THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE 2013 FILM 'THE MULBERRY HOUSE' TO DOCUMENTING WOMEN'S RESISTANCES IN THE 2011 REVOLUTION IN YEMEN

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ABSTRACT

The Mulberry House is a 2013 Sara Ishaq film that documents experiences of resistances that she and women in her family lived during the 2011 revolution in Yemen. I study this film in this thesis as a primary historical source in order to see how it can contribute to Yemeni women's history of resistances to authoritarianisms. I use an analytical approach in order to interpret the narratives this film provides. In my analysis, I look at experiences of bargaining with the patriarchal system as well as strategies women use to negotiate with the system and challenge it. At the same time, I study the way filmic material captures these moments of resistance to patriarchal authoritarianism as well as the way the film characters resist Saleh's authoritarian regime in the 2011 revolution. I approach the film analytically to explore the role political and social organization play in defining gender within the space of the house and the revolution. I study the stories of resistances in the film as part of a continuum of women's resistances between the revolution and the negotiation with patriarchy. In addition, my study of *The Mulberry House* explores the use of a Yemeni documentary film as a historical source. By doing so, I look at how this film contributes to the historicization of women's resistances in the 2011 revolution in Yemen as well as women's filmmaking as a form of resistance.

i

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Tan and his peanut butter jar that he shares with knowledge, dance and love. To Mo, who sings it all away. To Pablo and summertime. To MOMO who made this year possible, thank you! To Arman, who put me in touch with myself again. To the entire faculty that reminded me of how much I love what I do especially Professors Dominika, Vera and Jasmina. Thank you Budapest and see you soon!

Table of contents

Map of Yemen

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand. In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. It destroys, brings to life, nurtures. Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission (Minh-Ha, 1989, 121).

1.1 Background

My grandmother Fatima is a Yemeni woman who like many Yemeni women of her generation never learned how to read or write. Despite her lifetime investment in the education of her 8 children especially the 4 girls, the fact that she never read or wrote made the knowledge she passes on to me very different from everything I have ever read. Her memory has always served as a unique archive. She always has a story that includes a war, a revolution, a coup, a song, an argument, a family member or a friend. She would not necessarily put them in this order, though. In fact, the elements of her stories never have a fixed order. Her memory has a map of events, feelings, motives and people that intertwine not out of randomness but more like a reflection of all of these coming together as complex tissues whose order changes depending on how the anecdote is weaved and for what purpose.

In his book *History: A Very Short Introduction* John H. Arnold considers an archive a repository of past documentation (Arnold 2000, 59). In this case, I would say that I grew up around archives. The women I grew up around, whether literate or illiterate; designed their repositories of past documentation in their memories. They transmit this documentation through story telling in which they date births, deaths, graduations,

1

pregnancies, miscarriages, divorces, poverty, wealth and disputes with revolutions, coups, wars and the names of those who represented all of these. These memory archives, are organized according to the nature of events that are not separate, yet not paralleled either. Events intersect and sometimes, unite bringing categories to crisis and challenging the separation that categorization relies on.

On March 2011, Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh addressed the protestors in the third month of the revolution against his regime with one of his speeches saying: "You are asking the regime to leave. You say leave, but who should leave?"[1] At that particular moment, I became aware of my own memory archive. And for the past five years my fear of losing this memory has grown bigger than my fear of the gunfire I have witnessed since the age of 6. My memory archive is a documentation of my resistances. And as gunfire sounds escalate, the need to preserve an answer to Saleh's question has become my quest. The rhetoric question of "but who should leave?" is where the tyranny of authoritarianism lies. This tyranny prospers and feeds on a systematic looting of the memory of resistances. Thus, my interest in women's history of resistances is derived from the fact that I believe that preserving and transmitting narratives of resistances are acts of resistance.

I choose women's history because that particular moment in the 2011 revolution was not an unfamiliar moment. My relationship with authoritarianism goes further than Saleh's speech or the 2011 revolution. My assigned gender at birth has positioned me in a struggle with authoritarianism since as far as I can remember. However, the 2011 revolution came as a major event where I realized the complexity of the task of

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[1] Saleh gave this speech on 15th March 2011 at Sana'a University, Faculty of Medicine. The speech was televised and it was recorded while it was aired on national television. There are no available links to the speech on the web. However, in minute 21:11 of *The Mulberry House* Saleh appears giving this speech on the television captured on camera.

2

documenting women's resistances to authoritarianisms. This realization came at a time where the majority of written literature on Yemeni women in the 2011 revolution tended to either deem women's participation in the revolution as a "sudden phenomenon" or only focused on their political representation in the transitional period that followed the revolution. These analyses and narratives could not speak to the narratives of resistances to authoritarianisms stored in my memory archive. I do not contest the particular focus of this literature on women in the squares of protest. It is the separation of a wider variety of women's resistances that I contest.

In order for me to be able to historicize women's resistances, I had to find a source where I could look at women's resistances outside the narrative of the "sudden phenomenon" of women's resistance in 2011. But I also needed to find a source that captures the complex nature of authoritarianisms as well as the resistances that form against them. In other words, I needed a source that will help historicize and interpret the state's authoritarianism as well as patriarchal authoritarianism without locating the first in the "political public" and the latter in the "apolitical private" as presumed separate categories. At the same time, I insist on using resistance(s) and authoritarianism(s) because I am aware of the fact that each form of authoritarianism shares similarities and differences with other forms and so does every form of resistance. In all cases, they are not identical but cannot be separated either. The source I chose for the task this thesis aims to fulfill is *The Mulberry House,* a 2013 documentary film by Yemeni Scottish filmmaker Sara Ishaq. This primary source meets my search for historiography that gives me access to the story telling of authoritarianisms and women's resistances. As mentioned earlier in this introduction, the documentation of resistances is an act of resistance. For this reason, I chose a film that was created by a Yemeni woman that allows me to historicize and interpret

3

women's resistances. The making of this film is itself part of a filmmaking wave that broke out during the 2011 revolution. The next subchapter shows the significance of this film in relevance to the state of filmmaking in Yemen as well as the 2011 revolution.

1.2 Filmmaking in Yemen

The first filmic images made in Yemen were produced by Great Britain during the British colonial period in South Yemen that lasted for 118 years between 1849 and 1967. [2] The first film theaters in Yemen were established in Aden, South Yemen in 1918. These film theaters were among the earliest film theaters in the Arab world and they date back to the British colonial rule of the South as Anne Ciecko says in her article "Cinema of Yemen and Saudi Arabia: Narrative Strategies, Cultural Challenges, Contemporary Features" (Ciecko 2011, 4). In North Yemen, the first film theater was established in 1962, the year of the revolution against the Mutawakkilite Kingdom. The revolution against the Mutawakkilite monarchs ended their rule that lasted for 44 years between 1918 and 1962, then North Yemen became the Yemen Arab Republic. In 1967, South Yemen gained independence after a revolution against the British colonial rule and in 1970 it became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Ciecko considers what she describes as "nation formation" and geopolitics of great significance to the genealogy of filmmaking in Yemen (Ciecko 2011, 2). Although she does not go further into this, I read the connection she makes in relevance to the state-sponsored 1970s-1980s documentary films that were mostly produced in Aden. As there was no private film production, these documentaries mostly focused on promoting the state's socialist

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[2] For official colonial filmic images created in Aden, South Yemen, see The Colonial Film Database: Colonial Film Database | Colonialfilm. Colonial Film Database | Colonialfilm. Accessed May 31, 2016. http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/.

ideology. Here, Cieko emphasizes the role the socialist state played in financing arts and film theaters in the South in comparison with the North (Ciecko 2011, 2).

By the time the two Yemens united in 1990, there was a total of 49 film theaters most of which were closed by the mid-1990s according to a report by Samir Hassan titled "The Demise of Film Theaters in Yemen", which was published on *Aljazeera* in 2013.[3] The three remaining film theaters, one in the capital Sana'a and two others in Aden, open occasionally to screen DVDs where the audience is merely men. Yemeni filmmaker Samir Al-Afif was quoted in this report saying that Saleh's post unity state stopped funding film theatres and allowed fundamentalist ideologies to attack arts and filmmaking post the 1994 war.[4] In the same report, an interview with Hafez Mustafa Ali, head of Aden's Cultural Center, was included where he adds that cutting funding, neglecting arts and allowing fundamentalists to spread hate speech against the film theaters were all contributing factors to artists and filmmakers fleeing the country in the late 1990s. Another report titled "A Poll on Film Theaters" by Amal Ayyash and published in the Yemeni newspaper *Algomhoriah* by in 2012 features Abdullah Moqbel, a film theater manager in Aden, who believes that Saleh's era witnessed what he describes as the most vicious form of corruption in the arts and culture governmental sectors. In this interview, Moqbel criticizes the decision makers that were appointed in the Ministry of Culture under Saleh's rule after the unification. He adds that these officials lack necessary expertise and allocate funds for their own interests.[5]

Shutting down film theatres and most art institutions in Yemen distanced the generation of the 1990s from the field of filmmaking. Yet, this does not mean that Yemeni

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[3] Hassan, S. (August 1 2013). The Demise of Film Theaters in Yemen. Aljazeera.net This report was originally published in Arabic. Cited quotes from Arabic sources in this thesis are translated to English by the author of this thesis.

[4] Al-Afif here refers to the 1994 war, which will be explained in chapter 3.

[5] Ayyash, A. (1st. August 2013) Investigation on Film Theaters. Algomhoriah.

filmmaking disappeared completely. In fact the pre-2011 period of filmmaking in general and documentary filmmaking in particular in Yemen has known a Yemeni woman's name that occupied this field as a pioneer woman filmmaker between the 1990s and the early 2000s. Khadija Al-Salami who produced and directed a number of films, most of which were documentary films is considered the first Yemeni woman film director. Al-Salami's early work in the 1990s focused on documentaries featuring Yemeni historical sites. In the 2000s Al-Salami's work shifted towards a complete focus on women's issues especially child marriage. Among these films are Al-Salami's 2005 documentary *Amina* and her 2014 first feature film *I am Nojoom, Aged 10 and Divorced*. (*Kering*, 2015).[6] Another experience of filmmaking that took place in the pre-2011 period was that of the Yemeni British director Bader Ben-Hirsi. Ben-Hirsi produced and directed a 2000 documentary titled *The English Sheikh and the Yemeni Gentleman,* which was followed by *A New Day in Old Sana'a*, known as the first feature-length film fully shot in Yemen (Ciecko 2011, 3).

Sara Ishaq's 2012 film *Karama Has No Walls* presents a leap in Yemeni documentary filmmaking for a number of reasons. This film tells the story of one of the bloodiest days of the revolution when 52 nonviolent protestors were shot dead and 127 others wounded according to the *Human Rights Watch* report titled "Unpunished Massacre: Yemen's Failed Response to the Friday of Dignity Killings" (*HRW* 2013, 29). Sociologist Malcolm L. Rigsby in a 2013 film review published on the *Educational*

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[6] In an interview with Al-Salami, published in *Kering* magazine on March 2015 she tells the story of her forced marriage at the age of 10, which influenced the documentary and fiction films that she is mostly known for. See: Aged 10 and Divorced, Now Acclaimed Filmmaker. Kering, March 15, 2015. http://www.kering.com/en/magazine/aged-10-and-divorced-now-acclaimed-film-maker

Film Reviews Online database describes *Karama Has No Walls* by saying[7]:

> It is in this film that we follow the live accounts and recollected narratives of two principal cameramen. Through them, we live the atrocity when a government turns on its peaceful protesters and how that simple act of unabridged power can unify and build solidarity among the citizenry. Again, we may wish to contemplate what it takes to launch a revolution.

With this film Ishaq launched a new era of documentary filmmaking in Yemen, not only because this was the first Yemeni film that directly criticizes the state, but also because it is the first Yemeni documentary film that includes live-filmed footage of live ammunition fired on protestors. Ishaq's style in this film embraces the participatory approach where the two cameramen whose footage she uses are also the subjects of testimony, as Rigsby notes. Ishaq's film opened a wide gate for many other initiatives of documentary filmmaking in Yemen post the 2011 revolution embracing this participatory style at times and focusing on oral testimony recording at other times. When *Karama Has No Walls* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Subject in 2014, Yemeni scholar Farea Al-Muslimi, wrote that this film has served as a reminder of the atrocities Saleh committed despite the immunity from prosecution that he was granted in November 2011. Al-Muslimi's opinion presented in his *AlMonitor* 2014 article "On 'Day of Dignity' Nominated for Oscar" [8] is an example of a new relationship between Yemenis and Yemeni filmmaking.

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[7] Rigsby, M. (2013). Karama Has No Walls. Educational Online Review.
[8] Al-Muslimi, F. (2014).Yemeni film on 'Day of Dignity' nominated for Oscar.Al-Monitor. Retrieved June 09, 2016, from http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/yemen-oscar-nomination.html

Similarly, Tom Finn concludes his *New Yorker* 2014 article "Beyond the Walls of the Yemeni Revolution"[9] with a statement on *Karama Has No Walls* by stating:

> It is a snapshot of a protest movement at its most powerful, when differences (male, female, Southern, Northern, Sunni, Shia, old, young, secularist, Islamist) were put aside in the name of battling the shared injustices of poverty, unemployment, and corruption.

Karama Has No Walls was the first Yemeni film that reached the Oscars, travelling all the way from a country that had no remaining film theaters or film schools since the mid-1990s. It was followed by Ishaq's film *The Mulberry House,* which is the primary source for this thesis.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives

In my thesis, I will be treating *The Mulberry House* as a primary historical source in order to answer my main research question: How does *The Mulberry House* contribute to the documentation of Yemeni women's history of resistances to authoritarianisms? In chapter 2, I explain my use of this documentary film as a historical source as well as the approach and theoretical concepts I use to read *The Mulberry House* as a historical source. In chapter 3, I give a brief context of Yemen's history and I discuss some of the available literature on women and the 2011 revolution in Yemen. I delve into the narratives *The Mulberry House* captures in chapter 4, before I provide an answer to my research question in the conclusion.

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[9] Finn, Tom. Beyond the Walls of Yemen's Revolution. The New Yorker. February 27, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/beyond-the-walls-of-yemens-revolution

This research is the first study of *The Mulberry House* as well as women's resistances through oral story telling captured on film in Yemen. The aim of my work here is to contribute to the preservation of women's memory archives of their resistances against different forms of authoritarianisms. In addition, I aim to contribute to building up Yemeni women's history. My study of *The Mulberry House* also aims to introduce the use of Yemeni women's documentary film in women's history writing.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

My thesis explores *The Mulberry House*, a Sara Ishaq film that was released by Proaction Film[10] on November 20th 2013, as a primary historical source documenting experiences of women's resistances in the 2011 revolution in Yemen. In this chapter, I explain how I am treating this film as a historical source in addition to the approach and theoretical concepts I use in order to interpret the historical narratives of authoritarianisms and resistances this film provides.

2.1 The Mulberry House Synopsis

Sara Ishaq was born to a Scottish mother and a Yemeni father who divorced when she was a child. She was raised in the Yemeni capital Sana'a and by the age of 17 she left to Scotland to separate from her father's authority. After 10 years of being away, she decided to come back to Yemen for what was intended to be a short visit. In Yemen, Ishaq found herself reconnecting with her family that was dealing at the same time with her cousin Waleed's detention that took place the year before. The visit that was planned to be short coincided with the protests that rapidly swept the country and turned into a revolution demanding the overthrow of Yemen's president for 33 years, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

What started as arbitrary filming of daily family gatherings turned into a documentation of Ishaq facing her father and grandfather with the reasons that made her decide to leave Yemen. Her discussions inspired gender discussions among other women and men in the family. As the revolution progressed, Ishaq's camera continued capturing her family

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[10] Proaction Film is a Syrian film and television production founded in Damascus in 2002 and registered in Berlin since 2014. See http://www.proactionfilm.com/about/

discussions on gender, politics and the revolution as well as Yemenis' revolt in against Saleh's regime throughout the entire year of 2011.

2.2 Treating Film as a Historical Source

> *When Ghazal Al-Maqdeshya recited: 'Equal, all people are equal. No one's mother was born a concubine' she has risen to the highest levels of social resistance. It called for equality before the United Nations was born* (Al-Baradouni, 1978, 329)

This is how one of Yemen's prominent poets, Abdullah Al-Baradouni describes Ghazal Al-Maqdeshya's poetry in his book titled *A Journey in Old and Modern Yemeni Poetry*. Al-Maqdeshya was an illiterate tribeswoman who publically protested many levels of injustices through poetry in the second half of the 19th century. Between contesting her forced marriage, all the way to challenging feudalism, the socio-caste system and unjust taxations, Al-Maqdeshya's colloquial poetry is still recited by Yemenis a century later (Al-Baradouni 1978, 227). Whether it is poetry, songs or stories passed from one generation to the other, oral narration is the living memory of Yemenis (Caton 2006, 37). For this reason, I began my discussion in this subchapter with an example from this oral tradition that remains one of the most powerful tools Yemenis use in history telling. Al-Maqdeshya's ability to document her revolt against authoritarianisms resembles the narratives of many women I came across in 2011. Protesting Saleh's authority was neither their first nor their last experience of resistance. Nonetheless, the available written literature, which I discuss in chapter 3, uses a quantitative approach that focuses on women's presence in numbers in the squares of protest in a way that creates a narrative of women's "surprising" participation in the 2011 revolution. This kind of focus as we will see later makes women's resistances seem as if they only began on the date of the first protest and ended with the last protest in 2011.

Trinh T. Minh-ha objects in her book *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* to the Western understanding of storytelling in a non-written form as an equivalent of a people's limitation of knowledge. Minh-Ha's discussion of examples from the Western discourse on oral story telling shows how this discourse places the written in the category of the "civilized", leaving the oral story that is passed from a generation to another within the category of the "uncivilized". In this discourse, the "uncivilized" method must undergo the verification of the Western eye in order to qualify as data for the final written product (Minh-Ha 2006, 122-123). The process Minh-Ha describes makes oral narration relevant only when the narrator is situated as an informant whose narrative provides the data for an author's written work. The project I am trying to establish here, however, is the historicization of oral story telling of resistances where the act of telling is itself a form of resistance. In the example of Al-Maqdeshya, the poem she recites during a protest against the oppressor is used almost a century later to historicize the protest. Similarly, I consider a film made by a Yemeni woman in a country where filmmaking is struggling to emerge a form of resistance. And as I showed in the introduction, Saleh's era witnessed massive decline of arts and filming. So this film is especially important because one of the resistances it documents is the one against the man whose regime made it almost impossible to make film in the first place. Here my source, just like Al-Maqdeshya's poetry, stands as a documentation of women's resistances where these women narrate their experiences of resistances through a medium that is a tool of resistance.

Since this medium of storytelling is a documentary film, which I am using as a primary historical source, I need to address the particularities of treating this medium as historiography. Accepting film as historiography in comparison with written historiography draws the same challenges that oral story telling has been facing.

Historian Marnie Hughes Warrington explains in her book *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* that questioning the medium through which a historical narrative is told is also questioning the audience's ability of processing knowledge. Here, Warrington is referring to the reservations conventional historians have in regards to the use of documentary film as historiography. These reservations are derived from assumptions that audiences have different interpretations of film, which makes it an unqualified medium of transmitting facts (Warrington, 2007, 2). So if we were to question the audience's capability of interpreting a documentary film, then how is that different with written history? On a similar note, historian Robert A. Rosenstone discusses historical dramatic and documentary films as historical sources in comparison to written sources in his introduction to the volume *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*. He explains that the Western world's replacement of the oral tradition with the written word is not enough to dismiss non-written historiography including film. Rosenstone invites historians to view film as critically as they should in the case of written history, which he calls "a not solid and unproblematic object but a mode of thought", just as a historical film is (Rosenstone, 1995, 4). Moreover, questioning the possible biases and the objectives behind a written source is one of the most important tasks of a historian as John A. Arnold explains:

> Without 'bias' (were ever such a thing possible) there would be no need for historians. So 'bias' is not something to find and eradicate, but rather something to hunt and embrace" (Arnold, 2000, 67).

Warrington's reminder that the role of historiography is not limited to resolving debates between historians is quite important here as she adds that the role of historiography should also involve questioning what is considered conventional (Warrington, 2007, 3). Here she indicates that one role of historiography is the study of written history. In

13

addition, she draws attention to another role of historiography, which is questioning conventional approaches and sources used in writing history. This idea is important to my work as I consider the historicization that aims to go beyond the quantitative and rather aims to understand and interpret is indeed unconventional simply because the very act of historicizing resistances represents a disruption for both hegemonic regimes of power and the historicization they produce. Rosenstone believes that filmic image is incapable of producing generalizations or abstractions about the historical subject. This is due to the specificity of the image that makes it restricted to the time and space filmed (Rosenstone, 1995, 8). In addition, Rosenstone sees historical film, which he calls "visual historiography" an effective source of providing counter histories to the dominating narratives under colonialism, authoritarianism, war and various forms of oppression. He points out that in such contexts there have been cases where visual historiography was produced prior to written historiography (Rosenstone, 1995, 5).

Within the classification of documentary films offered by Warrington, *The Mulberry House* would fall into the category of participatory documentary films. A participatory documentary is a film where the filmmaker takes part in front of the camera in an interactive way that impacts the viewers' understanding of all the subjects of filming (Warrington, 2007, 128-129). Regardless of the classification of the historical documentary, Rosenstone draws attention to the influence the person behind the camera has on the content of the film in his book *History on Film and Film on History* (Rosenstone, 2006, 71). In this regard, it is important to remember that the influence of the person behind the source is not limited to film. In the case of written sources, Arnold says: "Sources are not transparent and innocent documents. They are written in particular circumstances, for particular audiences" (Arnold, 2000, 72-73). Accordingly, being aware of the circumstances that shaped the source as well as the subjective

influence of the person who constructed the source is critical regardless of whether the source is a written document or a film. In fact, the filmmaker's influence on the film is of an added value for my study. Since Ishaq's resistances are among my subjects of interest, her choices of what to show and what not to show are important to understand how she wants to document her resistances as well as other women's resistances in the film. This particular task and opportunity is quite accessible when the subject of study is a participatory documentary film. *The Mulberry House* offers accessibility to the circumstances and identities of the filmmaker due to the fact that she is one of the main characters of the film. Rosenstone also states that documentary film cannot be seen as a direct representation of the past. The filmmaker's involvement in filming, editing as well as choice of location, time, and characters makes a documentary film a text about one aspect of the past (Rosenstone, 2006, 87). Once again, this is not different from written sources or any other medium of representation and in the case of *The Mulberry House*, I do not intend to use documentary film to speak of past events. My focus here is to historicize and interpret experiences of resistances to authoritarianisms and not to record particular events of the revolution. In the next subchapters, I elaborate on the approach I use in this historicization as well as the theoretical concepts involved in it.

2.3 Approach

As stated before, the story telling in *The Mulberry House* provides a counter narrative to that of the "sudden presence" of women in the 2011 revolution. The film narrates resistances as experiences that form a continuum. The "surprising presence" narrative in my view is inadequate and even dangerous as it disregards the process, the experience, and therefore the continuum of resistances. It gives an illusion that Yemeni women's resistances did not exist outside this "temporal" space and timeline between

January and December 2011. Furthermore, this illusion produces a superficial quantitative account of women's presence or absence as that used by non-feminist historians in dismissing women's history. "My understanding of the French Revolution is not changed by knowing that women participated in it" is an example of non-feminist historians' responses to women's history that gender historian Joan Wallach Scott mentions in her article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis". Scott adds that the separation of women's history from the political is what reduces women in history writing to this humble mention of participation (Scott 1986, 1055), which is presented in the Yemeni case as "surprising". The humble mention of women's participation adds up to the illusion of the nothing before and nothing after the 2011 revolution. It also contributes to placing women's history outside the political that remains masculinized considering that the script that interprets and documents the revolution as a political project is a masculine script, as Joane Nagel explains in her article "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations". Nagel adds that even the roles women play in what are considered political projects as leaders and activists are still embedded in these scripts that are: "written primarily by men, for men, and about men" (Nagel 1998, 243). So in order to establish a historicization of women's resistances that understands the why and the how rather than the how many, I look at resistances as political without the separation drawn by the conventional masculine connotation of the "political public", which is Change Square in this case and the, "apolitical private space of the house".

The 60-minute-long film I look at as a source in this thesis consists of A-roll and B-roll[11] mostly shot inside the Ishaqs house with the exception of a 3-minute-scene in the

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[11] In a documentary film that includes interviews, "A-roll" is used to describe the interview scenes while "B-roll" is used to describe the other scenes where visuals do not involve a direct spoken dialogue with

16

Change Square in Sana'a as well as 1-minute-B-roll of the city. It is critical for my analysis to articulate how I approach the issue of this indoors-filmic material in relation to the public and private dichotomy critique in writing women's history. The public and private dichotomy is one of the most debated issues in feminist theory and scholarship. Authors Ulla Wischermann and Ilze Kalvina Mueller eloquently discuss the various feminist approaches that contest the separation between the public and the private in their chapter "Feminist Theories on the Separation of the Private and the Public: Looking Back, Looking Forward" from the book titled *Women in German Yearbook: Women in Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture*. Wischermann and Mueller's review of the ways in which feminist theory objects to the dichotomy of the public and the private leads them to conclude with what they call against-the-grain approaches in dealing with the public and the private binary. They refer here to approaches developed by research on women's reality and talk shows on the media that sees them as cases of breaking the public and private dichotomy. Such research considers media as a public space that women's reality and talk shows initiate a discourse within, where women's daily life stories are no longer located in the private. Yet, Wischermann and Mueller urge us to observe this kind of material in the media critically as in many cases these shows reproduce the discourse of the "apolitical private" by presenting women's stories as apolitical within the public sphere of the media. (Wischermann and Mueller 2004, 193). If women's lives are represented in media production separately from the political conditions that shape them, the result would be duplicating another "apolitical private" sphere within the public sphere. Thus,

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the filmed subject. See: Boyechko, Slavik. How To Shoot B-Roll - Transom. Transom. January 29, 2014. http://transom.org/2014/how-to-shoot-b-roll/.

17

the representation of women's lives in the media contributes to breaking the public and private dichotomy when it is situated in the political. Here, I find it important to explain the Yemeni context in relation to the representation of women on filmic image.

In Yemen, the visibility of women's faces in what is considered the public space retreated to a great extent starting with the late 1980s and more intensely in the 1990s. The public space within this period in Yemen is that masculine space where men's visibility is presumed as a norm and women's presence in that space came under the condition of a specific dress code. It is important here to emphasize that Yemeni legislations do not restrict women to a certain dress code. However, the geopolitics of the late 1980s and 1990s have imposed a Wahhabi fundamentalist ideology in Yemen under the Saudi influence especially after the 1994 war, as we will see later in this thesis. This influence did not succeed in restricting women to the house, but it made it difficult for many women to appear in what is considered public spaces without covering their faces as a 2014 report published on *Deutsche Welle* titled "Yemen: The Image of Women in Historical Narratives and Modern Culture"[12] mentions. Until this day, Yemeni women still work alongside with men in farming in rural areas without covering their faces. In urban Yemen, public universities are not segregated and nor are jobs or facilities, but under this Wahhabi influence, the numbers of women who cover their faces in these public spaces exceeds those who do not, according to the report. Yemeni women involved in politics, media and civil society who do not cover their faces are often perceived differently from women who are not well known and do not cover their faces. The visibility of their faces is much more accepted than women who do not appear in the media. So here we see a case where physical segregation between men and women does not exist and yet, because of the rapid change in women's dress

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[12] "Yemen: The Image of Women in Historical Narratives and Modern Culture (2014) *Deutsche Welle.*

code with a majority that covers the face in the cities made women with no activism, politics and media capital very reluctant to appear on camera. The reluctance here stems from fear of stigmatization on one hand and fear of images manipulated through Photoshop technology on the other hand. The growing use of internet in Yemen in the 2000s intensified women's fear of the use of Photoshop technology to alter their images then disseminating them on the web.[13]

Although women who work in media, civil society and politics have overcome this fear of face visibility, they still face a different kind of threats. A report by *Article 19*, a human rights organization based in the United Kingdom that works on freedom of expression, stated that:

> Women journalists or activists who criticize the government or its official policies expose themselves to government-instigated smear campaigns that aim to undermine their credibility, reputations and professionalism. In a country where the code of "honor" is crucial in preserving women's dignity, insults and insinuations that question women's morality are particularly damaging (Article 19 10, 2009).

The report that was published in 2009, two years before the revolution, mentions a reality that women who are active in the fields of media, civil society and politics still face when they engage in criticizing the regime. Thus, in this Yemeni context, I consider a film like *The Mulberry House* with its almost all "indoors" footage a very powerful example of breaking the public and private binary for two reasons. First, this

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[13] This is one of the issues that have not been researched in Yemen. Through my personal observation and experience, I would say that this fear of men acquiring women's pictures and manipulating them through Photoshop techniques is very common. When weddings became segregated in the 1990s, it was not until phone cameras became popular that all wedding invitations would request women not to bring a phone with a camera to a wedding. In fact, all wedding halls have women security guards who search for phones with cameras. I use this example because it shows a space were women do not use a veil or a face cover and out of fear of public shaming that could result of having photos or videos of them uncovered published online. I know of many cases where such photos or videos were taken and posted online or cases of manipulated images of women that put them in a position where their families would react violently and forbid them from work and education to protect the family's "honor".

film challenges the fear that accumulated since the 1990s of women's appearance on the camera, not only because it is made by a woman who filmed women in her house including herself on a daily basis, but by also addressing this fear as we will see in the analysis. Second, *The Mulberry House* as I explained in the introduction is one of the first documentary films that directly criticize the regime by documenting the participation of an entire family in the 2011 revolution against Saleh's regime. Moreover, the public and private binary in this source is shattered by the narrations of resistances that are captured through the medium of the camera. In a 2014 article on Aljazeera , Sara Ishaq wrote:

> The more I observed my family indoors and the protests outdoors, the more I became closer to both. I realized that my struggle to assert my own independence with the authoritarian figures in my family was being mirrored by the struggle of the entire country.[14]

This mirroring that Ishaq describes is what makes this source unique in terms of representing all the resistances portrayed in the film as political. Thus, my analysis of *The Mulberry House* will take an analytical approach that aims to historicize women's resistances in the 2011 revolution by considering the continuum of these resistances rather than distinguishing between some as "private" and others as "public". I seek a historicization that interprets women's resistances against authoritarian figures as political. And as Scott explains that conventional male dominant history writing fails to see women's history within the political (Scott 1986, 1055), I resort to oral narratives

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[14] Ishaq, Sara. The Mulberry House: One Family's Deeply Personal Journey Through the 2011 Yemeni Revolution.-AlJazeeraEnglish.October31,2014.
http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2014/10/mulberry-house-20141028113143478109.html

captured through an unconventional source that shows the political in different but deeply connected domains.

2.4 Theoretical Concepts

2.4.1 Experience

Having established that I chose *The Mulberry House* as a source that allows me to historicize women's experiences of resistances against authoritarianism, I need to emphasize my focus on looking at resistances as "experiences". For this purpose, I will be using Teresa De Laurites definition of experience, that she offers in her 1984 book *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema:*

> I use the term (experience) not in the individualistic, idiosyncratic sense of something belonging to one and exclusively her own even though others may have "similar" experiences; but rather in a general sense of a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in a social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations-material, economic, and interpersonal-which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical, the process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. It is an effect of that interaction-which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values or material causes, but one's personal, subjective, engagement in practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and effect) to the events of the world (De Lauretis 1984, 159).

When the medium that transmits the experience is the camera, we get to see the details of that ongoing construction and see the continuum. We get to witness the spoken word, the bodily expressions, the presences of sound and light and their absences that allow for other presences. I also use experience(s) in order to avoid homogenizing Yemeni women. I only intend to see how narratives in *The Mulberry House* can contribute to historicizing the continuum of resistances, and not claim that these experiences apply

21

to every Yemeni woman. By focusing on this continuum of experiences, I also focus on the process that forms them. It is this process that helps us understand how resistances form and where to locate agency, as Joan Scott explains in her article "The Evidence of Experience". I find this important, for I cannot interpret resistances in a void, as they form in relevance to the conditions around them including the regimes of oppression. Therefore, when I say an experience of resistance, I am not looking at an autonomous will separately from the conditions that formed the subject's will to resist or separately from the language of resistance. I am looking instead at the fluidity of resistance and this is why I say resistance(s), for this subject's resistance is entangled with the conditions that construct the subject and her resistance at the same time. As Scott says: "Being a subject means being subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise" (Scott 1991, 793).

2.4.2 Gender

To define the use of gender in my analysis, I turn again to Joan Scott's article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis". Scott weaves her two-part definition together where the first part defines gender as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes. She puts a four element condition to reading this first part that consist of cultural symbols, normative interpretations of symbols, inclusion of social and political organizations along with domestic dimensions and subjective identity. These four elements can make gender analysis a category that recognizes and comprehends the particularity of each context while writing history. The second part of Scott's definition considers gender as a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott 1986, 1067-1072). What I want to particularly take from Scott's definition is these four elements, which I use in order

22

to be able to historicize and read resistances as a continuum against the conventional linear narrative. Since *The Mulberry House* captures resistances in a way that does not make the 2011 revolution women's first event of resistance, Scott's four elements become a useful tool here to study that continuum and the experiences that create it.

I keep Scott's notion of cultural symbols, normative interpretations of symbols, inclusion of social and political organizations as well as domestic dimensions and subjective identity in mind as I look at the different forms of authoritarianisms. More specifically, while looking at the relationship between women and the men's authoritarianism in Ishaq's family, it becomes apparent how this relationship cannot be framed as identical with the relationship between protestors and Saleh's authoritarianism. In his 2014 *Variety* review of *The Mulberry House,* film critic Jay Weissberg writes:

> Though she includes power cuts, street shooting and the sound of fighter jets overhead, Ishaq isn't simply making a film about Yemen's unrest but rather about one family's response to a nation in rebellion. It's far more about negotiating her place between two worlds and her engagement with her family than a document of the protest movement, and as such reinforces the feminist refrain "The personal is political." Yet "The Mulberry House" does so with a gentle touch, conveying a sense of familial warmth without piling on the emotion.[15]

Although I disagree with Weissberg's interpretation of how Ishaq's film documents the revolution and how he reduces that documentation to the "family's response", I agree with his description of the sense of warmth. This sense of warmth does not compromise the fact that the relationship between women and men in the family, as portrayed in the

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[15] Weissberg, Jay. Film Review: 'The Mulberry House'. Variety. January 15, 2014.
http://variety.com/2014/film/reviews/film-review-the-mulberry-house-1201059884/.

film, shows experiences of authoritarianism and resistance. In the quote I used earlier in this chapter from Ishaq's article, she herself uses the word authoritarianism in describing her father's authority. However, only with a comprehensive consideration of the four elements I take from Scott's definition that I show in chapter 4 how Saleh's authoritarianism cannot be put in the same scale with that in the Ishaq family.

2.4.3 The Patriarchal Bargain

In her article "Bargaining with Patriarchy"; Deniz Kandiyoti coins the term "Patriarchal Bargain" which defines as follows:

> Women strategize within a set of constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I will term the patriarchal bargain of any given society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity (Kandiyoti 1988, 275).

Kandiyoti's article focuses on the strategies women use to negotiate with patriarchy in various cultural contexts in order to obtain certain benefits within a certain class or socio-caste. She provides a socio-economic breakdown of systems of patriarchy and looks at women's negotiations with patriarchy within the range of socio-economic gains (Kandiyoti 1988, 286). It is crucial to explain here that Kandiyoti sees these strategies as ways to survive and cope with the system and not as ways of challenging the patriarchal system. She only sees the bargain as a way of negotiation with the patriarchal system to gain means of survival while being accepted and integrated in the system.

In my analysis, I use the patriarchal bargain in a different way from the way Kandiyoti's article discusses it. I depart from here and use the patriarchal bargain in a way the strategies involved in the bargain mean to break the patriarchal system as the narratives I explore in my analysis of *The Mulberry House* show. It is also important to note that

24

despite the fact that economic independence as we see in the analysis plays a factor in Ishaq's ability to bargain with the patriarchal authority, there are other forms of the bargain where other power dynamics are involved. Additionally, my use of the patriarchal bargain is not exclusive to women. In the analysis I show how men in the family also negotiate and strategize to break the patriarchal elements at certain moments.

2.4.4 The Hidden and Public Transcripts

I look at the strategies used in my analysis of the patriarchal bargain in *The Mulberry House* by using James Scott's concepts of the "hidden transcript" and the "public transcript", which he introduced in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* The "hidden transcript", according to Scott, is the realm of the everyday relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. All means of non-confrontational resistance fall into the category of the "hidden transcript", which turn to a "public transcript" once the resistance becomes confrontational. Scott's theory helps us see potential for resistance even in what appears to be the silence of the oppressed (Scott 1990, 2). "Hidden transcripts" exist everywhere and everyday within the doings and the not doings of the oppressed. All the "hidden transcripts" accumulate in what Scott calls the "offstage" away from the eyes of the oppressor until they either reach a momentum to become public or until the oppressed finds safety in the anonymity of the crowd to show an act of resistance that is visible to the oppressor (Scott, 1990, 14). Scott does not draw a solid line between the "hidden" and the "public". He sees that the solidity of this line is drawn and measured by the power of the oppressor (Scott, 1990, 15). In Scott's theory, it becomes apparent how silences can be tactical acts of resistance. More importantly, Scott points out how crucial the

25

analysis of examples of daily oral arts of conversation and bodily gestures in history is for understanding relationships of power and resistance (Scott1990, 207-212). Scott's theory offers a critical lens through which I read acts of resistance that are narrated in *The Mulberry House*. I specifically use his theory in looking at the gender-based strategies used in the patriarchal bargain I explained earlier.

2.4.5 Hearing with the Mechanical Eye and Seeing with the Electronic Ear

> *Hear with that mechanical eye and see with that electronic ear. The text is not meant to duplicate or strengthen the verisimilitude of the images. It can, at best, strip them of their usual chatter.* (Minh-Ha 1991, 60)

In her book *When the Moon Waxes Red* postcolonial feminist filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-Ha discusses one of the most debated issues in film theory. Issues of reality, authenticity and objectivity are the key words to question the use of documentary film as a source, as I discussed before. In this regard, Minh-Ha says that film theory is incapable of theorizing that applies to all films simply because film theory relies on concepts that do not exist before a film is made (Minh-Ha 1991, 30-31). Even if we create a unified theory on the use of film techniques, the way they are used and received remains a matter between the filmmaker and each viewer. The audience is heterogeneous and each viewer interprets and receives film subjectively. Minh-Ha does not dismiss the role of equipment used repeatedly in filming. What she talks about here is that the use of equipment creates a different practice each time a film is made in a way that makes concepts difficult to fit in explaining every film in the same way. She goes further into this by pointing to the attempt of conceptualizing and theorizing film through language that advocates for what she calls an Enlightenment and "bourgeois" conception of language:

There is also advocacy of an Enlightenment and "bourgeois" conception of language, which holds that the means of communication is the word, its object factual, its addressee a human subject (the linear, hierarchical order of things in a world of reification)--whereas, language as the "medium" of communication in its most radical sense, "only communicates itself in itself" (Minh-Ha 1991, 31).

The issue of authenticity for Minh-Ha is a matter of the audience's dialogue with the filmic material. I agree with her in the sense that audiences do not need the mediator of film theory standing in the middle between film and their interpretations of film. Her filmmaking and film analysis project aims to create non-linear story telling where non-linearity is the common base with reality and authenticity. In my thesis, I do not study *The Mulberry House* for the sake of film analysis. Instead, I read the narratives provided in the film in order to historicize women's experiences of resistances. The use of camera, editing, light and sound are not of great focus for this study. However, I will treat all of these consciously using Minh-Ha's concept of "hearing with the mechanical eye and seeing with the electronic ear" for the type of analysis I do. I hear with the mechanical eye, the camera, in the sense that I recognize the selectivity of the shot scene and I acknowledge it. Similarly, I recognize and acknowledge the subjectivity of the editing process, yet I look at it as part of the story telling I am analyzing. Therefore, when Ishaq chooses to focus the camera on one angle or chooses to connect footage in the way she does excluding other footage, I look at that as a choice of the story she wants to tell. I hear the mechanical eye, the camera, speaking about the biases of shooting and editing while I see the final cut presented by Ishaq with the electronic ear, the recording device on her hand camera. I hear the image for the subjective choice of how she constructs the story and I see the story through the voices of the story teller(s). In a nutshell, the biases of the shot image are part of the story telling. In a way that is

27

no different from a person's choices of which parts of the stories should be told and in what order in a face-to-face conversation. These choices of speech and silence are part of the story telling of experiences and therefore the way of telling these stories is subjective the way experiences are.

In the next chapter I will provide a brief historical background of Yemen as well as literature review on women and the 2011 revolution.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of Yemen's recent history and I discuss some of the literature that was written on Yemeni women and the 2011 revolution. In 3.1 I briefly discuss South and North Yemen before the unity and Yemen under Saleh's rule since the unity in 1990. Next, in 3.2, I review examples from scholarly literature on Yemen women in the 2011 revolution. This chapter intends to provide the needed historical background to read this thesis as well as an idea of how the literature addresses women's resistances in 2011. This will provide relevant information and explain why I am critical of the approaches in some of the literature.

3.1 Yemen's Before the 2011 Revolution

3.1.1 The Struggle for Independence and the Republic

After being colonized by the Ottoman Empire, South Yemen was under British colonial rule between 1849 and 1967. North Yemen was under the Mutawakkilite Imamate monarchy between 1918 and 1962. Sheila Carapico's book *Civil Society in Yemen* presents a valuable documentation of histories of resistances in Yemen, especially urban and rural activism during the revolts against the monarchy imamate rule in the North and British colonialism in the South. Carapico describes Aden, South Yemen, between the early 20th century of the colonial period and the post-independence socialist state, the Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), as the home to the Arab World's militant labor movement. She refers especially to the Aden Trades Union Conference (ATUC), which was founded in 1956. ATUC brought syndicates and labor unions that started forming in 1947 together in a series of strikes against the British labor policies in Aden. Carapico chooses this example as a form of rural activism that

was started by members of the educated elite, who founded what she describes as white-collar syndicates. This form of rural activism provided an inclusive space for working-class activism that later integrated in the anti-colonial overall resistance (Carapico 1998, 91-9).

For a critical understanding of histories of resistance in Yemen we need to see that the line between the urban and the rural is blurred. This blurred line can be seen in Carapico's documentation of the Yafi' Reform Front in the South in the 1950s and the village associations in the Northern region of Taiz in the 1940s. The case of the Yafi' Reform Front offers a model of farmers' awareness of the sultanate aristocracy's alliance with the British. The sultanate aristocracy sustained a feudal system for its own benefits in return for the privileges they were given by the British as long as they maintained labor, revenue and land under the British rule. In the later 1930s, farmers in Southern regions began to protest the feudal system imposed by the sultanate aristocracy. Farmers' confrontations with the sultanate aristocracy were organized in the tribal alliance of the Yafi Reform Front in the 1950s, which pursued an agenda that opposed both the feudal system and the colonial rule. The blurred line between the tribal and the non-tribal, the urban and the rural in Carapico's documentation shows in the events that followed the foundation of many tribal farmer based organizations in the South, all the way from the outskirts of Aden to Hadhramout in the far South in the early 1950s. These organizations supported the National Liberation Front's revolts against the colonial rule in protest mobilization as well as supplying the armed revolt later in the 1960s with fighters and arms (Carapico 1998, 95-97).

Similarly, the experience of village associations in the rural and urban greater region of Taiz not only blurs the line between urban and rural but also adds another layer to what

can be understood as an assemblage of resistances. The geography of this region placed it under the imamate monarchy rule while it also connected the North with the South. Some of the associations that Carapico dates to the early 1940s were similar in their establishment to the syndicates in Aden in terms of the level of education of the founding members, who aimed for social and political reform. In a slightly different case, Carapico describes a model of associations that focused on social reform through providing financial support to members to seek education in Aden, so as to circumvent the imamate's restrictions on education for those not belonging to the ruling class in the North. Another focus of these associations was provision of some forms of welfare services (Carapico 1998, 98-99). These associations operated within a cooperative management of agricultural recourses, which managed to escape arbitrary taxations imposed by the imamate and its tribal aristocracy alliance in the North. The remaining resources were employed in providing autonomous welfare services in rural areas where many of the clinics, schools and wells still function until this day. The cooperative nature of the associations also contributed to an anti-colonial/ anti-imamate consciousness, in a situation in which social-political reform went in parallel with the farmers' daily struggles with feudalism and lack of basic services.

In 1962, North Yemen became the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) after a military coup against the monarchy, preceded by a popular uprising that ended the monarchy rule. Two years later the popular revolution in the South reached its peak under the leadership of the National Liberation Front, and South Yemen gained independence from British colonial rule in 1967. South Yemen remained under the National Liberation Front's rule until 1969 when a civil war between the Marxists and the Nationalists ended with the Marxists taking over the South, which became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in 1970.

31

3.1.2 The Two Republics

The years of revolution in the North and the South also witnessed the birth of the Yemeni feminist movement. The Yemeni feminist movement began with the anti-colonial movement in South Yemen. This does not mean that women's resistance in the North did not exist. However, for the sake of the limited space of this thesis, I can only provide a general overview of where women were located in the two republics, without going into much detail. The focus on South Yemen in historicizing the Yemeni feminist movement is due to the differences between the South and the North in politics regarding women. The four decades of a theocratic monarchy in the North from 1918 to 1944 made means of organization and assembly for women quite limited in comparison with the South.

Southern women's high literacy rates from the early 1940s onwards compared to Northern women who had no access to public schooling and lived under complete gender-based segregation especially in cities until the 1960s according to Linda Boxberger is one of the reasons that can explain the gap between women's movements in the two Yemens (see her chapter "From Two States to One: Women's Lives in the Transformation of Yemen.") Southern women's early education and involvement in politics were a result of the socialist state that ruled South Yemen until the unity in 1990 (Boxberger 1984, 124-125). PDRY's radical Marxist agenda endorsed progressive legislations for women's political and economic rights and provided remarkable access for women to education, social welfare and political participation (Molyneux et al. 1972, 8-10).

32

The 1971 constitution [16] of PDRY is considered one of the most progressive constitutions in the Arab World. Women were mentioned in the wordings of the constitution in articles 35 and 36 as follows:

Article 35: All citizens are equal in their rights and duties irrespective of their sex, origin, religion, and language, standard of education or social status. All persons are equal before the law. The state shall do whatever it can to realize this equality by means of providing equal political, economical, social and cultural opportunities.

Article 36: The state shall ensure equal rights for men and women in all fields of life, the political, economical and social, and shall provide the necessary conditions for the realization of that equality. The state shall also work for the creation of the circumstances that will enable the woman to combine between the participation in the productive and social work and her role within the family sphere. It shall render special care to the vocational qualifying of the workingwoman. The state shall, further, insure special protection for workingwomen and the children and shall establish daycare centers in all work facilities as specified by law.

These PDRY constitutional articles resulted in the 3rd Bill known as the "Family Bill" issued in 1973, which gave women full autonomy in personal status laws including marriage, divorce and custody of children (Boxberger 1984, 124).

In her article "Gender and Status Inequalities in Yemen: Honor, Economics and Politics, Sheila Carapico speaks about the impact of the Saudi influx of money that financed YAR in the late 1980s. Ali Abdullah Saleh who became president of YAR in 1978 benefited from the Saudi support, which also funded his tribal allies. In this regard Carapico writes:

> Bankrolling salaries for non-Yemeni Arab teachers, Riyadh recruited religious conservatives who supported its preference for gender segregation and women's

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[16] The 1971 Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

seclusion. Religious partisans established a large base among faculty and students at Sana'a University where, in several ugly incidents, bareheaded Arab or Yemeni women were humiliated or even pelted with stones. The Islamic front also had a following of genuinely pious men and women attracted by their religious message, were capable of making temporary regional alliances with Hashid and Bakil,[17] and could sometimes count on the support of Aden émigrés and anti-communist merchants (Carapico 1996, 94).

Despite the dictatorial nature that both PDRY and YAR had in common, the state ideologies conflicted in the context the Cold War, which delayed their unity. The negotiations of the unity were impacted largely by Soviet and Western interventions. The Soviets mainly supported the Marxist PDRY, while the conservative and military ruled YAR had the majority of the Western support.

3.1.3 Unity: The Republic of Yemen and Saleh's Rule

In 1990, South and North Yemen united under the name of the Republic of Yemen and Ali Abdullah Saleh became its president. The Republic of Yemen had the international community's support, which celebrated what was described repeatedly as the beginning of an era of political plurality after an era of dictatorship. A new constitution was drafted as a result and the mention of women was reduced to the word "sex" in one article of the whole constitution[18]:

Article 27: All citizens are equal before the law and equal in public rights and duties without discrimination among them based on sex, color, ethnic origin, language, profession, social status or belief

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[17] Hashid and Bakil are the largest two tribes in North Yemen. Hashid supported Saleh until the early 2000s. Besides Hashid's historical tribal power, it is also known for its strong alliance with Saudi Arabia, which finances the tribal leaders of Hashid heavily until this day.
[18] Constitution of the Year 1990 of the Republic of Yemen, Amended in 1991, also known as the constitution of the unity.

Right after the unity, Saleh began to change policies towards a centralized presidential rule that excluded the Southerners as well as their share of the distribution of wealth. The disagreements between Saleh and the socialists who had partnered with him in 1990 reached a peak in late 1993 and resulted in the 1994 war waged by Saleh against the South.

The 1994 war could not have reinforced Saleh's power without him resorting to the right wing, the Muslim Brotherhood's support especially the fundamentalist part of it, as Stacey Philbrik Yadav explains in her article on the "Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood and the Perils of Power-sharing." Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood party, which is known as The Congregation of Yemeni Reform "Islah," recruited soldiers with the use of religious language (Yadav 2015, 3-5). The 1994 war itself started with the support of a "fatwa", a religious declaration by Abdluwhab Al-Dailmai, a prominent figure in Islah and the minister of judicial affairs. The fatwa stated that Southern men were atheist Marxists who had to be prosecuted in order to preserve Yemen's Islamic identity. The fatwa that was aired on the national radio called for "saving Southern women from the immoral life style they were forced to live under the rule of Marxist men" (Carapico, 2002).

When Saleh won the war, Islah was rewarded generously. Abdullah Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar, the founder of Islah and the leader of Hashid, was assigned to head the parliament and continued in that position until he died in 2007. From that point onward Islah had the second largest parliamentary bloc after Saleh's ruling party, the General People's Conference (GPC). Besides Islah's share in the legislative body of the state, represented in the parliament, all legislative propositions had to be approved by the

Yemen's Islamic Committee, headed by Abdul-Majid Al-Zindani, a fundamentalist Salafist scholar.

The aftermath of the 1994 war resulted in constitutional amendments that radically altered women's legal status. Women are mentioned in only one article in the entire constitution, which is still in force today[19]:

Article 31: Women are the sisters of men and their rights and duties are guaranteed and assigned by Islamic Sharia and stated by the law.

The constitutional changes that appear in article 31 withdrew women's independent citizenship, as their existence in the eyes of the state became conditioned by their relationship to men. The ramifications of this constitutional definition of women's citizenship were apparent in the rapid alterations in the personal status law as well as the penal code, which were changed and approved in the same year. The implications on the penal code and personal status law were dramatic. The penal code[20] made a woman's wergild, financial compensation paid to a family of a victim of murder in case of unintentional murder, half of a man's wergild in article 42. Punishment of honor crimes was reduced in article 232 of the penal code where a husband who kills his wife in cases of adultery gets a lenient penalty of 6 to 12 months in prison in addition to paying a financial compensation. As for the personal status law[21], article 15 left the marriage age undetermined.

The years that followed the 1994 war were strongly influenced by these legal changes in regards to women. Despite women's powerful presence in civil society, women who did not support Saleh were in constant confrontation with the regime as well as the

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[19] The 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Yemen, Amended in 2001.
[20] The Penal Code for the Republic of Yemen for the year 1994.
[21] The Personal Status Law for the Republic of Yemen for the Year 1994.

extreme fundamentalist ideology that targeted women massively since the 1994 war. This ideology did not only attack feminists but also recruited numbers of women who became fanatic supporters of Islah and its fundamentalist Salafist wing. One example of this recruitment was the 2010 child marriage protests. In 2010, Islah opposed setting a minimum age for marriage under the pretext that it would be a violation of Sharia law. Meanwhile, a great numbers of Salafist and Islahi women protested on the streets of the capital Sana'a against the proposed bill, which sets the age of marriage at 18 (IRIN, 2010). These women's statements in the press used piety, protecting women's values of modesty as reasons to oppose the bill while accusing Yemeni feminists who protested for the bill of attacking Islamic values.

Saleh's rule after the 1994 war used political plurality and the fact that parties were allowed to form to portray his regime as democratic. Meanwhile Saleh weakened unions and cooperatives that dated back to the early 1940s with a history of anti-feudal/anti-colonial history. Saleh's alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood continued until 2003. After that, Islah and six other parties formed a coalition that became Yemen's formal partisan opposition to Saleh's regime. This opposition, now known as the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), consists of seven parties including Islah, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), Al-Haq party, the Yemeni Unionist Congregation, the Popular Forces Union party, the Unionist Popular Liberation Party and the Nasserite Unionist People's Organization (Durac, 2011). The coalition formed to create a strong bloc against Saleh in the 2003 parliamentary elections, despite these parties' conflicting ideologies that went back to brutal wars like the 1969 war between the Nationalists and the socialists in the South as well as the 1994 war in which the Muslim Brotherhood supported Saleh in his war against the socialists (Yadav 2011, 551-553). In addition to JMP running against Saleh in parliamentary and presidential elections, the 2000s

witnessed three main events that shaped the Yemeni political scene before the 2011 revolution. These three events were the six wars of Sa'ada, the establishment of the Southern Movement and the US counterterrorism policy in Yemen.

Marieke Brandt gives a historical account of the six wars that took place in the Northern region of Sa'ada between 2004 and 2009. Her article, titled "Sufyān's Hybrid War: Tribal Politics During the Ḥūthī Conflict," takes us back to the years that followed the coup that succeeded to topple the Mutawakkilite Imamate rule in 1962. The years that followed the 1962 coup witnessed armed conflicts with tribes and families that share the same bloodline with the monarchs. [22] These conflicts ended up marginalizing Sa'ada, which still lacks basic services of health, education and infrastructure until this day. Marginalization increased under Saleh gave access to Saudi funded Wahhabi schools to be built in Sa'ada whose locals are a majority of Zaydis. These Wahhabi schools strongly opposed the locals' religious school of thought, which increased the tension in Sa'ada. According to Brandt, the role of the Western free economy negatively affected tribal agricultural areas severely after the unity in addition to Western development projects that were concentrated in the cities, leaving tribes in a state of discontent with both Saleh and Western policies. In the early 2000s the Zaydi Houthi Movement was formed in Sa'ada to contest Saleh's policies. In response, Saleh waged one war after the other on Sa'ada to get rid of the Houthi Movement. As a result, the movement turned into a theocratic armed movement especially during the 2009 6th round of the war when Saleh allowed Saudi Arabia to bomb Sa'ada, which shares a

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[22] The Mutawakkilite Imamate monarchs are from the Hashemite bloodline that is believed to descend from the prophet of Islam, Mohammed. In Yemen, the majority of Hashemite families in the North, including the Mutawakkilite monarchs, follow the Zaydi school of Islamic thought. Zaydism is categorized as a Shiite Islamic sect, but it is known for its Sunni resemblance with the Sha'afi Sunni jurisdiction. For more on Yemeni tribes see: Dresch, P. (1989). Tribes, government, and history in Yemen. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

border with the Saudis (Brandt 2013, 124).

The 2000s also witnessed the beginning of implementing what is known now as the "US counterterrorism policy in Yemen". Saleh did not only allow extrajudicial arrests of Yemenis that were taken to Guantanamo without trial, but he also allowed extrajudicial killings through airstrikes and drone strikes. Among the first shocking encounters with US airstrikes Yemenis experienced was the one in December 2009, when a US cruise missile killed 41 civilians in Majalah,[23] South Yemen. The incident was neither the first nor the last. The US counterterrorism policy that depended on air strikes and mostly US signature drone strikes under the Obama administration has been targeting Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) all around Yemen since 2002. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates that the total number of extrajudicial killings until January 2015 resulted in over 580 victims who were killed by US air strikes with a majority of drone strikes. 131 of the victims are confirmed to be civilians, 34 of them were minors (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2015). The killings are based on the Pentagon and White House assumptions of who should be targeted. The White House counterterrorism advisor John Brennan gave a speech in 2012 stating that drone strikes are "ethical:"

> Targeted strikes conform to the principle of necessity, the requirement that the
> target have definite military value. In this armed conflict, individuals who are
> part of al-Qaida or its associated forces are legitimate military targets. We have

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[23] Majalah is an impoverished marginalized Yemeni village similar to most of the areas targeted by US air strikes. In addition to the critique directed to extrajudicial killings taking place without trials, Saleh was critiqued by a number of Yemeni and international experts on his policies of marginalization in the targeted rural areas. Many of these critiques are based on empirical evidence that shows that the US counterterrorism policy resulted in increasing the number of impoverished tribesmen who joined AQAP for revenge rather than ideological reasons. These critiques also accuse Saleh for allowing AQAP's recruitments of tribesmen in order for him to keep benefiting from the US influx of funding under the security agenda. See: Alwazir, A. (2012). Achieving Long-Term Stability in Yemen: Moving Beyond Counterterrorism (Rep.). Project on Middle East Democracy.

the authority to target them with lethal force, just as we target enemy leaders in past conflicts, such as Germans and Japanese commanders during World War II. Targeted strikes conform to the principle of humanity, which requires us to use weapons that will not inflict unnecessary suffering. For all these reasons, I suggest to you that these targeted strikes against al-Qaida terrorists are indeed ethical and just" (npr, 2012).

Under the US counterterrorism policy, Saleh received major military funding that consisted of financial support, training and weapons, most of which were used against the peaceful protestors in the 2011 revolution (HRW, 2013).

In addition to the Yemeni detainees in Guantanamo, Yemeni security forces were responsible for many arbitrary arrests under the justification of prosecuting Houthi supporters during the six wars of Sa'ada. Women in the capital Sana'a started protesting on a weekly basis since 2007 demanding the release of their relatives. Similarly, women in the South were involved in the Southern Movement that was also established in 2007. The Southern Movement is a mass movement that organized nonviolent weekly marches and sit-ins in southern cities, starting in 2007 with demands to compensate the atrocities of Saleh's war on the South in 1994. By 2009, the violence Saleh's armed forces faced the protest movement with, among other historical and political reasons pushed the movement to demand secession and the return to the pre-unity borders (Day 2010, 6).

In 2011, Yemen witnessed a revolution that aimed to overthrow president Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime that lasted for 33 years. Women from different socio-economic and political backgrounds took to the streets of Yemeni cities in massive numbers that surpassed the numbers of men at times. Despite women's participation in numbers and leadership in sit-ins and marches, women were excluded from the negotiations that

engineered the political deal that was signed in November 2011 and became known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative (SaferWorld 2012, 8). The GCC initiative that had the United Nations' and the international community's support, gave Saleh immunity from judicial prosecution in return for his resignation. The GCC initiative mentioned in its implementation mechanisms attachment that women should be included in the transitional process. The GCC initiative assigned Saleh's former vice-president Abdurabbu Mansour Hadi as Yemen's new president. The transitional process started officially in February 2012 after elections in which Hadi ran as the only presidential candidate. The difficulties that women faced to be included in the transitional process could be summed up in a quote from the UN envoy, Jamal Bin Omar, during the preparation for the National Dialogue Conference (NDC): "All political parties have disagreed on everything but agreed on the exclusion of women" (MarebPress, 2012).[24] The NDC outcomes according to the GCC initiative were to decide how the new constitution would be written, before presidential and parliamentary elections are held.

Women finally made it to the National Dialogue Conference with a 27% quota. The NDC that took place between March 2013 and January 2014 was under criticism of a number of local and international experts. One of the major criticisms addressed the extravagant spending on the conference by the UN and the international community while the country was suffering from extreme poverty as a result of Saleh's unjust policies (AlWazir, 2012). Issues of representation and ignoring the 20-point plan proposed by some of the NDC's preparation committee members were also among the factors that predicted the failure of NDC (Gaston, 2014). The 20-point plan included

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[24] Has the Yemeni Woman Retreated After the Revolution? July 15, 2012. Mareb Press. Accessed April 10, 2016. http://marebpress.net/articles.php?print=16512

41

practical steps of addressing atrocities committed on the ground during Saleh's regime and starting a process of accountability and compensation for the victims. However, both President Hadi and UN envoy Bin Omar rejected the plan. Ignoring the 20-point plan did not only affect modes of representation in the NDC but also had ramifications on feeding the potential for armed conflicts. This became apparent on the third month of the dialogue as an armed conflict started sweeping through the Northern part of the country. The gap between the dialogue held in the capital Sana'a and the conditions on the ground increased the mistrust among groups that had been marginalized during Saleh's rule. The environment for a proxy war that served yet another regional conflict after Syria was quite fertile. Iran backed up the Houthi militia while Saudi Arabia backed up its historical ally, the Muslim Brotherhood. Meanwhile Former president Saleh who enjoyed staying in Yemen under his granted immunity continued to militarize and make new allies out of the groups he previously marginalized and even fought against in the past, like the Houthi militia (Al-Muslimi, 2015).

This historical background of Yemen in general and the years that preceded the 2011 revolution in particular are important for situating my analysis of *The Mulberry House* in chapter 4. This background is also necessary for understanding my review of three examples from the literature on women in the 2011 revolution, which I provide next.

3.2 Literature Review of the 2011 Revolution and Women

In this literature review, I choose three examples from literature on women and the 2011 revolution in Yemen. The first example is from reports that came out between 2012 and 2013 and endorsed the "sudden phenomenon" narrative to describe women's participation in the 2011 revolution. Such reports were produced in large numbers during the transitional period, with a quantitative focus on the political representation

42

of women in the NDC. One of these reports was written by one of the NDC representatives, Nadia Al-Sakkaf, and is titled "Yemen's Women and the Quest for Change". The second example I look at is a study by Saferworld, a UK based organization that works on peace and conflict resolution, titled "Strong Voices: Yemeni Women's Political Participation from Protest to Transition". This report represents a body of literature that is based on quantitative research studying women's views on political representation in the NDC during the preparation phase for the conference. Finally, I take an example from literature that is also based on qualitative research done during the NDC, but here the outcome showed wide critiques on the framework of women's political representation in the NDC. The example I use for this purpose is Sarah Ahmed's study "Women's Voices in the New Yemen".[25]

Although Nadia Al-Sakkaf introduces her report with a historical background on the Yemeni feminist movement pre-unity and even mentions examples of queens that ruled Yemen centuries ago, she uses the title "Shallow Awareness" to describe Yemeni women's awareness post unity. Al-Sakkaf describes a woman she interviewed as a 29-year-old woman who finished high school and stayed home waiting to get married. She goes on to comment on her interview with her informant who supported the revolution from home by saying: "Like her, there are many Yemenis who were converted into surface-level politicians" (Al-Sakkaf 2012, 1-2).

This report is one of many similar ones that reproduced the public and private dichotomy by using analysis that does not see resistance unless it was in a protest on the street. This analysis also looks at women's participation in the 2011 revolution as a "sudden phenomenon". Here, resistance is still imprisoned in the masculine definitions

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[25] I conducted this study in 2013 and it was published in 2014 by Yemen Polling Center. In this chapter, I will be referring to it in the third person voice.

of the public and private because women's resistances outside the realm of the Change Square and the particular event of the revolution are unseen. In a comment on women's participation on the revolution, Al-Sakkaf writes:

> Compared with Tunisia and Egypt, the presence of Yemeni women in the public sphere was very limited before the uprising. Therefore, it felt like a national victory when women were accepted as sudden revolutionary heroes. When the political scene was turned upside down, it made women visible and they, in turn, aspired to be part of the decision-making process. Nonetheless, the euphoria Yemenis are experiencing – especially among young people because of their success in changing the regime – could work against the country's evolution to a real democracy, because they suddenly feel empowered and that they can change regimes (Al-Sakkaf 2012, 3).

The "sudden" is the quantitative element in this analysis, and refers to the number of women who took the street. This analysis makes an assumption that women's resistances were invisible before 2011. What is even more problematic in this approach is the exclusion of women who did not take to the street from histories of resistances and therefore political representation.

Al-Sakkaf urges Yemeni women movements to unite and fight for representation in decision-making positions and the NDC as the only way of "saving" Yemeni women. She emphasizes on the importance of seizing the opportunity of "international support":

> Today, Yemeni women face an amazing opportunity to jump miles ahead in terms of political and public empowerment. The uprising has given women the legitimacy to demand their rights, and the international interest in Yemen provides additional support and protection against the old, traditional, conservative tone (Al-Sakkaf 2012, 3).

Here, we can see an example of how the focus on political representation turned into an obsession with women's quota in the NDC, regardless of the road NDC was taking

44

in the transitional period that ended up with failure that resulted in war. In addition, I find resorting to "international support" against the "traditional conservative tone" very problematic in light of Yemen's history as well as how the revolution ended. This "international support" represents the same powers that gave Saleh immunity against the goals of the revolution not to mention the international support that was given to Saleh in the form of financing and weapons before the 2011 revolution. This discourse that focused on women's political representation regardless of who they represent and according to what politics, in my view, dismissed the struggle of many Yemeni women who did not revolt for this.

The second report I focus on, written by Saferworld, conducted a qualitative study in four Yemeni governorates that managed to capture more diverse voices from rural and urban Yemen. Saferworld's report was a result of the collective effort of Wameedh Shakir, Mia Marzouk and Saleem Haddad. Based on focus group discussions, the report discusses women's experiences in different squares of protest around the country. The study conveys voices of women who talked about experiences of political violence that women were subjected to from both pro and anti-Saleh men. Women in the report also referred specifically to experiences of sexual harassment in the Change Square a few months after the revolution started (Saferworld 2012, 6). Here, I find it important to mention the 16th April 2011 incident that changed the Change Square's map for women. On 16 April 2011, which was around one month after the First Armored Division under the leadership of General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar joined the people at the Change Square,[26] women were subjected to one of the most severe forms of political violence.

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[26] General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar was the head of the First Armored Division, one of the most important sectors of the Yemeni army. Mohsen, who was one of the most prominent army leaders in Saleh's wars on the South in 1994 and on Sa'ada between 2004 and 2009, is known for his loyalty to the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen. Despite his long-term support to Saleh, Mohsen joined the revolution on 21st March 2011. Mohsen's bloody history in the South and Sa'ada made it difficult for non-Islahi protestors

45

On that day women came to the Change Square to protest Saleh's speech one day earlier in which he had accused women protesters of being "immoral" because they protested side by side with men in marches and sit-ins. By then, the anti-Saleh Muslim Brotherhood protestors were empowered by the presence of the First Armored Division whom they resorted to for support to expand their control of the Square. In the April 16 incident, Islah tried to enforce segregation between men and women in sit-ins and marches, which it did not fully succeed in doing. Women who refused to march in segregated protests on 16April ended up being assaulted and beaten by First Armored Division soldiers with incitement from fundamentalist Islah protestors (Heinze and Ahmed 2013, 17). Women in the Saferworld's report mention that sexual harassment within the Change Square kept increasing after that incident.

Between women's personal experiences of fear and hope in the 2011 revolution, Saferworld's report focuses on women's skepticism in partisan opposition. Women expressed repeatedly that they felt used by the pro-revolution partisan opposition that encouraged their presence in the protests only so that women added numbers to the protests. This fear was also extended to the political representation of women in the NDC, which women in the report described as elitist (Saferworld 2012, 6).

Saferworld's report is an example of the few qualitative studies that incorporated voices

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to accept his support to the revolution. The Southern movement in the South, for instance, started went back to demands of succession after Mohsen joined the revolution. Similarly, the Houthi Movement in the Change Square could not accept his support. Mohsen's orders for the First Armored Division to surround the Change Square in order to "protect" created a state of fear among the peaceful protestors. They saw that the presence of this powerful section of the army around the square would put the square in the danger of Saleh using this as an excuse to attack the square. These fears turned to reality in September 2011 when Saleh's Republican Guards and Mohsen's First Armored Division engaged in a two month armed conflict before the GCC initiative was finally signed in November 2011. For more details on Mohsen and the 2011 revolution see: Bonnefoy, L., & Poirier, M. (2012, May). "La Structuration de la Révolution Yéménite," *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 62, 895-913. doi:10.3917/rfsp.625.895.

of women who did not participate in the NDC but took part in the 2011 revolution. This line of studies was vital in terms of showing the heterogeneous voices of women who were very critical of the process of quota representation in the NDC. :

> While there was recognition that women needed to unite to ensure that their demands were heard, some were angry at the Sana'a-based political parties and elites who they felt attempt to speak on behalf of all Yemenis. This was felt most strongly by women from Southern governorates, who were dissatisfied with the way the transition was going and the lack of genuine inclusion of Southern voices and the Southern Issue (Saferworld 2012, 3).

Similar to Saferworld's report, Sarah Ahmed's study "Women's Voices" included women in a number of rural and urban areas around Yemen. Ahmed's study was conducted in 2013 while the NDC was taking place. Women in the study listed security as their number one concern when they were asked about their priorities. They spoke extensively about the absence of security and the rising potential of militarization where they lived (Ahmed 2014, 26). In addition to security, women spoke about their struggles to provide basic needs for themselves and their families. Many of them expressed that their personal struggles have always been the same and they told stories of the ways in which they resist poverty, male authoritarianism, and the absence of security (Ahmed 2014, 27-30). This study, conducted two years after the 2011 revolution and published in 2014, shows how women's resistances have always been ongoing. The study also reflects that women in remote villages who never protested on the street were quite aware of their priorities and their problems, which they felt were not represented in the transitional period. Despite these women's hopes for a representation that conveys their daily security and economic struggles, the study showed their discontent with modes of representation in the NDC that was taken place in the capital (Ahmed 2014, 27-30). This study was one of a few studies conducted during the NDC that aimed to document

47

women's voices beyond the quantitative aspect of NDC quota. What I take from this study is the ongoing nature of women's resistances that do not have to take place on the street or in a National Dialogue Conference in order to exist. In the next chapter, we will look at how *The Mulberry House*, through a focus on one family, documented a wide variety of women's resistances against authoritarianisms in the 2011 revolution.

CHAPTER 4: WOMEN'S RESISTANCES AGAINST AUTHORITARIANISMS IN THE MULBERRY HOUSE

I grew up in Yemen to a Yemeni father and a Scottish mother who later divorced. And when I was 17 I finally decided to move to Scotland, where my mother lived. But my father would only approve under the condition that I would not forsake my Yemeni roots. A promise I made, but could not keep. Ten years later, I've come back to Yemen for a short visit to try to reconnect with these roots. I find the home of my past teetering on the brink: My cousin Waleed behind bars for treason and my family's patience with their surroundings worn thin.

I start this chapter with the only voiceover in *The Mulberry House.* Right after the introductory scene, Sara Ishaq's back faces the hand camera that rests temporarily on the tripod. Her voiceover prepares the viewer to accompany her on her journey of one year, 2011, the year of the revolution. Where does the journey begin and where does it end? How can documentation have rigid parameters when the documented doesn't? And if the lines are blurred, where does the documentation begin? Ishaq chooses to use one camera and let it roll for twelve months. She films with no script, as the documentation of blurred lines cannot be a scripted project. She cannot follow a storyboard simply because her film is a documentation of the nonlinear.

Ishaq's departure from and to Yemen, the family house, which she calls *The Mulberry House,* the detention of her cousin Waleed and the protests that started sweeping the streets of Sana'a are documented without hierarchies. The events do not happen separately and as a result they cannot be documented separately either. In *The Mulberry House* we witness the continuum of resistances to authoritarianisms that Ishaq's hand camera captured in 2011. I do not view forms of resistance separately from each other.

I see women's resistance to patriarchal authoritarianism as an ongoing process in which all forms are intertwined. In this chapter I aim to show this intertwined nature of women's resistances during the 2011 revolution, as they were documented in *The Mulberry House*. I will be reading and interpreting the experiences of resistances that for a continuum using Deniz Kandiyoti's term "patriarchal bargain", James Scott's concepts of "hidden and public transcripts", Joan Wallach Scott's four elements accompanying her definition of gender, as well as Trinh T. Minh-Ha's concept of "hearing with the mechanical eye and seeing with the electronic ear" in the ways I explained in chapter 2.

In 4.1, I discuss the "patriarchal bargain" where women in the film bargain with the patriarchal system with the aim to challenge it. Secondly, I discuss in 4.2 the hidden and public transcripts that are used as strategies in bargaining with patriarchy. Thirdly I hear with the mechanical eye and see with the electronic ear in 4.3 in order to read the nonlinear documentation of the 2011 revolution *The Mulberry House* provides. The discussion of all these forms of resistances will help us understand women's resistances as a continuum.

4.1 Resistance Through Bargaining With Patriarchy

Deniz Kandiyoti introduces her definition of the patriarchal bargain by saying:

> Women strategize within a set of concrete constraints, which I identify as patriarchal bargains. Different forms of patriarchy presents women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression (Kandiyoti 1988, 275).

50

As explained earlier, the examples of the patriarchal bargain that Kandiyoti discusses are examples of women's resistance through negotiating with the system to gain benefits that help them cope with the patriarchal system. Similarly, in Kandiyoti's study, men conflict with women's resistance and at times negotiate with it in order to reach mutual benefit without introducing any change in the patriarchal system. In my analysis of *The Mulberry House*, I look at two examples of the patriarchal bargain where resistance does not aim to cope with the system but rather aims to challenge it. The first example is Sara's bargain with her father's authoritarianism and the second is what I believe is the father's bargain with the patriarchal system.

Sara left her family's house at the age of seventeen. She reached a dead end with her father and resorted to complete separation from his authority by leaving to Scotland, where her mother lives. *The Mulberry House* does not tell us much about how Sara came to terms with the idea of coming back for what was supposed to be a short visit to Yemen. Yet, the conversations Sara has with her father reveal a very complicated relationship between the two. It is the dilemma of a loving father, yet an authoritarian one. A dilemma that many women in Yemen face where they cannot separate completely from a loving family which at the same time makes it almost impossible sometimes for them to be what they want to be. *The Mulberry House* captures many moments where we witness this dilemma. We can see the love and the authoritarianism. Most importantly, we can see how resisting this authoritarianism is a process that consists of many rounds of pain and joy to guard this love and not compromise one's own autonomy. It is a process of negotiating with patriarchy to challenge it with all possible tools. In Sara's case, she resorts to the fact that her mother lives in Scotland.

In one of the conversations with Sara at an early point in the film, her father admits that he had strongly opposed that she moved to Scotland. He explains that he did not want her to be influenced by Western values. Although Sara starts the film by saying that she did not keep the promise she made to her dad on not forsaking her Yemeni roots, a deep look at the film can help us unpack her statement. As the film proceeds, we get to see that Sara's education in the ten years she spent away as well as her financial independence changed the power dynamics between her and her father. The cultural and economic capital she accumulated in those ten years made the father accept Sara's own definition of her Yemeni identity. Before she left to Scotland, Sara's father measured her Yemeni identity with the degree to which she would answer to his authority over the choices she made as a woman. When she came back with new experiences and knowledge, he was forced to see her Yemeni identity not in relation to his authority but in relation to how she engages with the 2011 revolution. A conversation that takes place between Sara and her father a few months after the revolution breaks out reveals how Sara's father sees her Yemeni identity differently from the way he did before:

> Sara: When I came, did you expect me to join everyone and go to the square?
>
> Father: We didn't know this would happen in the first place. We didn't know things would be like this. We thought it would be a normal life. Remember, you came and nothing… The revolution had not started. You were supposed to be at the house most of the time taking clips of people around you to make your film, but suddenly you got involved because of how you feel towards the subject. And you are in your country and you got involved more and more. Especially that you have a means that is very valuable and it is indeed, very much. So I am sure you felt you are doing something useful.
>
> Sara: Can I ask...

52

Father: And I am really proud.

Sara: Really?

Father: I am pleased. Yes.

Sara: You are pleased that I am at the square…

Father: And I am proud as well. I am proud of you.

Sara's personal accomplishments were her tool in bargaining with patriarchy, which is the first example of the patriarchal bargain that I would like to discuss. Her education and job allowed her father to see that her autonomous choices have nothing to do with Western values taking over his daughter's Yemeni identity. Here, Sara challenges her father's authority by her success in building a career instead of getting married at an early age, as he wished before she left to Scotland. By resisting this authority through her economic independence, she manages to challenge the system that makes resisting patriarchal authority an equivalent of abandoning one's Yemeni identity. Sara indeed failed to keep the promise she made to her father. She did not answer to what he considers suitable for her as a woman. Instead, she sets new terms for defining what being a Yemeni means from her own autonomous gender perspective. In a confrontation with her father on his plans to marry her off when she was fifteen, Sara makes it clear that she did not leave to become a Western woman. She insists on how her father wanted to choose a different life for her than the life she wanted. And refusing this was Sara's own autonomous voice and not a Western influence. She refuses to choose between breaking ties with her family completely and compromising her choices. Instead, she chooses to bargain. She bargains to reconnect with her family, but on new terms that she created while being away.

53

When Sara faces her father about his attempts to marry her off, he tells her that he thought she wanted to get married back then. The smile on his face remains consistent despite Sara's escalating tone behind the camera while Lamiya, her younger half-sister, observes them. Lamiya takes the opportunity to challenge the father with a direct statement on marriage: "Only a girl who hates herself would get married." The power dynamics provided by Sara's presence as a successful independent woman shift the father's position from trying to explain his authority over Sara ten years ago to asking Lamiya if she wants to become like her sister instead of getting married. Here, the father resorts to his pride of Sara's accomplishments in education and career to escape Lamiya's questioning of his choices as an authoritarian figure. This shift represents the very heart of the bargain that determines daily choices of attack and retreat. As the camera zooms in on the father's face, his smile changes to discomfort. The first impression of this scene could be that he is unhappy with being showered with criticism despite his friendly reception of his daughters' criticism. But a deeper look at the particular moment of discomfort reveals the second example of the patriarchal bargain that I want to discuss, which appears in this scene:

> Lamiya: Dad, you do things under the table to avoid taking responsibility. You can't mention your virtues and disregard your flaws. Nobody is perfect but look at what you did!

> The father: My only flaw is that I am a victim. I let Nadine talk to her fiancé for two years.

54

Figure 1

Figure 2

In this scene, the camera captures the father's own bargain with the patriarchal system. "My only flaw is that I am a victim", indicates how the father feels that he is embedded in the system. This moment when the father expresses that his authoritarianism is a

result of the social and political system, rather than of his own beliefs, is repeated throughout the film. At moments like these, the negotiation between men and women in the family reaches a common ground. I speak here about moments where men in the family, especially Sara's father, acknowledge patriarchy as a form of authoritarianism.

What makes this a case of a patriarchal bargain in my view is how Sara's father moves to identifying his authority at another level, where he deconstructs his relationship as a man within the system. I particularly refer here to scenes where the father makes a distinction between what he believes in and how he is expected to act as a man and a father. To explain this further, I resort to Joan Scott's four elements that I introduced in chapter 2. Scott defines gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power." She puts a condition for reading this definition, which consists of four elements: cultural symbols, normative interpretations of symbols, inclusion of social and political organizations alongside with domestic dimensions and subjective identity (Scott 1986, 1067-1072).

I see these four elements as very useful in understanding the way the father shifts in the way he perceives differences between men and women. To explain this further, I want to look at the times Sara's father takes his daughter's side and refuses the presumed "natural" roles for men and women that his father, Sara's grandfather, states as facts.

Sara's grandfather only begins opposing that his granddaughter goes to the Change Square when Saleh's forces escalate the violence against the protestors. In one scene, Sara asks the grandfather if he would object to her brother going to the square the same way he does with her. He responds by insisting that he is against any of the family members going to the square. This position reflects his fear for the violence that could

56

harm any of his relatives regardless of their gender. It is more of a temporal fear based on the developments of the security situation in the Square. To the contrary, in another scene afterwards, the grandfather's explanation of his position shifts from the external factors that shaped his objection to an objection grounded in what he sees as "natural" differences between men and women:

Grandfather: (Recites Quran) Don't put yourself in harms way… Don't put yourself in harm's way. If it is harm, it is not allowed.

Sara: Granddad, would you tell me the same thing if I were Jameel? Or do you say this because I am a female, and it's unusual for women to do this?

Grandfather: No, it's not because you are a woman. Of course men can handle hardships better. They handle challenge better.

Sara: I don't believe so…

Grandfather: Men are more confrontational. They can face those enemy dogs. You won't tolerate the obstacles and barbed wire they lay down for you.

Sara's father: If she isn't scared, why scare her?

Grandfather: I speak from the heart; I was scared when I found out. I was only reassured when she left the place.

Sara's father: Since she is capable to do such and has the access, we should encourage her…

Grandfather interrupts:

Sara's father: It is not harm. She is not going to fight with a weapon. She is helping people. By documenting events with her camera and uploading so that the world sees…

Grandfather interrupts: This is your opinion. Talk is easy

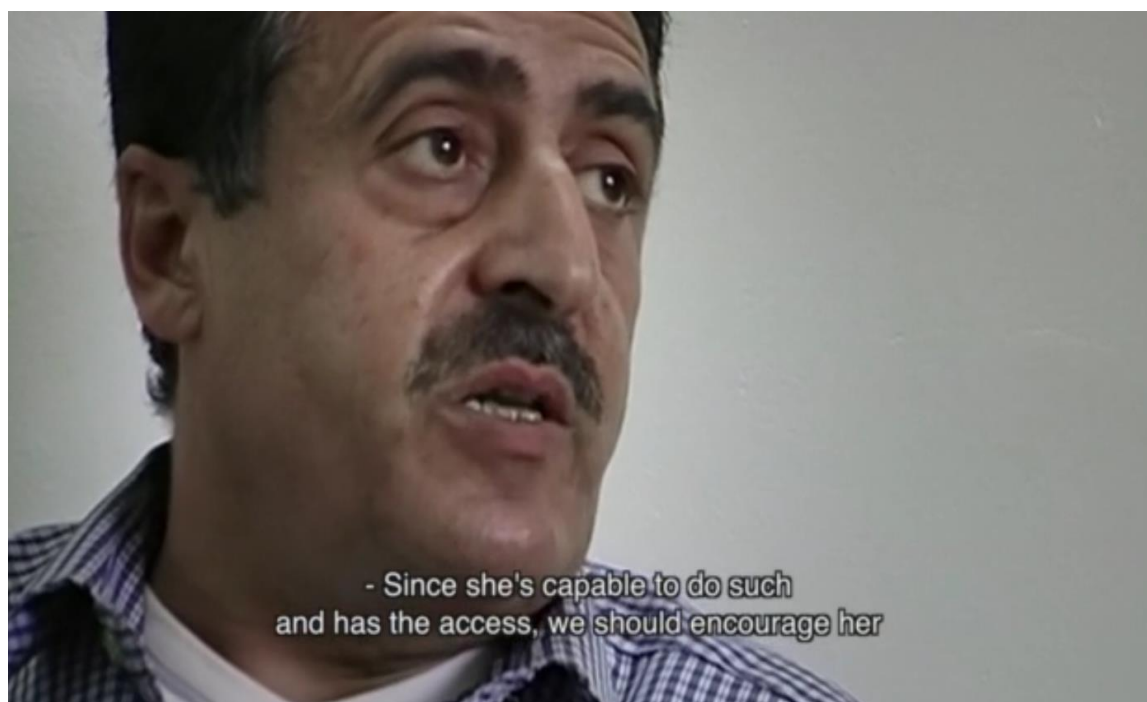Sara's father: She is reflecting people's pain.

57

Figure 3

In a scene towards the end of the film, one year after the 2011 revolution, Sara's father shows how proud he is of an interview with his daughter in the Yemeni newspaper *Yemen Times* after her documentary 2012 *Karama Has No Walls* was released. We see another shift in the grandfather's position towards Sara's participation in the revolution where he argues with his son that Sara resembles him more in her talent. In a very friendly manner, both Sara's father and grandfather turn to competing in showing how proud they are of her.

I do not see these shifting views on differences between men and women as a result of Sara seeking approval from men in the family. To the contrary, I see that her constant patriarchal bargains, based on her capital as an economically independent and successful woman, have managed to challenge the patriarchal system and not only in a way that makes her break free from her family's patriarchal authoritarianism but it also contributes to her father's and grandfather's own bargain with patriarchy. Their bargain depends to a large extent on their perceptions of gender that are not as rigid as they

58

think they are. These perceptions shift and with them patriarchal authoritarianism shifts, too. As I indicated in chapter 2, men's authoritarianism in the Ishaq's family cannot be put on the same scale as Saleh's authoritarianism despite the fact that Sara shows experiences of resistances against both. With the father and the grandfather, we can see the influence of politics on their exercise of authority as well as their perceptions on gender. Saleh's regime's rule between the 1994 war and the 2011 revolution had a direct impact on gender as a relationship of power. It impacted how men and women see their roles in society and in politics in the way I show in chapter 3. When the 2011 revolution started with women leading the protests, perceptions of gender and gender roles changed with different degrees. The common values that the father shares with Sara on opposing Saleh's regime and Sara's participation in the revolution have provided new terms to negotiate gender roles. His daughter's engagement in the revolution made him acknowledge that some of the restraints he imposes on his daughter are only a result of him trying to cope with social pressure rather than him believing in "natural roles" of women.

The father's perceptions of the symbolic representation of gender and its interpretations seem to shift in the family discussions on Sara's dress code where she does not stick to the long Abaya[27] and wears a shorter one that is distinguished from the long loose ones that Yemeni women started to widely wear in the 1990s. The father observes the grandmother's argument with his sister Abeer and his daughter Sara on this kind of Abayas, which I will return to in detail in the 4.2, and speaks in a way that reveals how

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[27]Abaya is a long black cloak that the majority of women started wearing since the late 1980s and much more widely in the 1990s. Many women believe that Abayas spread due to the Saudi influence. Abayas are less common in many rural areas were women still wear colorful traditional Yemen outfits. See: Feeney ,L. and Ahmed, S. (2015) "Yemen: When Is the Time?" The New York Times. http://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000003703918/yemen-when-is-the-time.html?playlistId=100000003677496

the political organization alongside with cultural symbols affect how he sees gender. When he disagrees with the grandmother on what she thinks is an appropriate length of Abayas, he even gives examples of how he negotiates with men's comments outside the family on his daughter's dress code. The cultural symbolism of women's dress code serves here as an example of defining what gender means to the father. The father's exercise of power shifts from an authoritarian position of deciding his daughter and sister's dress code to joining the women's patriarchal bargain and negotiating with men on the street who do not see that his daughter's dress code is appropriate for a woman.

The patriarchal bargain in the examples I show here depends to a large extent on women and men's understanding of the role of political, social organization, cultural symbols, domestic dimensions and subjective identities in shaping the perceptions of differences between the sexes. Based on understanding all these elements, the strategies used in the patriarchal bargain are formed in order challenge the system, which I discuss next.

4.2 Strategies Used in the Patriarchal Bargain: Hidden and Public Transcripts

The documentation of the patriarchal bargain in *The Mulberry House* gives us an opportunity to see the strategies women in the film use in their continuum of resistances and patriarchal bargains. The act of women going to the Change Square was documented in the film in a way that reveals what I will explain with James Scott's terms of the "hidden and public transcripts.". Scott defines the public transcript as "a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" and he uses the hidden transcript to " characterize a discourse that takes place offstage, beyond the direct observation by the power holders" (Scott 1990, 2-4).

60

Similar to the patriarchal bargain, the hidden and public transcripts of women's resistances did not begin or only exist during the revolution. In this film, the documentation of the revolution through the lives of the characters in the film revealed a case that can show the moment of transfer from a hidden to a public transcript. In 4.2.1, I discuss the hidden and public transcripts under what I call the "normalization" with women's faces on the street. Secondly, I look at the hidden and public transcripts of resisting the use of women's bodies as material for political violence in 4.2.2.

4.2.1 "Normalization with Women's Faces"

In my discussion in chapter 3 of the aggressive incitement against women's bodies in what the political religious speech called "the public sphere," I have shown the impact of this speech on Yemeni women's dress code on the street. Also, as mentioned earlier in chapter 2, the pushing out of women's faces from the street under its presumed masculine nature as a public space is an issue that the literature has not covered properly yet. This issue is paradoxical because of the fact that women increasingly covering their faces since the 1990s never prevented them from being present in the public sphere. Additionally, as I emphasized before, there is no Yemeni legislation that defines or restricts women's dress code. However, this rapid increase of the use of niqab made women who wear hijab, the head scarf, without covering their faces as well as women who wear neither niqab nor hijab seem to be a minority in the collective imagination, especially in urban Yemen. Other than the exception of women who constantly appear in the media, women's faces have been considered a taboo. The available literature that I reviewed in chapter 3 that roughly mentions Yemeni women's dress code in the public sphere is still imprisoned in the interpretation of Yemeni women's dress code within what they describe as the "conservative" nature of the Yemeni society. Instead, *The*

61

Mulberry House provides documentation that helps us see the political construction of what is taken for granted as a "conservative nature". This documentation reminds me to a certain degree of Asef Bayat's article "A Woman's Non-Movement: What It Means to Be a Woman Activist in an Islamic State" on the Iranian context:

> Women's daily routines and resistance to the Islamic government did not mean their departure from religiosity. Indeed, most displayed religious devotion, and many were willing to wear light head covers in the absence of force. Yet, they insisted on exerting individual choice and entitlement, which challenged both the egalitarian claims of the Islamic state and the premises of orthodox Islam. Women wanted to play sports, work in desirable jobs, study, listen to or play music, marry whom they wished and reject the grave gender inequality (Bayat 2007, 165).

I refer to Bayat's insights on women in the Islamic Republic of Iran as he describes the issue of individual choice in regards to dress code and the ways women choose to resist the regulations that the Iranain state imposes. Of course, the difference here is that the Iranian state, which turned into a theocracy post the 1979 revolution, unlike Yemen does have strict legislations on women's dress codes. Yet, the similarity here is how society was turned by the state against any other form of dress code than the one the state approves of.

At the very beginning of the *The Mulberry House*, Sara's grandmother objects to the camera rolling without further notice. She asks for her headscarf and for Sara to consider giving her sufficient time before she films her. What is very crucial to see from an eye familiar with the Yemeni context is the leap in these women's decision to be filmed in the first place, knowing that Sara will eventually make this footage public. The documentation of this decision in my opinion is as important as the documentation of women's visibility in footage from the Change Square. In fact, I consider the footage

62

of women in *The Mulberry House* extremely valuable in bringing the discussion of the visibility of women's faces to a different level of analysis. As discussed earlier in this thesis, in the past two decades, Yemeni women's faces in published material especially on the internet have presented a threat for women who are not well-known. The threat was a result of the technology of Photoshop and other techniques used in manipulating visual material. The internet became a space to exhibit faces of women who were photographed in public spaces without knowing they were being photographed after fixating them on available images on the web of other women's bodies. The more common threat was that of a lost or a stolen digital phone in the 2000s, since the majority of the websites that are used to exhibit manipulated photos or even authentic private photos and videos depend on material from lost and stolen phones or laptops. Knowing this context from within is what makes me interested in any documentation of non well-known women's faces in publically available material who approve to be filmed and photographed, for the approval itself is an act of resistance. I find this footage crucial because estranging women's faces from publicly available material has never been documented and this footage not only brings that discussion to life but the making of it is an act of resistance on its own. I also find this documentation helpful in raising questions about the politics that changed women's lives since the 1990s.

I choose to use the words "normalization" and "estrangement" because these were the words that I used myself as well as other women in Change Square each time we were reminded of the possible threat of public shaming through women's visual images.[28] In *The Mulberry House*, normalization takes a further step than the issue of face covering in discussions about women's dress in the square. The hidden transcript appears in how

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[28] I use normalization here in the sense of how women want the visibility of their faces on the street to be the norm instead of the estrangement that was imposed on the visibility of their faces since the 1990s.

women find ways around what became a conventional dress code for women in the late 1990s. I do not refer here to hijab and the Muslim practice of covering. I rather refer to the black Abaya that became quite dominant in the 1990s. The hidden transcript lays in the way women would alter the original Abaya and make it shorter and distinguished from the original loose long Abaya. The hidden switches to a public transcript not through the act of wearing a different, self-designed Abaya that is distinguished from the majority of Abayas worn on the street. It becomes public through the confrontation with the grandmother who negotiates the looseness and length of the Abaya as well as the make-up that her daughter and granddaughter wear to the square. The moment of confrontation is not that of going to the square in this different dress code. The moment of the public transcript is confronting the family about this dress code. In this particular case, "the dominant" is not the people on the street. It is the family. The consequences that women fear in cases of abuse are the ways their families would react to this abuse. It is the fear of a family imposing more restrictions on women's freedom of mobility and appearance as a result of the manipulation of visual material. It is also the fear of how the family may alienate a relative to reduce the public shaming that a relative's reputation or appearance may bring. The fear also relates to wishing to protect the family from this public shaming. Once again, there is no legislation that would force a Yemeni woman to dress in a certain way. This is why a deep gaze at the hidden and the public transcripts in the conversation between the grandmother, Sara and Abeer (Sara's aunt) reveals the immediate dominant here. In this conversation, Abeer brings up an important testimony of "normalization with women's faces" that would have been hard to document without the presence of the camera. Abeer says: "They'll get used to the short Abaya like they did with seeing our faces." On one hand, Abeer here reveals the continuum of resistances and the patriarchal bargain with the system. On the other hand,

64

her hidden transcript of resistance becomes public once she takes her dress code to a conversation with the person in power. She also takes this mode of resisting public estrangement of women's faces from the "unnoticed" daily hidden transcript to the public transcript act of annunciating what she is doing and for what reason.

Figure 4

The same conversation unpacks another level of the hidden transcript becoming public regarding the issue of political violence that women's faces and bodies became a display for it in 2011. Next, I look at the documentation of a family confrontation that happened in many cases in Yemen and was not well documented. Here the film helps us capture a glimpse of the daily struggles women in Yemen faced each time they went to the Square during the 2011 revolution.

65

4.2.2 Women's Bodies as Material for Political Violence

The 16th April incident that I discussed in chapter 3 was one of the most significant incidents that made it to written literature on women in the 2011 revolution. Whereas the literature did not go further into the daily conversations of fear and choices before and after this incident, *The Mulberry House* documents the everyday struggle with the fact that women's bodies became a battlefield for political violence exercised by both the regime and the opposition. We can see this at another moment, when the grandmother shares her fears:

- Rumors are going around; men and women meeting at tents in tents in the square. Rumors are really bad. They invent reasons for bad rumors about girls.
- They attack women's reputation and honor.
- It is not unlikely for them to throw acid on a girl they think to be loose.
- The veils you girls wear are too revealing.
- First, became your line of work could attract enemies for you. Especially you (pointing to Sara).
- Her in-law's states could attract enemies to her too (referring to Abeer and her husband's detention).
- We're not prepared to sacrifice.

This conversation reflects the amount of terror that women and their families faced on a daily basis due to their choices to go to the square. Other than the April 16th incident, there has been no documentation of this terror and the resistance to it by continuing to participate in and lead the protests. This political and psychological violence haunted women on social media and at work as well as school spaces. Yet, the most severe impact was the constant need to put so much effort into not estranging one's own body and not hating it. Embracing colorful scarves was an act of resistance to this hate relationship that fear and psychological violence may cause and so was smiling to the

camera or pushing to be at the front row of the protests. This moment in *The Mulberry House* revives the conversations among women and their families as well as among themselves: "They should get used to us" and "if there are more of us, our faces and photos will not be a phenomenon anymore". These are conversations that were not written down but that I have had and heard throughout 12 months in the square as well as in many other places in the country. Furthermore, women I know whose photos were taken and manipulated with Photoshop techniques on social media by one political party to shame the other started resisting by posting more pictures of themselves.

Normalization with women's faces and political public appearance of women who were not well known pre-2011 was also accomplished through citizen journalism that women did through their social media statements and reporting.

Seeing and hearing women who have never appeared in the media before was a moment of switching to the public transcript that was received differently on the family level. We can see that shift in the family's perception of what Sara does in her documentation of the escalation of violence in the square through her family gathering to hear her speak on TV.

It is a choice of using footage of a family watching TV to document the happenings in the square, which is a repetitive choice that I will discuss in the last part of this chapter.

In this case women bargain in different ways with patriarchy. Sometimes through hidden transcripts where they would endure political violence and public shaming just to be able to continue existing in the masculinized space of protests squares or simply on the street. The hidden becomes public and challenges the system in the cases I discussed when women face their families with their choices knowing that public shaming will have no power if the families did not fear it.

[Sara, is a British-Yemeni filmmaker,
she didn't want us to mention her surname.]

Figure 5

The continuum of resistances through the patriarchal bargain and strategies that alternate between the hidden and public transcripts are experiences that many women shared in 2011. In 4.3, we will see how *The Mulberry House* managed to document the Ishaq's resistances to Saleh's authoritarianism.

4.3 Seeing and Hearing the Revolution: Image and Sound Documentation

> The camera that focuses on an individual or a group proves to be heavily biased, for it fails to relate that person's or that group's activities to those of their kin. So goes the reasoning, as if a larger frame (one that contains more) is less of a frame, as if the wide angle does not like the close-up, cut off life (Minh-Ha 1991 61).

Trinh T. Minh-Ha invites us to hear with the mechanical eye, the camera, and see with the electronic ear, the sound recorder. It is an invitation to learn the story. It is not "The" story of the 2011 revolution in *The Mulberry House*. And it is not "The" story

68

of women's resistances either. It is the story of a continuum of resistances. We cannot capture every single story that creates the continuum, not in a written document nor in a film. What we can do is capture some of the resistances that create the continuum. I treat these stories of resistances as evidence of the continuum. For this reason, I am not concerned with the camera's incapability of recording every single story. What interests me instead is how the camera can record stories in a way that leaves space for us to remember that there was a before and there is an after. If the camera in *The Mulberry House* was biased then, it is because resistance is biased, too. Resistance is a conscious act of recognizing oppression and contesting it. It is biased to this contestation and so is the camera that records it. In the visual image of *The Mulberry House*, I hear the revolution and then I see it through the story telling. Despite her possession of footage she filmed in the Square, Ishaq chooses to document the revolution in *The Mulberry House* by filming her family members watching the happenings in the Change Square on television. I discuss this through examples from the establishment of Change Square, the Friday of Dignity and Saleh's immunity in 4.3.2. After that, I discuss in 4.3.4 how we can see the revolution through the voices of the characters narrating their fear of the failure of the revolution.

4.3.1 Hearing the Revolution with the Mechanical Eye

We hear the chants, the speeches and the ambulance sirens through the camera coming from the television in the living room. At first, it seems as if Ishaq brings the Change Square to the living room by filming her family watching the news. But as the film goes on, we see that the house was another Change Square. In fact, many Yemeni houses were Change Squares not only in 2011 but always. In Ishaq's 2012 film *Karama Has No Walls*, the film begins with a caption defining Change Square:

69

Change Square, as it is known today, is an arena in the Yemeni capital Sana'a, where citizens peacefully assembled in February, 2011 to demand an end to President Ali Abdullah Saleh 33-year autocratic rule over Yemen. The sit-in began after the fall of President Mubarak in Egypt with a group of Yemeni students setting down tents outside their university gates, vowing not to leave until their demands for freedom, justice and democracy were met. This ever-expanding tent city quickly became the epicenter of Yemen's uprising and the hub of hope and inspiration for thousands of its people (Ishaq, 2012).

In *Karama Has No Walls*, Ishaq defines Change Square as a space of protest. In the visual images of that film, we get to see the other happenings in the square during the one year of the sit-in besides the marches. In the tents, debates and discussions on Yemen's history, Saleh's atrocities and the future of the revolution took place every day. The space that the tents were installed around was occupied everyday with chants, revolutionary songs and dances. In *The Mulberry House*, the debates, the songs and the chants took place in the house, too. Contesting Saleh's power in *The Mulberry House* goes way back before the 2011 revolution. One among many reasons why the Ishaqs believe that Saleh's regime was unjust was Sara's cousin Waleed's arbitrary detention at the end of the sixth round of the Sa'ada wars in 2009.
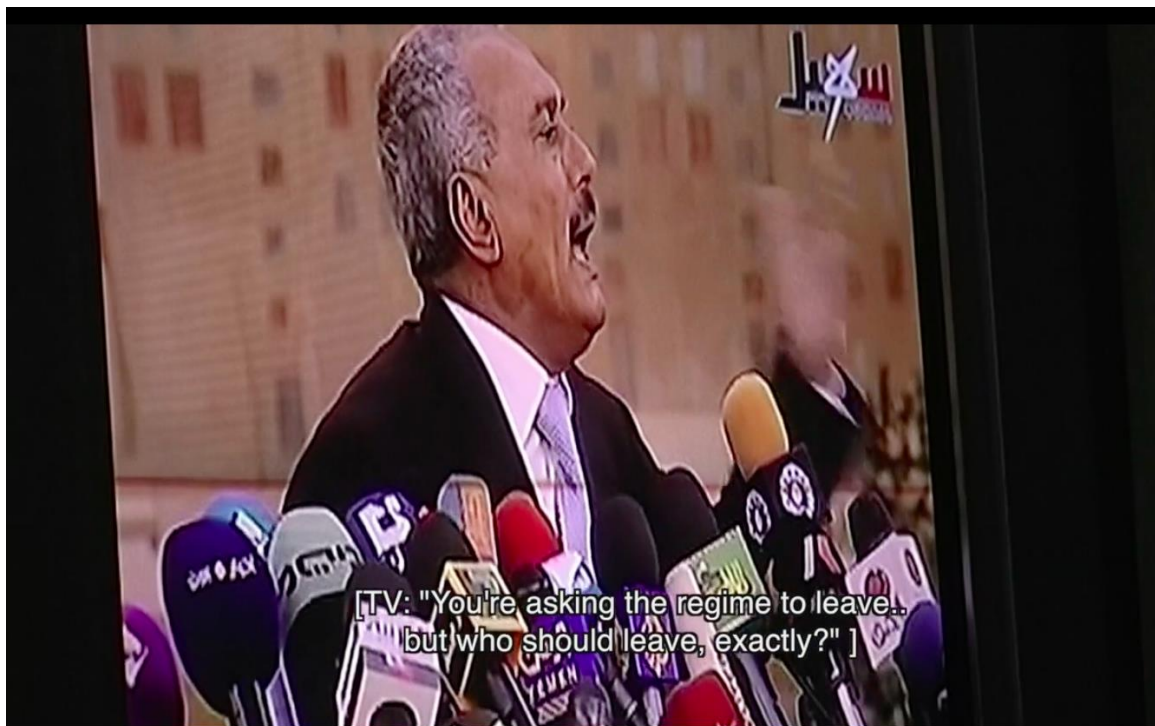
Figure 6

Figure 7

Ishaq makes a unique choice of capturing the Change Square in the house. She

documents the spirit of the beginning of the sit-in and marches through filming her

grandfather who was watching Saleh's speech on television and ridiculing him. The grandfather's toes tap the floor as he shakes his head with the music coming from the television, raises his hand and sings along "The people want to overthrow the regime". People went to The Square every day and when they went home, they went to their other Change Squares. They continued voicing their questions and anticipations, and, most importantly, they continued to criticize Saleh as they always did before 2011. The spaces here intertwine, the same way resistances do.

Figure 8

Ishaq's choice of documenting what was happening in the Change Square through the eyes of the family fixated on the television reached a momentum on 18 March 2011, Friday of Dignity. The camera takes us between the tears of the family members, the sounds of the ambulance sirens and the news anchor's voice coming from the television. The Friday of Dignity was documented in various ways. Human rights reports were written, *Karama Has No Walls* was made, news articles and Youtube videos appeared

of the shootings and the field hospital full of bodies of the dead and the injured. Yet, *The Mulberry House* provides another dimension to the documentation of this day. It shows how people at home were gathered around televisions in a state of disbelief. It captures the tearful eyes and the maze in the stares at the screen. The graphic images that Yemenis saw on television that day were not the last they would see. Yet, they never saw such graphic images from their country displayed like this on one television channel after the other until that day.

[90% of wounds were directly to the head and chest]

Figure 9

Media, scholars, and human rights reports have paid a lot of attention to the Friday of Dignity and what happened in the Change Square that day. The *Human Rights Watch* report "Unpunished Massacre: Yemen's Failed Response to the Friday of Dignity Killings" documented the violent attack and described it by stating:

> The Friday of Dignity massacre proved to be the deadliest attack on demonstrators of Yemen's yearlong uprising. Over the course of three hours,

73

the gunmen killed at least 45 protesters—most of them university students and three of them children— and wounded 200 while state security forces made no serious effort to stop the carnage. Outrage over the killings added further momentum to the protests, which in February 2012 forced President Ali Abdullah Saleh from office.

Emotions of anger, grief and mourning were put on hold. What came after the Friday of Dignity in Yemen only brought worse days and there has not been a break for mourning yet. *The Mulberry House* documents that particular moment of collective loss. It is a moment that needs to be historicized as the flow of more and more graphic images filling the Yemeni's memory makes the distance between people and that moment seems longer. I say this while being very aware of the fact that Friday of Dignity was not the first moment of collective loss. However, it was the first moment of live streaming of such a violent attack on peaceful protestors that people got to see on television. It was the first live display of the collective loss. On that day, and at least for one day, many Yemenis on the streets and in their houses put their doubts about the revolution aside. Those who were not in the square were somewhere watching television. The numbers of people who were at the Change Square in the evening were larger than during the days of the revolution. Mourning was put on hold as rage replaced it. It might have been easier to document what happened on the physical space of the Change Square. But I what I find more difficult to document is the sentiment of grief that preceded rage. It was the very subjective personal experience of relating to the moans heard on television that the camera allows us to hear in *The Mulberry House*. In my view, that moment of grief was not the only such moment Yemenis have lived through. Yemen's history of colonialism and authoritarianism is full of such moments. What is rare is to be able to capture a moment when people grieve collectively without words, simply because words would not be able to do it. So we have to hear through

74

the visual. We have to hear the moans that travel from the field hospital to the screen to the eyes that bleed in tears.

Figure 10

Ishaq's documentation of the collective loss manages to connect spaces of grief when she documents the funeral of the Friday of Dignity martyrs in another unique way. This time, it is how she edits the footage in a way that connects the funeral on the Change Square, the chants that followed the funeral at night and the family gathering to pray for the dead. She connects them all through documenting the collective prayer.

Praying collectively is a daily Muslim practice. Muslims go to mosques to pray side by side five times a day and they do the same in their houses. They also pray side by side before a funeral proceeds. Similarly, people prayed side by side in the Change Square as well as other squares of protest around Yemen. Before 2011, women would pray either in segregated mosques or houses. It was much more common to see men praying on the street than to see women praying there. Additionally, women almost never prayed on the street in a funeral until 2011.

75

The way Ishaq swiftly manages to connect the very little footage she uses outside the house with that taken indoors at the moment of funeral prayer shows a very thorough choice of editing. She captures her father, aunt and cousin among men and women praying together around the bodies that were wrapped in flags. Men and women gathered in in a ritual that usually segregates them. The Change Square is no longer an exclusive masculine space. Women's existence in protests, sit-ins and under gunfire made it no longer unacceptable for them to pray in public within the same space as men. Women's and men's unite in a prayer that mixes rage with grief. The prayer of rage is inspired by the revolution's chant "The people want to overthrow the regime".

Figure 11

From the daytime prayer before the burial to the evening protest that followed, once again, the camera allows us to hear. This time, it is the prayer: "We seek refuge in God, our best guardian". Ishaq connects the scene of the same prayer line in the square to the family gathering, side-by-side praying. Once again, the camera allows us to hear. This time, it is the prayer: "We seek refuge in God, our best guardian". It is the prayer of

grief, of surrendering to loss that individuals repeat a lot at times of despair. This time, it is collective despair, collective loss.

Figure 12

In 4.3.2 we see how Ishaq chooses to document arguments between the family members on the fate of the revolution through a focus on their voices rather than the image. When it comes to the image and the fate of the revolution, Ishaq captures her father's sentiments when watching another visual image. This time, she films her father watching the rough cut of *Karama Has No Walls* on her computer. She films this scene in 2012, months after Saleh was granted immunity from judicial prosecution as a result of signing the GCC initiative. The father watches a testimony of another father whose son was shot dead on the Friday of Dignity. Ishaq captures the tearful eyes of her father who listens to another father whom he has not met before saying: "My son and his

77

friends did not die in vain, they launched a revolution". Ishaq's father responds to the man on the screen: "That's what you thought, a revolution".

Figure 13

This moment was another moment that the Ishaqs shared from behind the screen with many Yemenis who witnessed Saleh signing the GCC initiative in November 2011. It was the moment when people who owned the Change Square did not have a say in the negotiations with Saleh, which could not have happened without their sacrifices. The GCC initiative was studied heavily in the literature. Yet, the collective loss was not documented as much. In *The Mulberry House*, Ishaq gives us access to hearing the moans the same way she did with the chants through the spectators' tearful eyes that witnessed The Friday of Dignity, then the man behind the killings of The Friday of Dignity—among many other killings—set free.

4.3.2 Seeing the Revolution with the Electronic Ear

Ishaq's concentration on images lessens as the focus on conversations gets much stronger when it comes to the political discussions about the revolution. Similarly to what she does with images, she uses the conversations to document sentiments that reflect the Yemeni political scene. I particularly speak here about Yemenis' skepticism in regards to partisan politics. Because a film cannot contain all stories, *The Mulberry House* does not show the history of Yemeni political parties and focuses instead on the skepticism this history created within Yemenis. As discussed in chapter 3, the involvement of the Yemeni Congregation of Reform (Islah) as part of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) oppositional partisan coalition in the negotiations that brokered the political deal known later as the GCC initiative was not easy news to digest for Yemenis. I single out Islah, the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen, because of their political and tribal weight in Yemeni politics during Saleh's era as we saw in the previous chapter. This does not mean that Yemenis had any better faith in other parties in the partisan opposition, yet other parties were not as powerful as Islah.

In *The Mulberry House*, Ishaq documents conversations between her family members capturing the fear that political parties will coopt the revolution. A conversation between her brother and uncle at the beginning of the revolution reflects many similar conversations around Yemen. The uncle doubts the revolution when the partisan opposition declares its support to it. Ishaq's brother argues that this is a social movement that is bigger than the political parties. On the same topic, Ishaq films her father speaking directly to the camera and insisting that the revolution is not a single person's revolution and that it is a revolution of the people.

These conversations reflect the question that haunted Yemenis during 2011, especially at the beginning, on choosing between gradual or radical change. Advocates of gradual change were skeptic about the revolution for two reasons. Firstly, people feared that the same traditional power would coopt the revolution through partisan opposition taking Saleh's place. Secondly, Saleh kept reminding Yemenis that they were an armed nation with a history of disputes that would stir the use of these weapons at any minute if he would resign. Ishaq captures her father's voice very clearly speaking of Saleh's threat of Yemenis killing each other if he were to resign: "This man taught the devil. The devil left Yemen because he could not keep up." In another scene, the father's angry voice while speaking of Saleh this way during the early stage of the revolution changes to a hopeful jolly tone when he speaks with his daughter:

Father: I was sure you would not be able to leave. If you did, you'd be devastated. You'd watch TV and say: I wish I'd stayed in Sana'a. Why rush? Why did I have to leave? Right? Thank God you stayed.

Sara: How long do you think I have extended my stay?

Father: Two months?

Sara: Nearly.

Father: Nearly, good

Sara: A month and a half

Father: That's excellent. By then I am sure, things would have been sorted out. One week for this guy to resign or to sign and 30 days to hand over and leave. That's it, and a week or two for you to see the transition. Then we will be pleased. We will be happy

In this conversation, *The Mulberry House* take us back to the very first months of the revolution when the peaceful nature of the revolution invalidated Saleh's threat of an ensuing civil war. The commitment to nonviolence despite the escalation of violence used against protestors made people feel more powerful than Saleh's civil war card. Despite the armed conflicts in May and September 2011 between Saleh's Republican Guards and General Ali Mohsen's First Armored Division, protestors remained peaceful.

The conversations in the family were vital during the whole film. Through these conversations, we got to see the patriarchal bargain, the hidden and public transcripts involved in the bargain, perceptions of gender as well as discussions about the revolution. The visuals managed to document some of the sentiments of one year of revolution in 2011. The film that begins with a family lunch and discussions on gender segregation ends with a family gathering celebrating Ishaq's cousin's release a year later, in 2012. The discussions continue as the voices mix between those arguing for establishing a new revolutionary political party to claim the revolution back and others discussing women and gender. The voices intertwine before *The Mulberry House* concludes, allowing us to see and hear the continuum. The film leaves us knowing that the bargains will continue and so will the other forms of resistances against authoritarianism.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

I was born in Sana'a in 1988 to parents from Aden. My generation was called the generation of the Yemeni unity. In 2011, borders disappeared for a moment and I started to belong to the generation of the revolution. In March 2015, I was close to surrender to the idea of belonging to the generation of war.

Between the closure of the National Dialogue Conference in January 2014 and the arrival of the armed conflict in Sana'a in September 2014, Sana'a became under the full control of the Houthi militia that managed to put President Abdurabbu Mansour Hadi and the government under siege. After its control of the majority of the North, the Houthi militia, which allied with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, kept on advancing towards the South. President Hadi, the prime minister and most of the members of the government, fled Sana'a to Aden in the South and then to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in January 2015. By the time the Houthi militia reached Aden in March 2015, Operation Decisive Storm was announced. The operation was officially launched on 26 March 2015 and led by Saudi Arabia against the Houthi-Saleh alliance militia. The coalition until this day involves a total of nine other countries including Egypt, United Arab of Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Morocco, Qatar, Jordan and Sudan. The US, the UK and Turkey logistically support the coalition that started its operation under president Hadi's approval. In addition, Iran and Russia continue to back up the Houthi militia (AlMuslimi, 2015).

As the coalition's aerial strikes put Sana'a in flames, Aden was burning with the Houthi-Saleh alliance missiles. The borders between the North and the South became more solid than ever and I have not been able to see my grandmother Fatima in Aden for two years now. However, I still see her through my own memory archive where I

82

keep arranging all the stories of those like her and me who have seen one war after the other, but refuse to be described as the generation of war. I still belong to the generation of the revolution, and my memory archive helps me to keep this focus.

In this thesis, I tried to answer my research question: How does Sara Ishaq's 2013 documentary film *The Mulberry House* contribute to the documentation of Yemeni women's history of resistances to authoritarianisms in the 2011 revolution? Through my analysis of *The Mulberry House* in Chapter 4 I hope to have shown that this film contributes to the documentation of a continuum of women's resistances in general and in the 2011 revolution in particular. This film focuses on women in the Ishaqs family and their resistances to state and patriarchal authoritarianism during the 2011 revolution. Based on my analysis, I would argue that these women's stories challenge the public and private binary. My analysis showed how these women negotiated with the patriarchal system in the house as they protested Saleh's regime in the Change Square. Their experiences contest the "sudden phenomenon" narrative on women's resistances in the 2011 revolution and reveal that women's experiences of resistances are ongoing experiences that did not only begin with the 2011 revolution. The film has also shown the strategies that women use to challenge the patriarchal system inside and outside the family's house. Through these negotiations with patriarchy, women in the film defined their autonomous Yemeni identity as well as their identities and choices as women. In addition, the analysis indicated the role political organization plays in defining relationships of power and perceived gender roles.

Analysis of *The Mulberry House* illustrated the value of film as a historical source. The use of filmic material to document collective moments of loss, rage and grief adds an important element to the written history of the 2011 revolution.

83

I hope that my thesis has shown that, through film as a medium, *The Mulberry House* stands as a form of resistance as well as evidence of the continuum of Yemeni women's resistances. By studying *The Mulberry House*, this thesis hopes to contribute to building up women's history in Yemen. Additionally, this thesis hopes to contribute to preserving a collective memory of the women who marched, chanted, and led a peaceful revolution in 2011. This contribution comes at a time when the memories of people in Yemen are filled with images of loss and death that come from the sky and the land. Today, it is the duty of Yemeni feminist scholarship, I believe, to document every form of resistance against all forms of authoritarianism. And with this thesis, I hope to contribute to a documentation that reminds Yemenis of their moment of revolution in 2011 and to remind Yemeni women of the strength they cultivate in their everyday revolutions.

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