

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PRE- AND  
POST-UNIFICATION YEMEN: FROM RESEARCH INTO  
PRACTICE IN HADRAMOUT

by  
SHAIMA ABDULKARIM FARAG BIN OTHMAN

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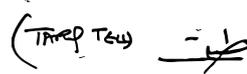
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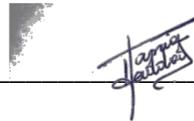


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Dad and Mom, this is for you.

# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Shaima Abdulkarim Farag Bin Othman for Master of Arts  
Major: Middle East Studies

Title: Women's Political Participation in Pre- and Post-Unification Yemen: from Research into Practice in Hadramout

The political and social complexity of Yemen was inherited from two political systems. The tribal conservatism of North Yemen contrasted with the socialism of South Yemen. These two different systems were unified to create modern Yemen. Also, the civil war and frequent leadership changes complicated the social and political environment. Thus, the political participation of women was and continues to be impeded.

In Yemen's political and social narratives, women in Hadramout, southeast Yemen, remain marginalized. There are no accounts of women's experiences within the political system in the history of Hadramout. Women's political participation in Hadramout before its independence from British occupation in 1967 and the civil war between the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, South Yemen and Yemen Arab Republic, North Yemen following Yemen's unification in 1994 remain poorly understood.

Hence, to comprehend the factors that affected women's political participation, we must employ a feminist perspective to analyze the historical political paths of Hadrami women. It would be interesting to trace the steps of these women who were active in various fields and achieved parliamentary status during this period. Consequently, this study centered its data collection efforts on women as its primary resource. This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of formerly active women to comprehend what has changed and why from their point of view. This study investigates how the political changes that occurred in Yemen's history prior to, during, and after the country's unification affected the position of women.

We would be better able to comprehend the present if we centered our understanding of women's political activism on these experiences. The primary research findings fall into three categories: the state system, family and social environment, and self-motivation.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

GUYW	General Union of Yemeni Women
GPC	General Popular Congress
PDC	Popular Defense Committees
NLF	National Liberation Front (South Yemen)
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen)
RoY	Republic of Yemen (unified Yemen post-1990)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen)
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party
GUYW	General Union of Yemeni Women

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Women's political participation is a primary international concern because it is crucial for achieving gender equality and advancing human rights. In addition, women's political participation is essential for ensuring that the needs, concerns, interests, and experiences of half of the world's population are adequately addressed by those in positions of power. Furthermore, according to the Sustainable Development Goals Report, women's political participation is necessary for sustainable development and peace, as research has shown that countries with higher levels of female representation are more prosperous, democratic, and peaceful. Investing in women's political participation can help build a more equitable and just world (United Nation 2022).

However, the status of women's political participation varies globally. Some countries have seen a rise in female representation, while others still lag far behind in terms of opportunities for women to hold public office and influence policy decisions. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, women's access to political power and decision-making roles is particularly low. According to a recent report by the World Economic Forum, only 18% of MENA's parliament members are women, which is significantly lower than the global average of 24%. The same report indicated that, despite this, there have been some notable successes recently, particularly in Tunisia, where women now make up almost a third of the country's parliament (World Economic Forum 2022). However, in other countries, such as Yemen, women still face challenges in their efforts to participate in politics.

For the past 13 years, Yemen was ranked last in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, depicting substantial gender disparities. The status of women's political participation in Yemen is troublingly low. Women face several formal and informal barriers that prevent them from participating in politics, including traditional societal norms, gender-based violence, and restrictive laws. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Yemeni women remain significantly under-represented in public and elected office, holding only 4.1 percent of managerial and decision-making positions and having minimal leadership roles in national and local peace agreements (UNDP 2022).

Yemen's current political and social environment is complex, inherited from two political systems to form what is known as the Republic of Yemen (RoY): the former North Yemen was a tribal conservative state, while the former South Yemen was a socialist state; to be explained in more detail later. These two very different systems have been combined to create a new form of government. This combination has resulted in a complex social and political landscape, while in recent years intensified by the revolution, civil war and fragmented leadership. As a result, women's political participation remains highly precarious, with significant obstacles to their full engagement in politics. Still, it is hard to find documents about women's political participation in Yemen for several reasons:

- In Yemen, there is a lot of social and cultural opposition to equal rights for men and women, making women less likely to get involved in politics.

- Because of the ongoing civil war and the frequent changes in political leadership, the political situation is unstable. This makes it hard to find reliable information about women's political participation.
- Women's voices are often silenced and marginalized, meaning their stories and experiences are not documented or reported.

That is why actively pursuing women's stories is essential to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of women's political participation in Yemen.

This thesis will focus on Hadramout governorate, southeast Yemen, because it is a region with a distinct history and culture that has been largely overlooked in terms of the discourse on women's political participation. By exploring the lived realities of women in Hadramout, this research provides a unique insight into the challenges and successes of women's political participation. This is an attempt by a Hadrami woman to investigate this gap.

I was born in Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout, two years after the Yemeni unification. The generation born in the 1990s grew up in Hadramout under incomprehensible political and social periods. They used to see photo albums of their mothers participating in public life and hear stories about their political and social activism. Then many of them were shocked by the reality that women's voices are absent, and men's are dominant in public life. One of these shocks is a recently widely spread social media photo showing the First General Conference for Yemeni Women 1974, held in Seiyun, a city in the middle of the Hadramout's Valley. This image was my primary inspiration for conducting this research. It will be covered in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

Women are the main subject of this study. It aims to document and explore the impact of political changes on Hadrami women and examine the factors influencing their political participation before, during, and after Yemen's unification. The research depends heavily on women's experiences and narratives to achieve this. By closely examining their stories, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their obstacles and the solutions they have adopted in their society. This approach also allows us to appreciate better the diversity of women's lived experiences in Hadramout and offers a more nuanced and detailed impression of their political engagement.

But first, it is important to comprehend Yemen's earlier history before exploring the factors impacting women's political participation. Understanding the historical context is essential for understanding the current situation and women's obstacles when attempting to access political power. Looking at the evolution of Yemen's legal and political systems, we can see how laws, policies, and social norms have shaped women's opportunities to engage with politics and how they have responded to these changes. This understanding is also crucial for formulating effective strategies to ensure women have greater access to political power in Yemen. Hence, this chapter will briefly outline this history, starting with the background of Hadramout's pre-independence period before 1967, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) from 1962 to 1990, and finally the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) from 1967 to 1990.

One of the most notable changes during these periods and political shifts was the attempt to change the role that women were expected to play in society. For this thesis to make more sense, the following sections briefly overview each part of Yemen's historical, social, and political context.

## **A. Background History**

### ***1. Hadramout in the Pre-independence period (pre-1967)***

The region of Hadramout was ruled via sultanates established in the 14th century when local tribes united and formed the State of Hadramout. Later, joined the Aden Protectorate, governed by the British Empire from 1867 until 1967 (Smith 1953). The sultan's rule ended in 1967 when the British withdrew from the region, and Hadramout joined the independent PDRY was created (Ingrams 1938).

As Molyneux mentioned, during the sultanate period, the role of women was largely overshadowed by the influence and authority of the male-dominated tribal hierarchy. Documentation of women's roles during this period was limited due to the patriarchal system that dominated the region (Molyneux 1991). Women were typically marginalized and relegated to domestic roles such as homemaking, reproduction, and caring for children. That is why researchers limit the mention of women in Hadramout to adornments, customs, and traditions. Even recently, most of the research on Hadrami women focuses only on cases of abuse or violence.

### ***2. The Yemen Arab Republic (YAR): Tribalism in the North***

The Yemen Arab Republic was established in North Yemen after the revolution of 1962 against the Mutawakkilite Kingdom. It was led by Marshal Abdullah Al-Sallal, the army chief of staff in the kingdom, who became the republic's first president. According to Corstange, the support of the tribes of North Yemen has historically been crucial for the central government in Sana'a, the capital of the YAR, to maintain its authority. During the time of the Zaydi Imamate, the religious authority in North Yemen that ended in 1962, the rulers and Imams of Yemen utilized their social status as

being from the family of the Prophet Muhammad to secure the support of the most influential tribal unionists in the north, Hashid, and Bakil, two tribes with a lengthy history of competitive rivalry (Corstange 2008).

After the establishment of the YAR, however, the methods used to win the tribes' allegiance began to change. The government, which no longer claimed legitimacy based on the alleged religious divine right, found it necessary to win the tribes' loyalty (Meeker 2009). Except for President Ibrahim al-Hamdi's government, in power from 1974 to 1977, most governments were successful in winning the tribes' loyalty (Corstange 2008).

Tribalism has always applied a strong influence on the society of North Yemen. These customs were frequently rooted in traditional conceptions of gender roles, which viewed men as household heads and women as homemakers. In addition, it substantially impacted state policy throughout its various political phases. The effects of tribal influence on women are evident in the revised constitution and family laws enacted after the 1994 civil war between North and South governments' forces. This will be discussed in greater depth in the coming chapters.

### ***3. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY): Marxism in the South***

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was established in 1967 after the revelation against the British Empire. The PDRY was closely aligned with the Soviet Union and received economic aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During this period, the government implemented several socialist reforms and strict censorship measures. The National Liberation Front (NLF), the governing party, wanted

to create a "true" socialist state in the region out of loyalty to Marxist-Leninist teachings (Lackner 2017).

According to Molyneux, the NLF's commitment to Marxist-Leninist teachings sets PDRY apart from other Arab states with different interpretations of Socialism. She argues that unlike Arab Socialism, which was conceived in the context of Cold War politics and responded to the postcolonial moral economy, it combines Marxist ideals, Arab nationalism, and Islamic principles (Molyneux 1995). The NLF officials wanted to dismantle the tribal system and limit the tribal sheiks' influence. Detalle and Hiltermann, mentioned that the NLF officials started what they called the "Corrective Movement," which aimed to dismantle tribalism in the South (Detalle and Hiltermann 1993). Local activists expelled tribal sheiks after the Corrective Movement, calling them "feudal and foreign agents." As a result of these radical social and economic reforms, Molyneux stated that a quarter of southern Yemen's small population (1.6 million in 1967–52) fled the country, and the North soon sheltered most southern refugees from the South's tribal areas (Molyneux 1995).

The most notable change was the transformation of women's roles in South Yemen, which challenged the traditional structures of the old society. Unlike the weak central government of the North, which supported women's rights only symbolically and allowing tribes and local customs to determine gender norms, the revolutionary Marxist government in the South allowed women more freedom than tribalism in the North as Würth, argued. In South Yemen, female literacy rates were much higher than in other countries, and women had greater access to education, employment, and political rights. However, the tribalism in North Yemen was still largely patriarchal and kept women in a subordinate role, with limited access to resources and opportunities.

Despite this difference, the South, and the North allowed women some degree of increased freedom and autonomy (Würth 2003). This will be discussed in more detail in the coming chapters.

In conclusion, Yemen has had a complex and diverse history of political systems that have shaped the way it is today. From the early tribes and Sultanates to the Marxist government in the South and the tribalism in the North, each system has uniquely impacted the country's culture and politics. Thus, understanding the different historical political systems of Yemen provides insight into how these systems have changed and evolved over time and offers valuable lessons for those looking to understand the current political landscape of Yemen.

## **B. Objectives of the Thesis**

### ***1. Main Research Question***

This research aims to explore the factors that influenced women's political participation in Hadramout between independence in 1967 and the final absorption of the PDRY into the RoY in 1990 from the perception of Hadrami women of these changes. It aims to investigate if there were evidence of a women's movement entangled with the national liberation struggle driven by women's initiative. Or was it state-sponsored by pressure from PDRY's connection to the USSR from above via the ideology and outlook of leading members of the NLF?

### ***2. Research Objective***

The study will examine women's lives, practices, and political experiences, focusing on women's roles as activists. It will explore how the various historical political systems, such as traditional gender norms, social structures, and economic

conditions, shaped their active political engagement. The goal is to look into the stories and experiences of the Hadrami women who used to be a part of the PDRY system of government. The inclusion criteria in this research focus on politically and socially active women in Hadramout throughout the period in question, especially members of the General Union of Yemeni Women (GUYW) branch in Hadramout and those who attended (The First General Conference for Yemeni Women) in Seiyun, 15–17 July 1974. In addition, the research engaged a number of young local activists and undergraduate students of political science at the University of Hadramout to provide their perspective on the political changes and their implications today. The study seeks to comprehend women's journeys, their significance to their roles, and how they describe their experiences. A primary objective is to position women at the center of research analysis and knowledge production.

### ***3. Overview of the Thesis***

This thesis consists of five chapters; chapter one is an introduction that provides an overview of Yemen's political history and women's political participation, the thesis's primary research question, and the study's objective. The second chapter is devoted to the conceptual framework and research design; it describes the adoption of (experience as a source of knowledge) as a concept within the feminist methodology employed in this study. In addition, it explains the research design, presenting the Gioia method used in data collection and analysis and the source of primary data, samples, recruitment, and data collection (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013). The third chapter is the literature review that examines the different legislative and social changes in the political history of Yemen that affected women's status. The fourth chapter will focus on the findings

from analyzing the data. Chapter five will outlay conclusions and actionable recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

#### **A. Conceptual Framework**

This thesis will use a feminist lens to examine women's political participation in Hadramout, Yemen. I believe that experience and personal storytelling can be significant sources of learning and understanding, especially in contexts where sources and research are limited, such as the situation of Hadrami women. In Hadramout, it was challenging to find resources that document women's lives in the public sphere. Above this, when al-Qaeda forces took control of Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout Governorate, in 2015, they seized the GUYW headquarter. Then burned all the few archives and records of women's history in Hadramout. Hence, women's stories remained the most crucial living evidence documenting women's history. As a result, women's accounts of their experiences had to be relied on as a primary source of knowledge.

The feminist approach to investigating women's political participation in Hadramout allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the issue. Drawing on personal experiences and perspectives, feminist scholars can uncover insights into gender norms, power structures, and cultural dynamics that traditional methodologies often overlook. This method gives us important information about how people live and a better understanding of the factors affect women's political participation in Hadramout.

I traveled to Yemen during the fall semester of 2022 to interview women about their experiences in the PDRY political system and their narratives about the changes following Yemen's unification. I used a theoretical framework based on this method and

an empirical data collection method focused on women. The main idea I used to analyze the data was (experience as a source of knowledge).

By using personal experience as a source of knowledge, feminist scholars can draw upon the unique perspectives of individuals and gain insight into gender dynamics, power structures, and social issues. This approach can provide valuable insight into the lived realities of people and communities that may otherwise remain hidden or marginalized. Bell Hooks argued that experience is "the most radical form of knowledge" and is essential for understanding social dynamics, as it "provides insight into the interaction between self, others, and culture." (Hook 1991). Similarly, feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins argued that "experience, when carefully interpreted alongside other sources of knowledge, can yield valid information about the society and human behavior." (Collins 2000). Through the use of experience as a source of knowledge, feminist scholars have been able to uncover valuable insights into the lived realities of individuals, which has, in turn, allowing for more comprehensive and accurate data analysis." As Foss and Foss argued, using personal experience as evidence is complex but produces many benefits. First, it provides a multiplicity of truths and values diversity that is impossible with other kinds of evidence. Second, it produces knowledge and understanding from interaction with participants." (Foss and Foss 1994).

For this thesis, every one of the participants is considered an expert in their own life, with their personal experiences, narratives, and perspectives informing the data analysis. This approach allowed me to feel the complexities of society and the intersectionality of gender, power, and culture in shaping women's political participation in Hadramout. By treating participants as experts in their own lives, the

research can better uncover the nuances and subtleties of how these factors interact and influence women's political participation.

## **B. Research Design**

### ***1. Methodology***

This chapter presents the research approach adopted in this thesis. This thesis, as qualitative feminist research, focused on producing knowledge about women's lives, gender role, and societal transformation from women's perspectives. Qualitative methods are employed in the analysis, mainly inductive and exploratory. This thesis selected the Gioia methodology, a grounded theory approach that uses a qualitative analysis technique using predetermined codes to identify and interpret textual data, based on the article *Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology* (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013). The Gioia approach was chosen and used for two reasons that are crucial to note:

- I desired a method with a well-defined process flow system to refine the raw data without sacrificing its quality and authenticity.
- I had to use a method that met the requirements of qualitative data analysis.

Based on the previously mentioned reasons, the Gioia Methodology would be the suitable method for data analysis. Before I employ the Gioia approach for analysis later, I want to discuss some of its key features first. In order to introduce "qualitative rigor" to the conduct and presentation of inductive research, Gioia, Corley and Hamilton stated that the Gioia method is intended to provide a "systematic approach to new concept formation and grounded theory articulation." The authors raised two major

concerns when describing the justifications for using the Gioia method. The following are some of these concerns:

- How can an inductive investigation have "qualitative rigor" while still generating new ideas and thoughts for which these studies are known?
- How can inductive researchers use a methodological, conceptual, and analytical approach that leads to reliable data interpretations and helps readers see that the conclusions are credible?

The author sought "qualitative rigor" in inductive research. Their method depends on a well-specified, if generic, research question and "multiple data sources" to provide credible data interpretations that convince readers that the results are defensible. The authors use the Gioia Methodology to illustrate the linkages between data, emerging conceptions, and grounded theory to attain qualitative rigor (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013). Gioia's method "devised an approach that allowed for a systematic presentation of both a "1<sup>st</sup>-order" analysis (i.e., an analysis utilizing informant-centric terminology and codes) and a "2<sup>nd</sup>-order" analysis (i.e., one using researcher-centric concepts, themes, and dimensions; for the inspiration for the 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-order labeling, see Van Maanen, 1979). According to Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, the tandem reporting of both voices—informant and researcher—allowed not just qualitatively rigorous evidence of the connections between the data and the induction of this new concept, sense-giving, but also the type of insight that is the hallmark of high-quality qualitative research (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013)

However, it is crucial to note that even though the study used the Gioia method, it does not use the grounded theory because it is not used to build a new theory by

analyzing data. I used it as a traditional research model by looking at the data through the lens of an existing theoretical framework (in the second order (theory-centric) themes).

Data was collected for this study through interviews and focus groups, allowing for the exploration of individual experiences, opinions, and perspectives. The main goal of this methodology is to gain an in-depth understanding of women's experiences in Hadramout, their political participation journeys, and the factors that influenced their participation along the way.

In addition, reflexivity is essential to any research, especially for individuals from the studied region. As a woman from Hadramout, I brought my own experiences and insights to this study, and thus, it is important to consider how they might shape or influence the research itself. To this end, I was conscious of my positionality concerning the research topic and strived to remain aware of how my beliefs, worldviews, and biases might shape my interpretations. I also recognized that my personal and cultural privileges might give me access to specific resources or networks that are not accessible to others. I made efforts to be conscious of this throughout the research process. Finally, I engaged in dialogues with community members to ensure that this research reflected Hadramout women's lived experiences. The use of in-depth interviews or focus groups allows for different points of view and discussions.

## ***2. Source of Primary Data***

The study population is the politically and socially active women during the chosen period, especially members of the GUYW office in Hadramout and, in particular, those who attended the (First General Conference for Yemeni Women in

Seiyun). Using in-depth interviews with these women helped to understand women's perspectives on the changes during that period. In addition, I engaged a younger generation of local activists and students of political science at the University of Hadramout. Bringing together members of the younger generation from various age groups and diverse backgrounds to discuss in small focus groups gave the study a more insightful perspective on the political changes they still witness and their implications today.

### **3. *Samples***

I intended for the research sample to consist of 20 women from the age 60-80 who were politically active during the period of interest to participate in the in-depth interviews and 25 activists from the younger generation (Females & Males) aged 25-50 from Hadramout to join in five focus groups. However, I encountered some difficulties, such as a shortage of time, the instability of the current situation in Yemen, and some personal difficulties that prevented some of those wishing to participate from participating. Hence, I ended up with 12 women and 17 activists in two focus groups. A detailed description of the samples will be provided in the findings chapter.

### **4. *Recruitment***

To reach out to the participants for the interviews, I shared an IRB-approved invitation script with the GUYW to distribute to women through a staff member who has no undue influence on participants. Later, those interested contacted me via the contact information available in the script. I ensured that the face-to-face interviews were in a private room in the GUYW office; however, a few could not come, so I visited them at their homes upon their request and consent. The number of women who

expressed interest in participating was 27, but due to some factors such as time constraints, distance, and the lack of the internet (in case the meeting could be held via Zoom), I was able to meet only 12 women.

As for the younger generation who participated in the focus groups, I recruited them through a public invitation for those interested in participating on my personal Facebook page. I ensured equal representation of different political and social affiliations and gender equality in each session of the focus groups by dividing them in a way that provided diversity in each session according to political orientation, gender, and activity. The number of people who contacted me via Facebook or with recommendations from people who shared the post was 23. However, only 17 had time to participate in the sessions on the specified date.

## **5. *Data Collection***

As previously noted, I conducted twelve in-depth interviews. I spoke Arabic in the local Hadrami dialect with the participants during the interviews to foster greater intimacy and comfort. The office of the GUYW in Mukalla, where I conducted five interviews, provided me with a private room. The time was coordinated based on the ability of each participant to attend. In addition, I conducted six interviews in the participants' homes based on their willingness and inability to come to the union's headquarters, in collaboration with the union's office and with the assistance of a female union member who accompanied me to the participants' homes. However, one interview was performed via WhatsApp voice recordings because the interviewee was traveling outside Hadramout and required a more reliable internet connection to have a Zoom call. The interviews ranged from one and a half to two hours. I conducted the most

extended interviews in the homes of the women I interviewed. Each woman consented to record the interviews and signed the consent form. I also conducted in Arabic using the local Hadrami dialect; the two focus groups with seventeen participants comprised younger generations. Since some participants were outside of Yemen, I conducted the sessions via Zoom, each lasting approximately two hours. All participants consented to the recording of the sessions and signed consent forms. The purpose of incorporating the younger generation of Hadrami activists was to gain a more holistic understanding of the political transformations they are still witnessing and the consequences they confront presently. Later, I transcribed the interview and focus group recordings verbatim (writing in Arabic in the local Hadrami dialect).

Regarding the development of codes for the analysis, I read the transcript multiple times and extracted the repeated, conspicuous, and essential items for the study question. Then, based on their similarities, I put them into themes and pulled out generic dimensions that answered the research question from those themes. Since the interviews give personal details about the people being interviewed and their thoughts and experiences, it is best not to share the transcriptions at the end of the research to protect their privacy.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **A. Introduction**

On 30 November 1989, the president of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), Ali Salim al-Baidh, joined the president of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), Ali Abdullah Salih, in signing an agreement for the unification of the two states (Nonneman 1994). Later, in May 1990, the PDRY and YAR were unified to form the Republic of Yemen (ROY) (Burrowes 1991). With this unification, two very different states with different visions of Yemen joined to form one unified country. Although there was an overwhelming feeling of optimism among many and a rush towards Yemeni unity, Stacey Philbrick Yadav, a specialist in comparative politics of the Middle East and North Africa, argues that this optimism was short-lived.

Before Yemen's unification in 1990, laws governing women's status had been passed between the north and the south. After unification, a single legal code was adopted, incorporating various legal and political principles. The differences between the two Yemeni states before their unification can be seen, among other things, in the laws governing the family and women's rights (Yadav 2009). As Würth argued, secular Arab nationalism and religious elements co-existing in the Arab countries at that period, the laws of the YAR, represented a relatively conservative legislative approach to the family. In contrast, a secular code was adopted in the PDRY in 1974, the Family Law, despite making some accommodations to Islam (Würth 2003). According to Saleh, the PDRY Family Law is thought to be the most egalitarian in the Arab world (Saleh 2017).

The PDRY was governed by the NLF after it gained independence from Britain in 1967. The NLF was established in 1963 as a radical nationalist party. However, by 1968 it had declared itself devoted to Marxist-Leninist ideals, including complete women's emancipation (Bell 1970). On the other hand, North Yemen's leaders adhered to a more conservative Islamist ideology. The most evident difference between these political orientations is how each state envisioned Yemeni women. The PDRY, like Tunisia, passed the most progressive family law in the MENA in 1974 which made polygamy very hard to do, gave women the right to divorce, and made men and women equally responsible for their care of homes and children (Lackner 2017). On the other hand, the YAR's family law strictly adhered to a patriarchal family form, where the man was responsible for the woman. After the unification, the YAR family law prevailed as the unified state's national policy, leading to a deterioration in the legal status of south Yemeni women (Dunbar 1992).

The development of laws governing the family and women's rights in Yemen over the four-year transition period, which spanned from unification in May 1990 to the civil war in May–July 1994, was a microcosm of the country's more extensive political changes and conflicts and a reflection of the legal system. During this time, the northern code effectively predominated over the southern code, narrowing the gap between the two political and legal systems. However, the introduction and implementation of the new law were the focus of controversy and conflict in society because there was widespread disagreement about power distribution in the new state. The family law was, therefore, a reflection of Yemen's evolving political situation and a component of it both before and after it was enacted.

This chapter explores how existing legislation and social norms influenced women's political participation in pre- and post-unification Yemen. It examines the different outcomes of the political changes and the impact they have had on the status of women. It starts with their original, distinct codifications before moving on to the changes made between 1990 and 1994, or the transitional period. The transitional period became evident on how gender issues and politics interact in modern-day Yemen. It demonstrates how the conflicts of the unification process, and the ensuing civil war impacted the laws governing families and women's rights. Later the chapter will review Hadramout as a case study for this thesis, focusing on the socio-political context of Hadrami women before independence and highlighting (the First General Conference for Yemeni Women, 1974).

## **B. The Tale of the two Yemens: Different Legislative Systems**

### ***1. Family Law in the YAR***

A literature review of family law in North Yemen before unification reveals a variety of perspectives. According to Judith E. Tucker, a professor of history at Georgetown University, Sharia-based family law shaped the traditional legal system in North Yemen. She writes, in North Yemen, Islamic law was the primary source of legislation and guided major aspects of family law, including marriage, divorce, custody, guardianship, and inheritance (Tucker 2008). The traditional family structure of North Yemen was also highly influential in shaping family law.

An important factor in understanding the family law in North Yemen before unification was the dominance of tribal rule. Anthropologist Paul Dresch noted that tribal leaders in North Yemen continued to hold sway over community decisions and

that their authority extended to family law. He writes: "Tribal leaders had authority over community decisions, including marriage relations, and their opinions were often highly influential in family law" (Dresch 1989). Finally, religious beliefs were common in structuring family law in North Yemen before unification.

As mentioned by Wurth, northern family law was not centralized in the YAR until 1979. Legal concerns for the family were settled following various authorities and *sharia's* interpretations (Islamic law). In general, women were treated kindlier by *Ijtihad*, or the interpretation of *sharia*, in the Zaydi districts than in the Shafi'i regions, where more orthodox restrictions, mediated by the Sunni interpretation of the law, were in effect. Tribal law, predominated in the tribal territories of the north, making this sort of legal proceedings about women worse. According to Dresch, the family law in North Yemen before 1990 was mainly based on traditional values, without the codification of any special rights for women—such as in marital relations, inheritance, or guardianship of children (Dresch 1989).

Following the conclusion of the North Yemen Civil War in 1970, a war fought between partisans of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom and supporters of the YAR, and the subsequent stabilization of the republican system, a constitution, and Shari'a-based legal codes was established (Dresch 1989). According to Molyneux, laws covering inheritance, pay, endowments, evidence, and compensation were adopted in 1976 after the constitution was ratified in 1970. Family law was adopted in 1979. Disagreements between the Zaydi and Shafi'i schools of law and between Shafi'is who were more concerned with religion and more apolitical legal professionals were reflected in the drawn-out writing process. Even though the law permitted polygamy and allowed men to divorce unilaterally, Dresch argued that the divorce provisions of the family law in

North Yemen before unification was based on traditional and religious principles and did not provide a high level of security to women.

However, the law also provided some protections for women. The equality of men and women was briefly mentioned in the YAR constitution. However, the shari'a was "the source of all regulations" in the context of respect for Islam and the religion (Article 4). Where there was no codified law, the courts were required to provide decisions per the shari'a's fundamental principles (Article 153). Hence, it gives an open and unregulated room for interpreting women's matters, which indicates that the YAR made fewer formal or practical attempts to raise women's social and economic positions.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that various factors - including Sharia-based law, traditional family structure, tribal rule, and religious beliefs - shaped the family law in North Yemen before unification.

## ***2. Family Law in the PDRY***

In the PDRY, the situation was considerably different with the adaptation of socialism by the government that seized power after the British withdrew from the region in 1967. A new secular constitution was enacted in 1970 and updated in 1978, while the PDRY family law was established in 1974. According to Würth, the PDRY "sought to construct a legal framework that combined Islamic law with progressive social legislation, socialist legality, and international standards" (Würth 2003).

While Islam was named "the state religion" in the PDRY constitution (Article 47), the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the new name of the NLF after October 1978, was sourcing regulations to cater for "the interests of the working class" as opposed to

religion (Articles 1, 2, 3, and 6). In addition, Islam was a major factor in PDRY's family law. Molyneux, explained how Islamic customs and beliefs often clashed with the socialist framework of the PDRY, mainly regarding issues such as divorce and remarriage. She writes, "When family disputes arose, the Islamic basis of family law often prevailed over the socialist provisions" (Molyneux 1991).

Regardless, the law was highly influenced by socialist ideology. Burrowes notes that the legal framework of the PDRY, which sought to emphasize gender equality, effectively abolished the traditional patriarchal family structure. He writes, "The socialist regime of the PDRY abolished the traditional household and replaced it with an egalitarian model of marriage, prohibiting polygamy and instituting a uniform system of inheritance" (Burrowes 1991). This framework established the equality of women. Article 35 states that "all citizens are equal in the rights and duties irrespective of their sex, origin, religion, language, the standard of education or social status. all persons are equal before the law." The law treats everyone equally, "the state shall do whatever it can do to realize this equality by means of dividing equal political, economical, social, and cultural opportunities. Article 36, which made further declarations, stated, "The state shall ensure equal rights for men and women, in all fields of life, the political, economical and social, and shall provide the necessary conditions for the realizations of that equality." It added: "The state shall also work to create the circumstances that will enable the woman to combine participation in the productive and social work and her role within the family sphere. It shall render special care to the vocational qualifying of the working woman. In addition, according to the constitution, "The state shall, further, ensure special protection for the working women and children, and she had established kindergartens and nurseries for the children, and

all other such means of care as to be specified by the law." Later articles added the rights to employment, social security, free education, free health care, and housing.

The Family Law furthered this implied secularization. The concept of freedom of choice in marriage was developed. The legal age of marriage was set at 16 for women and 18 for men. polygamy was prohibited but authorized in exceptional cases, such as when a wife had a terminal disease or was sterile. Article 17 of the PDRY Family Law mandates that both partners support their families. Some of the most contentious divorce laws, like the ban on divorce, were included in the family law. Every divorce needs the courts' approval and both partners' attendance. The right to custody was no longer granted automatically to men. Male children were typically expected to remain with their mothers until they were ten. In contrast, female children were typically expected to remain with their mothers until the age of 15, with the courts reserving the right to determine what was in the children's best interests.

Lackner argued that this law resembled the most radical laws previously passed in the Arab world, specifically the family laws of Syria and Tunisia. More so than through direct political interactions, Tunisian and Syrian legal experts' participation in the South Yemeni drafting process contributed to these countries' influence (Lackner 2017). However, in a political climate significantly more radical than what had previously been the case in these republics, a government dedicated to a socialist modernization agenda created the PDRY's family law. As in other socialist states, the law expressed a different viewpoint on gender relations and the role of women in society. In addition to other processes like public campaigns, changes to the educational and employment environments, and a diminishing role for religion, the family law was one of many tools used to alter social relations (Würth 2003). It is essential to keep this

context in mind when looking at what happened to family law after the 1990 unification because the apparent rejection of the policies embodied in the 1990 law can only be understood in the much larger context of political change in Yemen at the time, both in the North and the South.

In conclusion, family law in the PDRY was influenced by a variety of factors, including Islam and socialist ideology. These various influences were often in conflict with each other, resulting in a complex legal framework that sought to address a variety of competing interests.

### ***3. The Transitional Period, 1990-1994***

The transitional period in Yemen from 1990 to 1994 refers to the transition between the fall of the socialist government and the rise of the new unified Republic of Yemen. After the country's unification in 1990, there was a three-year period of political and social transition during which major changes were made to the legal system, including adopting a new constitution in 1991 and a new family law code in 1993. Additionally, during this period, the government implemented policies designed to improve access to education, especially for women. These changes had important implications for women's rights in Yemen.

The majority of the socialist and secular-specific components that were originally from the South were replaced by the laws and practices that were prevalent in the North. In Article 2 of the YAR constitution, Islam was referred to as "the religion of the state." In Article 3, which embraced the attitude of the North constitution, Islam was referred to as "the source of all legislation."

Maxine Molyneux's argues that changes towards democratization created more significant opportunities for women's advancement and improved conditions while reverting back to authoritarian rule led to a decrease in women's rights. According to Molyneux, "Women's rights, in particular, became a site of political contestation during the three-year period of transition between the fall of the socialist system and the rise of the new government, the General Popular Congress (GPC)" (Molyneux 1995). She also details how the unification of North and South Yemen further complicated the situation for Yemeni women, as the different legal systems in each region created inconsistencies and tensions. She notes, "The laws of the former state of North Yemen gave women far fewer rights than those of the former state of South Yemen". For example, the Southern female judges continued holding their positions after the unity and the North's and South's divergent press coverage were indicators of differing sentiments toward them (Molyneux 1995). Although there was a unified government, there was no unification of state systems yet, and diversity was most noticeable in the central government, political parties, and security forces. Far from advancing this process, the 1993 election served as a catalyst for a new, more overt reassertion of the North and South's divergent political interests and priorities (Detalle and Hiltermann 1993).

The impact of this period on women's rights reveals a complex set of factors that affected the advancement of women's rights at that time. According to Yadav, the unification of North and South Yemen triggered changes in the legal system that had both positive and negative implications for women's rights. She writes, "The unification process of North and South Yemen in 1990 led to changes in the legal system, which had both enabling and disabling effects on women's rights" (Yadav 2009). In addition, Molyneux, argues that the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990 had major

implications for the country's legal system, as the two regions had "very different approaches to governing". The unification process triggered a series of changes that led to the promulgation of new laws in Yemen (Molyneux 1995). For example, the unified RoY adopted a new constitution in 1991, Würth writes, "A new unified Yemeni constitution was promulgated in 1991, which abolished many laws in effect in the former states of South and North Yemen".

In addition, the changes to the country's family law impacted women's rights. Molyneux wrote, "The unified Republic of Yemen adopted a new code of family law in 1993, which drew from both Islamic and secular sources and aimed to provide more equal rights to women in areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance". Observers also noted that the RoY adopted a new family law code incorporating elements from both Islam and secular sources. As mentioned by Detalle and Hiltermann, "The code of family law adopted by Yemen in 1993 has two main Islamic law and customary law, represented in its most up-to-date and internationally accepted form, namely secular law" (Detalle and Hiltermann 1993).

According to the findings of this review of the relevant literature, significant changes to Yemen's legislative framework occurred during the transitional period in the country that lasted from 1990 to 1994. These changes included the adoption of a new constitution and a new family law, which had a tremendous effect on the rights and status of women in Yemen.

#### ***4. The Civil War, 1994***

The 1994 Civil War in Yemen was a conflict between the northern government forces, led by President of the RoY Ali Abdullah Saleh, and southern secessionists, led

by Vice President Ali Salem al-Beidh. The war resulted in the defeat of the southern forces and the reunification of Yemen under a unitary government. The war saw significant violence and destruction, resulting in high civilian casualties and widespread displacement. The central government also used its resources to suppress political opposition and isolate the South. In July 1994, a ceasefire agreement was reached, ending military hostilities, and laying the groundwork for a political settlement that would later be agreed upon in late 1997.

The outcome of Yemen's family law during the 1990–1994 transitional period describes the unique situation of women and reflects the country's overall growth pattern. Changes to both state policy and the law affected women. After the unification, the dominance of religious groups in the North and South and all the ruling bodies had the effect of marginalizing women and reinforcing the patriarchal-misogynistic system (Badran 1998). Although many North and South Yemenis supported a higher level of secularism and modernity in the legal system, it was not immediately clear what this meant for the status of women and family law legislation. Such issues were not top priorities in the bitter political conflicts dividing the republic.

The remnants of the southern state and the social and political diversity that predominated during the transitional period were destroyed due to the northern forces' victory in 1994. The South lost much of its distinctive, modern identity due to the North's political and military domination. Additionally, the growing influence of radical Islamists in Sana'a, the capital of the RoY had a major impact on women's status.

According to Stacey Yadav, the demand for changing the constitution only based on Islam has prevailed. She wrote, "The 1994 civil war between the armies of the

two former ruling governments of North and South Yemen led to the socialists' near-total decline." (Yadav 2009).

The General Popular Congress (GPC), the leading party of North Yemen received the largest share of vote in the 1993 elections (Detalle and Hiltermann 1993). It worked jointly with the Islah party, is a Yemeni Islamist party founded in 1990, to marginalize the socialists, relying on Islah sheiks to demonize the YSP 's "atheistic" leadership. Doubts about Islah's promises were deep, especially among South Yemen women activists (Yadav 2009). Southern women propose that Islah's conservative strategy toward gender aspects added to a mood that had increasingly come to restrict women's space and weight within the political parties (Nonneman 1994). North laws and practices replaced most South socialist and secular components. This period had a complex impact on women's rights. Since North and South Yemen had "very different approaches to governing,"

article 40 of the new unified constitution declares that "citizens are all equal in rights and duties," but this is undermined by Article 31, which states that "women are the sisters of men. They have rights and duties guaranteed and assigned by Shari'a and stipulated by law." In the cultural context of Yemen, being sisters of men indicates a status where women are protected hence enforcing the patriarchal family system on the state. This comes after the PDRY was a progressive and pioneering example of women's empowerment in the Arab region before the 1990 unification.

## **C. The Case of Hadramout**

### ***1. The Socio-Political Context of Hadrami Women Before Independence***

This study was motivated by the lack of resources available about Hadrami Women. On my most recent trip to Mukalla for data collection, I did not find a lot of documentation. However, I came upon a research paper titled "About Women's Movement in the Fifth Governorate," published by the Hadramout Governorate's Sub-National Women Committee on International Women's Day in 1975 (Hadramout Governorate Sub-National Women Committee 1975).

The study discussed the economic and social challenges Hadrami women faced before independence and how men's norms frequently outweighed religious beliefs in women's positioning in the society. For example, the study mentions that the Hamoum tribe repeal the women's inheritance law, fearing that married women would hand over the tribe's lands to their husbands from other tribes. Women's roles were also limited to health and education fields. Only nomadic girls began to study reading and writing and pursue careers as midwives and nurses.

The study also covered how women resisted British colonialism as well. In 1965, this position was exemplified in the rallies led by women, particularly female students, who supported the NLF and demanded the overthrow of colonialism and the sultans. Many women's protests were held in Hadramout's streets for the first time. The report claims that women lacked a women-led organization to coordinate their efforts at the time. The patriarchal sultan system and colonial control were to blame for this. It was not until after independence that the Hadramout office of the GUYW was founded as a government agency with 150 female members that sought to draw large numbers of

women to coordinate and lead the women's system for political, economic, and social freedom.

Hadrami women started participating in political and cultural activities, such as founding literacy schools and giving lectures and seminars. When the Popular Defense Committees (PDC), are committees formed to implement laws and solve societal problems in the PDRY, was established, women were heavily involved, particularly in the social and family aspects, and they also took on the function of social affairs secretariat. At the governorate level, there were 567 female members of the PDC. Then, in 1973, the Yemeni Democratic Youth Union was established; by 1975, there were 454 female members according to (Hadramout Governorate Sub-National Women Committee 1975).

## ***2. The First General Conference for Yemeni Women, 1974***

Recently, a scanned black and white photograph from 1974 went viral on Yemeni social media. The photograph features women standing before a banner that says, (The First General Conference for Yemeni Women, taking place in Seiyun 15-17 July 1974 under the theme: Yemeni Women Fight Ignorance). The women in the photograph are from the GUYW, which organized the conference with support from the state. Personally, I kept looking at the photo, and I could not get over the word (Seiyun) that visibly appears in the banner. This city was chosen to host the first women's conference in the history of Yemen. How is it that it was acceptable for women to exist in a way that is now considered a violation of society's norms? Here I am not talking about how these women were dressed, but rather the idea of women's participation itself. Seiyun is considered one of the most conservative cities in Hadramout, and up

until recent years, it was rare even to see women walking in the street. For this reason, it was essential to consider these photos as primary sources for this study.



Figure 1. The First General Conference for Yemeni Women.



Figure 2. The First General Conference for Yemeni Women.

In figure 1, a black-and-white photograph from 1974 features only women standing on the stage in front of the banner. Not having men there is indicative of the overall goal of this conference. It implicitly states that it is the time for women to speak for themselves and have the attention they ought to have. Supported by the banner's slogan: "Let Yemeni Women Fight Against Ignorance and for ...", the word "Fight" indicates that women lacked rights at that time. Thus, they had to begin demanding those rights; three years after this meeting, in November of 1977, women voted for the first time in South Yemen.

In figure 2, standing to the right is President of PDRY Salem Rube'a Ali, known as Salemin. The attendance of the President among the people expresses the authority's support for such an event. This indicates the state's direction toward women's empowerment. Salemin was standing like an ordinary person and not on the stage.

The observer can notice in these historical photographs that women interact with men without-borders and are not regarded as private matters that must be kept at home and away from men. It is a situation that describes the ideals and behaviors encouraged by the ruling YSP. The overwhelming message is that the government took the issue seriously, highly regarded women as citizens, and their voices were worth listening to.

The most explicit statement is in a speech by Salemin at the congress. He deplored the more extreme forms of "humiliation, degradation, oppression, and exploitation to which women were subjected under colonial and reactionary rule. In addition, he highlighted how women were 'deprived of their right to work ... and of their right of equality with man'" according to Maxine Molyneux. The speech denounced the

exploitation and oppression of women in the home, the practice of arranged marriages, and the customs considering women worth half a man in law, property rights, and employment. Salemin stated that women's freedom would now be possible under socialism and lay 'in education and in inculcating new traditions that lie in the secret of their love of work and production' (Molyneux 1979).

In December 1977, the sociologist Maxine Molyneux, interviewed three members of the GUYW one of them is, the first women standing from the left on figures 1. During a research visit made to the PDRY she wanted to study how the status of women has changed since independence in 1967. According to her, one cannot legitimately assess the status of women in the PDRY by comparing it to that of women in the West. A more fruitful exercise would be to compare the PDRY's progress to that of another nation with a comparable degree of development and cultural background to ascertain the relative progress. As a result, she compared women's status in the PDRY to women's position in the YAR. According to Molyneux, women in South Yemen had achieved significant progress compared to most Muslim countries and many third-world countries at that time (Molyneux 1979).

# CHAPTER IV

## FINDINGS FROM DATA ANALYSIS

### **A. Introduction**

As mentioned earlier in the research design, I used two methods to collect data: in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

#### ***1. Description of the Samples from the in-Depth Interviews***

The sample for the in-depth interviews included 12 women, ages 60 to 75, who were politically and socially active during the chosen period of the research. They were all active members of the GUYW and the PDC in Hadramout during the PDRY.

- Five women attended the (First General Conference for Yemeni Women)
- Two women were elected to the parliament during the PDRY.
- All were or still are members of the GUYW.
- Three women assumed the position of president of the GUYW in Hadramout.
- Two women participated in the within the efforts of the NLF against the British occupation.
- All of them were members of the YSP before the unification.
- Four of them are still members of the YSP.
- Ten women with educational backgrounds started their activism as teachers.
- All are from different cities in Hadramout between the coast and the valley (Mukalla, Ghail Bawazir, Al-Shihr, Seiyun, Wadi Dawan, Al-Hami).

#### ***2. Description of the Samples from the Focus Groups***

The sample of participants in the focus groups comprised 17 Hadrami activists aged 25 to 35 (nine females and eight males). They varied from university students

majoring in political science and law to civil society activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. All were from different political and social backgrounds, members of the YSP, the Islah party, the GPC Party, and independent. And from different areas in Hadramout (Seiyun, Mukalla, Al-Shihr, Ghail Bawazir, Wadi Dawan).

I used Gioia's method to provide a systematic way to process the raw data to perform the qualitative data analysis (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013). Starting with 1<sup>st</sup>-order review codes from the transcripts, I developed them as broad concepts based on how the interviewees reflected their stories. Then I repeatedly reviewed the data, marked similarities, and researched possible themes that would inspire the 2<sup>nd</sup>-order labeling. Then I organized the 2<sup>nd</sup>-order codes on a whiteboard to cross out the similarities and name each group of codes under a theme. This strategy helped identifying strong statements that answered the research questions. Then I wrote these statements on a small index card, with the quote's citation that refers to who said it and location on the transcript. Then, I put the cards in front of me in no particular order and began grouping them based on similarities and assigned a theme to each pile. This technique helped explain how these themes were systematically mentioned throughout the interviews and the focus groups. The themes generated by this method are shown in Figure 3.

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the findings drawn and shown in figure 3 below. The findings from both the in-depth interviews and the focus groups revealed three aggregated variables for perspectives on factors influencing women's political participation.

First, there is the **State System**, which was clearly acknowledged by the participants when asked about the most significant factor motivating individuals to

engage or withdraw in terms of political participation. The subsequent section of the anticipated findings describes the role that the **Family and Social Environment** played in the formation of the political identity of the interviewees. In addition, the interviewees' **Self-motivation** enabled them to experience a sense of accomplishment and impact, which kept them engaged throughout and interested in the process.

Because I am working with data collected through two methods (in-depth interviews and focus groups), I developed a mechanism for identifying quotations. I marked the quotes from the in-depth interviews with the letter (I), followed by a number allocated to each interviewee ranging from 1 to 12. The quotations from the focus groups were then marked with the letter (F), followed by a number assigned to each participant ranging from 1 to 17.

## **B. System of the State**

This thesis looked at the factors that affected women's participation in politics in Hadramout, and the effects of political changes before and after Yemen became one country. The country's political system is the most frequently stated of these factors, both in the interviews and from the perspective of the younger generation in the focus groups. In the context of state political systems, the following three themes were reflected:

### ***1. Law and Legislation***

The theme of law and legislation provided a solid basis for initiating a tangible reality of women's empowerment. Most interviewees began their historical accounts of the social and political circumstances in Hadramout before and after independence by

emphasizing the significance of law in forging a new society. Furthermore, one of the most important laws imposed by the state in the PDRY is related to women's education as a basis for empowering women. According to the interviewees, when asked about the situation before Hadramout joined the PDRY, most of them stated that education was limited to the daughters of nomadic Bedouins, and for society to accept the presence of women in the larger public context, education was a crucial first step.

From this perspective, it is essential to report that ten women interviewed began their activism as teachers. They all completed the fourth grade of elementary school, and according to what they said, "the fourth grade was equivalent to graduation from high school." Then they were designated as teachers and spread across Hadramout. I1 indicated, "the state constructed the first girls' school in Tarim in the 70s, but none of the parents permitted their daughters to attend." She added, "When the PDC were created, forces from the PDC accompanied me to speak with the parents at their houses to convince them to let their daughters attend school." The interviewees also mentioned that the state focused on the laws that relate to women's daily lives in the household and in public. One of these pieces of legislation was the Family Law, which was repeatedly referenced throughout the data collected from the in-depth interviews and the focus groups. It was frequently described as "a win for the family in southern Yemen under the PDRY."

I3 said, "The family law did not apply only to women; it was a true family foundation that protected the rights of women, men, and children." Thus, women are recognized as equal actors in the foundations of society and the state. I5 also said, "Family law was the beginning of women's true participation as it started with the

modification of their roles in the household, thus reflecting her roles outside the household." Even among the younger generation in the focus groups, family law was mentioned in their conversations with their parents. According to F5, "the PDRY has developed a true partnership between men and women; respecting women's role in the home facilitated the ability to respect women's presence outside the home."

The interviewees also acknowledged the constitution and its laws, which featured numerous articles encouraging and facilitating women's work in society. I7 said that "revising the PDRY's constitution will provide the impression that it addresses citizens who are equal in rights and responsibilities while recognizing the additional effort women invest in motherhood." She added, "In contrast to the constitution following the country's unification, the terminology used to distinguish between men and women, such as in the requirements for the presidential candidate, refers only to male candidates—such a minor but substantial alteration."

When asked about the changes that took place in the laws after unification, the general impression was negative. I10 stated, "The abolition of the Southern Family Law after 1990 was a dangerous indication of the future of women after the unification." Nevertheless, there were some positive views about the legal situation after the unification. F8 stated, "It is true that the general impression of the legal changes after the unification is negative. However, partisan pluralism was acknowledged as a positive indicator. It could have opened up a broader domain for women to participate had it not been for the dominance of extremist religious discourse."

## ***2. Protection and Security***

One of the reasons that emerged for women's political participation in Hadramout is their perception of safety and belief that the state system protected them. Whether at home, in public society, at work, or on the street. I8 stated, "We used to attend meetings in the middle of the night and come home on foot alone without fear." I12 affirmed that everyone feared the state, and the crime rate declined, adding, "Not even a drunk would dare to do anything to us." Women's safety from physical or verbal violence was perceived as being fundamental to their political participation.

The interviewees claimed that women's protection drastically changed after the country's unification and that women were subjected to abuse throughout the transitional period. I4 recalled, "During the 1994 war, the GUYW office in Mukalla was besieged, our pictures and files were ripped, and the ugliest language was used against us."

Protection and safety are basic human rights that apply to women and everyone. Once humans feel protected, they are motivated to be active. During the interviews, the lack of safety was frequently stated as why many Hadrami women leaders withdrew from political participation after the unification. I10 stated, "Perhaps one of the greatest losses for women after the unification was the loss of their sense of security." Also, I9 agreed by saying, "It is not about women, not even males." People will only participate if they feel secure. "It is naturally human." According to I2, "Hadramout society is conservative and patriarchal in nature; I am not saying this is a negative thing, so an important factor in the change of Hadrami society after joining the PDRY was that families felt that their daughters were safe if they went outside the house." The interviewees also mentioned how women in Hadramout used to travel abroad to attend

workshops without a male guardian; I7 said, "Our families were not concerned about us traveling alone."

Protection was also a recurring subject among the younger generation. F9: "For us now as young women in Hadramout, it is dangerous to walk the streets after 10:00 p.m." F7 also mentioned, "My mother, who did not permit my sister to study in Aden out of fear for safety in 2003, used to tell us how my grandfather encouraged her to travel to Russia during the PDRY." F13 stated, "Every time I ask my mother how she felt safe in the 1970s walking in the street without wearing the abaya, she would answer that no one dared harass women because they knew the consequences well." She added, "As a female student majoring in political science today, it is sad that I do not feel safe as much as my mother did in the 1970s; I am subjected to harassment daily." Moreover, according to F15, "It is not just about being female; I am a young man who has studied political science; I do not feel encouraged to participate in political activities at this time, as I cannot guarantee my safety." The overall impression among the participants in the focus groups was that engagement in political work has become surrounded by suspicions and fears among the young generation in Hadramout. F9 said, "The stereotype of any politician is that he or she is corrupt and has a bad reputation."

The majority of the participants, whether in the interviews or the focus groups, agreed that the PDRY succeeded in imposing protection laws and strict penalties in cases of harassment and assault of all kinds, and this gave a general feeling of safety. However, this perception of safety changed a lot after 1994. I10 mentioned that "defamation was used against women after unification; in a conservative society, this was one of the most horrendous ways to keep women from participating in public activities." According to I5, "during the PDRY, the state realized the importance of

protection at micro levels; women and men used to refer to each other as comrades." I7 said, "I was an elected member of parliament from Hadramout before the unification. In 1997, we were asked to attend a public meeting in Sana'a with the rest of the members from all over Yemen; we were only seven women; the men's looks around us were frightening, and personally, I felt like we were attacked."

### **3. *State Recognition***

The third theme that emerged was the feeling of state recognition. The interviewees stated that their conviction that the state acknowledges them as equal citizens with a vital role in the development of the state was a prime motivator for participation. I2 stated, "Social work was voluntary, and we used to pay monthly contributions from our salaries out of love for our role in society and a belief in its importance." As for I8, she said, "the state permitted us to dedicate two or three days per week from our government jobs to community service." I10 mentioned, "the state facilitated the work of women by providing nurseries in workplaces for working mothers." I7 also said, "the public discourse in the PDRY was promoting those women and men, as citizens, are partners in building the nation." All the interviewees told stories about women participating in the PDC to raise awareness and hold training, workshops, and public lectures in public about the importance of women's role in society. Encouraging women and creating a friendly environment was crucial. I11, "When the communist party was in power, I felt my worth as a citizen." She continued, "My labor and efforts were valued."

There was a general feeling among the interviewees that they felt less important to the state after unification. Women were restricted to limited sectors such as education and

health, and former women political leaders were marginalized. I7 mentioned, "I was the head of the GUYW in the Mukalla office. In 1990, an order came to us from Sanaa that all women volunteering in the public sector must be restricted to only their government jobs." I11 said, "I was one of three Hadrami women elected to the Parliament in the 70s; however, after unification, I was forced to work as only a supervisor in a kindergarten."

## **C. Family and Social Environment**

### ***1. Family's Political Affiliation***

The political affiliation of the male family members, including the brother, father, and husband, was one of the themes that surfaced throughout the data collection. Women said that Hadramout culture during the pre-independence period and the fight against British colonialism was a conservative society in which women did not have a significant role in the public sphere. The prominent exception was for the women of some households whose members are NLF members and adhere to socialist beliefs. During this period, women joined in what was known as the "secret struggle," which included the male revolutionaries' sisters, wives, and daughters. Women smuggled flyers and prepared food and medical care for the fugitives pursued by the occupation soldiers. I8 said, "I used to wear my brother's clothes and carry messages to revolutionaries in the street among the men." She added, "My brother was one of the revolution's leaders, and he urged me to join and convinced my parents."

Nine out of twelve women cited the existence of a male family member affiliated with the socialist political system as their primary motivation for participation and involvement, which is an interesting outcome of the interviews. I3: "My father

opposed the notion of me being a teacher, but after I married a YSP member, my husband urged me to join the YSP."

Nevertheless, the interviewees underlined that their participation was not forced; had they not been self-motivated, they would not have participated. I1: "I became interested in politics due to my family environment." With my father, I used to listen to the radio for news about the revolutionaries, which fueled my desire to participate. As for I10, "I used to attend the leaders' meetings that took place in our home; as my father was one of them, I often voiced my view, and they listened attentively despite my young age." However, after the unification, particularly during the 1994 war, when Ali Abdullah Saleh's forces persecuted the leaders of the YSP who opposed unification, many families preferred to safeguard their daughters and not encourage them to engage in the political realm.

## ***2. Patriarchal Environment***

One of the themes identified by the interviewees was the dominance of the male gender in Hadramout in the pre-independence period, which prohibited many women from participating in the public community. However, the interviewees said that the severity of this patriarchal society was significantly reduced when the YSP was in charge. It did, however, persist to some extent. When the interviewees were asked why a woman from Hadhramaut was not assigned to the governor position, despite there being numerous eligible women, the answer was that the position required direct appointment and recommendation from the party leadership. I9 answered, "It is true that the state policy promotes women, but men were in charge, and men did not want women in sensitive positions just yet." As for I3, "there was nepotism, and party leaders

shared positions among them." She added, "Not all members were genuine socialist believers." However, I7 has a different opinion: "I believe the stage was the establishment stage, and the mere accession of women to Parliament and the high percentage of educated women and workers in professional sectors is considered a great achievement, and I believe that if the state's policy had continued on the same path, women would have reached the position of president and not just a governor."

Initially, those lucky enough to have a supportive family were given priority for participation at the beginning of the PDRY in Hadramout, but soon the community's perspective began to shift positively to accepting women's participation.

The interviews revealed, however, that the patriarchal system arose again savagely almost immediately after the country's unification, encouraged by the policies of the Islah Party and the religious sheikhs in the north who defamed the YSP 's leaders. "We have returned to zero; society has grown not only patriarchal but also misogynist," I6 said, "The politicians coming from the north were misusing religion to affect society, particularly regarding the presence and engagement of women."

All participants, whether they took part in in-depth interviews or focus groups, seem to agree that the change that occurred in Hadramout regarding accepting and supporting women as partners with men during PDRY was erased entirely after the unity.

#### **D. Self-Motivation**

It is important to point out that when asked about political participation, the majority of interviewees had a meaning of the term that differed from the definition found in the literature. For these women, political participation implied involvement in all aspects of society, including the education, health, and vocational training sectors.

When discussing women political leaders, they noted their role in hosting awareness workshops and visiting homes to persuade parents of the importance of educating their daughters and informing them of their rights. This indicates that it is necessary to understand the local contexts to analyze what women's participation in society is and their own understanding of this.

### ***1. Life Purpose***

Consequently, a sense of life's meaning was the theme that the interviewees identified as a self-motivation dimension. The women felt a sense of purpose in their lives due to the direct and tangible influence their everyday interactions with others had on them during the PDRY. I8, "I was in charge of consulting with women in divorce and custody cases." She added, "in the past, women's rights were lost, but after the adoption of family law, their rights were guaranteed by force of law, and I was helping in enforcing the law." As for I5, "life's significance and value were the driving forces behind my commitment." She added, "I felt I was participating in forming a state." In addition, I4 claimed, "I traveled alone to Wadi Dawan for an entire year, where I taught at a new girls' school. My daily conversations with the girls and their enthusiasm for learning fueled my pride and determination to continue my activity."

### ***2. Knowledge***

The concept of feeling "qualified" was one of the topics that came strongly from the interviews. During the PDRY, women were encouraged to travel to the countries of the Soviet Union through the availability of scholarship programs. All the interviewees mentioned that they had traveled abroad at least once to attend training, study, or

participate in an event. The interviewees also mentioned employing lecturers and teachers from overseas colleges and schools in order to provide training and workshops in Hadramout and its various districts. I7, "I recall attending a partisan school where the ideals and philosophy of the YSP were taught. We were only four females from Hadramout. Once the training ended, the Russian instructor asked me to prepare a lecture and deliver it at the provincial level in Aden before a huge audience." She continued, "I thought I could not do it, but he told me I was the most qualified of my classmates."

According to the interviews, during the PDRY, women believed they had the skills and qualifications to work in various spheres of society. The state prioritized many skills and not just merely party training. I8 said, "Vocational complexes, which are educational complexes that teach various occupations such as printing and vehicle maintenance, contributed significantly to the self-confidence and motivation of women." I4 also mentioned, "the vocational complexes were not only for training. After each training course, the graduates were distributed to different sectors to be employed."

Knowledge gave women a great sense of self-confidence, and thus a sense of entitlement and motivation to participate. However, the situation changed after the war in 1994, when vocational complexes were shut down, and state interest in providing opportunities to women for learning and training decreased. According to the interviews, the development rate of female literacy dropped after the unification in Hadramout.

For the younger generation, education and knowledge were also mentioned as important motivating factors for political participation. Participants in the focus groups

mentioned that the political science major, for example, was not opened at Hadramout University until 2018.

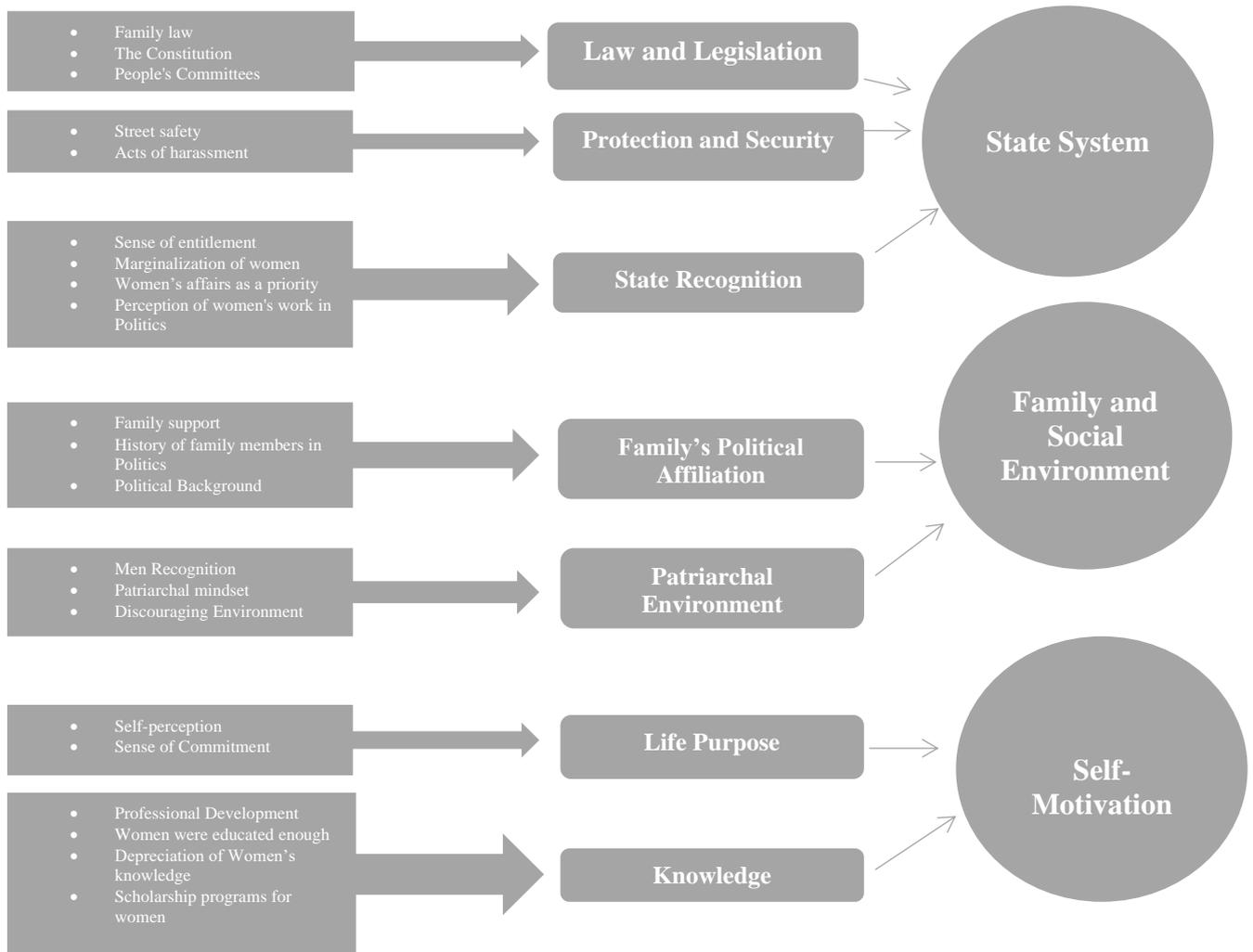


Figure 3. Summary of the Thematic Analysis.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Several researchers have recognized the different factors that influenced women's political participation in Yemen before and after Yemen's unification, which can be deduced from an examination of the relevant literature. The supportive policies for women during the PDRY were significant in women's participation. Nevertheless, the transitional period after the union saw considerable changes in many policies, such as the provisions of the constitution and family law. As noted, the results of the data analysis, whether from interviews or focus groups, were summarized into three key factors: 1) The state system, 2) The family and social environment, and 3) The self-motivation of women.

Understanding the elements determining women's engagement through the available literature is vital; moreover, more was needed to be discovered about women in politics in Hadramout. Women's lives and journeys in Hadramout have received less attention than men's, which means that scholarly works on this subject still need to include women as a vital part of a complete understanding.

Due to the lack of documentation from the women's perspective, it is always worthwhile to investigate their experiences and pathways. My thesis adds to the research on women in politics by bridging the gap between the different experiences of women and getting a deep understanding of their points of view.

In the current Yemeni context, women are frequently referred to as vulnerable, with many calls for women's empowerment. But without a fundamental understanding of the perspectives of women who have gone through this experience in the past,

particularly in the situation of Hadramout governorate, which is entering an uncertain political turning point. Hadramout is currently experiencing three voices: those advocating for Yemeni unity, those advocating for secession and the return of the state of the south, and those advocating for Hadramout's independence. In light of this, women's voices remain hushed, particularly those of prior leaders who fought and were forgotten.

Therefore, it was vital to listen to the stories of these women and comprehend their experiences. Most of the women in Hadramout today blame women leaders of the past for not continuing the fight. However, after evaluating the interviews and listing the women's perspectives, I saw that their lives were filled with both joy and sorrow. I now have a clearer perspective. In every interview I conducted, whether in the office of the Women's Union in Mukalla or in one of the women's houses, I sensed a strong willingness to share stories and experiences in depth, and the discussions were lengthy, even after I had completed my questions.

In focus groups with the younger generation, I felt the same motivation that led me to conduct this research in the first place: we, the younger generation, wish to comprehend what happened, why it happened, and how we might learn from it.

Using my experience as a Hadrami woman born in the 1990s, this journey answered all my childhood questions. I grew up wondering why and how reality is so utterly different from the photographs in my family's album.

In 2018, when I became the CEO of a Mukalla-based organization focusing on political awareness, this distinction was striking. The men visiting our office were more interested in conversing with my male coworker rather than me. I had to prove a lot before they treated me in the way my position entails. Even in our training workshops,

women were underrepresented in comparison to men. Although there are numerous requests and appeals for women's empowerment in Hadramout, women's positioning is still superficial and inadequate. Therefore, as a woman, I feel that we should stop viewing ourselves as only "women" and begin viewing ourselves as citizens. Women are treated like second-class citizens when they only assigned to work in women's departments and on family and children's committees.

Hence, for women in Hadramout to achieve valid political participation, this thesis suggests the following actionable recommendations:

- Calling for more documentation of the experiences of women in Hadramout.
- Recognizing women's presence as citizens regardless of their gender.
- Imposing strict policies that ensure women's protection.

# APPENDIX I

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thesis | Women's Political Participation in Pre- and Post-Unification Yemen: from Research into Practice in Hadramout

### A. Topic Guide for the in-Depth Interviews

#### 1. *The interviews tackled the following themes about periods in Yemen's history:*

- Pre-independence period (pre-1967)
- Post-independence period, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) (1967)
- The Unification, Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) (1990)
- Hadramout in the current context of Yemen

#### 2. *Interviews questions:*

- How would you describe the status of women in Hadramout during the pre-independence period (pre-1967)? How active were women politically? What kind of women's organizations if any existed?
- Can you tell me about women's involvement in the revolution in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen?
- How did society in Hadramout view women's political participation during the PDRY?
- Can you tell me about the women's section of the National Liberation Front (NLF) activities?
- What was your view of the PDRY political system as a woman from Hadramout?
- What is your opinion of the Family Law in the PDRY?
- What prompted you to be politically/socially active? Tell me about your experience.
- What were the topics discussed in the first women's conference held in Seiyun?
- In your opinion, what has changed - concerning women - after the Yemeni unity?
- What is your opinion of the Family Law in YAR?
- How can you describe women's political participation in Hadramout now?
- Any recommendations for the current political system regarding women's participation?

### B. Topic Guide for Focus groups

#### 1. *The focus groups tackled the following themes:*

- Post-independence period, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) (1967)
- The Unification, Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) (1990)
- Hadramout in the current context of Yemen

**2. Focus groups questions:**

- In your opinion, what were some of the prevailing views in Hadramout about the presence of women in the political scene before the Yemeni unity?
- In your opinion, what is the Hadrami society's view of the presence of women in the political scene after the Yemeni unity?
- In your opinion, has Yemeni unity affected (negatively or positively) the political participation of women in Hadramout?
- What prevents women in Hadramout currently from participating and being politically active?
- What do you think when you see the pictures of the first women's conference that was held in Seiyun in the seventies?

## APPENDIX II

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS TABLE

QUOTES	CODES	THEMES	AGGREGATION DIMENSIONS
"The family law did not apply only to women; it was a true family foundation that protected the rights of women, men, and children." -I3	Family law	<b>Law and Legislation</b>	<b>State's System</b>
"Family law was the beginning of women's true participation as it started with the modification of their roles in the household, thus reflecting her roles outside the household." - I5			
"the PDRY has developed a true partnership between men and women; respecting women's role in the home facilitated the ability to respect women's presence outside the home."- F5			
"It is true that the general impression of the legal changes after the unification is negative. However, partisan pluralism was acknowledged as a positive indicator. It could have opened up a broader domain for women to participate had it not been for the dominance of extremist religious discourse." -F8	The Constitution		

<p>"When the PDC was created as a committee that imposes laws, forces from the PD accompanied me to speak with the parents at their houses to convince them to let their daughters attend school." -I1</p>	<p>Popular Defense Committee</p>		
<p>"We used to attend meetings in the middle of the night and come home on foot alone without fear." - I8</p>	<p>Street safety</p>	<p><b>Protection and Security</b></p>	
<p>"Everyone feared the state, and the crime rate declined, adding, "Not even a drunk would dare to do anything to us."- I12</p>			
<p>"Our families were not concerned about us traveling alone."- I7</p>			
<p>"Hadramout society is conservative and patriarchal in nature; I am not saying this is a negative thing, so an important factor in the change of Hadrami society after joining the PDRY was that families felt that their daughters were safe if they went outside the house."- I2</p>			
<p>"Perhaps one of the greatest losses for women after the unification was the loss of their sense of security."- I10</p>			
<p>"For us now as young women in Hadramout, it is dangerous to walk the streets after 10:00 p.m."- F9</p>			
<p>"During the PDRY, the state realized the importance of protection at micro levels; women and men used to refer to each other as comrades."-I5</p>			

<p>"My mother, who did not permit my sister to study in Aden out of fear for safety in 2003, used to tell us how my grandfather encouraged her to travel to Russia during the PDRY."- F7</p>			
<p>I4 recalled, "During the 1994 war, the GUYW office in Mukalla was besieged, our pictures and files were ripped, and the ugliest language was used against us."</p>	<p>Acts of harassment</p>		
<p>"Every time I ask my mother how she felt safe in the 1970s walking in the street without wearing the abaya, she would answer that no one dared harass women because they knew the consequences well."- F13</p>			
<p>"As a female student majoring in political science today, it is sad that I do not feel safe as much as my mother did in the 1970s; I am subjected to harassment daily."-F13</p>			
<p>"It is not about women, not even males." People will only participate if they feel secure. "It is naturally human."-I9</p>			
<p>"Defamation was used against women after unification; in a conservative society, this was one of the most horrendous ways to keep women from participating in public activities."- I10</p>			
<p>"I was an elected member of parliament from Hadramout before the unification. In 1997, we were asked to attend a public meeting in Sana'a with the rest of the members from all over</p>			

Yemen; we were only seven women; the men's looks around us were frightening, and personally, I felt like we were attacked."-I7			
"The stereotype of any politician is that he or she is corrupt and has a bad reputation."- F9			
"It is not just about being female; I am a young man who has studied political science; I do not feel encouraged to participate in political activities at this time, as I cannot guarantee my safety."- F15			
"Social work was voluntary, and we used to pay monthly contributions from our salaries out of love for our role in society and a belief in its importance."- I2	Sense of entitlement	<b>State Recognition</b>	
"The state facilitated the work of women by providing nurseries in workplaces for working mothers."-I10			
"When the communist party was in power, I felt my worth as a citizen."-I11			
"My labor and efforts were valued."-I11			
"I was the head of the GUYW in the Mukalla office. In 1990, an order came to us from Sanaa that all women volunteering in the public sector must be restricted to only their government jobs." -I17	Marginalization of women		
"I was one of three Hadrami women elected to the Parliament in the 70s; however, after			

unification, I was forced to work as only a supervisor in a kindergarten." -I11			
"The state permitted us to dedicate two or three days per week from our government jobs to community service."-I8	Women's affairs as a priority		
"the public discourse in the PDRY was promoting that women and men, as citizens, are partners in building the nation."-I7	Perception of women's work in Politics		
"My father opposed the notion of me being a teacher, but after I married a YSP member, my husband urged me to join the YSP ."-I3	Family support	<b>Family's Political Affiliation</b>	<b>Family&amp; Environment</b>
"I used to attend the leaders' meetings that took place in our home; as my father was one of them, I often voiced my view, and they listened attentively despite my young age."- I10			
"I became interested in politics due to my family environment. With my father, I used to listen to the radio for news about the revolutionaries, which fueled my desire to participate." -I1	Political Background		
"I used to wear my brother's clothes and carry messages to revolutionaries in the street among the men."- I8	History of family members in Politics		
"My brother was one of the revolution's leaders, and he urged me to join and convinced my parents."-I8			

<p>"there was nepotism, and party leaders shared positions among them." She added, "Not all members were genuine socialist believers."-I3</p>	<p>Men Recognition</p>	<p><b>Patriarchal Environment</b></p>	
<p>"It is true that the state policy promotes women, but men were in charge, and men did not want women in sensitive positions just yet."-I9</p>	<p>Patriarchal mindset</p>		
<p>"We have returned to zero; society has grown not only patriarchal but also misogynist," -I6</p>			
<p>"The politicians coming from the north were misusing religion to affect society, particularly regarding the presence and engagement of women."-I6</p>			
<p>"I believe the stage was the establishment stage, and the mere accession of women to Parliament and the high percentage of educated women and workers in professional sectors is considered a great achievement, and I believe that if the state's policy had continued on the same path, women would have reached the position of president and not just a governor."-I7</p>	<p>Discouraging Environment</p>		
<p>"in the past, women's rights were lost, but after the adoption of family law, their rights were guaranteed by force of law, and I was helping in enforcing the law."-I8</p>	<p>Self-perception</p>	<p><b>Life Purpose</b></p>	<p><b>Self-Motivation</b></p>

"I felt I was participating in forming a state."- I5			
"life's significance and value were the driving forces behind my commitment."-I5	Sense of Commitment		
"I was in charge of consulting with women in divorce and custody cases."- I8			
"I traveled alone to Wadi Dawan for an entire year, where I taught at a new girls' school. My daily conversations with the girls and their enthusiasm for learning fueled my pride and determination to continue my activity."-I4			
"Vocational complexes, which are educational complexes that teach various occupations such as printing and vehicle maintenance, contributed significantly to the self-confidence and motivation of women." -I8	Professional Development		<b>Knowledge</b>
"the vocational complexes were not only for training. After each training course, the graduates were distributed to different sectors to be employed."-I4			
"I thought I could not do it, but he told me I was the most qualified of my classmates."-I7	Women were educated enough		
For the younger generation, education and knowledge were also mentioned as important motivating factors for political participation. Participants in the focus groups mentioned that the political science major, for example, was not opened at Hadramout University until 2018.	Depreciation of Women's knowledge		

<p>I recall attending a partisan school where the ideals and philosophy of the YSP were taught. We were only four females from Hadramout. Once the training ended, the Russian instructor asked me to prepare a lecture and deliver it at the provincial level in Aden before a huge audience." -I7</p>	<p>Scholarship programs for women</p>		
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