians! #Yemen (Afrah Nasser, Twitter Post, 15 June 2015).

Women's organisations pressing for women's inclusion in the peace negotiations also use arguments about women's contribution to the peace process. They argue women will bring forth "key issues that are prerequisites for lasting peace" (Middle East Eye, Twitter Post, 5 December 2018), will bring women's concerns and demands at the negotiation table (Interview Al-Thaibani) and, most importantly, will increase the chance of the peace agreement to last longer (O'Reilly et al 2015, 12; Women4Yemen, Twitter Post, 8 March 2019).

The second argument used to demand women's inclusion in peace negotiations refers to Yemen's (inter)national commitments concerning women, peace and security. Yemen is for instance signatory to UNSCR 1325 (2000), which states signatories:

> ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict (UN Security Council 2000).

Yemen is thus obliged to include women in all stages of the peace process, also the formal peace negotiations (UN Security Council 2000; UN Security Council 2013; UN Women 2015). One problem with referring to this Security Council Resolution is, however, that with the lack of a powerful legitimate government, it is questionable if and to whom this international commitment applies. Even if the Hadi-government (who, as the legitimate government, is the official signatory) is obliged to fulfil its duties of this commitment, the Houthis, forming an illegitimate regime, do not consider themselves bearer of the obligation and keep excluding women from peace negotiations. More importantly, there is no mechanism of enforcing this commitment. The importance of the resolution can only be emphasised continuously (as is done by the UN), but it cannot be forced upon the parties. More important than this international obligation which cannot be enforced are therefore the national commitments all Yemeni parties have made in the 2011 transitional process. It has been decided that

> the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative and Implementation Mechanism, the outcomes of the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, and relevant Security

> Council Resolutions provide the basis for inclusive negotiations for a political settlement of the crisis in Yemen (UN Security Council 2016; UN Security Council 2017b).

Taking these documents as the basis of the peace negotiations has important implications for women's inclusion in the process. In the Implementation Mechanism the 'appropriate representation' of women was decided and the NDC outcomes established a 30% quota for women (Implementation Mechanism 2011; NDC 2014). Hence, if these two documents are the basis for peace negotiations, this quota must be abided by. Besides women's inclusion being beneficial to the peace process (as is argued by proponents of women's inclusion) both Yemen's national and international commitments demand women's inclusion in the peace negotiations. Yet as we shall see, these obligations are defied in reality.

Reality of women's inclusion

These two arguments – of (inter)national obligations and women's contribution to peace – are used to argue for women's inclusion in formal peace processes yet they have turned out to be not too convincing since only few women have participated in formal politics. In the first two rounds of negotiations in Riyadh and Geneva in 2015 only one woman was present, in the Kuwait-negotiations in 2016, 3 of the 28 delegates were women, and in Stockholm in 2018 one woman was present (Al-Thaibani 2019; UN Security Council 2017a). Obviously, these numbers do not equal the 30% quota for women. Yet what is more important is that the women present could not participate in a meaningful and independent way. The three women in Kuwait were representatives of their respective political parties and were bound by party lines. They were used as 'token women'; not allowed to speak and compelled to vote according to party lines (WILPF 2018; Women Solidarity Network 2016). In Stockholm in December 2018, Rana Ghanem's single-woman presence in the negotiations was noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, she became part of the peace negotiations 'by accident'. As she states herself:

> I participated in the Sweden consultations representing the Popular Nasserist Organisation; I was not representing the quota system. In the government delegation, there was representation of political blocs, but women and youth were excluded from such representation (Women4Yemen, Twitter Post, 13 February 2019).

The delegation of the Hadi-government consisted of senior leaders of several political blocs. Ghanem happened to be one of the senior leaders of the Popular Nasserist Organisation, appointed during the women-friendly transition process. She was thus not, as she states herself, appointed through the quota nor was she a representative of the 'women bloc' (which was not

present). She was not appointed because she was a woman and to have a woman representative, but because she happened to be in a position which had to be present (Al-Thaibani 2019). Nevertheless, although she was not appointed *as* a woman, she was confined to speaking about women's issues (Al-Thaibani 2019). This example of Ghanem shows the paradoxical situation of women's inclusion in peace negotiations: women are by default not included in the political process, but when they are included, they are used as token women, to speak about women's issues and to be silent about the rest.

Furthermore, there is, as Ghanem states, no 'women bloc' during the negotiations (Women4Yemen, Twitter Post, 13 February 2019). The few women involved in the peace negotiations have been affiliated with a political party. Whereas one of the merits of the NDC was the inclusion of independent women, this is missing in current peace negotiations:

> An important missing component in the previous talks was the participation of women. Yemeni women are playing a vital role as advocates for peace-building […] and yet they have nearly no access to the peace talks (Nasser 2016).

Peace negotiations are limited to representatives of the main warring parties, the Houthis and the Hadi-government. An Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security appointed by the UN Security Council called in July 2017 for the inclusion of an independent all-women cross-party delegation in the negotiations in order to have Yemeni people in general and women's issues specifically better represented (UN Security Council 2017a). Although no independent women have gained a seat at the table yet, there have been some efforts to include independent women in the negotiations. During the Kuwait-negotiations in 2016, seven independent women were invited to the side-lines of the negotiations. They could not participate in the actual negotiations but could observe them and give a collective statement to the warring parties (Al Naami & Moodley 2017, 10-11). Almotawakel was one of these seven women but stated their statement was not taken seriously. They drafted a plan for negotiations and Yemen's future:

> We gave it to the Special Envoy, he was supposed to give it to the negotiators and to take care of it. But when we were there, we discovered that they had not read it. It was not taken seriously […] And our plan is the main part of what Griffiths [i.e. the current UN Special Envoy] is doing now. They came back to this idea we had four years ago. If they had adopted it earlier, they could have saved many people and prevented Yemen from becoming a disaster (Interview Almotawakel).

The independent women were thus side-lined in the Kuwait negotiations; their presence and input were ignored, according to Almotawakel. In the last Stockholm negotiations of December 2018, the UN Special Envoy again sought to include independent women by establishing a Technical Advisory Group. This group did not have a seat at the negotiation table but could advise the UN Special Envoy on the negotiations. By using independent women as observers and advisers, their concerns still find a way to reach the main negotiation table although the women themselves remain excluded from it, the Envoy argues (OSESGY 2018c, 2018e-g). However, considering the neglect of the independent women's group during the Kuwait negotiations, it remains dubitable to what extent women's input is taken into account during the actual negotiations.

Formal political empowerment?

It can easily be stated that women's inclusion in current formal peace processes in Yemen still has a long way to go. Despite the presence of empowering causal mechanisms in informal politics, this has not led to women's inclusion in formal politics. Both women's organisations and the UN emphasise the importance of women's inclusion, yet this is largely ignored by the main warring parties who are present at the negotiations. Even when women are included, either as participant or as observer, they are often used as token women: bound by party lines, silenced on important matters and speaking only on women's issues.

5. Conclusion: political empowerment?

As shown in this chapter, the current conflict has large consequences for women's position in Yemeni society and politics. Women came out of the 2011 transitional process with political experience and rights yet due to the conflict these gains are at risk of being wiped away. Besides bearing the brunt of conflict, however, women are also active participants in the conflict. They participate in war-efforts, work for peace, organise themselves in order to amplify local voices to political levels and push for their own inclusion in the formal peace processes. Gender norms concerning women in the public space change, their political utility is recognised and there are more capable women with a capacity and ambition to participate in politics. Yet despite the presence of these empowering causal mechanisms – i.e. changing gender norms, increase in women's political utility and an influx of eligible candidates – women are not meaningfully included in the formal peace process. When they are included, they are used as token women or solely for women's issues. Since the conflict is still going on and no comprehensive peace agreement has been reached yet, a definitive conclusion on the empowering aspects of the

conflict cannot be reached. So far however, the conflict seems to be politically empowering in informal politics but disempowering in formal politics. This shows an interesting difference with the 2011 uprisings, in which the same causal mechanisms occurred, but where women were politically empowered in formal politics as well. In the next chapter I discuss possible explanations of this difference.

5.
Comparison: democracy as the determining difference

In the previous two chapters, I analysed the impact of two crises – the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict – on women's political participation in Yemen. I have shown how both crises have worked empowering for women in informal politics: they could go out on the streets, voice their demands and they were recognised as an important political actor. Yet the outcomes for women in formal politics differed. After the 2011 uprisings, women were included in the transitional process and could, for the first time in Yemeni history, participate in high-level political negotiations. During the current attempted peace negotiations, however, women are little (if at all) present: they are prevented from attending the negotiations and, when present, they are used as mere token women. Since both crises are similar in crucial variables such as time, contestation, size and internationality, and since the same causal mechanisms have come into play – i.e. changing gender norms, influx of eligible female candidates and an increase in women's political utility – this different outcome in women's formal political empowerment needs explanation.

In this chapter, I discuss some differences between the two crises that may have caused this different outcome. First, I refute the argument of 'previous experience'; that the experience of women's participation in the 2011 transitional process would cause their exclusion in the current peace negotiations. Subsequently, I show that the lack of political will is what causes women's exclusion from current peace processes. I argue that the reason for this lack of political will (and therewith the cause of the different outcomes between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict) lies in one dependent variable: the circumstances and nature of the formal political process. In addition to variables of time, contestation, size and internationality, a fifth variable is necessary to compare the impact of crises on women's political empowerment: the presence of democracy and rule of law.

1. Previous experience

When comparing the differences between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict, the most important difference is chronology: the one comes after the other. In the current peace processes, people already have knowledge of and perhaps experience with the presence of women during the 2011 transitional process. It can thus be argued that women are not included in the current political processes precisely because they have been included in the 2011 transitional process. Perhaps women's presence had been a bad experience people did not want

to repeat. Particularly the way women were treated during the National Dialogue Conference provides support for this argument. As stated in Chapter 3 – The 2011 uprisings, women's presence was not unanimously experienced as something positive and many were bothered by their presence in the transitional process. Considering this possible bad previous experience, people might oppose women's inclusion in current peace negotiations.

Although this argument of a possible bad previous experience sounds logical, it is not likely to be decisive in the current Yemeni peace negotiations. Analysing the main parties involved in the peace negotiations – the Hadi-government, the Houthis and the UN – women's exclusion cannot be explained by negative previous experiences. The Houthis for instance did not experience women's presence at the NDC as something negative. Rather, by aligning themselves with women, they benefitted from their presence; women supported Houthi issues because Houthis voted in favour of women's issues. The UN also did not consider women's inclusion in the 2011 transitional process a bad experience: the UN had pushed for women's inclusion in the NDC and lauded the NDC for its inclusiveness (Benomar 2013). Lastly, the Hadi-government provides a more difficult case. Since the Hadi-government consists of many different political parties with differing views on women's roles in politics, some of these parties (for instance Islah) might have had bad previous experiences with women's presence at the NDC. However, the Hadi-government does not explicitly reject women's inclusion in the negotiations, nor does it refer to such a possible previous experience. Even more, the women that were present at the peace negotiations, were always part of the Hadi-government delegation.

The argument of a bad previous experience might thus – although it is not likely – account for the stance of the Hadi-government concerning women's inclusion, but it cannot explain the different stances of the Houthis and the UN since they did not have a bad previous experience.

2. Lack of political will

Since the argument of a possible bad previous experience cannot fully explain the different outcomes in formal politics between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict, additional explanations are required. When asked why she thinks women are not included in current peace processes, Gamal simply stated: "Because male warlords don't want it to be!" (Interview Gamal). With this, she expressed a common idea about women's exclusion from peace processes in Yemen, namely that it is due to a lack of political will among men (Interview Al-Aghbari; Interview Almotawakel; Interview Gamal; Nasser 12 December 2018). In this section,

I discuss some possible arguments for this lack of political will as determining difference between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict.

First of all, Almotawakel states this lack of political will can be explained with tradition-arguments. She states that some argue tradition simply does not allow for women in politics and hence women should be excluded from peace negotiations. If women are included after all, one risks conservatives would pull out of the negotiations. However, she also rejects this argument herself, stating:

> They [i.e. people arguing for women's exclusion] say the tradition does not allow this, but at the National Dialogue in 2011 women were there and they did not say this. […] They did not say it was against tradition. This tradition-argument that parties do not accept women is really broken at the uprisings in 2011. The brother used to take his sister and go, the husband used to take his wife and go to the square. Why at that time was it accepted and now not? […] I don't believe it is a matter of tradition at all. They say 'the conservatives will not accept it', but it is not a matter of conservatives or of religion. It is a matter of political will and competition (Interview Almotawakel).

According to Almotawakel, the tradition-argument is not valid because women were included in the 2011 transitional process; why would conservatives accept women's inclusion in 2011 and object it now? However, this tradition-argument may partly hold because some conservatives opposed women's inclusion in the 2011 transitional process as well. Rashad Union, a Salafi political party, for instance opposed the 30% quota for women and Islah regularly banned women from party negotiations (AlJazeera 2014). The main difference is that in 2011 the UN pushed for women's inclusion and succeeded in overruling this argument, whereas now they do not. The question thus remains what causes women's exclusion in the current peace processes.

Almotawakel also offers another explanation of the current lack of political will, stating men feel threatened by women:

> There is not really a will to support women's participation in the process to peace. […] It is a conflict of interests. Some of the male politicians feel threatened that women could take seats. […] So, they try to drive them back. It is all personal interests and a matter of competition. They saw that women could compete and could take 30% of the seats and this limits the chances of male politicians to be in decision-making places (Interview Almotawakel).

Here, Almotawakel refers to the fact that with the established 30% quota, women would take up the seats of men and replace them, which would result in men having less chances to participate in the political process. However, since this threat of competition also existed during the 2011 transitional process, it cannot explain the difference between 2011 and the current peace negotiations. Moreover, there have been multiple attempts by women's organisations to get 'extra seats' reserved for women during peace negotiations (Wadekar 2018). Rana Ghanem, the only female delegate during the negotiations in Stockholm in December 2018, proposed for instance to create four extra seats for every delegation which can only be filled by women. If parties would not fill them with women, the seats must remain empty (Women4Yemen, Twitter Post, 13 February 2019). This way, women could be present without taking the place of men and hence without diminishing the chances for men to get a seat at the table. Yet the fact that this proposal, which would remove the threat of competition, has also been rejected by male negotiators, suggests that this threat of competition is not the primary reason for objecting women's inclusion. Apparently, there are other reasons for objecting women's inclusion.

3. Democracy: the dependent variable

Women's exclusion from the current peace negotiations is mainly due to a change of attitude of the parties involved; they simply lack the political will to include women. The remaining question is: why did these attitudes change since the 2011 transitional process? In the previous section, I have shown that tradition nor the threat of competition is a sufficient reason to explain this change of attitude. Instead, I argue the determining variable is the circumstances and nature of the formal political process: the presence of rule of law and the democratic nature of the transitional process is crucial for women's formal political participation.

One important difference between the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict is the presence of progressive tendencies. This extra causal mechanism that came into play during the 2011 uprisings cannot by itself cause the different outcome (Hughes 2009, 180-181), but it does point to a crucial difference between the two crises. The presence of these progressive tendencies gave women convincing arguments to claim their participation in formal politics. In 2011, the progressive tendencies during the demonstrations entailed a new vision on society. Protesters shared ideas about changing gender norms and new roles for women and wanted to change society in that direction. Consequently, including women in formal politics was a prerequisite for parties to remain credible. Supporting women's participation in the demonstrations but excluding them from formal politics would have meant rejecting the values

of the revolution and hence losing credibility. These progressive tendencies thus gave women leverage to claim their inclusion in formal politics. As Al-Thaibani states:

> In 2011, it was embarrassing for men to ignore women. […] But when the coup happened, there were no rules, no democracy, no references you can embarrass them [i.e. the Houthis] and tell them 'this is wrong, this is a democracy, you have been in the uprising where you said Saleh has ruled us for thirty years and that is not democratic'. You could embarrass men during the 2011 transitional process because they were following the same book you are trying to convince them with. But when you are having a coup or war, they are having no rules and no morals, no obligations (Interview Al-Thaibani).

If men would have objected to women's participation in the 2011 transitional process, they could be 'embarrassed' because they did no longer uphold the values of the revolution, Al-Thaibani argues. Yet in the current conflict, this is not the case. Although gender norms are changing, they are not publicly promoted by the warring parties as their achievement (as was the case during the 2011 uprisings). Hence, these warring parties do not have to pretend they value or adhere to new gender norms which would force them to include women in peace negotiations. Women's inclusion was a logical consequence of the revolutionary progressive spirit of the 2011 uprisings and it simply would not have been accepted or been plausible if women would have been excluded from the transitional process. But in the current conflict, such progressive tendencies are not present and hence women have little convincing arguments to claim their seat on the table.

In 2011, women's inclusion in the formal political process was thus a logical consequence of the progressive tendencies during the uprisings. In the current conflict this is not the case, and women's perceived irrelevance to the peace negotiations is reinforced by the aim of the negotiations. Whereas the 2011 transitional process was aimed at rebuilding the Yemeni state and society, the current peace negotiations mainly focus at establishing a ceasefire. This difference is known as peace-making (i.e. reaching a ceasefire) versus peace-building (i.e. the subsequent rebuilding of state and society). Because the current Yemeni peace negotiations are focused on establishing a ceasefire (and thus peace-making), only warring parties are considered to be relevant actors and are attributed a seat at the table. Others who may be affected by the conflict but are not active belligerents, such as women, cannot contribute to the establishment of a ceasefire, it is thought, and hence are excluded (Anderlini 2003, 18; O'Reilly et al 2015, 4). As a consequence of this "patriarchal philosophy of peace-making", as Jarhum calls it, women's inclusion is thought to be redundant (Jarhum 2018) or even a "luxury choice" (Interview Al-Thaibani). In contrast, the 2011 transitional process was an effort of

peacebuilding, focused on restructuring and rebuilding the Yemeni state, and women were considered to be useful in this and hence were attributed a role. Although the UN continuously calls for women's inclusion in the process, the Special Envoy also seems to point at this distinction between peace-making and peace-building. He argues he "will be very keen to make every effort to reach a peaceful solution to restore peace to Yemen […] and open the door for women and men together to continue the march for peace and prosperity" (OSESGY 2016). In this quote, he suggests a chronology: first, he wants to establish peace (i.e. peace-making) and subsequently, he opens the door for women to participate in peacebuilding.

Women thus are perceived to have little convincing arguments to claim their seats on the table at the current peace negotiations. They cannot demand their inclusion referring to a revolutionary spirit or required adherence to progressive gender norms, nor are they thought to be relevant to the process since they are no warring party. Even if women would have arguments thought to be convincing, in the current conflict there are no structures they can use to enforce their claims. Al-Thaibani argues that the lack of a democratic framework and rule of law in the current conflict causes women's exclusion (Interview Al-Thaibani). The 2011 transitional process was a democratic process; parties were obliged to make the transitional process as inclusive as possible and had to adhere to democratic standards. Hence, women could demand their inclusion through this democratic framework. In the current conflict, however, there is no rule of law and no democracy. Therefore, women cannot successfully appeal to democratic values, rights and duties of the government to include them in formal politics. A striking example is that the Yemeni government is signatory to UNSCR 1325 (2000) which requires women's inclusion in all stages of the peace process. But because it is unclear who is de *de jure* and *de facto* government, it is unclear who is obliged to fulfil these duties under UNSCR 1325 (2000).

The main cause of the different outcomes of the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict for women's formal political empowerment is thus the circumstances and nature of the formal political process. Causal mechanisms enable women to participate in informal politics, but a level playing field is required for them to be able to pluck the fruits of these causal mechanisms and to actually participate in the formal political process. If there are no democratic structures and no rule of law, women cannot make effective claims to their own inclusion and hence, as a result, are often excluded from formal politics. The conclusion that during the current conflict there is no democracy or rule of law may seem obvious and a logical consequence of the increased level of violence in Yemen. However, what is important, is that when comparing different sorts of crises, the presence of democracy and rule of law is a determining variable for women's inclusion in formal politics. Hughes (2009) argued time, contestation, size and

internationality are crucial elements to compare the impact of crises on women's political empowerment. But as I have shown in this research, an additional element is necessary to explain differences in outcomes in women's formal political empowerment. The presence of democracy and the rule of law is a fifth element which plays a determining role in women's participation in formal politics. Women can only be empowered in formal politics if the formal political process is a democratic process. Otherwise, women are excluded by default.

6.
Conclusion: crises as opportunities for women?

Since 2011, Yemeni people have experienced a lot of changes. In early 2011, mass demonstrations erupted throughout the country. The 33-year Saleh-regime collapsed and a relatively inclusive democratic process to rebuild state and society commenced. After this transitional process a new progressive blueprint for the Yemeni state was finished, yet it was never implemented due to the coup of the Houthis in the summer of 2014. After this coup, Yemen descended into an armed conflict in which international actors mingled. In this thesis I have analysed the impact of these crises on women's political participation. Fundamental was the theory that crises may work empowering for women; despite the horrors they face, women may also gain opportunities to participate in politics. Comparing the different impacts of the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict on women's political participation, I conclude that crises may indeed work empowering for women. However, it cannot be simply stated 'crises in general' work empowering in 'politics in general' for women. This thesis has shown two important nuances: the distinction between formal and informal politics, and the distinction between different sorts of formal political processes.

No politics or crises 'in general'

First of all, this thesis shows there is no 'politics in general' when it comes to women's political empowerment during crises. Academic literature on this matter often discusses 'political empowerment' in general but there are important differences between formal and informal politics. As shown in this thesis, crises generally work empowering for women in informal politics: they gain space to go out on the streets, voice their demands and participate in informal politics. In both the 2011 uprisings and the current conflict in Yemen, women's opportunities in informal politics increased and they were politically empowered. However, this does not mean this empowerment is automatically extended to formal politics as well. In the 2011 uprisings, pressure of the UN was necessary to establish women's inclusion, and in the current peace negotiations women are barely included at all. The distinction between formal and informal politics is thus crucial to improve our understanding of women's political empowerment during crises.

The second nuance of this thesis is even more important: different crises have different impacts on women's political empowerment. In the academic debate so far, little distinction was made between different sorts of crises and their impact on women's political empowerment. It was also not discussed what aspect of a crises made it have empowering

effects on women. In this thesis, I have compared two crises which are similar in the crucial variables of time, contestation, size and internationality. Yet despite this similarity, they have different outcomes in women's empowerment in formal politics. What causes this difference is, I argue, a fifth crucial variable: the presence of democracy in the transitional process. Lacking democracy and a level playing field in the current conflict, women are, despite their empowerment in informal politics, less likely to be included in formal politics. Acknowledging the importance of democracy in the formal political process, helps us understand the different outcomes of different crises on women's political empowerment.

Prospects and personal note

Yemen has been in a constant state of crises for over eight years now. Women have been particularly impacted by this: they are the primary victims but also gained political opportunities. They have entered the public and political sphere, they have become important political actors to reckon with and they have been 'empowered' in many respects. This thesis showed how these crises impacted women and how women responded to these crises. In this, I generalised the notion of 'women', using the experience of a limited number of women as illustrative for Yemeni women's experiences in general. Future research can further elaborate on this by doing extensive fieldwork in Yemen and perhaps nuance my conclusion by differentiating between women from different strata of society or from different parts of the country. Even more interesting is a testing of my conclusions about democracy as a fifth variable by comparing other types of crises in other countries. Do my conclusions, which are valid for Yemen's two crises, hold in other countries and for other sorts of crises as well?

Not denying the horrific effects these crises (particularly the current conflict) have had on women, I cannot do anything else but end this thesis on a hopeful note. I acknowledge women are the primary victims of these crises, but that is not the complete story: they are victors as well. They have gained opportunities, have been empowered and have established a precedent for a bright Yemeni future once the war has ended. We must recognise the hardships women endure during crises, but we must also appreciate their potential for politics and peace. After all, women are half of society…

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