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The role of women in conflict resolution: the case of Yemen

Elisabete Júlio Domingues

Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

PhD, Giulia Daniele, Integrated Researcher and Guest Assistant Professor
Center for International Studies, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (CEI-IUL)

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History Department

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Dedico este trabalho à minha mãe,

Por me ter incentivado e apoiado sempre nos momentos certos.

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RESUMO

Os Media internacionais, as organizações não governamentais, a Organização das Nações Unidas, entre outros atores, afirmam que o Iémen está a viver a pior crise humanitária de sempre. A Amnistia Internacional refere que o conflito é quase sempre seguido de sofrimento e miséria. O Iémen é um dos países mais afetados pelo conflito no mundo todo.

Em geral,os conflitos afetam toda a população, de diferentes formas, no entanto afetam de forma desproporcional mulheres e crianças, que constituem a parte mais vulnerável da população.

Embora existam estudos que demonstram que a paz é mais sustentável quando as mulheres participam nos processos de construção da paz, a verdade é que as mesmas não têm assumido um papel ativo neste âmbito e têm sido constantemente relegadas para segundo plano.

Este estudo pretende abordar o papel assumido pelas mulheres na resolução de conflitos e tentar descobrir se o seu envolvimento é um fator chave para a resolução do conflito internacional no Iémen.

Palavras-chaves: Resolução de conflitos; Iémen; Mulheres; Participação política.

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ABSTRACT

International media, non-governmental organizations and, the United Nations, among other actors, claim that Yemen is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis ever. Amnesty International says that conflict is almost always followed by suffering and misery. Yemen is one of the countries most affected by conflict worldwide.

In general, conflicts affect the entire population in different ways, however, they disproportionately affect women and children, who constitute the most vulnerable part of the population.

Although there are studies that demonstrate that peace is more sustainable when women participate in peace-building processes, the truth is that they have not taken an active role in this area and have been constantly relegated to the background.

This study aims to address the role played by women in conflict resolution to find out whether their involvement is a key factor in resolving the international conflict in Yemen.

Keywords: Conflict resolution; Yemen; Women; Political participation.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

MENA - Middle East and North Africa

AQAP - al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

NDC - National Dialogue Conference

NGO - Nongovernmental Organizations

OSESGY – Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen

STC - Southern Transitional Council

TAG - Yemeni women's Technical Advisory Group

UAE - United Arab Emirates

UN – United Nations

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNSCR – United nations security council resolution

US - United States of America

USIP - United States Institute for Peace

WHO – World Health Organization

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INTRODUCTION

C'est alors qu'on trouve le pays le plus agréable de la terre. L'air y est parfumé, dans un été continuel, de l'odeur des plantes aromatiques que la nature y fait croître sans culture. Mille ruisseaux descendente des montagens, et entretiennent une fraîcheur perpétuelle, qui tempere l'ardeus du soleil sous des ombrages toujours verts. C'est sur-tout dans ces pays que le mot de jardin, paradis, signifiait la faveur celeste. Les jardins de Saana, vers Aden, furent plus fameux chez les Arabes que ne le furent depuis ceux d'Alcinous chez les Grees; et cet Aden, ou Éden, étais nommé le lieu des délices. On parle encore d'un ancien Shedad, dont les jardins n'étaient pas moins renommés. La félicité, dans ces climats brûlants, était l'ombrage (Voltaire, 1817, p. 57).

We live, these days, in a complex world, where people, nations, and economies (basically everything) are interconnected as it has never happened before in our History. These are days of short distances, and easy access to information, motivated by the spread of media technologies through the world. This is a process that has transformed the world into a *global village,* as McLuhan has already predicted in the sixties. The globalization process has allowed, for instance, that an event happening in a country creates consequences, almost automatically, in other countries, linked by cultural, economic, or political ties (Castells, 2003).

Related to the idea that we live in a global village, connected by invisible ties, it can be said that those rules can be applied to several sectors of society, like information dynamics, economy, culture, politics, and guaranteed also to armed conflicts that have taken place in the world. Branco, Sousa, and Oliveira (2017) state that "conflicts of the 20th/21st centuries have shown a very special ability to threaten regional and global stability and peace" (p. 28)[1]. Therefore, the interconnection between countries has made armed conflict's consequences to increase their impacts in size and extent. For instance, a conflict in a country like Yemen can spread its effects at a regional level, in the neighbourhood countries in the Middle East, but its effects can also achieve other regions in the world, namely Europe or the United States of America (US).

The nature of the conflict itself has changed over time. Currently, countries do not use conventional approaches to make war, rather they use more unconventional methods, also called hybrid threats, to cause an impact on their opponents, employing non-state actors and weapons like cyber tools and disinformation (Fernandes, 2014). According to Bachmann and

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[1]Free translation from the original version: "Os conflitos dos séculos XX/XXI revelaram ter uma capacidade muito especial para ameaçar a estabilidade e a paz à escala regional e global".

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Gunneriusson (2015), hybrid threats are "multimodal, low-intensity, kinetic as well as nonkinetic threats to international peace and security include cyber war, asymmetric conflict scenarios, global terrorism, piracy, transnational organised crime, demographic challenges, resources security, retrenchment from globalisation and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction" (p. 78). On one hand, the conventional conflicts reduced their numbers, but, on the other hand, further phenomena like religious and political extremism and terrorism have made the number of victims to grow. According to the Global Peace Index 2020, "terrorism and internal conflict have been the biggest contributors to the global deterioration in peacefulness" (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020, p. 4).

Although the spread of consequences, conflicts happen today more frequently between the so-called *weak states.* Countries called *weak states* are characterized by poor structures, that have not the capacity to guarantee the basic functions of a state, like control their territory, keep their people safe, guarantee justice, health, and education. According to the Positive Peace Academy (2020), 84% of the main political crises occur in countries with a low level of peace. In other words, countries with a low level of development and positive peace[2] are more likely of becoming a country in conflict. According to International Amnesty,[3] the occurrence of conflict is almost always followed by suffering and misery.

Conflicts cause death, massive human rights violations, like torture, disappearances, and arbitrary or illegal detentions. Armed conflicts affect all the parts involved; however, they affect disproportionately women and children. Besides, as all the population - women, men, and children – have been involved, it would be necessary that also women could take part in peace negotiations and conflict resolution. However, the literature points out that historical records have shown that women have been ignored in the main formal or political mechanisms of armed conflict resolution (McGuinness, 2006). This has been disregarded for a long time, but recently the international community has started to pay attention to gender issues, especially, regarding conflict and conflict resolution.

In 2018, the Global Peace Index underlined that the world was less safe than at any moment since 2008, when the Institute for Economics and Peace has started doing such reports. Despite the light improvement verified by the Global Peace Index 2019, the statistics are not so encouraging in 2020, with the average level of global peacefulness deteriorating again (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018, 2019 and 2020).

Conflicts have originated, mostly, from issues concerning identity, ethnicity, religion, or competition to control resources. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2019), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remained the world's least peaceful region,

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[2]Positive peace is defined as a type of peace that lasts in time, with built bases on sustainability, economic development, strong institutions, and behaviour that promote peace. Positive peace is different from negative peace, which means just the absence of war (Positive Peace Academy, 2020).
[3] Retrieved from https://www.amnistia.pt/tematica/conflito-armado/ (accessed on February 12, 2020).

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and the growing conflict in the region has been the key driver to the global deterioration in peacefulness. That trend is verified again in 2020, with countries like Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, that are among the ten least peaceful countries in the world. Although the MENA region knew a highly important key moment that marked its history in 2011, known as the Arab Spring, major conflicts are still going on in the Middle East at the moment (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020).

Yemen is an example of an internal conflict that has become an international issue, it has also been called proxy war because it is an internal conflict, where the different parties are supported by external actors and countries (Byman, 2018). According to Mumford (2013), a proxy war represents "an indirect implication in a conflict by third parts that wish to influence the strategic outcome".

Yemen remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with 80% of the population in need of protection and assistance, while the humanitarian aid has been continually rejected. In 2017, Jamie McGoldrick, the United Nations (UN) representative for Yemen, defined the Yemen war as an "absurd war", arguing that "the conflict only results in suffering and destruction to the country and people" (UN, December 28, 2017).

The negotiations discussions for achieving peace in Yemen have taken a long time. The balance of the negotiation efforts is still insufficient to bring some stability and improvement to the country. It is already known that war affects all parts of society, but their groups are affected in different ways, and in particular, women can get different roles in conflict resolutions and peace negotiations.

The present dissertation is elaborated as a work to get a Master's approval in International Studies Master, with a specialization in Middle East matters. The reason for choosing this subject of study is related to the importance of gender equality in conflict resolution and especially, in the case of Yemen, where women are relegated to the background. Even though there are studies that have showed that when women are listened to in peace processes and talk negotiations, peace and development are more lasting and the construction of positive peace is more easily implemented (Crespo-Sancho, 2018; McGuinness, 2006; Sandole-Staroste, 2009).

In 2000, the UN approved Resolution 1325, which has been one of the prime steps toward gender equality, concerning conflicts. Since then, many improvements have been achieved, but the reality is not the desirable one yet, because the participation of women in conflict resolution is still deeply low and insufficient, in many parts of the world. Therefore, it is important to keep studying this phenomenon to understand the reasons why this is happening and try to understand if the role of women in these contexts is so crucial in the Yemen conflict how it seems to be in other places in the world.

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In recent years, this question has occupied the core of the international political agenda. In this study, I want to focus on the relevance of gender at the table of conflict resolution, regarding the peculiarity of the Yemeni conflict. Therefore, the main research question is: "has Yemeni women's participation in formal and informal peace processes had a positive impact on conflict resolution in Yemen?". This study has the purpose of understanding how Yemeni women are involved in the peacekeeping process, namely in formal and informal processes. In detail, I searched for some examples of initiatives regarding women's participation and tried to understand if Yemeni women's involvement in peacekeeping processes has encouraged the path to sustainable peace.

For achieving such a goal, I used a methodology focusing on the existing scientific literature and the analysis of open sources, such as newspaper articles and interviews. I also analysed international institutions along with nongovernmental organizations (NGO) reports and up-to-date information available on some websites, such as the International Crisis Group[4], UN[5], and UN Women[6]. Regarding the interviews, I have talked with the following people: a Portuguese police officer that was in a UN mission, in Hodeida, Carla Costa[7]; José Manuel Rosendo[8], a Portuguese journalist, that was working in Yemen[9]; Milena Raposo[10], a Portuguese architect, who studied and lived in Yemen; Osamah E. Al-Fakih[11] who is the Director of Media, communications, and advocacy at the Yemeni NGO Mwatana for Human Rights; Hana Showafi[12] who is working at the Embassy of Netherlands in Yemen; Cate Buchanan, the senior gender advisor in OSESGY Office[13]. I also tried to contact other international organizations, but unfortunately, I did not receive any answer.

The present dissertation is structured into three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the recent state of the art, regarding the role of women in conflict resolutions. One of the topics about which I am going to focus on is the UN Resolution 1325; besides, I am going to underline the presence of women in conflict resolution processes, formal and informal. Later on, I am going to focus on women's role in the Arab Spring and to indicate the achievements carry out in that period.

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[4] Information retrieved from https://www.crisisgroup.org/

[5] Information retrieved from https://www.un.org/en

[6] Information retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/en

[7] In person interview conducted according with the informed consent and script in Annexes 1 and 2.

[8] In person interview conducted according with the informed consent and script in Annexes 1 and 2.

[9] As a result, José Rosendo published a report on July 31, 2019, named "Yemen: o lado Houthi da Guerra". This report is available in https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/grande-reportagem-antena-1-iemen-o-lado-houthi-da-guerra_a1163821 (accessed on May 10, 2020)

[10] In person interview conducted according with the informed consent and script in Annexes 1 and 2.

[11] Videocall interview conducted through WhatsApp, according with the informed consent and script in Annexes 1 and 2.

[12] Videocall interview conducted through WhatsApp, according with the informed consent and script in Annexes 1 and 2.

[13] Videocall interview conducted through WhatsApp, according with the informed consent and script in Annexes 1 and 2.

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In the second chapter, I am going to talk about the Yemen conflict. First, I am going to talk about the geostrategic interests around Yemen, then I am going to explain the main actors involved in the conflict, internal parties and the countries that are supporting the conflict. At that point, I am going to focus on the main achievements made regarding the peace negotiations until now, approaching the Stockholm agreement, and the Jeddah agreement. For last, I am going to explain the future expectations for the conflict resolution.

In the third and last chapter, I am going to discuss the role of women in Yemen conflict resolution and peace talks, with an approach in their role in the Arab Spring. It is going to be given some description of the intervention of Yemeni women in peace negotiations, regarding formal processes and I am going to mention some examples of women that challenged the social norms and tried to impact the peace negotiations, making use of informal processes.

<div align="center">**The role of women in conflict resolution: the case of Yemen**</div>

1. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In this chapter, I address the topic of conflict resolution in International Relations, using the UN standards approach. Then, I focus on women's role in conflict resolutions, giving special attention to the efforts done by the UN to empower women in peace negotiations, as well as the role of women as informal players and the achievements achieved at the time of the Arab Spring.

The conflict has always been present in our lives, considering our human condition. Some authors argue that "conflict is an unavoidable component of human activity" (Brahnam, S., Margavio, T., Hignite, M., Barrier, T. & Chin, J., 2005, p. 204). Humans have faced daily conflicts, at home, at work, and even when talking with friends about insignificant things, but also with some major questions like ethnic groups, religious or political ones. According to the Council of Europe (2012), there is a recent and general trend to consider conflict as a normal event: "an everyday social phenomenon, and a simple and natural characteristic of human social systems" (p. 54). The major part of the conflicts does not result in violence, because in the major part of situations people conciliate their differences, without using violence, in a constructive way (Positive Peace Academy, 2020).

The word "conflict" has its origin in the Latin word *conflictus,* which means collision or clash (Council of Europe, 2012). Still, the definition has changed all over time and the academics and fieldwork people keep trying to develop definitions according to their own reality. In 1956, Closer defined conflict as "a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources". In 1969, Galtung said that conflict can be defined as a "dynamic process in which structure, attitudes, and behaviors are constantly changing and influencing one another". In 1986, Pruitt and Rubin defended that conflict as "perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously". In 1991, Conrad argued that "are communicative interactions amongst people who are interdependent and who perceive that their interests are incompatible, inconsistent or in tension". In 1994, Glasl argued that conflict can be defined as "an interaction between actors (individuals, groups, organizations, etc.) where at least one actor senses incompatibilities between their thinking, imagination, perception, and/or feeling, and those of the others" (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 55).

When people talk about conflict, it can be said that there are differences between the conflict itself and its consequences, which can be different according to the strategies or tools utilized for dealing with conflicts have. War is one of them, which means that "war is not the conflict, but rather the negative result of how the conflict was dealt with" (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 54).

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There is no common understanding about conflict categories, they can be categorized in numerous ways, according to the context, motivations, consequences, duration, among others. Branco et al. (2017) argue that "internationalized intra-state and intra-state conflicts are those that occur more frequently since the end of World War II" (p. 30). During the Cold War, in the 1960s, there was a tendency for an increase of intra-state conflicts. After the end of the Cold War, from 1991 until 2010, there was a descending trend in the number of active conflicts. In 2010, it appeared a growth trend, that resulted in 2015 with 29 intrastate conflicts and 20 internationalized intrastate conflicts. These conflicts have essentially taken place in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Branco et al., 2017).

The conflict resolution field of studies emerged after the Second World War, with a normative concern for changing the state of war to negative peace (absence of violence) and negative peace to positive peace (absence of violent conflict and social injustice). Dispute resolution through conflict analysis and problem-solving aims to transition from war to negative peace, while conflict transformation aims to eliminate the root causes of the conflict and aims the transition to positive peace and development of non-violent conflict prevention mechanisms (Branco et al, 2017, p. 51). Conflict resolution "is more than the absence of war. The parties are agreeing to respect each other and prepare for living together with one another" (Wallensteen, 2002, p. 10).

The word peace has come from the Latin word *pax*, namely *absentia belli*, which means the absence of war. That meaning reflects the traditional definition of peace – what it is called negative peace. In this definition, peace is understanding merely as the opposite of war. On the other hand, positive peace is not just a result, but, mainly, all the processes for achieving peace. According to the Council of Europe (2012), "positive peace proposes that involving all parties in a negotiated solution will surely make it more sustainable. This understanding of peace also stresses the fact that even during periods without war, people are still being killed and injured, physically, and mentally. Inequality in social structures limits what individuals can achieve in their lives. Institutional violence, racism, exploitation, and other barriers to equal opportunities limit peace" (p.66).

Positive peace, as a concept, was introduced, for the first time, by the Norwegian Johan Galtung, who has distinguished two types of peace. The first was *negative peace*, that is the absence of violence and the absence of fear of violence and, the second one was *positive peace*, that is defined as a more lasting peace, with bases built on sustainability, economic development, strong institutions, and behaviour that promote peace. Positive peace is characterized by eight pillars: well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, free flow of information, good relations with neighbours' communities or nations, high levels of human capital, acceptance of the rights of others, low levels of corruption, and sound business environment (Positive Peace Academy, 2020).

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Armed conflicts can be ordered in three stages, which can become a vicious circle if not completely solved: pre-conflict, during-conflict, and post-conflict. According to the Council of Europe (2012), most of the conflict interventions leading by a third party took place during the conflict and not in pre-conflict or post-conflict stages, although experience has shown that it has more positive outcomes.

The first one occurs before the conflict itself, it is characterized by its potential. This stage is based on negative peace, where there is no war, but structural and cultural violence are present. In that stage, it may occur episodes of escalation and de-escalation of violence (Council of Europe, 2012).

The second phase, called during the conflict, is considered the peak of the conflict, where violence is already intense, and people are being killed. Usually, the involvement of foreign actors happens in this stage, to end the conflict. The intervention of these actors may have different forms, like mediation, boycotts, or military strikes (Council of Europe, 2012).

The third phase, also known as the post-conflict stage, is the moment when violence comes to an end, which means parts involved in the conflict achieve an agreement, and tension and violence decreased. However, the work has not finished here, as it is known positive peace is a lifelong process, and initiatives to promote justice, social conditions, equality, have to take place, otherwise, the efforts done to restart the peace are going to be in vain (Council of Europe, 2012).

Internationalized intra-state and intra-state conflicts have been the centre of international intervention, concerning its management or resolution. Taking the United Nations approach as a reference, there are five main types of conflict intervention: 1) *conflict prevention*, with structural and diplomatic measures, to avoid the growth of the conflict; 2) *peacemaking*, that uses diplomacy to bring the two antagonists to the negotiation table; 3) *peacekeeping*, to assure the cease-fire or a peace agreement, assisting transitions, consists in missions with military and police forces with the propose of assuring the application of some accords; 4) *peace enforcement*, that includes the military or police coercive power; 5) *peacebuilding*, that has the propose of preventing another conflict to restart (Coning, Detzel, & Hojem, 2008).

There are many ways of conflict resolution, and mediation is one of them. According to Alexander, "mediation is a facilitative form of conflict resolution, which focuses on the parties commercial, financial, as well as social and personal interests, intending to reach a mutually acceptable agreement while promoting the principles of confidentiality and party autonomy in decision-making" (Alexander, 2006, cit in Klein, 2012, p. 279). Another definition is given by Branco *et al*. (2017), according to whom mediation is "a conflict management process where the parties seek support or accept the offer of help from an individual, group, state or organization to resolve their conflict or resolve their differences, without resorting to physical

force or invoke the authority of the law" (Bercovitch & Pospieszna, 2011, cit in Branco et al., 2017).

The peacekeeping missions are operations with several dimensions, useful for "facilitate the political process, protect civilians, assist in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants; support the organization of elections, protect and promote human rights and assist in restoring the rule of law"[14]. In fact, peacekeeping operations represent a relatively new phenomenon. Fox (2001) declares that "no doubt military leaders and warriors from past centuries would be aghast at the idea of a large and well-armed army entering another country not with the objective to invade and conquer, but to prevent further bloodshed between two parties" (p. 9).

UN is one of the main actors developing knowledge regarding conflict resolution. According to them, the concepts of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and peace enforcement are concepts close to each other, and sometimes they happen at the same time and a single mission can have different dimensions and proposes (Coning et al, 2008). According to Fritz (2020) "peacebuilding can occur before, during and after conflict. It includes approaches such as prevention; promotion of stability and justice; capacity building; humanitarian assistance; establishment of peace zones; reconciliation; peacekeeping; and informal as well as official peacemaking" (p. 69).

1.1. WOMEN'S ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The discussion about the role of women in conflict resolution is quite recent. The big step into that discussion is marked by the adoption of Resolution 1325 UNSCR in 2000, by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). With this formal document further attention has been given to women's participation in conflict processes.

Resolution 1325 UNSCR has represented a historic moment for the increase of the importance given to women's participation in peacebuilding. This has been the UN first formal document that clarifies the disproportional consequences felt by women in war zones when compared with the rest of the population. Simultaneously, it focuses on low participation in decision making regarding conflict prevention and resolutions (Shepherd, 2015). In 2000, the UN Security Council stated that "peace was inextricably linked with equality between women and men" (Olsson & Tryggestad, 2001, p. 1). The resolution focuses on some aspects that were earlier defended in other discussion forums, like the

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[14] UN terminology. Retrieved from https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology (Assessed in May 24, 2020).

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importance of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, and the post-conflict reconstruction of peace and security[15].

The Resolution 1325 UNSCR has encouraged women's participation in all aspects of peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. This imperative has been reiterated in subsequent resolutions, including 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010), and in several reports of the Secretary-General on mediation and on women, peace and security.

Some of the main episodes that have occurred before and have contributed to this Resolution were the Convention on the Status of Women[16] in 1946 when were defined universal standards concerning gender equality, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted later in 1979 (Porter, 2007, p. 12). In 1953, it was signed the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, that established women's political rights, namely the political rights that member states should guarantee to women, like voting in parity with men or having the possibility of being elected to political positions[17]. In 1962, another important event took place: The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages[18] came to reinforce the rights of women concerning marriage. In 1982, it was signed the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and Cooperation.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women, conducted in Beijing in 1995, was the largest UN conference ever organised, with a participation of 30 000 women around the world. The Beijing Declaration[19] was enormously significant in raising global awareness of gender inequalities. It was defined twelve areas of concerning that were identified to women's progress: "poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economic considerations, power, and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, the media, environment and the girl-child" (Porter, 2007, p. 12).

Despite all these efforts and progress have made, a report from UNDP (2020) still focuses on the differences existing among countries, stating that "despite remarkable progress in some areas, no country in the world — rich or poor — has achieved gender

[15]Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/ (accessed on May 30, 2020).
[16]The Commission on the Status of Women is an intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. For more information, access https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw
[17]For more information about the Convention on the Political Rights of Women access https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20AM/Ch_XVI_1p.pdf
[18]This document is available in https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1964/12/19641223%2002-15%20AM/Ch_XVI_3p.pdf (accessed on June 2, 2020).
[19]For more information consult the Beijing Declaration access https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf?la=en&vs=800

equality" (p.1). Many academics defend that "sustainable peace, security, and development cannot be achieved if only one gender is included in decisionmaking processes" (Sandole-Staroste, 2009, p. 226).

Here, it is important to focus also on the concept of gender mainstreaming, that has its origins in UN's conferences in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985), "where women developed recommendations, for primarily male-dominated governments, on how to empower women and to improve their situation globally" (p. 226). These recommendations were ignored, and a new strategy was developed in 1995 with the UN Beijing conference, already mentioned.

Sandole-Staroste (2009) argues that "a gender perspective allows both women's and men's voices to be heard, which, in turn, makes it possible to imagine and to build a better future for all humans (…) gender mainstreaming emphasizes gender, not women" (p. 226). In the same direction, Kathleen Kuehnast, in the Online Course Gender Inclusively in Peacebuilding, developed by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP)[20] sustains that "gender is not another name for women. Men are also gendered beings and we know that we will not fully address the pervasive problems of gender-based violence until we approach it as a dynamic whole of a society". These authors want to underline the importance of gender balance for the whole society, and not just for women. Gender issues are a society's problem and not a women's question.

In 2004, Swanee Hunt wrote in her book *This Was Not Our War*, that "it is not a lack of interest or ability on the part of women that excludes them from war and peacemaking, but the deliberate efforts by men who hold leadership (and less influential) positions. The reasons why women are excluded from decision-making processes are complex, but research indicates that women who occupy leadership roles are perceived as threatening because their mere presence disrupts male solidarity, thereby undermining the privileges that come with male power" (Sandole-Staroste, 2009, p. 227).

Sandole-Staroste (2009) also underlines that in conflicts women do not fit the gendered stereotype, that means they are not only victims of male, but they participate actively in communities. Although, when the conflicts finish, academics, politicians, and others tend not to notice women's presence: "they fail to notice women's less privileged positions, the importance of the issues women want addressed, and the contributions they make, and, if they notice, they often dismiss women's demands" (Sandole-Staroste, 2009, p. 227).

Reilly (2009) argues that women are in the centre of conflicts right now and in a new way, as combatants, as targets of physical and sexual violence, as part of society and

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[20]The Online Course Gender Inclusively in Peacebuilding, developed by the United States Institute for Peace is available in https://www.usipglobalcampus.org/training/micro/gender/1-1/

community and they are expected to sustain everyday life, even under catastrophic conditions.

According to McGuinness (2006), "women's participation in and influence over the terms of peace is therefore both a precondition for addressing a range of post-conflict issues and to long-term prevention of armed conflict and of the harms that war inflicts disproportionately on women" (p.66). Caprioli's study about internal conflicts between 1960 and 2001 presented a positive correlation between gender inequality within a state and the likelihood that the state is going to experience intrastate warfare. This study demonstrates that societies with higher levels of gender equality are less likely to experience interstate or civil war (McGuinness, 2006). Similarly, Positive Peace Academy (2020) mentions that some studies confirm that countries where there is gender equality, or where the rights of women are more protected and considered, are countries where positive peace is more probable to happen, and where the probability to begin a conflict or a war is deeply low.

It has been defended a new concept of *gender neutrality* in conflict resolutions (McGuinness, 2006). According to this concept, when assuming some roles in the field usually attributed to men, women must think and act like men, however, this approach has not been accepted by all. According to Shepherd (2015), men and women have different conflict management styles. Studies have shown that women tend to use more frequently collaborative, compromising, or avoiding styles of managing the conflict, while men are more susceptible to using competing or avoiding styles in managing the conflict. Shepherd (2015) also states that the collaborative style is better than a competitive one in international conflicts and can be of great advantage for conflict resolution. In the same sense, McGuinness (2006) states that "armed conflict is not a gender neutral event" (p. 67). That means that men, women, and other gender have experienced conflicts in different ways and suffer the consequences in diverse forms; they also have different approaches to finding solutions for dealing with conflict.

1.2. WOMEN AS INFORMAL PLAYERS

Usually, theories of armed conflict resolution present two approaches for typologies of peace processes. On one hand, there are the formal processes, constituted by the negotiations between states or political groups. On the other hand, there are informal processes, that are constituted by actions of negotiation performed by nongovernmental organizations, informal groups, or private citizens (MacGuinness, 2006).

According to Shepherd (2015), women have mainly taken part in the informal peace process since the beginning of the existence of war: "women have been advocates outside the formal structure to prevent war before it begins and heal wounds after the war has

ended" (p. 58). According to Porter (2007) "while women are active peacebuilders, their contribution often is informal, behind-the-scenes, unpaid, collaborative and unrecognized as actual peacebuilding, and thus they consistently are excluded from formal peace negotiation processes and public, political decision-making" (p.5). Although the importance of formal processes, the truth is that women are almost absent from them, in contrast, they have a huge impact in informal processes, they have made their influence in war and peacebuilding through informal methods.

When people talk about conflict resolution, it is important to notice that History has shown that "controlling parties have ignored or excluded women from the negotiation table, and women often encounter overt discrimination when attempting to influence armed conflict resolution" (MacGuinness, 2006, p. 65). Most of the literature that has been written about women's role in peace processes have focused on the way women have been excluded from political and peace processes or how women have been victimized by the consequences of war (Adjei, 2019).

Women and men feel the war effects in different ways and until now the roles that men and women have been adopting are different. According to Shepherd (2015), women and children are often victims of violent situations, like rape, sexual slavery, and other sexual violence. Sexual offenses towards women and children are used as "weapons of war in international conflicts" (p.54). Klein (2012) also points some examples like "rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence are used as weapons of war in international conflicts" (p. 281).

According to Klein (2012), "given the second-class status of women in most societies, their skills and contributions are often under-valued and under-utilized" (p.278). This is the reality of many countries in the MENA region, where women have a low status in society. Yemen is one of those countries, according to José Rosendo and Cate Buchanan interviews.

Alison (2006, cit. in Porter, 2007) has revealed a different side of women because not all women are victims in conflict, she states that "all women are not natural peacemakers; some women are aggressive combatants". Related to this, Bouta (2005, cit in Porter, 2007) affirms that between 1995 and 2005 women were part of fighting forces in 55 countries and were involved in 38 armed conflicts across the world. All of these were internal conflicts in countries like Angola, Columbia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uganda (Bouta, 2005, cit in Porter, 2007).

Despite that, the fact that "women universally are the prime nurturers in relationships, families and communities, they play crucial roles in peacebuilding, often in very informal, unofficial ways" (Porter, 2007, p. 3). According to Mindry (2001), the importance of women's role is based on the fact that, as she states, "after the war situations it's women who start to put the fabric of life together" (cit in Porter, 2007, p. 4). In fact, such situations can represent

the last chance for them, because they do not have another choice. This happens because several men have died in the combat field, and women are left alone, with their children and have no other choice than to find a way to survive. Porter (2007) argues that "during war, women often are victims of rape and the loss of loved ones and grief, poverty and intense trauma sets in. Yet, an overemphasis on victimhood obscures women's agency and power to overcome massive obstacles" (Porter, 2007, p. 4).

According to Snyder (2009), there are two main reasons for women to be involved in peacebuilding. In the first place, women need to change the circumstances that affected them and that was created by conflict. On the other hand, "they recognize that peace agreements offer an opportunity to transform society generally and gender relations specifically. Transformation of society during conflict may provide post-conflict opportunities for transformation of gender relations" (p. 48).

Snyder (2009) also underlines "the importance of women, [that] consciously identifying transformative experiences during armed conflict and building networks of female support around those experiences because in post-conflict settings women tend to experience a backlash as men rebuild male power bases" (p. 48). In that sense, it is important not to just have women in informal groups, but also in formal processes, defining the lines where it is going to be based on their future society. Having women in formal processes of peacebuilding is important for two reasons. Firstly, to achieve justice, and secondly, peace would be sustainable and lasting (MacGuinness, 2006).

1.3. WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE ARAB SPRINGS

The Arab Springs have represented a set of protests and uprisings against governments of some countries that spread across the MENA region at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, as a reaction to oppressive regimes and the absence of quality of living. The protests began in Tunisia and the effects spread strongly to other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain, where the regimes have taken down or major uprisings along with social violence have taken place.

Women have shown their importance and have affirmed their presence during the protests, where they have been the first ones to take the streets. According to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2017), "women were visibly present in the uprisings that swept across the Arab States from 2011, claiming for attention in Media and public opinion, although their influence in the official channels, like diplomatic circle or Governments, were very much invisible and without any relevant influence" (p.3). According to the same source, "the 'Arab Spring' uprisings and their call for social, economic, and political freedom were electrifying for women" (p. 6). This behavior reflects how women

assume their informal role in society, despite being excluded from formal discussions and positions, they are active participants in their countries. According to the same report "*en masse*, they refuted their exclusion at every level of politics and from organizing as civil society" (p. 7).

Revolutionary processes have always opened up social and political spaces for women. History is full of noble examples around the world. By taking into account the Middle East, there is an example of the Egyptian anti-colonial and independence movement at the turn of the XX century that gave rise to the Egyptian women's movement and, later on, the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation (Al-Ali, 2012, p. 27). It is important not to forget that "it has been easier for women to participate in politics in Egypt, where the protest movement had initially taken an explicitly nonviolent character (…) and where there exists a long history of largescale women's political participation. Indeed, in Egypt and also in Iran (…) women activists have been spearheading civic rights, democracy and human rights movements in the context of their women's rights struggles" (Al-Ali, 2012, p. 27).

The involvement of women in the actions of contestation was not a new phenomenon. Women have been involved in other fights in history, defending their rights and the interests of their communities. For instance, in the 1950s, took place the Algerian resistance against the French, where "women fought and died beside men in the underground, certain that their future equality was at stake, but with independence won, their "revolutionary brothers" soon sent them back to the kitchen" (Hitman, 2018, p. 2). Despite the involvement of women, many times, when it is the moment for planning post-conflict, they are not listened to, and their interests are put apart again.

Yet, history also teaches us that during political transitions, women are regularly marginalized and tend to lose many of the gains they might have acquired, or have been promised, at the height of a revolutionary struggle. Historical evidence suggests that unless women explicitly insist on their gender-specific needs, rights, and problems, their demands are going to be excluded, ignored, and swept under the carpet (Al-Ali, 2012, p. 27). Women's public participation has been obstructed and violated by many different tools: "harassment and brutalization by the police, the *mukhabarat*, or secret police, and the army often has sexual connotations for women. Egyptian female protesters have been strip-searched; pictures have been taken while they were without clothes; they have been accused of prostitution and in some cases forced to undergo virginity testing" (Al-Ali, 2012, p. 27). Also, in Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Saleh stated in April 2011 that anti-government protesters in the capital Sanaa violated Islamic law because women were not allowed to mix with men. He engaged in campaigns on national TV implying that women in pro-change demonstrations have lost (Al-Ali, 2012).

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Khalid (2015) argues that "a broad range of women participated in the protests, including those who had a strong history of activism, those who had not participated in organized political action before, working women and housewives" (p.8). Although in the Arab Springs women's participation has been more visible, the truth is that women have participated and have been active in the public space for decades. According to Al-Ali (2012), they have participated in "trade unions, political opposition parties, and more informal networks and organizations that were all instrumental in the recent political developments. Women have been very much involved in the virtual communities of bloggers and Facebook users" (p. 27).

In the Arab Springs, women have played a leading role, and "rather than simply supporting men, women were on the frontlines of the revolutions across the MENA; in Yemen, the symbolic figurehead of the revolution was a female human rights activist in local media", as underlined by Tawakkol Khalid Karman, journalist, politician, and human rights activist, who won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. In 2011, she became the international public face of the Yemeni uprising and called the "Mother of the Revolution" by some Yemenis (Khalid, 2015, p. 8).

Although women's considerable participation, their ideals have been put apart from the table of negotiations, they were not listening and some analysts observed that "they are routinely ridiculed in the media as being ignorant or incapable of social and political commentary and organizing, or face direct physical violence when they try to participate in public political life" (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2017, p. 7).

As a result, despite all these adversities, even in the most conservative countries, women have pushed boundaries of what is sociable acceptable when joining protests and making their requests (Al-Ali, 2012). For these reasons, the Arab Springs characterised a moment of development and achievement for women, a moment in which they have shown their will to be heard and to be part of the society, in equal circumstances with men.

The role of women in conflict resolution: the case of Yemen

2. YEMEN CONFLICT

The Yemeni conflict is often presented by scholars as a dual conflict between a pro-Hadi side, or the government forces, and a pro-Houthi side, the revolutionary forces. The international community tends to understand the conflict as one between an illegitimate non-state actor against the legitimate government. Besides the international recognition of the Hadi government, the Houthis have been the strongest force in the country until now. Their area of influence is more representative in the north of the country (Clausen, 2018).

The Houthi movement, officially called Ansar Allah, is an Islamic political and armed movement that emerged from Saada in northern Yemen. According to Fraihat (2016), the origins of the Zaidi Shiite Houthi movement have started in the early 1980s. The movement was called Houthis because its founder was native from the Houthi tribe. Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a member of Yemen's Zaidi Shia minority, was killed by Yemeni soldiers in 2004. Since then, the movement has been led by his brother Abdul-Malik al-Houthi (McKernan, November 21, 2018). One of the key ideas of this movement is the rejection of American hegemony (Fraihat, 2016). In the north of the country, mainly, Houthis oversee controlling checkpoints, securing roads, collecting taxes, overseeing local government administration and, administering justice (Clausen, 2018).

Between 2004 and 2010, President Ali Abdulla Saleh, which was in power since 1978, fought six wars against Houthis, and in all of them, he was defeated. In 2014, the Houthi took over the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. Consequently, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) immediately launched their intervention in Yemen in March 2015. According to Horton (2020), "the Saudis and Emiratis bet on a quick victory over the Houthis. Now, more than five years on, it is clear they have lost their bet. The Houthis and those allied with them have provided themselves to be resilient, capable, and strategically and tactically creative". The depreciation of the Houthis has been supported on the idea of the technical superiority of Western, but that depreciation has not brought good results and the war continues to persist. About this, Horton (2020) remembered Coronel John Boyd when he argued, "machines don't fight wars, terrain doesn't fight wars. Humans fight wars. You must get into the minds of humans. That's where the battles are won".

The situation in Yemen is quite similar to other countries in the Middle East region, that deal also with foreign intervention, sometimes declared and others not declared, by Saudi Arabia and Iran. These two countries are competing for regional power, or in other terms, they are fighting against each other in a proxy war. According to Drew (2019), conflict in Yemen is "like many of the internal armed conflicts that have erupted in the Middle East during the twenty-first century, (…) is not a single conflict, but is instead a mosaic of

multifaceted regional, local, and international power struggles which are the legacy of recent and long-past events" (p.3).

This chapter covers the following topics: first, an overview on the geostrategic position of Yemen and in particular of the Yemeni conflict, namely the beginning and the background of the conflict that is going on, as well as the analysis of the main actors and their concerns. Second, this chapter focuses on the process of peace negotiations that has taken place until now, with an especially relevance given to the Stockholm Agreement and Jeddah Agreement.

2.1. THE GEO-STRATEGIC POSITION OF YEMEN

Yemen is a country in the south of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia. Unexpectedly, that piece of land was called by Greeks and Romans "Arabia Felix", that are the Latin words for "happy Arabia" or "fertile Arabia", what is a contradiction with the Yemen condition at this moment, where misery and sadness multiply for their needy population.

The Yemeni state was established in 1990 when North Yemen joined South Yemen and formed United Yemen under the leadership of Ali Abdulah Saleh, who was already ruling North Yemen since 1978, and then for 33 years until the Arab Spring exploded. According to Clausen (2018), "the new state was hailed as the first representative democracy on the Arabian Peninsula as relatively free presidential elections were held every seventh year" (p.4). However, according to the previously mentioned author, "democracy in Yemen was portrayed as a system that had learned the motions of the process, but not the spirit of the process" (p.4). Saleh declared in 2008 that "governing Yemen is difficult (…) it's like dancing on top of snakes"[21].

Yemen can be divided into three geographical regions: the north, south, and eastern. The north, where the Houthi movement assumes themselves as the dominant power, is constituted by the Shiite population. Zaidi Shiism predominates in the northern highlands, alongside a small Ismaili minority. The south, mainly made up of the Sunni population, was a British colony between 1839 to 1967, and after that period it became an Arab communist state until 1990. Finally, eastern Yemen, known as Hadromawt, is occupied by the Hadrami population, traditionally an independent people from ancient tribes (Orkaby, 2017).

Although all these divisions have taken place in the country, the truth is that during history sectarianism has been minimal and it can be seen in the routine intermarriage between Sunnis and Zaidis. Just recently, people have started paying attention to the religious differences, especially because of the rise of political Islam, namely the Muslim

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[21] Information retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/apr/24/yemen-victoria-clark-review (accessed on February 22, 2020).

Brotherhood in the region. Another change that has contributed to religious sectarianism has been the spread of Sunni ideology (Salafism) in traditionally Zaidi areas, which has been considered a contributing factor for the emergence of the Houthi movement (Baron, 2019).

According to the International Monetary Fund (2016) "Yemen is a strategically important country in the Arabian Peninsula, overlooking the Mandab Strait, and has great economic potential with its large labour force, long shoreline, and agricultural and hydrocarbon resources". The Bab el-Mandeb Strait ("Gate of Tears" in Arabic) has historically had a strategic meaning, as it forms a vital strategic link on the maritime trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

Yemen is linked to the major transition corridors of oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf to Europe and the United States of America (US) through the Suez Canal and the SUMED oil pipeline in Egypt. This strategic importance, and mostly the location, can explain the involvement of regional countries and western countries in this conflict, like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US.

Although all the economic and strategic potential of Yemen, the country is one of the poorest in the world, with high levels of poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment. According to the International Crisis Group (March 27, 2020) "when Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen's civil war in March 2015, the country was already the poorest in the Arab world. Five years later, it has become one of the most poverty-stricken places on the planet".

The beginning of the conflict is not well defined, and it is exceptionally discussed among academics, diplomats, journalists, and analysts. This happens because conflicts in Yemen are always mixed with different tensions, groups, tribes, and causes, which makes it difficult to identify the beginning and the end of any conflict. Although a common assumption is that the war began on March 26, 2015, with the Operation Decisive Storm that marked Saudi Arabia, UAE, and the coalition partners' intervention in the conflict, at that time the conflict was already ongoing. According to Gunaratne and Johnsen (2018), the conflict started on July 9, 2014, the date that Houthis consolidated their control over the governorate of Amran, in the west of country, defeated the Yemeni Military's 310th Brigade.

2.2. BACKGROUND AND MAIN ACTORS

In 2011, when the Arab Springs revolts in Egypt and Tunisia took place, many Arab countries felt the wind of change and started making protests in the streets. Yemen was not an exception, and on the 1st of January the protests had already arrived in the country, but the major day of protests was on January 27th, which marked the first day of the so-called Yemeni Arab Spring.

With this turn, the Houthis had a chance to achieve their purposes and by the end of 2011, they forced President Saleh to step down and to be replaced by his vice president, Hadi. With that outcome, the government and opposition groups started a national dialogue that culminated in a plan, in 2014, supported by Hadi, with the aim of writing a new constitution and dividing the country into six provinces. However, the Houthis were not part of this agreement and they rejected the deal. It is important to focus on Blumi's opinion, when he says that "the idea of devolving Yemen into six disproportionate regions with enormous autonomy was a blatant effort to benefit foreign interests and subdue the rebellious populations through poverty and administrative obscurity" (Bachman, 2019, p. 3).

With an alliance made with Saleh, in September 2014, the Houthis took Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. In 2015, the parliament was dissolved by them, that forced Hadi to resign and escape to Aden, in the south of the country. With that overcome, a revolutionary committee was installed, with the main goal of substitute the Yemeni government (Orkaby, 2017; Bachman, 2019). On the 6th of November 2014, the UN announced sanctions on the former President Saleh, placing a travel ban on him after it became apparent that he supported the Houthis in derailing the transitional process.

However, the Houthis continued their advance towards Aden, which conducted Hadi to request military assistance from Saudi Arabia, where he also required refuge.

2.2.1. SAUDI LED COALITION'S INTERVENTION

Many observers consider that Saudi led intervention in the conflict marks the moment of the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, but it just marks the moment the conflict became an international conflict. In March 2015, the Coalition, constituted by intervened with the support of UN Secretary-Generals Special Envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, advancing with *Operation Decisive Storm*. According to Orkaby (2017), "the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen has considerably intensified the complex conflict ravaging the country" (p.5).

The Saudi-led Coalition was constituted by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, and Qatar, in August 2016, according to Human Rights Watch (2018).

Saudi Arabia argued that the intervention was a response to the threat of Iranian expansionism, which has used Houthis as an Iranian proxy. According to Byman (2018), "a proxy war occurs when a powerful political actor has a prominent role supporting and managing a war in another country but only performing a small percentage of the war itself. (…) the most powerful forces finance different armed groups by means of money, weapons, intelligence, and military equipment to perform the war. The balance between the *proxies* and the *powers* gradually changes depending on the development and needs of the conflict".

However, Iran seems to have a limited influence on the Houthis, at least until the beginning of the Coalition intervention, the moment when the relationship strengthened (Clausen, 2018). Fraihat (2016) argues that "no one can deny the impact of the regional Saudi-Iranian "coldwar". (…) Saudi Arabia prioritized what is seen as its own security over what could become a successful transition in Yemen. Vicious competition between the two countries will continue to inflict damage to Yemen's transition" (p. 53).

The Saudi-led intervention has begun with a series of attacks against Houthi's military targets. Nevertheless, the conflict quickly turned into an act of destruction of Yemen's economic and civil infrastructures. The Yemen Data Project shows that between 26 March 2015 to 25 March 2018, 19,652 Coalition air attacks took place in Yemen. The attacks on non-military targets affected civilian targets, like residential areas, vehicles/buses, marketplaces, mosques, airports, ports, bridges and roads, farms, private businesses, oil, gas, water and electricity facilities, food facilities, educational facilities, and medical facilities (Bachman, 2019). According to Bachman (2009), "the blockade is essentially using the threat of starvation as a bargaining tool and an instrument of war".

Besides, the Saudi Coalition, helped by the US, blocked the ports and the airport of Yemen, making it difficult for the action of the aid agencies. The attempts of the Saudi Coalition provoked the economy to collapse. According to Orkaby (2017), the economic collapse brought as main consequences the difficulties of Yemenis buying food or medicine. The US provided logistical and intelligence assistance to the Arab Coalition. According to Picard (2018) "U.S. involvement stems in part from the longstanding security partnership between the US and Saudi Arabia, and partly from concern over Iran's influence in the region".

Orkaby (2017) made the following analysis of the events: "by portraying its intervention as a conflict with Iran, Saudi Arabia seems to have convinced much of the world, especially the United States, to ignore the deliberate targeting of Yemeni civilians" (p.6). The US has presented a position pro-Saudi Arabia and this public position has influenced the international community to forget about the Yemeni conflict.

After the Saudi led intervention, the main concern of Houthis was no longer the Hadi government, rather the rebel movement put all the efforts fighting against the Saudi led Coalition. The Houthis received some public support in consequence of their continued opposition to Saudi Arabia, especially in the north of Yemen, where the Saudi Coalition involvement is understood as a war against Yemen. According to Clausen (2018) "Saudi Arabia and Yemen have a long-shared history where Saudi Arabia has sought to influence and control events in Yemen" (p.10).

According to Horton (2020), "the war and their martial abilities are the Houthis' greatest sources of legitimacy and support. Many of those who back the Houthis do so only for

pragmatic reasons. For example, many Yemenis want to stop what they see as a foreign invasion by the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Yemenis of various political persuasions calculate that only the Houthis are capable of preventing outside powers from carving up Yemen. Others support the Houthis because they provide a measure of security and predictability, especially when compared with southern Yemen. Members of the Yemeni elite most often align themselves with the Houthis for financial and political gain rather than any shared ideology. (…) However, alienation among a significant percentage of the population of northwest Yemen is growing due to Houthi abuses and their exclusivist policies. Without the war, tensions within the core leadership will become more pronounced. As rival leaders attempt to broaden and reinforce power bases, there will be more space for old and emergent elites to reassert their authority. Over time this will lead to the dilution of the power held by the Houthis' core leadership".

The Saudi Arabia leaders have been always worried about the security of its border with Yemen and "each time a popular movement or a strong central authority has locked as though it were appearing in Yemen, the Saudi government has responded with military action and financial support for pro-Saudi groups" (Orkaby, 2017, p.4). Actually, Fraihat (2016) points out that "historically, Saudi Arabia treated Yemen as one of its territories. Saudi intervened in internal Yemeni politics, advocated certain agendas, supported leaders like Saleh himself, and bought tribal loyalties within Yemen. This Saudi intervention in domestic Yemeni affairs angered many Yemenis including the Houthis" (p. 52).

Saudi Arabia has been interested in the fact that the Yemeni government was in accordance with the Saudi government. With a Shiite movement admittedly against Saudi Arabia, they would lose the Yemeni alliance and the control of the Red Sea trade route. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has all interest to keep a weak government in Yemen that is dependent on them and that can be manipulated, but with the Houthis antagonism, it seems that it is going to be impossible. The Saudi-led intervention is an answer to Hadi's demand for international assistance, but many observers consider that this is just an excuse, because the intervention makes part of the Saudi Arabia geopolitics agenda.

On April 22nd, 2015, the operation Restoring Hope took place, with the announcement of the Coalition saying that the goals of Operation Decisive Storm were achieved. At the same time, Oman announced the Muscat Peace Plan, a proposal of peace negotiation to pacify the conflict. On April 25th, 2015, Ismail Ould Chekh Ahmed became UN Special Envoy to Yemen. On May 12th, 2015 took place a 5-days ceasefire agreed by both parties and humanitarian supplies arrived in Hodeidah.

The Saudi-led coalition has continued to wage its campaign against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, resulting in heavy civilian casualties. In June 2018, the coalition launched a major offensive to retake the coastal region of Hodeida, further worsening the humanitarian

crisis. The Houthis have responded to Saudi airstrikes with missile attacks on Saudi Arabian infrastructures and territory, including oil tankers, facilities, and international airports. Further complicating the civil war, secessionist groups in the south of the country, supported by the UAE, have clashed with the UN-recognized government forces based in Aden.

According to Fraihat (2016), "Saudi airstrikes are likely to exacerbate the crisis for Yemen rather than resolving it. Military intervention will overwhelm the transition process by creating deeper divisions within Yemeni society between those who support and oppose the Saudi strikes, destroy infrastructure and state institutions, and create long-term instability. Airstrikes are not in Saudi Arabia's interest either as instability on its southern borders means refugees, poverty, and a lack of security. There is no military solution to the crisis in Yemen, and Saudi airstrikes are likely to make things worse for both Yemen and Saudi Arabia" (p. 52-53).

2.2.2. SOUTHERN TRANSITION COUNCIL

The Hadi insignificance before the eyes of Houthis and the international players led to the emergence of the al-Hirak movement, as it is informally known in the south of the country, fighting for southern Yemeni autonomy. This movement is also known as the South Yemen Movement and exists since 2007. In 2017, the Southern Transition Council was formed with the declared aim of improving governance in the south and working for Southern autonomy in a direct challenge to Hadi (Clausen, 2018). This movement is led by Aidarus al-Zoubaidi.

The UAE is the most influential external actor in southern Yemen, which has built capacity on the ground in south-eastern Yemen and Aden. UAE has been criticized because they are exploiting the current power emptiness to take control of strategic territories in Yemen. The relationship between UAE and Hadi government is tense, resulting sometimes in some hostilities, despite the participation of UAE in the Coalition (Clausen, 2018).

On May 11, 2017, Aidrous al-Zubaydi, former governor of Aden, announced the creation of a 26 member Southern Transitional Council (STC) (Foster, 2017). According to Foster (2017), "the creation of the Southern Transitional Council is more than a local response to the "Southern Question" and is reflective of three trends within the Yemeni conflict. First, the STC is a product of the disconnect in goals between the Hadi government and local constituencies within Yemen (…). Thus, the alliances of the Hadi government, particularly with a militarily empowered Hirak, were likely to come into question. Moreover, the governing style of Hadi, who instigated multiple reshuffles of the Cabinet and other political appointments — four between December 2015 and June 22, 2017 — has been disruptive to political processes and appears to be founded on political loyalty rather than professional capability".

According to the International Crisis Group (May 16, 2019). in the South battles between UAE-proxy forces (The Giants Brigade and Republican Guard) and the Huthis continued in other points of the country, like al-Dhale, Abyan, and Lahj, while fighting in the northern border with Saudi Arabia also reportedly intensified, particularly in the Abs. According to the Intrnational Crisis Group (May 16, 2019), in response to this situation "the Interior Minister Ahmed al-Maysari said the government had asked the coalition to help liberate Yemeni territory, not administer it".

According to Foster (2017), the creation of the STC has exposed the weaknesses of internationally led technocratic peace processes that contrast sharply with the political and everyday aspects of conflict resolution.

2.2.3. THE ROLE OF EASTERN COUNTRIES

The US has played an important role in Yemen. US military operational support to the Saudi-led Coalition has included the delivery of munitions, tactical intelligence, and fuel tanks since the beginning of the conflict. According to Bachman (2019), "the US and UK have contributed to the Coalition's genocide in Yemen by their massive sale of weapons and military technology to coalition members". Moreover, the US and UK have provided the Coalition with essential aid and assistance to commit its attacks and to maintain the blockade and as consequence provoke a genocide (Bachman, 2019).

The increasing tensions between Iran and the US are visibly affecting discussions about Yemen. Inclusively some Saudi and US analysts have argued the Houthis' attacks on oil pumping stations in Saudi Arabia were coordinated with Iran to coincide with attacks on four oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman (International Crisis Group, May 16, 2019). According to the Human Rights Watch (2019), "the US continued to carry out drone attacks in Yemen (…). The US has also worked closely with the UAE, which leads to Coalition efforts in southern Yemen".

US, UK, France, and others have continued to sell munitions and weapons to Saudi Arabia and countries from the Coalition, despite they have been aware of their frequent unlawful attacks. In October 2018, the European Parliament asked EU member states to suspend weapons trade with Saudi Arabia, due to its conduct in Yemen, criticized the Coalition's war crimes, and called for sanctions against those responsible for blocking humanitarian assistance in Yemen (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

According to the International Crisis Group (November 21, 2018), the five permanent members of the UN Security Council all supply armament to the Saudi Coalition. US, UK, and France are the largest sellers of UAE and Saudi Arabia.

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The lasting contention between the US and Iran represents a real danger that Yemen could come to be seen in both states just as another battlefront in their regional competition for dominance. According to Clausen (2018), "the current conflict in Yemen is better understood as a struggle over who controls the state than as a struggle between a non-state actor and the state" (p.13).

According to Fraihat (2016), "the failure of the international community to manage the transition in Yemen has significantly contributed to the collapse of the central government, making violence seemingly the only available alternative. In particular, the U.S. prioritization of the fight against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has clashed with the goals of a peaceful transition. Although the youth in Yemen are not supporters of AQAP, they did not begin their revolution to fight the group but rather to change a corrupt regime and demand serious development in the country" (p. 53).

2.3. PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

According to Wallensteen (2002) "peace agreements are an integral part of conflict resolution" (p. 8). According to the same author, "an agreement, even if implemented, may not be sufficient to establish a durable peace. Peace requires more than an agreement among the parties. The peace agreement is, however, a necessary step to a lasting arrangement" (p. 8).

As it is going to explain forward peace agreements like the Stockholm Agreement and Jeddah Agreement are important steps, but they are not sufficient to stop the war in Yemen.

2.3.1. STOCKHOLM AGREEMENT

On 17 December 2018, the UN announced a ceasefire in Hodeida, known as Stockholm Agreement, after the meeting between the Yemeni internationally recognized government and the Houthis movement that took place in Sweden. The Stockholm Agreement has been a first step toward implementing an agreement to demilitarize Hodeida city and its port, and the wider Red Sea trade corridor.

Hodeida is a strategic city and the fourth larger city in Yemen. The strategic interest is related to the fact that the city has the main port in the Red Sea. After the beginning of the war, the port became the main door for the delivery of humanitarian aid, food, and fuel. According to the International Crisis Group (May 6, 2019), the Stockholm Agreement has prevented a battle for the Red Sea port and city of Hodeida that would cause a major famine.

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Before the Stockholm Agreement, the discourse about Yemen war was quite pessimistic. An offensive on Hodeida was happening, with a high humanitarian impact. The US did not seem to be interested in interfering against their Gulf allies' decisions. The key changing event was represented by the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018. The killing had a stimulating effect on the US Congress and created an opening criticism of the Yemen war[22].

The agreement established that the Houthis and the government would remove their military forces from the port and the city of Hodeida, and from the port of Salif and Ras Issa oil terminal. Also, the parties said they would establish and protect a humanitarian corridor linking Hodeida with Sanaa.

On May 15th, Martin Griffiths announced that military forces loyal to the Houthi movement had retired from the three main ports on Yemen's Red Sea coast – Hodeida, Ras Issa, and Saleef. But the government of Yemen has called the Huthi reorganizations a publicity show because they left the security local forces constituted by Houthis. The government forces argued that they violated the Stockholm Agreement and accused the UN of being an accomplice. The Stockholm Agreement did not clearly define how the military groups would be redeployed nor the composition of local security forces designated to secure the areas left.

For this reason, the Stockholm Agreement has represented just a starting point because the conflict keeps on moving. On 14 May, the Houthis announced that they had attacked an oil export pipeline linking the east and west coasts of Saudi Arabia. Houthis representatives said that the attacks came in response to the Coalition intensification of fighting along the frontlines in Hodeida and in the Yemen-Saudi border. On 16 May, the Coalition threw airstrikes in Sanaa, that caused civilian casualties, what seemed to be a retaliation for the drone attacks. According to the International Crisis Group (May 16, 2019), "while Hodeida carries the lion's share of headlines, political, economic and military competition continues unabated in the rest of the country and has accelerated since December".

According to Murphy (2019), it was significantly important that the negotiation by the UN went ahead in 2019 and the Stockholm agreement was implemented, as a short-term goal. But for rebuilding and creating a post-conflict future it is important to encourage sustainable and inclusive economic growth and building strong and transparent state institutions.

As a result of geostrategic interests put in place, an international solution took too much time to happen, and it was only in 2018, with the US change of position, that an agreement could be signed between the Houthis and the government, with the UN as mediator.

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[22] For more information about this episode please consult the following website: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/17/world/middleeast/jamal-khashoggi-saudi-arabia.html

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The Stockholm Agreement is crucial for the preliminary efforts for a peace process and for stopping the worsening humanitarian crisis lived by the Yemenis, by starting with an agreement to demilitarise Hodeida city and port, and the wider Red Sea trade corridor. According to Salisbury (December 19, 2018), "without strong international support, the Hodeida ceasefire will falter. The consequences of failure are painfully clear. A battle for Hodeida would be lengthy and destructive, and it would almost certainly precipitate mass starvation".

2.3.2. JEDDAH AGREEMENT

The Riyadh Agreement was signed on 5 November 2019. According to Salisbury (November 5, 2019), this agreement "has averted a war within Yemen's civil war (...) The deal prevents a collapse of the fragile alliance of Yemeni forces that Saudi Arabia has supported since intervening in Yemen in March 2015 to prevent Huthi rebels from taking over the country". But Salisbury argued that: "the question now is whether the agreement can act as a bridge to a nationwide political settlement or if it simply marks a pause before another round of violence". This position is understandable because previous agreements in Yemen were a failure.

The Riyadh Agreement has the same characteristics as previous failed Yemeni agreements. It is poorly formulated, probably because the imprecision was necessary to get the parties to sign it and leaves several unanswered questions about the implementation in practice. The reforms include the formation of new mixed security forces, the removal of military units from the city, and the transfer of heavy weapons to places supervised by the Saudis (Salisbury, November 5, 2019).

According to the International Crisis Group (January 24, 2020), the narrow window of opportunity to end Yemen's war, which opened in late 2019, may be closing fast. The struggle along the main front lines in northern Yemen, along with the Houthi rebel rocket attacks and the resumption of Saudi-led air bombing, threatens to tip the conflict into a major escalation, reversing attempts at dialogue.

There is still a chance to break the cycle by expanding the newly opened channels of communication between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia in order to include the internationally recognized Yemeni government and others to negotiate a truce on all the main fronts. Still, this is going to require a coordinated and continuous regional and international effort.

By April 2020, mediation approaches included: "the UN's ceasefire/confidence-building/peace talks plan; Saudi-Huthi talks focused on border security and the rebels' relationship with Iran; Saudi-overseen efforts to implement the Riyadh Agreement; and the UN's stalled attempts to get the Huthis and the government to carry out the Hodeida

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Agreement". These tracks are interdependent and there is no mechanism to prevent setbacks in one track from disrupting others (International Crisis Group, May 27, 2020, p.21).

According to the International Crisis Group (April 29, 2020), on 25 April, "the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared self-administration in areas of Yemen's south that were part of an independent state prior to unification with the north in 1990", as a result of the deteriorated situation between STC and the Yemeni government. According to the same source, "it also came as the UN struggled to engineer a nationwide ceasefire and COVID-19 response plan. STC forces quickly took control of ministries, local government offices and the Central Bank building in Aden, the government's temporary headquarters since the Huthis pushed it out of the capital Sanaa in 2015. The STC has not yet taken over day-to-day management of state institutions, but it has formed committees charged with doing so, and STC officials say they will soon start running southern affairs" (International Crisis Group, April 29, 2020).

Consequently, the government condemned the STC position, arguing that they were disrespected the Riyadh Agreement. Saudi Arabia and the UAE rejected the STC's announcement, appealing to the government and secessionists to return and focus in the Riyadh Agreement (International Crisis Group, April 29, 2020). This situation strengthened the position of the Houthis, undermining the government's credibility and giving them time to reorganize their forces (International Crisis Group, April 29, 2020).

According to the same source, "Some Yemeni observers believe that the conflict in the south is creating an opportunity for the Huthis to strike a deal with the STC that excludes the government. This eventuality would accelerate the country's fragmentation. The rebels and secessionists view each other as lesser threats compared to other rivals and, in theory, such a deal could benefit both" (International Crisis Group, April 29, 2020).

To sum up, "events in the south are a stark reminder of Yemen's fragmentation after five years of war. They underscore the necessity of including sub-national groups, like the STC, in any overall settlement to end the conflict" (International Crisis Group, April 29, 2020).

According to Perkins (2019), "the Jeddah Agreement seeks to end the long-simmering fight that escalated sharply in August between the Southern Transitional Council and pro-Hadi forces, which comprise the bulk of the anti-Houthi coalition. While the signing of this deal will not see an end to the war, it is an essential step to begin addressing the political fragmentation that would undoubtedly see any future political settlement with the Houthis break down if left to fester (...) The Jeddah Agreement serves as an important reminder that the only way to end the conflict is to begin addressing the fractured political scene across Yemen, regardless of which groups are viewed as the main belligerents". This agreement could freeze the conflict, and draw a path toward more comprehensive achievements.

2.4.   FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

The conflict in Yemen has lived ups and downs, moments with an openness to negotiation, and others where conflict explodes. The conflict in Yemen has many actors, but the main actor affected is no doubt the civilian population. According to Salisbury (April 17, 2020), "Yemenis do not just want the shooting to stop; they want state institutions like the police and the courts to be accountable to ordinary people. It's increasingly clear that stopping the war won't automatically bring peace to Yemen" (p. 9). This is happening because "there is a disconnect between national politicians and the armed groups that control things on the ground – and between both these sets of actors and society as a whole" (Salisbury, April 17, 2020, p. 9).

The main economic and civilian infrastructures' destructions have caused extreme consequences in Yemeni society. According to the Human Rights Watch (2019), since 2015, there were documented about ninety coalition airstrikes, that may constitute war crimes. For example, in 2018, the Saudi led Coalition bombed a bus occupied with children, killing at least 26 of them. These attacks were perpetrated by using US munitions.

According to Clarke (2018) "an estimated 80 percent of the population – 24 million people – require some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including 14.3 million who are in acute need" (p.4). De Waal (2018) describes Yemen as "the greatest famine atrocity of our lifetimes" caused by the Coalition that is aware of the consequences caused by the destruction of infrastructures producing food. According to Backman, in Yemen, "17.8 million (60%) people are food insecure and require urgent humanitarian assistance, 9.4 million people are in an immediate crisis, and 8.4 million people are on the brink of famine". Save the Children testified that approximately 84.700 children died of hunger between April 2015 and October 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

According to the Committee of the Red Cross, Yemen's cholera epidemic is the largest and fastest-growing cholera epidemic in history and had affected over 1 million people (Human Rights Watch, 2019). According to Médecins Sans Frontières, on 11 June 2018, a cholera treatment centre run by them was bombed by the Coalition (Davi, 2018). At the same time, human rights' violations have been huge. The report Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019 indicates that "as the conflict intensifies there has been an increase in indiscriminate attacks and potential violations of international humanitarian law, which are taking a brutal toll on civilians" (p. 7). According to the Human Rights Watch Report, in 2018 the UN concluded that the Houthi, Yemeni, Saudi, and UAE forces were believably implicated in detainee-related abuse that might be considered war crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2019). According to the same report "Houthi forces have used landmines in governorates across

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Yemen, killing and wounding civilians and preventing their return home. Yemen is a party to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty15" (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Yemen occupies the top position as the most Fragile State in 2019 Index, which indicates that the situation in the country is *very high alert*. According to the report, at the end of 2018, 75% of the population need humanitarian help, 3,5 million were displaced and 14 million faced starvation (Murphy, 2019). The crisis in Yemen has experienced several twists and turns. It is now possible to assume, according to the literature and reports analysed, that the situation in Yemen is deeply dependent on regional and international strategic decisions, by involving the major world powers, such as the US, as shown with the death of the Saudi journalist, that brought a change in the US strategic position.

Yemen is an instrument to measure the geostrategic powers in the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, where much of the world's oil and natural gas trade occurs. This channel has been a veritable "gate of tears" for the Yemenis, who have seen their poor infrastructures being destroyed, their economy declining, and diseases proliferating.

The conflict in Yemen is also the result of a regional power dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran, that are involved in a hybrid war in a foreign territory, with the support of other international allies. According to Fraihat (2016) "both Saudi Arabia and Iran know that their power struggle has affected many parts of the Middle East and created proxy wars for which the countries in the periphery are paying the price" (p. 56). Fraihat (2016) opinion is that "reaching an understanding between these two regional power will give hope to solutions in a number of places" (p. 53-54).

Moreover, according to the International Crisis Group (March 27, 2020), "now the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to further decimate a vulnerable population. No case has yet been confirmed, but when an outbreak comes, it is likely to wreak havoc on a people already weakened by hunger and dependent on a healthcare system on the verge of collapse. Less than 50 percent of Yemen's hospitals and clinics are operating at anything like full capacity, and most lack qualified staff, medicine and often electricity". To avoid a disaster, on 25 March, "UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for a ceasefire in Yemen to allow for UN-led mediation to end the war and help prevent an outbreak of COVID-19" (International Crisis Group, March 27, 2020).

Fraihat (2016) states that "Yemen faces significant challenges in attempting to remedy the intense polarization it has experienced since its revolution. Indeed, the country faces several difficult issues, including security reform, good governance, and development. There are three major challenges specific to Yemen, however, that will have a major impact on the success of the country's reconciliation: the demand for secession in the South, the Houthi rebellion in the North, and the 2015 civil war. No stability, civil peace, or national reconciliation can be achieved in Yemen if these three key problems are not solved in a

sustainable way". In Salisbury's fieldwork report, he gives his personal feeling about the conflict resolutions in Yemen as follows: "I returned even more convinced that any lasting solution will have to include local input" (Salisbury, April 17, 2020, p. 10).

According to Fraihat (2016), "Saudi-led airstrikes and the bombing of Yemen are not the solution either. War, especially airstrikes, exacerbates conflicts. Saudi airstrikes have certainly created new issues that will burden the transition process including displacement, damage to infrastructure, and increased sectarianism in Yemen. Saudi Arabia should keep in mind that many of these new issues, like displacement, will end up spilling over to its territory" (p. 56). According to International Crisis Watch (March 25, 2019), "this conflict has no military solution, only a diplomatic one". José Rosendo[23] argues that these conflicts that took place for years have left deep scars in Yemen society and it is the main issue that will bring difficulties at the negotiation table.

According to Cate Buchanan, it is extremely difficult for the UN to conduct face to face talks because parties have been severely resistant in having regular conversations. It is difficult to get the progress that is necessary to find some solution for this war and that has a huge humanitarian impact. Cate Buchanan highlights that there is not a major agreement, but many small agreements, which also makes the process unclear and unstructured. According to Cate Buchanan the different dynamics, the number of external actors that are involved, and foreign states turn this conflict into a complex reality.

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[23]In an interview realized to José Manuel Rosendo, journalist in the Antena 1, responsible for the documentary "Yemen: o lado Houthi da guerra", available in https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/grande-reportagem-antena-1-iemen-o-lado-houthi-da-guerra_a1163821

3. THE THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN YEMEN CONFLICT

For many years Yemen has been ranked as the worst country in the world according to the Global Gender Gap Report, published by the World Economic Forum. In 2020, this report referred to Yemen as the most unequal country in the world for women, among 153 countries ranked.

In this chapter, I analyse the gendered norms in Yemen, and in particular women's role in society. More in detail, I focus on Yemeni women's role during the Arab Spring and explore Yemeni women's role in peace negotiations, considering the formal and informal processes.

3.1. GENDERED NORMS IN YEMEN

Yemen is still a country that reflects largely agrarian, tribal, and patriarchal traditions, that combined with illiteracy and economic difficulties have led women to continuously deprivation of their rights as citizens. According to Manea (2010), "Yemen is a tribal and traditional country where prevailing cultural attitudes, patriarchal structures, and Islamic fundamentalism accord women low status in the family and community and limit their participation in society" (p. 546). Milena Raposo[24] said that when she was in Yemen at the beginning of this decade, it was possible to see that Yemen seems more a tribal culture than a patriarchal one. Adra (2011) argues that "while not all aspects of tribalism are positive, tribal cooperative mechanisms and methods of resolving conflict through mediation are exemplary and currently being emulated in developed countries with robust state courts" (p. 12).

Considering the Global Gap Index 2020, Yemeni women are at the end of the spectrum for economic opportunities with a percentage of 27,3%, followed by Syria and Iraq, that occupied the last place of all countries ranked. When we talk about literacy, it is important to evidence that only 35% of women are literate, compared with 73% of men. The illiteracy of women can be a justification for their lack of interest in internal and international politics (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020). According to Milena Raposo, generally, women are not interested in these thematics, contrary to men, that spend their afternoons discussing these subjects and doing *khat* mastication. The Global Gap Index 2020 says that "women are almost absent of political life in Yemen (1.9%)". For sure, there are some exceptions, and I am going to talk about them in this chapter (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020).

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[24]On September 25 2020 I had a conversation, in Lisbon with Milena Calvário Raposo, who shared with me her experience in Yemen. I made a brief sumula of what we talked in the annexes. She also gave an interview in 2015 to Antena 1, that is available at https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/entrevista-a-milena-raposo_a799888, where she shared more or less the same perspectives.

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Heinze (2016) argues that women's role and political participation are influenced by two cultural opposite phenomena: on one side, there is a perspective that considers women with "the role of *interior minister* in the family and to men the role of *exterior minister*". That means women are responsible for what happened in their homes, but men are those who take care of working outside and get money to sustain their family, consequently men participate in public life. On the other side, especially in Yemeni tribes, there is an "egalitarian ethic", so there is a traditional respect for the role of women in the local economy in rural areas, considering their main role, as mothers and sisters, they have and consequently they collect the respect of men. According to Heinze (2016), "this results in an openness of men and women towards female leaders and a pragmatic acceptance of the importance of women for society" (Heinze, 2016, p. 5). This position agrees with the view of Milena Raposo when she said that the roles are well defined in society, but women make her voices heard because husbands hardly do something without consulting their wives. Milena Raposo also underlined the huge influence mothers have in children's lives, including the choice of son's wife and inclusively the fact that the couple after marrying goes living with the husband's family and the mother in law has a huge influence/power in the family. She also noted that when it is time for men to get married, almost all of the time, they ask their mother to choose their wifes, because the mother must approve the wife.

Despite being vulnerable, older women can also have decision-making power in the everyday life, and they have the capability of influence decisions. Milena Raposo told me that in Yemen women have a central role in the family. While the man is expected to work and be capable of sustaining their family, the woman is expected to take care of all matters related to family life. Milena Raposo also told me also that it is usually men that asks for a wife's opinion before taking important decisions.

MENA region labour sector is characterized by low female participation and discrimination against women, which have a huge impact on economic growth, social cohesion, economics, and social mobility. Yemen has the lowest women's participation rate in the world (6,3%) in labour markets (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020). According to Yemeni culture, women have as responsibilities the care of the house, family, and children, and even though some of them have a job, they also have to do their domestic activities. According to Al-Sharif (2019), "Yemenis usually get married in their teen. Women often depend on men for most basic of the tasks, particularly moving around from place to place" (p. 150). For a woman to be independent and think about her career is quite complicated, because society does not positively see these women, because they do not fit the standards established.

Gender relations in Yemen are characterized by diversity related to religious, cultural, social, and political traditions across the geographical regions, and between different tribes

and generations: the North has been traditionally more conservative than the South, typically more egalitarian due to its socialist past (CARE, 2015, p. 1)[25]. To Heinze (2016) opinion, "in the north, women have been struggling against conservative interpretations of Islam regarding women's role in society, which see the role of women limited to family affairs. In urban areas (…) these struggles for political participation were limited to a small educated elite (Heinze, 2016, p. 2). On the other hand, the south and its "socialist ideology brought two generations of highly educated and empowered women leaders in urban areas" (Heinze, 2016, p. 2).

These roles established in society are not beneficial to women's activism in Yemen. The reason is that "men feel pressured to control the behaviour of women in their household in such a way that it will not threaten the women's security; and disgrace the family in the eyes of their community" (Adra, 2016, p. 317). According to Heinze (2016), women "require protection not only because the honour of the family is directly linked with their behaviour, but also because they are considered to be physically as well as emotionally weak" (p. 5).

The cultural norms in Yemen are profoundly diverse, including the involvement of women in peacebuilding, which is different from one region to the other. Adra (2011) gives the following example: "in the tribal highlands, (…) outside urban areas, cases relating to disputes that concern the community are not only discussed among men, but also among women in separate meetings nearby. Children channel back and forth between the male and female gatherings and update both sides on the deliberations of the other. In the evenings, families discuss the matter, and the "next day, the men bring the opinions of their wives, mothers and sisters with them to the discussion" (Adra 2011).

In general, Yemeni men and boys have a privileged status from birth. Men are expected to marry within their social group although they could choose not to do this, whereas women do not have that option. This class hierarchy, deeper in the north, puts the Sadah at the top and the so-called Muhamasheen[26] at the lowest position in the social classes.

The ideal image of a woman is a higher class woman, that accepts the lifestyle provided by her husband. She should be shy, soft-spoken, obedient, and conservative. She should dress appropriately and should be religious (Saferworld, 2017).

Violence against women is widespread and has increased during the country's conflict. Historically, women are seen as *weak* and have generally had less power in society than men and have been the primary caregivers at the household level (CARE, 2015, 2; Rohwerder, 2017, p.3). The unprivileged treatment given to women in Yemen can be seen in situations like they cannot marry a person chosen by their own, it is needed the male

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[25]CARE is an organization dedicated to ending poverty. They are known everywhere for unshakeable commitment to the dignity of people. There is more information about the CARE work on Yemen, in the website https://www.care.org/

[26]Yemen's Muhamasheen are a minority who suffer from caste-based discrimination.

guardian permission, and also when they want to finish the marriage they stay in a vulnerable situation (Saferworld, 2017). According to Milena Raposo, most of the time, the couple just knows each other in the moment of marriage, which is almost all times decided by their families. It is important to mention the poor legal protection to women when dealing with domestic and sexual violence. Female genital mutilation is still acceptable by Yemeni society (Gressmann, 2016, 45)[27]. According to Manea (2010), female Yemenis have to deal with "domestic abuse, deprivation of education, early or forced marriage, restrictions on freedom of movement, exclusion from decision-making roles and processes, denial of inheritance, deprivation of health services, and female genital mutilation" (p. 546). More than 3 million Yemeni women and girls are at risk of gender-based violence, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).[28] More than 3 million people have been displaced by conflict.

The prevailing social norms also impose difficulties when women require access to services, livelihoods, and other opportunities; for instance, girls have been less likely to attend school as a result of time-consuming gendered tasks such as fetching water, lack of appreciation of girl's education, and scarce facilities in school (Rohwerder, 2017). Although, the educational system has formed more women with a university education than ever before. Nonetheless, the latest school books are promoting a more and more conservative image of female roles and gender relations. This conservative Islamic environment has limited the presence of women in public spaces (Heinze, 2016).

Women must do most of the household work and take care of their children and husband, regardless of whether they also have a job outside the home. This constrains most women's opportunities to participate in training or to get involved in public spaces. By extension, women who are unmarried or have no children are more easily able to participate in public activities than women who are married or have young children.

Women in Yemen have often lost access to family planning, exposing to potential unplanned pregnancies in dangerous conditions. With the sensitive risk of communicable disease outbreaks, including dengue fever, bloody diarrhea, and rubeola, adequate and appropriate messaging for women and girls must be made available to help them to prevent infection and to identify symptoms and seek treatment (CARE, 2016).

Women are also the most vulnerable among the 10 million people in Yemen who rely on food aid to survive. Especially, pregnant and lactating women are in a vulnerable situation, many of whom already face life-threatening challenges because of a lack of reproductive

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[27]Information retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/empowering-women-in-yemens-civil-war/a-50586064
[28]Information retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/empowering-women-in-yemens-civil-war/a-50586064

services [29.] The number of suspected cholera cases has exceeded more than 2 million and at least 3,700 people have died from the waterborne bacterial infection in Yemen since October 2019, said the WHO. Although cholera can be easily treated, it can kill within hours when untreated.

Women and girls in Yemen generally prepare the household's food and also have primary responsibility for collecting water and firewood, cleaning, and childcare. When food is scarce, females are the first family members to eat less as a managing mechanism, even though they continue to do hard activities such as working in the fields. Besides to these roles, women provide 60% of the labour to produce cultivation, and more than 90% intending livestock while earning 30% less than men (CARE, 2016).

Gender norms and inequality, and men's privilege within this system, intersect particularly strongly with socio-economic power in Yemen. The government has made efforts to improve the rights of women, including the formation of a Women's Development Strategy[30] and a Women Health Development Strategy, following the UN recommendations, especially to implement Yemen's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, but legislation implementation is almost none, along with many cultural and religious elements that have resulted in a weak improvement of Yemeni women's rights (Gressmann, 2016, 13).

Afrah Nasser[31] gives an interesting testimony when she remembers that in secondary school, her female teacher taught her that equality between women and men was a creation from the West, which intends to destroy Arab and Muslim communities (Nasser, April 2019)[32]. However, when she started college she was exposed to a different idea, concerning women's rights. Nasser (2019, April) refers that "women's rights advocates in political positions or leading CSOs, such as Radhya Shamsheer, Amat al-Alim Alsoswa, Raufa Hassan, or Amal Basha, speaking eloquently about women's activism in Yemen, have all been crucial in shaping my feminist consciousness. They were working on issues like child marriage, gender-based violence, discriminatory laws, and women's political participation, among many other things".

Yemen does not have a strong women's movement, but definitely, women's rights activism has changed after the Arab Springs in 2011. According to Nasser (2019, April), "the

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[29]Information retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/empowering-women-in-yemens-civil-war/a-50586064

[30]More information about Women's Development Strategy can be accessed here: https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/es/countries/asia/yemen/2006/national-strategy-for-women-development-20062015

[31]Afrah Nasser is a researcher in Human Rights Watch, regarding human rights violations in Yemen, before she was an activist, independent journalist, and analyst reporting, she is also the founding editor of the Sana'a Review. For more information can be accessed in https://www.hrw.org/about/people/afrah-nasser (accessed on September 19, 2020).

[32] http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/2019/04/yemeni-women-making-most-of-space.html

future of Yemeni women depends on the future of Yemen. Women activists will therefore not rest until the country is back on its feet and peace prevails" (Nasser, April 2019).

According to the International Rescue Committee "even before the war, Yemen was one of the toughest places to be female. Deeply ingrained patriarchy means many women and girls cannot access their family's finances, make decisions for the household, or even move about freely"[33]. After almost half a decade of war, on one hand, we have men injured, killed, or fighting on the front line, and on the other hand, some women are facing new challenges.

Suha Basharen[34], a Yemeni activist, said in an interview to the German media – Deutsche Welle – that "many women have unexpectedly found themselves responsible for their families — a responsibility they weren't prepared for"[35]. In the same interview, she said that "with the war, finding food became the priority, not talk about rights". This last sentence put in evidence the dramatic situation lived by the Yemeni population, where the priority is to give a solution for basic needs, like food, health, and security. The war has drastically changed the priorities of Yemeni women, concerning all the consequences brought by it, as the absence of men or the need to get another job, to be available for sustaining their families.

The conflict has worsened the limitations felt by women and girls, and it is threatening the improvements made in recent years to address gender equality. Although, there are different regional and tribal perceptions of gender equality, human rights, and living conditions for women and girls across the country, depending on which group has the power in a given location and time (Rohwerder, 2017).

3.2.   YEMENI WOMEN DURING THE ARAB SPRING

Yemeni women played a leading and dynamic role in protests when the Arab Spring took place in Yemen, in consonance with what happened in other countries in the MENA region. Female activists demanded their inclusion, setting a statutory marriage age, ending maternal mortality and illiteracy. Yemeni women have paid a heavy price for their participation in the uprising with a large number being killed, wounded, imprisoned, and tortured. Karman (2018) argues that "Women's mass participation in the youth-driven popular revolution was seen as a surprise in Yemen. However, it was not surprising for those attentive to the situation of women in the country. After 11 February 2011, Yemen witnessed political and social

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[33] https://www.rescue.org/article/4-ways-war-yemen-has-impacted-women-and-girls
[34] Basharen is motivated in part by her own success. Born in Aden, on Yemen's southwest coast, she studied at university both in her home country and in the UK. However, the idea of a university education and independence still remains a luxury for many of Basharen's female compatriots, particularly in rural Yemen.
[35] https://www.dw.com/en/empowering-women-in-yemens-civil-war/a-50586064

openness and an unprecedented growth in media freedoms. These developments augmented the civic vibrancy of Yemeni society, proving particularly beneficial for women, who increased their participation in the public sphere" (p. 217).

Tawakul Karman is a Yemeni woman that put herself forward in the Arab Spring. She was the first Arab woman to win the Nobel Prize, at that time. She is a journalist, politician, and human rights activist, which leads the group "Women Journalists Without Chains," which she co-founded in 2005[36]. She became the international public face of the 2011 Yemeni uprising when she was reportedly called the "Mother of the Revolution" by some Yemenis.

The massive participation of women in the Arab Spring brought some positive effects to women's rights. According to Rohwerder (2017), "some progress was being made and the 2011 uprising challenged the norm of women's limited participation in society with women actively participating in the protests" (p.2). Women have experienced a short liberalization from patriarchal norms. Women from across the social spectrum joined the protests, staying overnight on protest squares. According to Heinze (2016), "although widespread participation of women and their leadership in many protests surprised many outside observers, this actually built on the traditional role of women in Yemeni society" (p. 3).

According to a report from Saferworld (2017), "the 2011 uprisings gave women a platform they never had before and reaffirmed their legitimate voices in political, peace and security discussions. However, many of these gains are yet to be put into practice and are being resisted by groups that silence and exclude women in the name of traditional culture or ultraconservative interpretations of Islam".

According to Karman (2018), "women were heavily involved in political and civil work after reunification. Yemeni political and civic life witnessed an increasing presence of women, who joined existing political parties and participated in mass rallies and various elections. Yet the millions of votes cast by women in favor of various parties did not result in an increase in their representation among elected politicians. Political parties did not nominate sufficient women in parliamentary" (p. 212).

Nasser (2011) argues that female protesters come from all sectors of Yemeni society, more liberate or conservative. According to Nasser (2011), women gain confidence and "begin to think that they have to have a voice, a place in this new society - something that has never happened before".

Women's participation in political matters has had as direct consequence the increased risk of prejudice, threats, and violence. Moreover, these women belong almost in all cases to the elites and urban areas, underlining the inequalities present in Yemeni society.

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[36] The webside is available in https://womenpress.org/en/

The gap and inequalities between men and women have deepened with conflict (Saferworld, 2017). Despite the developments made with the participation of women in the 2011 uprisings, three years of war have resulted in a significant setback for the Yemeni female population, who are absent from formal networks of politics and conflict resolution (Nasser, 2018). Karman (2018) also shares the same opinion, stating that "war in Yemen has brought women back into isolation and closed the door to civil activity, which had witnessed a remarkable development in recent years" (p. 221).

3.3. THE ROLE OF YEMENI WOMEN IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

Women participate actively in times of war, yet they are categorically absent in times of peace. For instance, over the past ten years, there have been approximately thirty-nine conflicts in which negotiations and peace agreements did not include female participants. A Saferworld report about gender relevance in conflict contexts points that women are being excluded from the formal peace processes. Their political participation is limited by insecurity, which means women have less access to public spaces and for that reason fewer opportunities to participate in public political activities and decision making, including peace processes (Saferworld, 2017).

According to Heinze (2016), "female civil society activism tends to focus on development, humanitarian issues, and human rights rather than on peacebuilding. There remains a significant lack of knowledge regarding how to become active in peacebuilding as a woman at the local level" (p. 2). Cate Buchanan told me that the status of women is deeply low, like in other countries in the world, and this fact is not related to their capabilities, but the processes are deeply exclusionary and dominated by men, and it is hard to include women in formal processes.

According to the OSESGY website[37], "Yemeni women have been actively engaged in matters of peace, security, and governance despite their marginalization and exclusion from formal politics and political institutions". The women's involvement in peace negotiation is one of the intentions of the UN. They have achieved some initiatives that stimulated women's inclusion with a lot of innovation. Women's participation and civic engagement have been raised during the National Dialogue Conference[38].

According to the OSESGY[39], "Yemeni women make critical contributions to peacemaking at the local, national and international levels". They engage in many activities, like evacuating civilians and taking care of injured in areas affected by war, negotiating humanitarian access,

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[37] For more information access https://osesgy.unmissions.org
[38] The National Dialogue Conference was a transitional dialogue process held in Sana'a, from March 18, 2013 to January 24, 2014, as part of the Yemeni crisis reconciliation efforts.
[39] https://osesgy.unmissions.org

the opening of roads and crossings or the release and exchange of prisoners, to advocating for a nationwide ceasefire to help the spread cessation of Covid-19[40][41]. According to Cate Buchanan women in Yemen are involved in many activities related to the promotion of the role and power of civil society, but these are mainly informal activities.

Researches from Oxfam, CARE and, GenCap also find examples of women's resilience during the conflict that challenge the predominant representation of Yemeni women, as they are distributing humanitarian assistance by their communities, making some actions related to hygiene promotion, and leading some projects to protect women victims of gender-based violence and facilitating women's access to services (Gressmann, 2016, 3). Yemeni women have reported their involvement in carrying out rescue missions, searching for and providing medical, housing, and food resources for those in need, creating hotlines to report offenses, using social media to mobilize charity, providing psychological support, documenting crimes, and more (Pandya, 2015, 1-2).

According to Cate Buchanan the positive influence of the presence of women in peace processes is quite clear based on evidence of sustainability issues and effects on the quality of peace processes, but despite this women must be present because they are half of the population.

3.3.1. FORMAL MECHANISMS

Formal processes are negotiations between states or political groups, and in a few cases, the parties have been extremely resistant in having women between them. Nevertheless, the UN has been innovative in developing some initiatives to include women (Cate Buchanan).

According to Nasser (April 2019), "among many political losses—from Yemen's National Dialogue Conference' (NDC) and the Houthis' takeover of Sana'a in mid-2014—was the loss of women's political power. At the time, Women secured thirty percent representation in the NDC and took part in the Constitution Drafting Committee, for the first time in Yemen's history ensuring a thirty percent in any future committee formation".

Women's participation in the National Dialogue Conference was crucial for achieving important agreements for the new constitution, including a 30% quota for women's political participation and a law to increase the age of marriage to 18 years. The NDC was a transitional process held in Sana'a, Yemen, between March 18, 2013, and January 24, 2014, intending to achieve a reconciliation agreement. These efforts were organised by the UN and the Gulf Co-operation Council (Gressmann, 2016). According to the OSESGY, "the United Nations provided diplomatic, political, technical, logistical, and financial support for the

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[40] COVID 19 is a new kind of virus that show up in the end of 2019 and spred all over the world.
[41] https://osesgy.unmissions.org/search/node/women

national dialogue process. Through a team of experts in transition processes, national dialogues, constitution-making, law, and governance, among other issues, the Office helped empower Yemenis to lead their transition, to plan for it in a deliberate, considered, and informed manner, and to learn from the experiences of other countries"[42]. As a conclusion of NDC, it was established that Yemen should become a federal state, consisting of six different states: Azal, Tahama, Saba, Janad, Aden, and Hadramout (Fraihat, 2016). On January 3, 2015, the Houthis officially rejected the federalism plan—one of the major recommendations of the NDC (Fraihat, 2016).

According to Nasser (April 2019), "Yemeni women's political activism has continued and received the support of the international community. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths has ensured women's political participation in peacebuilding processes through creative ways, to apply UN Security Council resolution 1325".

In 2015, the OSESGY and UN Women collaborated to create the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security (also referred to as Pact) as a consultative mechanism for Yemen peace negotiations. The Pact was led by UN Women and constituted by 60 Yemeni women by late 2018. In 2016, the OSESGY invited a delegation of seven Yemeni women from the Pact to Kuwait meeting led by UN[43], although the women were not directly involved in the negotiations[44].

In mid-2018, the Yemeni women's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was created by the OSESGY with the support of UN Women and the Pact, in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). The TAG is currently comprised of eight Yemeni women. According to the OSESGY, members of this group consist of women with diverse backgrounds, like economics, human rights, governance, and politics.

According to the OSESGY, in September 2018, TAG members traveled to the Geneva Consultations on Yemen. Three papers were developed to feed into those consultations, namely on the economy, on politics, and trust-building. In December 2018, eight TAG members[45] were proximate in Stockholm for consultations with the parties, and met with the Special Envoy and his team daily.

The OSESGY states that they are committed to strengthening their efforts to promote gender inclusion in line with UN standards and commitments. Also, they try to ensure a minimum 30% representation of women in all meetings and initiatives led by them. Although

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[42] Information available in https://osesgy.unmissions.org/national-dialogue-conference
[43] Information available in https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/07/534602-yemen-un-envoy-urges-definitive-decisions-peace-talks-continue-kuwait (accessed on September 9, 2020).
[44] Women, Peace and Security, available in https://osesgy.unmissions.org/women-peace-and-security (accessed on June 14, 2020).
[45] The Group which comprises eight women working with the Office of the Special Envoy for this round of consultations are: Afraa Al-Hariri; Afrah al-Zuba; Asmahan Al-Alas; Balqis Abu-Osba'a; Enas Al-Arashy; Maeen Sultan; Najat Jumaan; and Sumayya Al-Hussam.

The role of women in conflict resolution: the case of Yemen

Cate Buchanan has noticed that the parties have been very resistant to having women in delegations, the government delegation had only had one woman, that is the reason why the office has created this indirect mechanism. The first one was the Pact in 2015-16, and later in the middle of 2018, the TAG was created. They are indirect inclusion mechanisms, similar to the Women's Advisory Board in Syria. These mechanisms have become a feature of the board in recent years because of the enormous difficulties getting meaningful women participation in the process.

In Stockholm peace talks, women participated in three groups: Women's Technical Advisory Group, including eight Yemeni women; Political Advisory Group involving three men and two women; and Women's Pact for Peace and Security group supported by UN Women (Nasser, April 2019). According to Nasser (April 2019), "the setting of the recent Stockholm peace talks has given these women groups better access to engage with the two warring parties delegations (…). When Yemen's last peace talks in Stockholm took place in December 2018, only one female delegate was at the negotiation table. Assistant Secretary of the Yemeni Popular Nasserist Party, Rana Ghanem[46] was the only female member, in the Yemeni government delegation". According to Hanna Showafi, it is very difficult for women to be in the table of peace negotiations, despite the women's will for being part of it and participating in political matters, making their own demands, and sharing their interests.

According to Crespo-Sancho (2018), "gender equality is an essential factor in a country's security and stability. Excluding women from actively participating in society can increase the risk of instability. Gender equality is not only about doing what is right or about social justice; it is also an important element in economic development and a critical predictor of stability and security, which can inform and improve work on conflict prevention".

Crespo-Sancho (2018) affirms that "research on women, peace, and security provides strong evidence that women's empowerment and gender equality are associated with more peaceful and stable outcomes". The same author underlines that "the larger the gender gap, the more likely a country is to be involved in inter- and intrastate conflict and to use violence as a first response in a conflict setting" (Crespo-Sancho, 2018). So, in general, involving women can contribute to a more sustainable way of building a peaceful society.

According to Bigio and Vogelstein (2017), the involvement of women in peacekeeping forces and the security sector increases accountability and has fewer abuses against civilians, as consequence. According to the Council on Foreign Relations[47] "when women and civil society groups participate in peace negotiations, the resulting agreement is 64% less likely to fail and 35% more like to last at least fifteen years".

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[46] A lonely fight for Yemeni's only female delegate to UN-bancked talks. December 13, 2018. Available in https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/a-lonely-fight-for-yemen-s-only-female-delegate-to-un-backed-talks-1.802535

[47] https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/

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In November 2015, CARE and GenCap conducted a scoping study to review and assess available information on the impact of the conflict on gender roles and relations, and consequently, the different needs of women, girls, men, and boys. According to this study, before the war, gender-based violence was common in Yemen, this violence is represented by forced marriage, genital mutilation, and restrictions on mobility. The conflict has deepened the previous vulnerabilities Yemeni women and girls have to deal with. According to this study, there has been an intensification of the incidents concerning gender-based violence with the conflict worsening, which requires responsive critical medical care and immediate as well as long-term psychosocial support. However, the lack of such services, as well as the lack of safe refuge for victims of abuse, compounds the issues victims already face, including stigma and rejection from their families and communities. Cultural norms and stigma related to sexual violence crimes further discourage survivors from both reporting and from seeking necessary medical and psychosocial services (CARE, 2016).

Including women in peace processes has a positive impact on the durability of peace agreements, which thus prevents conflict from reoccurring (Crespo-Sancho, 2018). Including women as negotiators, mediators, signatories, and witnesses increases the probability of an agreement lasting at least two years by 20 percent, and the probability of it lasting at least 15 years by 35 percent (Crespo-Sancho, 2018). There is a positive relationship between the participation of women's groups and peace deal results. When women are less involved, agreements are reached less often, and the likelihood of reaching an agreement is even lower when women groups are not involved at all (Crespo-Sancho, 2018).

Women's economic empowerment has a multiplier effect on a country's local and national well-being. Empowering women and promoting gender equality is crucial to accelerating development and producing more equal societies, which are important elements in preventing violent conflict (Crespo-Sancho, 2018). States with higher female participation in the labour force exhibit lower levels of international violence and are less likely to use military force to resolve international conflicts (Crespo-Sancho, 2018). Countries with 10 percent of women in the labour force compared to countries with 40 percent of women in the labour force are nearly 30 times more likely to experience internal conflicts (Crespo-Sancho, 2018).

According to Koppel (2017), "after decades of advocacy and few changes in practice, it is clear that the only way to achieve the crucial changes needed is to introduce incentives to promote inclusion (...) Women continue to be shut out of peace talks". In the same sense, Cate Buchanan states that it is highly difficult for women, in particular, to be included because the process is still unclear and unstructured. In spite of that, according to Oxfam,

"negotiations to end a bloody conflict in Yemen have a far better chance of long success if women have a place at the table"[48].

3.3.2. INFORMAL INITIATIVES

Informal peace processes are constituted by actions of negotiation performed by nongovernmental organizations, informal groups, or private citizens (MacGuinness, 2006). Cate Buchanan explained that informally women are involved in a lot of initiatives, at a local and subnational level, to try to promote peace, they are involved in local humanitarian arrangements and understandings, they are also involved in lots of initiatives to promote the role and the power of civil society. These initiatives, even informal, are extremely important and establish new women's positions in society.

At the beginning of 2017, it has been reported that there have been hundreds of women-led initiatives to address the effects of the conflict (Rohwerder, 2017). When I talked with Milena Raposo, she told me that some women are trying to change things in many different ways, and so to build a society more equal. Also, Cate Buchanan expressed that there are many positive examples of women's contribution to peace. Women make a real difference to ordinary everyday people because women can be very proactive in local violence reduction and that has a huge significance. Yemeni women have done amazing things, to promote local everyday peace and to try to influence public policy.

A study conducted by Saferworld (2017) refers that the war is bringing significance to women and "in any future peace agreement, women must play a role at all levels. Throughout the conflict, women in Yemen are "sustaining community cohesion and promoting peace at the local level" (Saferworld, 2017). On the community level, women pursue to lead local advocacy and campaigns about community peacebuilding, and the inclusion of women in all levels of governance in addition to their roles as mediators. One notable example is Sabreen, who is an educator, civil society leader, and mediator in Shabwa governorate (UN Women, 2018). In 2015, she facilitated a truce agreement between her community and rebel forces that culminated in the rebels leaving her community (UN Women, 2018).

Yasmin Al-Qadhi got a degree in journalism, and she was one of the first women to write articles for local newspapers during the Arab Spring. When the civil war broke out in Yemen in 2015, Yasmin and her sister Entisar established the Marib Girls Foundation, which is a women-led organization that focuses their activity on supporting women and youth participation in peacebuilding. Through the foundation, Yasmin Al-Qadhi works with senior

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[48] Yemen: Women are key to finding political solution at peace talks. December 15, 2015. Available in https://www.oxfam.org/fr/node/10469

army officials to combat child recruitment. She looks after support displaced women, by coordinating with the local and international community. She encourages women's empowerment and meaningful participation in civil society and the UN-led peace process[49]. Yasmin Al-Qadhi was also chosen as an International Woman of Courage in March 2020. Peter Salisbury[50] talked to her during his journey to Yemen[51]. She described the work of her group in training people to mediate conflicts. Peter Salisbury also met in his fieldwork Sabah Al-Swaidi[52]. She is the representative of the Association of Mothers of Abductees. This women's group influences the release of civilians that are arbitrarily detained across Yemen.

Another activist is Radhya Al-Mutawakel, a human rights defender, and the Yemeni co-founder and chairperson of Mwatana Organisation For Human Rights, an independent organization working to defend and protect human rights in Yemen. Al-Mutawakel and Mwatana's recent work has focused on documenting alleged human rights abuses by all parties within the current conflict in Yemen, including the United States, the Saudi-led coalition, and the Houthi forces. She has briefed the UN Security Council on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, becoming the first person to do this, and has written widely and appeared in a range of media outlets. Osamah Al-Fakih told me that Mwatana does not have an active role in formal peace negotiations in Yemen. Their organization promotes human rights and pursuits to document human rights violations of all parties to the conflict.

Safe Streets Foundation[53] started as a feminist initiative in 2009 and was called Kefaia. It had continued working on supporting and empowering Yemeni women untill 2011 when the initiative launched the first campaign in Yemen against street harassment called Safe Streets Campaign. In October 2013, the initiative was officially registered under the name of Safe Streets Foundation for Development. The Foundation aims to be a pioneer working in the field of Gender and Development, and works on achieving peace for women through engaging them economically, politically, and socially, and more importantly in the platforms of decision making.

According to Cate Buchanan, women's participation and representation are making some progress, but is a very slow progress. There are already many indirect ways of including women in peace processes, but not as much as it is desirable, like having women in negotiation teams or as mediators.

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[49]Information available in https://eca.state.gov/iwocprofiles/yasmin-al-qadhi-yemen.

[50] Peter Salisbury is a Senior Analyst for Yemen at the International Crisis Group.

[51]Information available in https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/behind-front-lines-yemens-marib

[52]Information available in https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/behind-front-lines-yemens-marib

[53]Information available in http://www.thesafestreets.org/p/blog-page.html and https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/860-gender-issues-in-yemen, an interview to Ghaida'a Alabsi

CONCLUSION

Recent researches have demonstrated the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution. When and where there have been higher levels of gender equality, there has been a reduced risk of conflict and the likeliness to experiencing interstate or civil war is reduced (Crespo-Sancho, 2018; McGuinness, 2006). In other words, when women are involved in peace construction, the absence of conflict is more sustainable, and the peaceful condition is more likely to last longer. For instance, Sandole-Staroste (2009) believes that "sustainable peace, security, and development cannot be achieved if only one gender is included in decisionmaking processes" (p. 226). Cate Buchanan has presented a similar idea when she expressed that the influence of women's presence in peace development quite positive, and it is based on evidence of sustainability and the quality of peace processes, besides that, the women must participate and be included because they are half of the population. So, if the whole society, including women, is considered in peace procedures, the processes of conflict resolution are going to be more successful.

The Yemen conflict has been exacerbated after the Saudi led Coalition intervention, in 2015. In my research, I have found out that the conflict in Yemen has its deep roots in the creation of the country. José Rosendo thinks that these conflicts that have taken place over time, causing deep scars, are responsible for such difficulty solving the conflict. However, internal disputes are not the only reason for the conflict has survived for so long: foreign actors such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and other MENA countries, have turned Yemen into a stage for a proxy war, between Saudi Arabia and Iran, that are fighting, without declaring war to each other, for their geostrategic interests in foreign soil. Yemen conflict has become a stage where big powers dispute their influences, without putting at risk their stability, in economic, political, and social terms.

In 2017, Jamie McGoldrick, the UN representative for Yemen, defined the Yemen war as an "absurd war", arguing that "the conflict only results in suffering and destruction for the country and people"[54]. Organizations, like UNICEF[55], World Food Programme[56], Mercy Corps[57] have been saying that "Yemen is the largest humanitarian crisis in the world". This conflict has affected the entire population, seeing itself limited in its most basic needs such as health, food, home, and security. Discussions regarding the parties involved in the conflict

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[54]Yemen: Amid spike in casualties, UN relief official says civilians bearing brunt of 'absurd war'. Available in https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/12/640582-yemen-amid-spike-casualties-un-relief-official-says-civilians-bearing-brunt (accessed on 30 May 2020).
[55] Information retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis
[56] Information retrieved from https://www.wfp.org/yemen-crisis
[57] Information retrieved from https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/quick-facts-yemen-crisis

or about the role of women in society become secondary in this scenario. Thus, for the Yemeni population, it is essential to end the conflict, one way or another.

Although the urgent necessity to finish the conflict, the process of doing so is not so easy as people could think. According to Cate Buchanan, it is extremely difficult for the UN to conduct face to face talks because parties have been severely resistant in having regular conversations. Cate Buchanan also underlines that OSESGY is profoundly focused on finding solutions, but it is difficult to get some progress that is necessary and to find some solution for this war, that has a huge humanitarian impact.

Nevertheless, the involvement of women in formal negotiation mechanisms is a progressive path, which cannot be achieved overnight, and by imposition. Prejudice about gender roles is not the only reason for the removal of women from the negotiation table. The Yemeni culture has its society roles categorically well defined, as Milena Raposo referred, in Yemeni society, it is expected that men concern about family by going out for work to afford the family needs, whilst women keep the main role of taking care of family and assuring the education of next generation. So, there is a general resistance to bring Yemeni women to the political stage, through formal mechanisms. After all, some women demand their role in peace negotiation, and the Arab Spring represented a key moment for women because they actively participated in public protests against the government in 2011. Although, some authors point out that the improvements that were made during the Arab Spring concerning women's rights have taken a setback (Nasser, 2018; Karman, 2018).

The UN is doing an effort to include women in peace talks, despite all the difficulties put by the traditional Yemeni society and the resistance of parties in conflict to include women. Initiatives like the Pact for Peace and Security, as a consultative mechanism for Yemen peace negotiations, and the Yemeni women's Technical Advisory Group, are examples of the effort that has been made by the UN to bring women to the table of negotiation. According to Cate Buchanan, these indirect mechanisms are UN answers to the parties' resistance in having women in their delegations.

Despite all obstacles to have a place in formal processes for peace negotiations, women are taking part in some informal initiatives. Many associations and NGO's have been struggling to assure human rights. According to Cate Buchanan, women's participation and representation have been making some progress but it is a slow progress, and she added that there have been many indirect ways of including women in peace processes, but not as much as it is desirable, like having women in negotiation teams or as mediators.

According to Castro and D'Angelo (2019), nowadays Yemen lives in a logic of struggle for survival, where the bombs have become irrelevant, compared to hunger, disease, and death. Also, Suha Basharen, a Yemeni activist, states that "with the war, finding food

became the priority, not talk about rights". Women's rights are relegated to second place when there are problems like violent conflict, starvation, and disease.

We are currently witnessing what appears to be the inertia of the international community in the face of humanitarian atrocities that have occurred in Yemen since the Coalition intervened in the country[58]. What Yemen is experiencing today is one of the worst humanitarian crises of all time. This reality must make us question the role of the international community in resolving this conflict and in particular the UN. I consider relevant the development of future studies about the role played by the so-called developed countries in the conflict, such as the USA, Brazil, France, and the United Kingdom, which continue to sell arms to the parties involved in the conflict and to sponsor the parties involved, in exchange of geostrategic power.

It is now necessary a concerted action by the international community, supporting the UN in its efforts to create a process leading to peace in Yemen. As Cate Buchanan has told me, it is necessary a huge agreement and not successive small agreements. These peace negotiations should be headed up by the UN. Nonetheless, this is not enough. It is necessary, as stated by the International Crisis Group (July 2, 2020), to create sustainable economic structures and transparent and effective state structures. It is important, therefore, that the states, that supported the Yemen conflict, engage themselves in contributing to the reconstruction of a society, where people have suffered the consequences of having a weak political structure manipulated by foreign actors.

As a limitation in my work, I would like to mention the fact that I have never been in Yemen and I have not conducted fieldwork; instead, I made some efforts for conducting interviews with a few Yemeni citizens, and people who have worked in Yemen, and also people from international organizations with a role in the conflict resolution. Another limitation that I could identify when I was carrying out this study was the difference between my European cultural background and Yemeni culture and society, which makes it harder to understand and relate, because it is not easy to put ourselves in others shoes. Another point I want to focus on was given by Cate Buchanan, that warned me that sometimes it is hard to understand some procedures in conflict resolution from the outside. Most of these processes are multi-layered and they are often involved in confidentiality and secrecy, in order to encourage the parties to find agreement and reach dialogue. This is one of the reasons why there is not a lot of information publicly available, and it does not mean that there is not a lot of effort behind the scenes to try to change and improve things.

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[58] There are several periodical articles that evidence the absence of interest from other governments in Yemen conflict. For example: https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/18/mundo/noticia/iemen-chacina-nao-indigna-governos-opinioes-publicas-1848075 and https://observador.pt/especiais/iemen-o-que-se-passa-na-guerra-da-qual-ninguem-quer-saber/

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To sum up, it can be said that women, in general, have a positive impact on conflict resolution and in peace processes. In particular, when we look at the Yemeni context, we can see that the conflict represents a really difficult and complex situation, where many parties are involved, where there are many patriarchal and tribal traditions and norms, that relegate women to second place. Despite that, the UN is making an effort to assure the presence of women in peace talks, and to create some formal mechanisms, to guarantee the presence of women, like the Pact and TAG. On the other side, women keep assuming their role in informal mechanisms, they are getting involved in some initiatives related to human rights, and that is one of the paths for peace.

In that sense, I have concluded in this study that the intervention of women in peace resolution is still low, but it is growing. I have also understood that women are relevant for building a peaceful sustainable society, and their voices should be listening. However, like all transformations in the world, it takes time and each society has its own pace and its historical background that must be respected.

I began my study with an idyllic vision of Yemen, shared by Voltaire, in which he says that Yemen is the most pleasant place in the world. When I read those words I thought that Yemen should have been a beautiful place before the conflict. The image I had of the conflict in Yemen was given me by the Western media, in which I saw images of destruction, armed men, women displaced with their children, which are mostly thin and with visible bones under their skin. These images may not be fake, but they are not enough to understand Yemen society. It is necessary to get knowledge about the world around us, especially realities as different as the Yemeni, when compared to the European one, to do so it is needed to develop those thematics in public schools and universities, in order to contribute to an open-minded, solitary and, inclusive society.

When I saw the sparkle of emotions in Milena Raposo's eyes while she was talking about Yemen and its people, I understood that the beauty is still intact and is not just physical, but made up of people that live in Yemen, that are characterized by "tolerance, acceptance, humility, and authenticity".

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ANNEXES

ANNEX A - INFORMED CONSENT

This study is carried out within the research, that will lead to the writing of a master's thesis in International Studies at **ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**, for which there is no funding entity. This study focuses on women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Yemen.

The study is carried out by Elisabete Domingues, a master's student at ISCTE-IUL, who you may contact if have any question or wish to share any comments.

Your participation, which will be highly valued, consists of being one of the key interlocutors in the study. There are no expected risks associated with participating in the study. Although you may not directly benefit from participating in the study, your answers will contribute to a better understanding of Yemeni women role in peace negotiations in Yemen conflict. In the end, the study will also be shared with you.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary: you may choose to participate or not to participate. If after agreeing to participating and while you are answering the questions you decide to withdraw your participation, that will also be fully respected. You may choose to be identified. However, participation can also be anonymous and confidential, if you wish so. In this case, you would be identified only by a fictional name.

The data collected in the interview will be used for content analysis.

Please state whether you agree to participate in the study:

I ACCEPT ☐ I DO NOT ACCEPT ☐

Please state whether you accept to be identified in the study:

I ACCEPT ☐ I DO NOT ACCEPT ☐

* if you can't fill in this form and return it, please reply to our email with the answer to the questions above.

Name:_____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

ANNEX B – FRAMEWORK AND INTERVIEW SCRIPT

The role of women in conflict resolution: the case of Yemen

"Women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Yemen"

Framework

I am a Portuguese student, currently writing my dissertation for the Master's course in International Studies at ISCTE, in Lisbon.

My dissertation aims to further gather evidence on women's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Yemen. The object of this study was chosen to shed some light into how gender equality is taken into account in conflict resolutions, in particular in the case of Yemen, where women seem to be relegated to the background. Many studies have emphasised that when women are listened in peace processes, peace and development are more lasting and the building of positive peace is more easily implemented.

In recent years, this question has been at the core of the international political agenda and many countries have seen major changes in the role of women. In this study, I aim to focus on the relevance of gender at the table of conflict resolution, in the context of the Yemeni conflict.

The main research question will be: "Is women participation in peacebuilding relevant for conflict resolution in Yemen?". By pursuing the answers to this question, we expect to understand how Yemeni women are involved in the peacekeeping process, namely in formal and informal processes; find out some examples of women participated/led initiatives; and understand if the Yemeni Women involvement in peacekeeping processes is impacting the path to sustainable peace.

You will find attached some questions for guidance, but feel free to add any other relevant information and to organise the answers as you deem convenient. Shall you have any question or concern, please do not hesitate in contacting me.

Thank you in advance for your kind assistance in this project.

Kind Regards,

The role of women in conflict resolution: the case of Yemen

Interview Script

1. How would you characterise the present situation in Yemen?
2. What successes have peace negotiations yielded in Yemen so far?
3. How would you describe Yemeni women and their role in Yemen society?
4. How are women seen by the rest of Yemeni population?
5. Are Yemeni women involved in formal/informal peacekeeping processes in Yemen?
6. Are there any some initiatives led by Yemeni women to support the peacekeeping process in Yemen?
7. Are there initiatives led by other international organizations to empower women in Yemen, in particular their role in peace negotiations?
8. In your opinion, to what extent involving Yemeni women in the peacekeeping process is or is not a key part of the process?
9. In general, are there differences in peace processes when women take part in negotiations and when they are not?
10. How would a future solution for Yemen conflict resolution take into consideration the role of women?