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# **Is Inclusion the Solution?**

A Power Analysis of Women's Organizations and Individual Women Activist's  
Political Participation in Yerevan, Armenia



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# Abstract

In Armenia, women are systematically excluded from political processes and issues related to gender equality and women's rights are not politically prioritized. In the absence of this prioritization, civil society actors play a vital role in promoting and addressing issues related to women. Inclusion is often promoted as a key element in democratization processes and this study takes a gender perspective and explores the potential of civil society as an oppositional sphere to the state. Through semi-structured interviews with women's organizations and individual women activists, this study identified how the actors are included and/or excluded from political participation in Yerevan, Armenia. Further a power analysis enabled an understanding of the obstacles facing the civil society actors in their political participation. This study concludes that women's organizations and individual women activists face practical, systematic and structural obstacles in their political participation, making it hard for them to be a driving force for democratization.

*Keywords:* Armenia, political participation, power, women's organizations, women activists, inclusion and exclusion, democratization, civil society.

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# Abbreviations

EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organizaions
HHK	The Republican Party of Armenia (Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IWPR	Institute of War and Peace Reporting
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations

# 1. Introduction

In Armenia, the political sphere is male-dominated and women are systematically excluded from political processes. The lack of trust for political institutions in combination with the fact that Armenia is permeated with traditional and patriarchal values, creates barriers for issues related to women to become politically prioritized. By that, women in civil society play a vital role in promoting women's rights and addressing issues related to women.

Globally and historically, civil society has been granted the task of creating inclusive political institutions and has often been considered a key element in transitioning to democracy (Howell & Pearce; Ishkanian et al., 2013). The significance of inclusive societies took another dimension last year, when the world came together and agreed on a global agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal number 16 states; "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" (UN General Assembly, 2015). This indicates that inclusion is generally understood as something inherently good for democracy and development; something worth striving for. But is inclusion always the best solution?

The global consensus of the importance of inclusion as a key factor in democratization, contrasted with Armenia's exclusion of women, offers an interesting entry point for research. As Armenia is classified as a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime it is of relevance to study civil society, as an oppositional sphere with democratization potentials. Is it possible that civil society actors that prioritize issues related to women can play a vital role in not only enhancing and improving the lives of women in Armenia, but also contribute to democratization?

## 1.1 Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore obstacles for civil society in Yerevan, Armenia to be a potential sphere for democratization. Having a gender perspective is relevant as women in Armenia generally have restricted access and influence of the political agenda. The aim is thus to identify obstacles women's organizations and individual women activists face in their political participation. This study will seek to answer:

- How are women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan, Armenia included and/or excluded from political participation?

To generate a broader understanding of obstacles women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan face in their political participation, this study will further explore:

- How can women's organizations and individual women activists' inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation be understood according to the three dimensions of power?

In accepting the premise that civil society is a sphere for potential democratization, it is important to explore how power flows in between the state and civil society, as well as in between different civil society actors. Ishkanian and Lewis (2007:408) emphasize that civil society is not a power free space that exists in a vacuum and thus it is important to consider the interactions and relationships that both challenge and produce power. With that in mind, by using the voices of active women in Yerevan, this study looks at different dimensions of power in between civil society actors (women's organizations and individual women activists) and their relation with the state. This will ultimately allow conclusions on how different dimensions of power create obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activist's inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation.

## 1.2 Delimitations

Measuring influence is difficult since it is hard to isolate and rank different factors that contribute to political change. Political participation can thus not be equalized with influence, a factor discussed in the analysis. However, for the purpose of this study, political participation is seen as a precondition for influence.

It should be noted that the theories in this study conceptualize democracy as something good and worth striving for. Because of the limited scope of this study, there will be no discussion of how democracy following Western traditions, can have implications when imported and implemented in non-Western contexts.

## 2. Case Context

Understanding political participation requires contextual knowledge to situate the circumstances under which women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan work. The Armenian society, as any society, is dynamic and ever-changing, and to give an all-embracing presentation is beyond the scope of this study. The following section should be seen as a selection of significant contextual knowledge that will help situate the political environment of women's organizations and women activists in Yerevan.

First, Armenia is a landlocked country in the South Caucasus region, bordering Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran and Turkey. The official number of the the Armenian population is 3 million, by which approximately one million people live in the capital, Yerevan (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). Labor migration, primarily male, have resulted in a majority of the Armenian population being women (BBC News, 2012; CIA World Fact Book, 2015).

### 2.1 History

Armenia has only experienced short periods of independence as its territory has been a conflicting object for 2000 years (Redgate, 1998). Armenia belonged to the Ottoman empire in the beginning of the 20th century and existing tensions between the Ottoman rule and Armenians increased between 1915 and 1917. During these years, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Armenians were killed by the government troops in the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey). The exact number of killed Armenians is still disputed, ranging anywhere between 600 000 to 1,5 million.

Turkey claims the number to be significantly lower and refuses to recognize the atrocities as a genocide (BBC News, 2012, Kifner, date unknown). The strained relations between Armenia and Turkey remains today and the borders between the countries are closed since 1993 (CIA World Fact Book 2015; Kifner, date unknown).

Armenia became part of the Soviet Union in 1922. During the Stalin rule, political expressions were limited to those in line with the ideology of the Communist party; regime critics and opponents were persecuted or killed. A societal transformation was encouraged and this included efforts to replace the Armenian citizens' family loyalty with state and party loyalty. The communist leaders argued that the family was a backward institution and imposed intrusive inspections and control mechanisms to ensure that Soviet legislation was followed. However, the loyalty efforts had the opposite effect as it strengthened the family as an institution of resistance against the state (Ishkanian 2007).

Armenia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 which was followed by turbulent years due to a withdrawal of economic support from Soviet, an energy crisis, a transportation blockade and war with neighboring Azerbaijan (Freedom House, 2015; Ishkanian, 2003). All of these factors contributed to Armenia's economic collapse in the early 1990s (Freedom House, 2015). The global economic recession in 2008-2009 hit Armenia hard, resulting in high levels of poverty and unemployment. Today approximately 32 percent of the Armenian population live below poverty line (BBC News, 2012; CIA World Fact Book, 2015).

## 2.2 Geopolitical Context

Armenia is an important geopolitical partner to both Russia and the EU, much due to its location and its neighboring countries. Since the signing of the EU-Armenia

Partnership and Cooperation agreement in 1999, EU have close relations with Armenia and “is committed to further developing and strengthening its comprehensive cooperation with Armenia in all areas of mutual interest” (European Union External Action, 2016).<sup>1</sup> But despite cooperation with the EU in several areas, Russia continues to be Armenia’s most important ally (CIA World Fact Book, 2015).

Armenia’s border to Azerbaijan is closed due to an ongoing “frozen” conflict over the mountain region of Nagorno-Karabakh (BBC News, 2016). Having closed borders to both Turkey and Azerbaijan has resulted in Armenia having a dependency relationship with Russia; the largest import and export partner (CIA World Fact Book, 2015). Since 2015, Armenia further established its economic exchange with Russia when they joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which was met with widespread public disapproval (European Union External Action, 2016, Freedom House 2016).<sup>2</sup> This decision was, according to the prime minister, based on the need for military support from Russia in the conflict with Azerbaijan (Freedom House, 2015).

## 2.3 Political Context

Armenia is a semi-presidential republic with a unicameral National Assembly. Since independence in 1991, Armenia has had issues with political instability and lack of democracy. The political system is based on consensus among elite groups that control political and economic resources (Freedom House, 2015:69). Merely 10,7 percent of the members of parliament are women (14 out of 131) despite

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<sup>1</sup> Armenia is included in the European Neighborhood Policy since 2004 and in the Eastern Partnership since 2009 (European Union External Action, 2016). Further they are members of the Council of Europe since 2001 (BBC, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Members of Eurasian Economic Union are: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (European Union External Action, 2016)

legislation stating that the number of persons of each sex should not exceed 80 percent (Quota Project, 2014). The president of the republic of Armenia is since 2008, Serzh Sargsyan, who is serving his second term and representing the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). The HHK has over time increased their power over state bureaucracy, and by that, cemented their control over resources and policymaking. Although discussions and debates occur in the parliament, it is on the premises of the HHK (Freedom House, 2015). In 2015, the HHK and opposition parties refused cooperation by mutually blocking each other's proposals in the Parliament (Freedom House, 2015:70). Municipal elections were held in 2014 in 121 communities and although campaigning, voting and vote count was deemed satisfactory, the lack of political competition hindered the emergence of new officeholders. Instead, government officials were rotated with officeholders; ensuring HHK continued power (Freedom House, 2015:67). In 2015, constitutional changes were adopted which were met with widespread protests as it could allow President Sargsyan to remain in power beyond his second term (Amnesty International, 2015; CIA World Fact Book, 2015).

According to Norwegian Helsinki Committee, a NGO working in Armenia, there are reports and evidence of buying votes as well as nepotism and corruption on all levels of the political system (Norwegian Helsinki Committee 2014:15, 18; Wickberg, 2013). The opposition has challenged the results in every national election since independence and thus deemed the parliament, the president and the constitution to be illegitimate (Freedom House, 2015:66).

Norwegian Helsinki Committee (2014:18) claims that it is a well known fact that oligarchs benefit from trade agreements and Ishkanian (2015) argues that oligarch capitalism exists and expands at the hands of president Sargsyan's administration. The corrupt practices and rigged elections in combination with a decline in living standards have caused political apathy and low public trust in political elites (Norwegian Helsinki Committee 2014:15, 18; Wickberg, 2013). Paturyan and Gevorgyan (2014), found that there is a wide mistrust in the population towards the government, NGOs and civil society at large. The judicial system is also considered

to be corrupt and inefficient and there are ongoing investigations where judges are accused of accepting bribes. Thus, the judicial system is vulnerable to political pressure (Business Anti-Corruption Portal, 2014).

As of 2015, Freedom House classifies Armenia as a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime, with a total democracy score of 5 (1 being democratic and 7 being authoritarian) (Freedom House, 2015; Freedom House 2016).

## 2.4 Media and Political Discourse

There are a number of media outlets and independent newspapers online and in print. However, the most common source of information for Armenians is TV, which is controlled by the state and political forces and financed partially by oligarchs. Journalists are subjected to political pressure as well as violence and threats but these actions go unpunished (Freedom House, 2015:67; Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2014:22, Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that there are 19 documented cases of violence against journalists in 2015 (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). The World Press Freedom Index places Armenia at 74 out of 180 countries due to the lack of pluralism and violence against journalist (Reporters Without Borders, 2016).

Mainstream media is a powerful tool in sustaining power and cementing ideas of nationalism and gender roles. Political leaders make discriminatory statements on issues considered to contradict the national identity, such as sexual orientation and gender identity (Amnesty International 2013; Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2014). Armenia is a country with traditional and conservative values of gender in which the role of family and especially mothers, have come to be a part of the national rhetoric, describing the essence of the Armenian identity. In accordance with that view, Armenian women are traditionally strong matriarchs who take care of the family and household while also working outside the home. Mothers are

highly respected but only when she is of a certain age and remain the role of the mother in the home (Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2014:28). Many Armenian women have higher education but they are expected to have the life goal of fulfilling their roles as mothers and caretakers of the family (Wickberg, 2013:23). The gender expectations are starting to dissolve somewhat in Yerevan but remain strong in other parts of the country (Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2014:29).

The traditional gender roles being intertwined with nationalist discourse makes averting from the norm being perceived as a threat to the Armenian identity. Homophobia and transphobia is thus widespread in Armenia and the authorities repeatedly fail to respond to violations against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people despite their constitutional right to protection (Amnesty International, 2013: 10-11). In the same way, feminism is perceived to be an anti-family ideology and since the family is considered to be the core of the nation, anti-family ideologies are seen as anti-national. In other words, feminism is perceived as anti-national in Armenia (Ishkanian, 2003, Ishkanian, 2007).

## 2.5 Human Rights Violations

Being critical of mainstream ideas of Armenian identity and national interests is rarely tolerated in Armenia, according to Amnesty International (2013). This is partly because the security of Armenia is believed to depend on a strong Armenian unity and deviating from the norm can thus be dangerous (Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2014:23).

Even NGOs are wary of taking an “unpatriotic stand” at the risk of being labelled traitors (Amnesty International, 2013: 5, 9). Peaceful protests have been continuously disrupted, sometimes with the use of violence by police and HRW expresses concern about the right of freedom of assembly which has been continuously violated (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). Excessive use of force often

occurs during anti-government protests, protest organizers and members of oppositional movements have been arrested, and at times, even killed (Freedom House, 2015:66). Further, ill-treatment and torture has been reported in police custody and prisons. However, police violence is rarely investigated or prosecuted (Amnesty International, 2015; Freedom House, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2016a).

Women have formal and legal equality in Armenia but have according to Ishkanian (2007:493) experienced setbacks in the political and economic sectors in the post-Soviet era. Domestic violence is fairly accepted in Armenia and there is no law criminalizing domestic violence despite it being common in Armenian society (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). According to Norwegian Helsinki Committee (2014), one in four women are victims of violence at the hands of their husbands and it is not uncommon that mother-in-law's participate in abuse. At the moment, there are no state funded support of women who are victims of domestic violence, the existing services are provided by NGOs (Ibid.).

### 3. Previous Research

In order to situate my study empirically, this section presents relevant previous research of civil society, women's organizations and activism in Armenia. For the purpose of this thesis, a women's organization is understood as an NGO with an agenda for women, who are formally registered with the state (Edwards, 2000; Glasius & Ishkanian, 2015). An individual woman activist is a person engaging in actions intended to bring about social, political, economic or ideological change, directed at either the state, community organizations or the public at large (Embrick, 2008). Women's organizations and individual women activists are seen as different components of civil society in which women's organizations represent formal civil society actors, while individual women activists are seen as informal civil society actors.

The extensive research "Armenian Civil Society after Twenty Years of Transition: Still Post-Communist?" (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014) was conducted 2012-2014, exploring if and how the communist legacy is influencing Armenian civil society today. They used existing public opinion surveys to get an understanding of public attitudes and involvements on civil society activities in the past and contrasted that with their own survey with Armenian NGOs. The quantitative data was complemented through interviews with NGO leaders and civil society volunteers. Paturyan and Gevorgyan (2014) concluded a widespread and increasing mistrust for civil society and their capacities. They identified a prevalent suspicion for most societal and political institutions and organizations, and the mistrust for the parliament was even larger than for civil society. A majority of the population are skeptical of civil society's impact in addressing social issues in Armenia, and even more skeptical of their impact of policymaking. The chosen location for my study, Yerevan, is where mistrust was most widespread. The interviewed NGO

representatives stated that the government run NGOs, also known as GONGOs, is undermining the credibility and the public perception of NGOs (Paturyan &Gevorgyan, 2014). The research by Paturyan and Gevorgyan highlights the element of mistrust, an important aspect in my study. Further, it assisted me in identifying themes and can thus be seen as an in-depth continuation of their study but with the focus of women.

The ongoing research project, “Civic Activism as a Novel Component of Armenian Civil Society: New Energy and Tensions” (Paturyan, Gevorgyan, Badalyan, Grigoryan & Kojoyan, here on forwad Paturyan et al.), investigate the relationship between NGOs and activists as important actors of civil society in Armenia. Using both primary and secondary data of qualitative and quantitative nature to describe the political culture of civil society actors, they focused on participation and (mis)trust and include a gender aspect.<sup>3</sup> Their study measured confidence in different organizations and institutions and found an increased confidence in what they call a “women’s movement” in Armenia. However, they confirmed a general disinterest in politics and non-conventional political participation is low. Because of this, they argue that it is a clever tactic for Armenian civic initiatives to frame their activities as non-political. The research team highlights the victories made by civil society, lead by young activists, when overriding governmental decisions by voicing public concerns. They found evidence supporting NGO members participating in civic initiatives as individuals but NGOs as organizations remains behind the scenes. What they argue for is that NGOs and activists could complement each other (Paturyan et al., 2015), and this potential interplay of individual activists and women’s organizations falls within the line of my study. What differentiates my study though, is the power analysis between women’s organizations and individual women activists and their relations to the state, conceptualized through inclusion and exclusion from political participation.

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<sup>3</sup> This is an ongoing two-year research project and the results discussed here are the findings from the first year.

Armine Ishkanian has done extensive research, looking at the impact of foreign donors on women's organizations agendas (Ishkanian, 2003; Ishkanian, 2007). She uses the case of domestic violence to exemplify what she claims to be an artificial injection of an issue, by donors who disregard the Armenian context. Although it is still relevant to include in my analysis, because it has been thoroughly explored, it is only discussed briefly.

Between 2011-2012, Ishkanian (2015) conducted extensive field research, including interviews and focus groups with environmental activists both in Yerevan and other Armenian regions. She focuses on environmental "civic initiatives" which she claims illustrate broader concerns about the lack of democracy, corruption, oligarchic capitalism, the absence of rule of law and the elites' failure to address concerns of the Armenian citizens. She concludes that the activists involved in civic initiatives are introducing new understandings of civil society and activist practices due to disappointment in both political parties and professionalized NGOs inaction in social injustices (Ishkanian, 2015). These studies use specific cases to illustrate a bigger picture and because this has been done, I chose to focus less on one particular issue and more on the broader political setting in which women's organizations operate. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been a power analysis on the relationship between women in civil society and the state regarding political participation.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

This section starts with theories of civil society intended to provide the basis of how civil society is understood as a sphere with potential to generate change in terms of democratization. After that, Dryzek's theory of inclusion and exclusion is presented, followed by a conceptualization of political participation. Lukes's theory of power provides the final piece of the theoretical framework, aiming to enable an analysis of potential obstacles of inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation.

### 4.1 Civil Society

Scholars of democratization have often considered a vibrant civil society as a key element in transitioning to democracy. Whether civil society causes democratization or whether democracy encourages civil society has been debated for 200 years and regardless of what comes first, the two are strongly interrelated (Edwards, 2009:25, Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014:12). As previously mentioned, Armenia is classified as a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime, so the relationship between civil society and the state is important to understand Armenia's democratization process. Howell et al. (2008:90) write; "Organized civil-society initiatives are crucial, both symbolically and politically, if civil societies are to maintain their emancipatory potential and widen the spaces for public discussion and deliberation". Young (2000:8, 156) recognizes the importance of civil society in combating injustices and social transformation, but argues that civil society cannot completely eliminate dialogue and potential cooperation with state institutions if they wish to transform it. Thus, structural

change should be pursued on two fronts, in the civil society sphere and at the state institution level.

The notion of civil society as an oppositional power against a corrupt and authoritarian state grew in the 1980s (Howell & Pearce, 2001:15) and by this dichotomy, civil society has come to be a normative concept that; “[...] is generally understood as a ‘good thing’ by democrats and as a ‘dangerous thing’ by autocrats” (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014:11). Feminists have been critical of the traditional conceptualization of civil society and more specifically, the distinction between different spheres. The most common critique is against the distinction of private/public in which civil society exist between the state and the private sphere. Feminist theorists adopting the slogan “the personal is political” are critical of this distinction because the family is seen as an important site of power, especially in a country with traditional values and gender roles (Williams, 1997). The private sphere is not free from state control, gender hierarchies move from one sphere to another, so a division of the private/public means a depolitization of the private; a site where women experience oppression (Williams, 1997). According to Howell, “What matter analytically is not the demarcation of boundaries but understanding how the relations between males and females in the family shape the norms, practices, and behaviors of the public realm, that is, in the state, civil society, and market institutions” (Howell, 2007:418).

New conceptualizations are less rigid about who belongs to civil society and where the distinctions are made and rather adapts a dynamic approach. For the purpose of this study, Fioramonti and Fiori’s conceptualization of civil society will be seen as “[...] an ‘arena’, populated by groups, individuals and organizations sharing similar values and advancing common interests, rather than a collective noun describing certain types of organizations” (Fioramonti & Fiori, 2010: 25). This definition allows an analysis of the differences within civil society and its internal power balances that may be altered by external factors (Ibid.). Fioramonti and Fiori (2010) argue that power struggles within civil society can generate rivalry which may not be beneficial regarding democratization. The notion of power within civil

society is compatible with my study as it allows an understanding of how the relationship between different civil society actors can affect their political participation and possibilities to influence the political agenda. Howell and Pearce claim civil society to be a sphere where power relations are both challenged and produced, a sphere for critical thought and action (Howell & Pearce, 2001:3). Thus, civil society has the potential to be both a progressive and conservative force for women and men (Howell, 2007:424). In order to get a thorough understanding of inclusion and exclusion of civil society actors, it is relevant to see how power operates in the different sites and in between each other, to ultimately get an understanding of how this affects women's organizations and individual women activists' political participation.

## 4.2 The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

According to Dryzek (1996), democracy is generally perceived to be an unfinished project in terms of enhancing the democratic qualities of all societies. Although not exclusively, democratization can be seen as “[...] the progressive inclusion of various groups and categories of people in political life” (Dryzek, 1996:475). However, advocates of this type of progressive inclusion, of as many groups as possible, disregard the difference between authentic and symbolic inclusion. The only way inclusion in the state is beneficial is if, what a certain group seeks from the state, is also imperative to the state in terms of public policy. Otherwise the inclusion risks being co-opted, in which there is no actual power sharing but the inclusion is merely symbolic and poses no threat to the stability or existence of the state (Ibid.:475-476). Dryzek argues that “inclusion in the state is only benign if fairly demanding criteria are met, and that when these criteria are not met, inclusion in the polity beyond the state is more appropriate” (Ibid.:475). By that, Dryzek (1996:475) recognizes that inclusion is essential in democratization processes, however questions when the inclusion is sponsored by or sought in the state.

It is important to clarify the difference of inclusion in politics and inclusion in the state; conceptualized by Dryzek as; “a set of individuals and organizations legally authorized to make binding decisions for a society” (Dryzek, 1996:475). State inclusion can happen through lobbying activities as an organization or interest group; negotiations between public officials and group leaders in policy development and implementation; participating in conventional party and electoral politics; accepting activities initiated by governmental officials; or increasing the group’s opportunity for participation through changes in public policy. State inclusion thus goes beyond basic citizen rights, such as the right to vote (Ibid.).

What he argues is that exclusion from the state can allow a flourishing oppositional sphere, which can be beneficial for democratization (Dryzek, 1996:475). This oppositional sphere, civil society, has historically almost always been the driver for democracy (Ibid.:476). Therefore, by inclusion, the state will have less to fear in terms of public protest since the group leaves the oppositional sphere. Thus, through state inclusion, state opposition declines at the cost of a less vital civil society (Ibid.:475-476). Further, by entering the state, oppositional groups are forced to adapt to the state’s more hierarchical structures in order to establish stable relationships with government officials. By that, a democratic loss is also at play when entering the state, which can be hard to justify if the instrumental gains are few (Ibid.:480). So, although some democratic rewards can be reached through state inclusion, Dryzek argues that it may reduce future democratization (Ibid.:476).

Dryzek emphasizes that the element of power is not lost through exclusion; “[...] choosing civil society rather than the state does not necessarily imply choosing powerlessness” (Dryzek, 1996:486). Even if civil society action does not have an immediate impact on public policy, it does not mean that it has no impact at all. In fact, civil society can, by bringing awareness to certain issues, have real social effects. Social actions can bring awareness and change political discourse which in turn can affect public policy content. Further, these type of actions can gain cultural attachment in which transformational societal effects can be achieved long after the social action occurs (Ibid.:482, 486). By that, “power can be exercised from and

within, civil society in several ways” (Ibid.:481). Civil society, by being excluded from the state, can thus constitute a sphere for democratization (Ibid:482).

Groups should take two criteria into consideration when deciding on inclusion and/or exclusion. The first is what has previously been mentioned, whether or not the group’s interests have a chance to be integrated in state imperatives. If no, state entry is a poor strategy as the outcomes is unlikely to have any policy affect but rather result in a co-opted agenda with symbolic rewards, which is bad for democracy. By that, the first criteria ask a group to contemplate if state inclusion will result in real influence (Ibid.:485). The second criteria ask the group to consider if their state inclusion would leave behind a flourishing civil society. If no, the risk of a less vital civil society is ultimately a less democratic sphere which can have implications for democratization. The groups should thus consider the potential impairment of losing its oppositional position by becoming an actor in conventional politics (Ibid.:485). Assisted by the two criteria, the decision of inclusion and/or exclusion should be based on which strategy is considered to increase the prospects of democratization. However, there is no universal right or wrong in terms of state inclusion and/or exclusion that works at all places and at all times, rather, the decision is contextual both in time and space (Ibid:485). Thus, Dryzek reject determinism and claim that “The dynamics of democratization reveal a subtle interplay between inclusion and exclusion, the state and civil society” (Dryzek, 1996:476).

### 4.3 Political Participation

Historically “political participation” has been seen as activities aiming to (directly or indirectly) influence governmental decision-making (Kaase & Marsh, 1979:42; Verba & Nie, 1972). But this is a narrow conceptualization of political participation, as not all attempts to influence politics are directed towards the government (Teorell, Torcal & Montero, 2007:336). Most compatible with this

thesis is Conge's definition in which "Political participation is any action (or inaction) of an individual or a collectivity of individuals which intentionally or unintentionally opposes or supports, changes or maintains some feature(s) of a government or community" (Conge, 1988:246).

To enable a power analysis between women's organizations and individual women activists, as well as their relationship to the state, it is necessary to make the distinction between conventional and unconventional political participation. The features of Dryzek's state inclusion are, for the purpose of this study, seen as conventional political participation, which can be summarized as the aim of influencing politics through institutionalized means (Stockemer, 2014). In contrast, unconventional political participation is the aim of influencing politics through non-institutionalized means (Ibid.).

## 4.4 Power

Steven Lukes's three dimensions of power is compatible with this study as it focuses on the political setting, a crucial element in understanding the power dimensions flowing inside and between civil society and the state. It enables a power analysis on three different levels which will all assist in answering how women's organizations and individual women activists are included and/or excluded from political participation.

Lukes power theory is developed by drawing on previous scholars' work. He claims that power can be divided into three dimensions, which all have their strengths and weaknesses and can be used for different purposes. However, to get a deeper understanding of the elements of power, the third dimension is, according to Lukes (2005:16-17), most crucial, as it goes beyond what we can see and count. He argues that, "[...] power is at its most effective when least observable" (Lukes, 2005:1). By analyzing power using all three dimensions, it is possible to explore how

political systems can prevent political demands or questions to be raised. It is thus allowing an analysis of the direct and indirect operations of power.

Before presenting the different dimensions of power, it is essential to clarify how Lukes conceptualize power. He uses Robert Dahl's definition, in which, "A exercise power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interest" (Lukes, 2005:30). The three power views can all be seen as different interpretations of this concept of power. Lukes recognize the weakness of the initial definition of power, partly because it implies power *over*, that is a source of domination. He adds that power can be a transformational and productive force, used to advance and satisfy the interests of others (Ibid.:12). However, the restrictive element of power is cohesive with purpose of this paper as the power analysis will focus on the obstacles women's organizations and individual women activists face in inclusion and exclusion from political participation.

#### 4.4.1. The First dimension of Power

The one-dimensional view of power is the most literal and direct in relation to the above mentioned definition. This is referred to as the pluralist view in which the focus is observable behavior (Lukes, 2005:17).

The best way to determine who has the power is to see who prevails in decision-making because power is embodied in concrete decisions or in the process leading to that decision. The key interest issue should involve actual and observable disagreement or conflict (Ibid.:18, 20). These interests are to be perceived as policy preferences, "[...] so that a conflict of interests is equivalent to a conflict of interests" (Lukes, 2005:19). These preferences are assumed to be consciously made and demonstrated through action and therefore, it is through the observation of people's behavior that power can be detected and analyzed. The one-dimensional view of power disregards the potential that people may have interests that are unobservable or unarticulated, or that they may perhaps even be unaware of their

own interests (Ibid.). It is thus a direct or immediate exercise of power. Lukes conclude that:

[The] one-dimensional, view of power involves a focus on *behavior* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation (Lukes, 2005:19).

#### 4.4.2 The Second Dimension of Power

The two-dimensional view is critical of the pluralist notion of power as only being decisions embodied by observable actions (Lukes, 2005:20). Instead, it is believed that power can be exercised through the exclusion of decisions. In collective decision-making, someone has the power to set the agenda and by that, decide what to make decisions about, and even more importantly, what *not* to make decisions about (Badersten & Gustavsson, 2010:70). Power in this dimension can thus be understood as constricting the agenda of decisions to fairly “safe” issues. There is both decision-making; a choice between different actions, and non-decision making; a decision resulting in the suppression of challenges of the decision-maker’s interest and values (Lukes, 2005:22). To empirically study inaction, or non-decisions power is possible because inaction is not necessarily featureless as the consequences of that inaction may be visible. Thereby a power analysis is enabled by identifying the consequences of inaction and the non-appearance of certain political issues (Ibid.:53). The central point is the idea of conscious or unconscious barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts (Ibid.:20). Bachrah and Baratz, quoted in Lukes, speak of the “mobilization of bias” in which certain persons or groups benefit at the expense of others through dominant values, rituals, beliefs and institutional procedures, operating systematically and consistently. Generally, it is elite groups within a population that defends the dominant system and the status quo, by controlling the agenda (Ibid.:20-21). The want for change

can potentially be threatening to the decision-maker and thus s/he can control the agenda so that an issue becomes a non-issue through its exclusion from the agenda in the political system. Lukes conclude that:

The two-dimensional view of power involves a *qualified critique* of the *behavioral focus* of the first view [...] and it allows for consideration of the ways in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as embodied in express policy preferences [...] (Lukes, 2005:25).

The common denominator between the one- and two-dimensional view of power is thus that aspect of conflict of interests need to be present in order to enable a proper analysis.

#### 4.4.3 The Third Dimension of Power

The third dimension tackles structural power and thus presumes that there are certain dominating structures in society that are influencing how people think and perceive themselves. For example, capitalism and patriarchy, which impose people with ideas that make them identify as i.e. consumer, worker, man or woman. From these identities, people express what they think their interests are (Badersten & Gustavsson, 2010:70). By that, “[...] *A* may exercise power over *B* by getting him to do what he does not want to, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (Lukes, 2005:27).

Lukes argues that this third dimension offers a more encompassing understanding of the workings of power and that excluding potential issues from the political process is done most effectively by preventing the conflict from arising in the first place. It goes beyond controlling the agenda and is rather a controlling of peoples’ minds (Ibid.:25, 27). The main distinction of this dimension is based in Lukes

critique of the one- and two-dimensional views, namely that a power analysis requires an observable conflict and that the lack of visible status quo opposition is equalized with consensus. Instead, he argues, power can take mundane expressions and generate a manipulated consensus through socialization and control of the mass media. It is the decision of how certain things are spoken about which influence the way people think; a discursive power (Ibid.:27). Lukes concludes that:

The three-dimensional view of power involves a *thoroughgoing critique of the behavioral focus* of the first two views as too individualistic and allows for consideration of the many ways in which *potential issues* are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals' decisions" (Lukes, 2005:28).

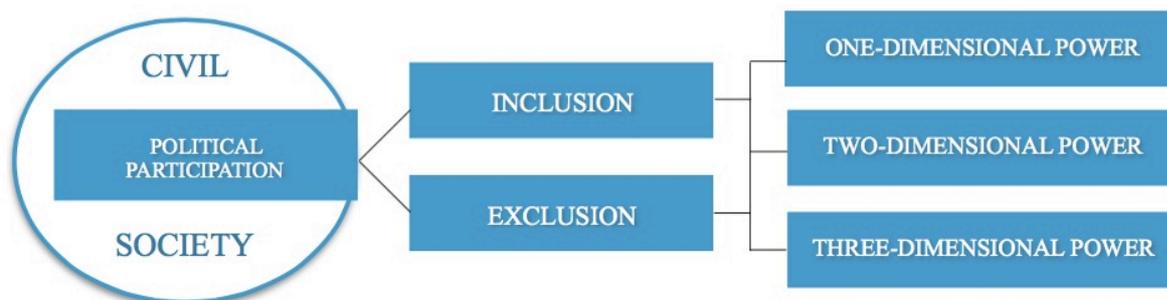
The wants of people may be products of a system that works against their interests and power can thus be exercised without an observable conflict (Ibid.: 38).

## 4.5 Theory Application

Political participation refers to the activities of women's organizations and individual women activists. Dryzek's inclusion and exclusion theory maps these activities and finally Lukes's power dimensions enables a power analysis of the obstacles ultimately affecting the political participation of women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan. The image below illustrates how the different theories will be used.

First, civil society offers the contextual theoretical parameters for the actors in this study; women's organizations and individual women activists. Political participation allows a mapping of the activities (conventional and unconventional) of women's organizations and individual women activists, that is, the actual

methods used. After that, the mapping of political participation is placed in the theoretical framework of inclusion and exclusion, in which obstacles for participation are identified and finally analyzed through the power dimensions. The three dimensions of power thus explore the practical, systematic and structural obstacles arising from inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation.



*Image 1: Theory Application*

Regardless of politically participating through inclusion and/or exclusion, there can be obstacles. By that, placing inclusion and exclusion into a power framework will allow an understanding of the potential obstacles women’s organizations and individual women activists face in their political participation.

The framework of inclusion and exclusion answers the first research question of how women’s organizations are included and/or excluded from political participation in Yerevan, Armenia. Applying the power theory will generate an answer to the second question, by exploring how the exercise of power creates obstacles for women’s organizations and individual women activists’ political participation. Ultimately, this is a power analysis of the obstacles women’s organizations and individual women activists’ in Yerevan face in inclusion and exclusion from political participation.

# 5. Methodological Framework

This section begins with an introduction of the chosen philosophy of science; feminist standpoint theory, and is followed by a presentation of the methodological choices for this study. Feminist standpoint theory is thus a guiding tool, influencing every methodological decision in the research process, as it sets the parameters for knowledge production.

## 5.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist researchers aim to problematize women's different situations and the institutions shaping those situations. A premise for feminist researchers is that gender, as an organizing principle, shapes the circumstances of women's lives and the intention is thus to explore "gender domination within a patriarchal society" (Creswell, 2007:25).

Feminist methodology is post-positivist in the sense that it questions the notion that we can reach "truth" or "reality" (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). Feminists view knowledge as particular rather than universal (Hekman, 1997:356) and a fundamental argument in standpoint theory is that all knowledge is situated, that is, socially located (Haraway, 1988, Hekman, 1997).<sup>4</sup> Science can thus never provide truths, but subjugated groups can, through their lived experiences offer alternative, or situated knowledge. This situated knowledge is a way of "studying up" by

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<sup>4</sup> Although recognizing that feminist research, feminist theory and standpoint theory is not only about women, for the purpose of this paper, it will be the focus.

deriving from a specific subordinated group which allows a more complete understanding of dominant groups, institutions and structures. Hence, it is a way of mapping power practices from a bottom-up perspective (Haraway, 1988; Harding 1997; Harding, 2004).

Feminist standpoint theory is based on the premise that women have a unique standpoint in society, which provides the “justification for the truth claims of feminism” (Hekman, 1997:341). Further, women’s lives enable a particular and privileged understanding of male supremacy, due to their subordinated position, giving them an epistemic advantage (Hekman, 1997:344; Letherby, 2003:44). By that,” A feminist standpoint is therefore grounded in the experience of women who are reflexively engaged in the struggle, and knowledge arises from this intellectual and political engagement” (Letherby, 2003:45).

Harding (1997:384) addresses that dominant groups have better opportunities in formulating (including and excluding) ideas of how social relations and nature ‘really work’. Further, Sayer argues that those in dominant positions have a tendency to regard their situated view as universal (2000:51). The State, having a dominant position, can conduct practices seen as patriarchal, echoing nationalism and masculinity (Schaffer 2004:147). One example is that state responsibility traditionally fails to extend responsibilities to the private sphere of the family in which a lot of discriminative practice against women usually takes place (Letherby, 2003:44; Savery, 2005:91). As this is the case in Armenia, it is important to use methodology that gives voice to those with actual experience of working with the issues at hand. It is essential to derive from the epistemological standpoint of Armenian women in civil society who work with issues related to women, because; “[...] the activities of marginalized groups provide more useful starting points as they generate the most critical questions about the status quo” (Letherby, 2003:46). Haraway claims that the positioning of the researcher enables her/him to make plausible truth claims and it is through the situating of oneself that objectivity is accomplished (1998).

It should be noted that feminist standpoint theory does not claim that all women share the same experience, summarized in *one* standpoint. Hooks (1986) suggests that one talks of feminist standpoints and the idea is that the different standpoints can lead to a broader understanding of women's experiences and through that, a unity can be found in the shared resistance and oppression (Hooks, 1986; Letherby 2003:57). By that, to get a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan face, it is pivotal to derive from their standpoints.

## 5.2 Case Study

This research is a case study with an in-depth exploration of women's organizations and individual women activists' political participation in Armenia. This is suitable as; "Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts" (Baxter, Jack, 2008: 544). Case study analysis is human centered with an intent to understand the multiple social realities that characterize the chosen context and its members (Yanow, Schwartz-Shea & Freitas, 2010).

A single-site case study with embedded units enables the researcher to explore the case from different perspectives, enriching the understanding of the case. The strength of this analysis is the possibility to analyze within, between and across different subunits (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Yin, 2003). For the purpose of this study, it will allow an analysis of: women's organizations and individual women activists as separate actors; analysis between women's organizations and individual women activists, as well as analysis across women's organizations and women activists as a combined representation of women in civil society in Armenia.

## 5.3 Sampling

The selection of organizations was from the outset limited to the capital Yerevan for a number of reasons. First, the women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan are the ones with the most access to the state, as it is the location of the government. Second, before leaving Sweden, contacts with some women's organizations and my field supervisor was established and they were located in Yerevan. Third, knowledge in English is limited outside of Yerevan and I did not have the resources for a translator to accompany me to different regions. There is a significant difference in Yerevan and rural areas and thus, the results of this thesis cannot be generalized to all of Armenia.

My selection of Armenia was partly based on the seemingly large selection of women's organizations, especially in the capital Yerevan. Approximately 60 women's organizations are registered at the Ministry at Justice but according to Ishkanian (2003), only a handful are active. I identified a total of seven active women's organizations in Yerevan, by which I interviewed six. The seventh organization was contacted both through e-mail and phone, but were eventually excluded due to language barriers. It should be noted that other NGOs in Yerevan work on issues related to women, although not exclusively and therefore, they fall outside the scope of the conceptualization of women's organization used in this study.

The initial contact with some of the organizations took place with the help of the Swedish women's organization Kvinna till Kvinna<sup>5</sup> who support local women's organizations in war affected areas, amongst them; Armenia. Kvinna till Kvinna collaborate with four out of the six women's organizations that I interviewed and in two instances, they helped establish connections by referring me to a particular

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<sup>5</sup> Kvinna till Kvinna literally mean Woman to Woman.

person via e-mail. The remaining organizations were contacted through e-mail or phone after receiving information of women's organizations and whom to contact from my field supervisor.

There was an element of purposeful sampling, in which the inquirer, with the aim of showing different perspectives on the issue, selects multiple units (Creswell, 2007:74). Based on this, the decision to include two different groups of civil society actors were made, allowing a broader understanding of inclusion and exclusion from political participation. Snowball sampling was used to identify the activist respondents, in which "a small pool of initial informants [...] nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study" (Morgan, 2008). The initial informant was my field supervisor, who provided me with a list of people to contact and from which I got two interviews. The remaining two were then located by referral from one of the respondents from that initial list.

## 5.4 Interviews

To explore diversity and similarity for women in civil society in Yerevan, interviews have been conducted with both women's organizations and individual women activists. By that, it will be possible to get their understanding of the obstacles they experience, which in accordance with feminist standpoint theory, is a way of mapping power practices from a bottom-up perspective. It is thus a way to legitimize the experiences of women in civil society while simultaneously generating an understanding of how the experiences can be understood collectively (Cockburn, 2007; Letherby, 2003:57).

### 5.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted, enabling the researcher to explore the topic while also allowing the respondents to take any

direction. Open-ended questions do not presume an answer and allows the respondent to highlight what s/he finds important (Gillham, 2008; Seidman, 1998:69-70). An interview protocol, intended to guide the interview (Roulston, 2010) was used when conducting the interviews. Before the first interview, I tested my protocol on a fellow student with experience of working in an NGO. All interviews took different directions depending on the answers from the respondents but the same themes were consistently covered. Picking up and probing questions on the given accounts allows for deeper understandings and new findings and is compatible with the semi-structured and open-ended interview (Ibid.). Since both women's organizations and individual women activists were interviewed, a slight change was made in the interview protocol, all the while covering the same themes. The interview protocol included a ranking of what questions were most important, making it easy to prioritize when short of time.

In three organizations, more than one person was interviewed. This was on the one hand to get a broader understanding by allowing more than one person to be the voice of the organization and on the other, to overcome potential language barriers. The interview language was English; my second language and for all respondents, their second or sometimes third language (after Armenian and Russian). There is always a risk of misunderstandings, however after weighing this against using a translator, with the risk of things being lost in translation, I decided to conduct the interviews in English. Partly because of this, two interviews were conducted as group interviews (with two people) in which they helped each other interpret when needed.

A total of 11 interviews with 13 respondents by which seven were with women's organizations and four with women activists, were conducted. Two interviews were conducted via Skype as the respondents were not in the country during my stay in Armenia. The interviews lasted between 25-75 minutes, depending on number of respondents and time constraints. A majority of the interviews stayed within the requested time frame 45-60 minutes.

## 5.4.2 Transcription

All interviews were audio recorded to enable transcription. Two Armenian students were hired to do the transcribing and my field supervisor assisted me in finding two students at the American University of Armenia. Before sending them the audio recordings, we met and they signed a contract (see appendix 1), ensuring that the recordings and transcriptions would be deleted after the work was finished, in order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents. The students' salaries were based on local market pricing.

I provided the students with an information sheet of transcriptions techniques to ensure that I would understand everything correctly and that it would have an identical structure. Translating discourse to text means that certain characteristics that can alter the meaning of the words, such as intonation, pitch and volume, are lost (Bloor & Wood, 2006). The transcriptions were translated word by word, thus placing more focus on the actual content of what was said rather than how it was said. I ended up transcribing two interviews myself because they took place during my last days in Yerevan and thus the students would not have had time to finish them before my departure. In order to confirm accuracy in the transcriptions, all interviews, including the ones I transcribed myself, have been listened and read through from start to finish. The transcribed material resulted in approximately 72,000 words.

## 5.5 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the interview process, the principle of informed consent was applied. The purpose of informed consent is to protect the welfare of the respondents and ensure that respondents freely choose to participate and do so being fully informed about what the participation in the study entails. It is thus a way to protect the respondents by allowing them to make an informed decision of their participation

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011; Owens, 2010). All respondents were given a short description of the study in the initial contact, over the phone or in an e-mail. Before the interviews started, the respondents were given a research summary and consent form, informing about the research question and the study as well as what they were consenting to by agreeing to be interviewed (see Appendix 2-3). All respondents will receive a copy of the finished study after its publication in Lund University Papers.

The topic of this thesis can be considered sensitive since the respondents were asked questions about the state and its institutions. It is crucial to not place respondents at further risk as a result of the conducted research (Creswell, 2007:44). As noted in the case context section, being critical of the state in Armenia can place a person in danger of threats and violence. Because of that, all respondents have been made anonymous which they also were informed about in the consent form. Quotes used in the analysis were coded to once again, ensure anonymity and there is only a differentiation made between women's organizations and activists for analytic purposes.

As previously mentioned, the Swedish organization Kvinna till Kvinna assisted me in establishing connections with some respondents in my study. It should be noted that this is an independent study and the Kvinna till Kvinna staff has not partaken in my research process in any other way than generating contacts.

## 5.6 Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research, it is impossible to stand "outside" the subject matter. The element of reflexivity; the acknowledgement of one's own role in knowledge production, is crucial in research, as it allows for a more thorough and transparent process. Further, reflexive research requires that one's epistemological and ontological convictions are presented (Anderson, 2008).

The researcher thus has expectations and sometimes even prejudice, that effects the methodological choices in the study, i.e. the type of questions one asks, who is chosen for interviews etc. In my case, my identity as Western, Swedish, woman, feminist, student and political scientist have come to consciously or unconsciously influence my research process. As the context of my study is outside my own, there is a risk of reproducing stereotypes about women in a “non-western” context as being suppressed and subjugated in contrast to the western, “free” woman. It has been a priority of mine to not reproduce this type of stereotypes, which is why I decided to use feminist standpoint theory, as it is allowed a production of situated knowledge of women with actual experience of the topic of study. It was thus a way to minimize my preconceptions and reproduction of stereotypes by having the respondents’ answers, guide the research. Nevertheless, the interview data becomes a representation of reality, constructed by the interviewer and the respondent in a joint process (Rapley 2001:304).

## 5.7 Interview Coding

Due to the comparison aspect of my thesis, it is of relevance to use different codes for the individual women activists and the women working in women’s organizations. The nine women working in women’s organizations were coded as R1-R9 (Respondent) and the four activists were coded as AR1-AR4 (Activist Respondent). All coding was done randomly with no indication of order or preference.

Using the research question as a starting point, the interview protocol was created with four different themes in mind; 1) inclusion and exclusion 2) political participation 3) civil society and state collaboration 4) power. These themes correlated with my theoretical framework although it became evident that the distinctions between these overarching themes were fluid and had no clear boundaries. Due to that, new themes, seen as expressions of the initial overarching

theoretical themes were identified when starting the analysis. The process of identifying themes was done through coding; the interpretive process in which patterns are identified and related to each other and the wider theoretical frameworks (O'Reilly, 2009). The coding allowed the data to be connected to the theories and by that, a theory-driven thematic analysis was conducted, following the aim of thematic analysis; examining commonalities, differences and relationships (Harding, 2015). My identified themes were: 1) violence and imprisonment; 2) corruption and mistrust; 3) funding; 4) state and civil society collaboration; 5) patriarchy; 6) media and political discourse; 7) geopolitics; 8) civil society collaboration. Each theme will be analyzed according to the model presented in the previous chapter. That is, political participation will be categorized as inclusion and/or exclusion and related to one of the three dimension of power.

## 6. Analysis

The analysis is structured according to the three dimensions of power in which women's organizations and individual women activists' inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation is analyzed to explore the obstacles they face.

The dimensions of power get wider and more complex from the first to the third dimension and it is thus natural that the second and third dimension are more comprehensive. As the topic involves dynamic spheres, the different themes are interrelated and some themes can be argued to fit under more than one dimension. With that, the themes were placed according to where they were found to have most analytic value. To clarify the connections, the three dimensions are tied together in a last section to present a cohesive understanding of the obstacles facing women's organizations and individual women activists in their inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation in Yerevan.

A short introduction of the women's organizations and individual women activists, received from the interviews, will be presented before starting the analysis. This is essential to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the following findings and discussion.

### 6.1 Women's Organizations and Individual Women Activists

Armenian Young Women's Association work to strengthen women through

business and entrepreneurship. Democracy Today aims to create awareness and develop women's capacities as a means to strengthen democracy in Armenia. The remaining four organizations work with domestic violence: Society Without Violence, Women's Resource Center Armenia, Women's Rights Centre, Women's Support Centre.<sup>6</sup> Two of them offer shelter for victims of domestic violence and all four provide social services by offering social, psychological and legal counselling. All of the organizations conduct projects both in and outside of Yerevan.

The organizations have been operating from between 4 to 22 years and they vary in size, having 10 to 37 staff members and some organizations also have volunteers. The respondents have between 1 to 22 years of experience working for a women's organization in Yerevan. Further, the respondents have different positions in the organizations and there is a large variety in age.

The organizations have different methods of working, some prefer to have a low profile and engage mainly in conventional political participation, while other work with both conventional and unconventional political participation, that is, both state collaborations and public actions. The state collaborations may make the women's organizations reluctant of being too critical of the state, as it can come to jeopardize that relationship. Activists are not dependent on any relationship with the state and were included to broaden the perspective on civil society participation and influence. But, due to the risks involved with being critical of the regime, as will be illustrated below, no personal information of the activist respondents will be presented. This is to ensure the anonymity and safety of the respondents so that the quotes in the analysis cannot be traced to any individual.

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<sup>6</sup> Domestic violence and gender-based violence are different terms used to describe the nature of violence (in this context against women). I have chosen to use whatever term the organization in question is using as this is how they have chosen to frame it.

Most of the activists did not have experience of working for a women's organization and at the time being, none of the activist respondents were affiliated with any women's organization. However, they all had years of experience and knowledge of civil society, activism, and women's organizations in Yerevan. It should be noted that the individual women activists in this study are women who self-identify as feminists and who are active on issues that in one way or another relate to women's rights or the emancipation and empowerment of women.

## 6.2 The First Dimension of Power

[...] she personally was also attacked, there was this theatre street performance and they attacked us, like we were perverts (R7).

According to the first dimension, power is demonstrated through action in a situation of an observable conflict. Political participation is an expression of policy preferences in the observable disagreement and it is in people's behavior that power can be detected (Lukes, 2005). By that, this section discusses the direct expressions of power, creating obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activists' political participation.

### 6.2.1 Violence & Imprisonment

Both women's organizations and individual women activists talk of the experience of violence during, what can be classified as, unconventional political participation, i.e. demonstrations and street actions. When participating in this type of actions, the actors have chosen exclusion from the state, and in that choice, obstacles such as

violence arise, which can be seen as a direct exercise of power (Lukes, 2005).

It became clear that the use of force and violence were dependent on the political nature of the topic of the unconventional political participation. With that, if the topic is politically “safe”, then the police are just present without acting, however R4 argues: “Whenever we are, like, making [...] political demonstrations [...] on different issues, a lot of activists are imprisoned and beaten up brutally”. This was reaffirmed by AR4: “[...] let’s say if it’s a taboo [...] let’s say, it’s something against the president [...] they are insane in terms of how violent they can be”. HRW have reported about excessive use of force during anti-government protests which was also demonstrated by the respondents, AR2 states:

[...] like many others I’ve been taken to police many times. Last time I was taken [I] was protesting against Putin’s arrival and I said Armenia’s president’s father came and I had a poster, they apparently didn’t like that text.

Here, a difference was identified between women’s organizations and individual women activists. R4 says that rather than speaking up on issues concerning the government, their organization avoid it, as there are no police support for them. She argues:

[there are] a lot of imprisonments of activists in different fields, like political activists are one of the first victims, [...] we had cases when women and also young men were beaten up in the streets according to their political views, and this kind of issues are supported by the government.

AR4 agrees that it is less violent when the protests are not perceived as threats to the political elite. She uses the example of a protest for changes in maternity leave

legislation in which the activists used a less radical tactic, highlighting that the current legislation contributed to the demographic decline in Armenia, which the government was trying halt. This illustrates a type of manipulation when trying to make political demands against institutionalized discrimination, having negative effects for women. The previous mentioned study by Paturyan et al. (2015) argued for framing civic initiatives as non-political because of the low interest and mistrust for politics in the general population. To frame a women's rights issue, such as maternity leave, as an obstacle for a demographic increase can be seen as a non-political framing of a political issue. It is thus an exclusion strategy by choosing unconventional political participation and by framing it as non-political, there is a better chance for participation and influence as it is not perceived as a threat by either the population or the state. AR4 adds:

But whenever we do whatever we really want to do, not pretending that we are politically correct people - then, many challenges arise, and I wouldn't say that there is any positive interaction between civil society and the state in that cases.

Police violence to obstruct controversial protests are supported by the government and can be seen as a way of excluding alternative voices and shutting down demands for competing interests. This relates to the one-dimensional view of power as a direct and observable way for a political system to prevent political demands. In the case of unconventional political participation in which, people's interests are demonstrated through action, women in civil society in Yerevan are excluded through the use of violence. So in the choice of exclusion from the state, violence presents itself as obstacle for political demands. However, as noted by the example above, when constructing it as a "safe" demand, there may be a way to avoid conflict but that strategy does come with an element of self-censoring, as illustrated by the quote above.

Dryzek (1996) argues that when civil society actors either choose exclusion or are excluded from conventional political participation by the state, they can be a driving force for democratization by bringing awareness to the specific issue. Thereby political action can lead to change in political discourse which in continuation can affect public policy content. Political demands through unconventional political participation by the women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan, require strategic thinking in how to frame the issue at hand. It is a fine line to consider as the self-censoring can risk the "real" message being lost and with that, the odds of cultural attachment leading to political changes are reduced. For example, by reframing the issue of maternity leave to an issue of demographic decline, the larger agenda which the issue is rooted in; the rights, liberation and emancipation of women, which is ultimately what the women's organizations and individual women activists are working for, is lost. However, if the topic is too controversial, there is a risk of violence and imprisonment which is an effective way to silence political demands. This demonstrates that an observable disagreement, expressed through political participation risk being eliminated through the use of violence which can be seen as way for the Armenian state to ensure their power.

### 6.3 The Second Dimension of Power

[...] the problem is that one of our main enemies are the state (R4).

It is not merely the physical obstruction, as noted in the previous chapter, that creates obstacles for participation and influence. As Lukes's (2005) second dimension of power theorize, the decision of what to decide upon and more importantly what *not* to decide upon, is also an exercise of power, limiting women's

organizations and individual women's activists' political participation and influence in Yerevan.

### 6.3.1 Corruption and Mistrust

As previously noted, there is a widespread mistrust for the state, civil society and public institutions and organizations in Armenia, and especially in Yerevan (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014). Ishkanian (2006:731) claims that Armenians' low trust for the state is due to corruption on all levels of government, a fact that was also confirmed by the respondents in this study. R2 says: "We don't trust this result of these elections". Further, AR4 talks of the lack of trust for the state:

No, the trust for the state is also very low, and the people are sick and tired of the current regime, but, paradoxically, even though they are in a very miserable conditions, they prefer selling their votes, for, let's say, €10. When it comes to the elections, they get these €10, they go to vote, and they vote for the candidate they have been paid for, and then they complain that the life is not good, that everything is corrupted. So they are becoming key elements of the corruption, and then they are saying it's very bad that there is a corruption and we have zero level of trust towards our government. I can't really explain the reason of that, and I don't really think there is a single reason, legit reason for explaining such kind of attitudes, but it's mostly related to the fact that the citizens don't perceive themselves as agents of change. They don't think about their future, but about their present day, and they don't consider their voice to matter, so they rather sell their voices and just go and tick a box, and then complain again rather than stand, stand up for their rights [...].

The quote illustrates both corruption and the political apathy existing in Armenia (Freedom House, 2015:66; Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014). This apathy does not only have consequences for conventional political participation, such as voting, but also for civil society as an oppositional force against an oppressive state as

corruption results in an exclusion of decisions potentially opposing that oppression (Lukes, 2005). Dryzek (1996:486) argues that “Because pressures and movements for democratization almost always originate in civil society rather than in the state [...], a flourishing oppositional civil society is the key to further democratization”. If excepting that premise, the political apathy and civil society’s failure to connect to the broader public (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014) reduces the chances of democratization through civil society participation. A population disconnected from the spheres of potential political influence, both the state and civil society, is not likely to be able to influence the political agenda. Thus, it makes it harder for civil society actors to make political demands upon the state when there are few who believe in civil society as potential actors of change. Selling and buying votes sustain the power of the elite by eliminating competition which in turn is a way for the state to control the political agenda.

As mentioned, the trusts for the state is even lower than for civil society. When one activist was asked if she personally trust the state, she (AR4) said: “Of course not! There is no single department, level - even person - representative of the state, I have blind recognition for, or trust for, unfortunately”. The women’s organizations were not as critical when asked the same question. R1 says:

I trust it but I don’t trust at the same time. I’m not trusting them because I knew that they are not that much interested in all these things [women’s rights]. But in the other hand, the state, the government is my government. So, government is me, me is government, so, that’s why, I’m -- I am trusting them.

So how does low trust for the state and corruption influence women’s organizations and individual women’s activists’ political participation and influence? Well, if there is corruption in politics, that means that diversity of opinions is eliminated before even becoming a threat. According to Lukes, it is a powerful tool to be able to decide what *not* to decide about. By that, corruption results in what Lukes

(2005:22) calls non-decision-making; a suppression of challenges of the decision-maker's interest and values. In other words, corruption is a systematic exclusion of political demands by which elite groups are able to sustain the status quo in the current political system. This illustrates that corruption and mistrust goes hand in hand in ensuring women's organizations and individual women activists limited space for participation and influence.

### 6.3.2 Funding

Another way for the Armenian state to make sure that political demands on issues related to women are suppressed is by creating financial obstacles for women's organizations to pursue their work. All interviewed women's organizations talked about the lack of funding as a big problem, R3 states:

[...] we cannot, sometimes, sustain our work, if we do not have funding. And we cannot offer the services that we offer, in the absence of the state, who is not offering, also, if we do not have funding. So funding is-is essential, to maintain our staff, to improve on the capacity of our organization, we need funding.

AR4 argues that "The richest beneficiary of foreign funding is our state, especially the police are having a lot of funds, getting a lot of funds from the OSCE and from the European Union [...]". This has created an atmosphere of competition between the state and civil society actors. R8 claims:

[...] many government officials see us as competitors in the field as the ones who just [...] take government grants, these international grants and do nothing because we are becoming competitors in using the money.

She continues to talk about GONGOs, that is, fake NGOs created by the state. R8 says: “[...] we always had a, so to say, access to international organizations communities [but] it became different because there is this layer of GONGOs”. The GONGOs are reducing funding opportunities for women’s organizations and by that making it harder for them to pursue their work and political participation. This indicates that the state perceives women’s organizations as a potential threat which relates to what was previously mentioned, that civil society “[...] is generally understood as a ‘good thing’ by democrats and as a ‘dangerous thing’ by autocrats” (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014:11). On top of increased competition through GONGOs, there are according to R8, also a burdensome reporting system for NGOs, both to the state and to donors. The state is constricting the political agenda by controlling the civil society sphere, through administrative obstacles. This relates the second dimension of power as it is a way to prevent decisions of potential issues by creating barriers (Lukes, 2005). Time and resources that could have been spend dedicated to the cause of the women’s organization, is instead forced to be spent on looking and applying for funding. The Armenian state is engaging in non-decision making process through increased competition for funding which eliminates women’s organizations potential political demands that potentially can be threatening to the ruling elite (Ibid.).

Another issue related to funding is the economic dependency on donors which can be argued to influence how and what women’s organizations in Yerevan do. Ishkanian (2003; 2007) emphasizes that donors have their own agenda and the major donors, such as UNDP and USAID have prioritized projects supporting women’s political voice and political empowerment but have simultaneously steered the direction of the issues, the methods and the projects. This relates to the reasoning of AR1 who argues that issues are depoliticized at the hands of the donors through the focus on separate issues rather than the power structures that create those issues, she states:

[...] now in Armenia during last few years a lot of money and grants are being given to women organizations [and] for me it's a bit risky [...]. It's very much now concentrated on violence against women, gender equality, but [only] rhetorically [...] there is big missing, the political, you know. All this is politics. That's why the grant is risky because when you get the grant donors are apolitical, which is absurd, but the gender issue now -- World Bank, everyone that is giving money or supporting, it's like apolitic. It's not apolitic. The gender issue, gender equality is a political issue because [it is a] power issue [...]"

This illustrates another obstacle facing the women's organizations in Yerevan; the power to set their own agenda is not always in their own hands, which is far from optimal because donors, according to R8, sometimes lack contextual knowledge. In that, women's organizations may be encouraged by donors to use methods of work that do not challenge existing power structures, which the quote above indicates. This can be seen as a systematic exclusion of political demands (Lukes, 2005) in which women's organizations become part of someone else's agenda rather than pursue their own.

The combination of donors' impact on the women's organizations' agendas and the state's making of GONGOs as well as administrative barriers, is creating an environment that is aggravating the work of women's organizations as it limits their possibilities to both conventional and unconventional political participation. R7 states:

[...] it's hard, it's really like a matter of survival. It's just not that you know, really advancing something you're doing, it's just keeping the status quo, the things that you're doing now.

This clearly illustrates that the financial burden, made even more difficult by the state and donors, has immediate impacts on the work of women's organizations who do not have the capacities to try to challenge the status quo; beneficial to the political elite (Lukes, 2005). Instead, they are just trying to survive. Glasius and

Ishkanian and Glasius summarizes the threats that NGOs in Armenia is facing; “[...] after a decade of virulent criticism, distrusted by governments and the general public alike, in a hostile financial climate, they may have outlived their purpose, and wither and die or become hybrid organizations such as social businesses” (Glasius & Ishkanian, 2015:2642). This may sound dramatic but R7 talked about a new legislation that would in fact create a possibility for women’s organizations to become small social businesses. R7 states:

[...] he was saying now because the law is changing you can do other things, but I don't wanna do business things! I'm not here to do business -- even, it's good, they consider it as a good thing, you know, now you can earn money by for example, he was constantly bringing an example of one NGO that producing stuff, I don't know, like toys for kids. I mean, I'm not -- I have Phd in Sociology, I don't wanna produce toys, I'm not interested in stuffed animals you know.

What this illustrates is that on one side the Armenian state is introducing new legislation to enable NGOs funding, but on the other, they are creating GONGOs, making it harder for NGOs to get funding. If women’s organizations were to sell their services, they would not be able to reach the women most in need of their support. R7 says: “[...] that's not gonna work because who's is going to pay? Oh this really poverty-stricken women, violated and abused, they are going to pay our service?”. So although it would decrease women’s organizations dependency on grants, it would also risk less time dedicated the cause of the NGOs by being busy doing other things, rather than making political demands upon the state.

Transparency International (2014) have expressed their concern about the continuously shrinking space for civil society in Armenia, which is what the second dimension of power has illustrated. The Armenian state is exercising power through non-decision making; the suppression of political demands, by creating barriers for women’s organizations and individual women’s organizations political

participation. Using Dryzek's (1996) reasoning, this results in civil society becoming a less vital sphere as the potential contribution to democratization through participation, is reduced.

### 6.3.3 State and Civil Society Collaboration

Another potential way for the state to shrink the space of civil society is through state inclusion. Political participation through collaboration with the state may appear to be a way to ensure influence of the political agenda, but for that to happen, the inclusion need to be cohesive with the state's imperatives. On this topic, it was obvious that state collaboration, or in other words, state inclusion, was a divider between individual women activists and women's organizations. The activist's method of working is to try to reach the people in the making of active and aware citizens, hoping that this will lead to them making political demands upon the state. Women's organizations who had initially not wanted any cooperation with the state, now felt it was necessary. This clearly illustrates the different methods of state inclusion and/or exclusion and the divide between the activists and women's organizations. The overall understanding of the activists in terms of inclusion and exclusion strategies, with the exception of one activist who emphasized the value of working on two fronts, can be summarized in this quote by AR2:

I would very much like to see NGOs not working with the government but working with women, helping them to get liberated because when someone is liberated that's forever [...].

However, all women's organization had some type of state collaboration and several respondents mentioned it as a necessary means to enable change (R1, R3 R6, R7, R8). R8's response illustrates the inclusive strategy of their organization:

Opposing ourselves to the state, it would not help. Irrespective the fact we like them, we do not like them, it is in every state; there are excellent people in every level who work, who know and who sympathize, who understand things. So, we have to try to turn them on our side. And, that's what we're doing through our conferences.

R7 says that their organization changed strategies from only exclusion to now have both inclusion and exclusion strategies in terms of political participation. She is less optimistic than R8 and calls the relationship between them and some of the Ministries, "bearable", but she does not want to go as far as calling it cooperation. By that, even when there is some type of collaborations, there is skepticism of the state's intention of that collaboration, which according to R4 only exist on a superficial level, R1 says:

[...] to show that they are also working on this kind of issue, you know, because it's a problem and they need to say, "You know, yes Armenia accepts this paper and we are fighting [...] for domestic violence, so they somehow should show that, you know, we are also working on it, but only in this part.

This relates to what Dryzek (1996) calls the risk of inclusion being co-opted, in which the state takes advantage of a civil society actors as it portrays them as being inclusive and democratic. But eventually, there really is no opportunity for influence if there is not a political will in the ruling elite. The issue presented thus has to be cohesive with state imperatives, otherwise there will be no change and the inclusion will be merely symbolic. Since 2007, women's organizations have been cooperating with ministries in the making of a draft law on domestic violence but

it is yet to be adopted.<sup>7</sup> This correlates with Dryzek's idea of a co-opted inclusion, in which women's organizations in this case were included in the state but without any actual influence or power sharing, as the state claims that there is a lack of resources for implementation of a domestic violence law. By that, it relates to Lukes's second dimension of power in which a decision results in the suppression of challenges of the decision-makers interest and values. Using the argument lack of resources, is a way of controlling the agenda and making it into a non-issue, assuring the political elite that status quo remains (Lukes, 2005).

It has not been a state imperative to adopt a domestic violence law in Armenia and because of that women's organizations' agenda have through inclusion become co-opted to show international donors that they are inclusive. AR1 says:

They invite these women groups or other NGOs to sit with them because they have to show to European Union or USA, even if they are aware of, but to show, "You see, we are democratic, we are doing a dialogue" and so they are formal, but nothing changes in real life because [...] you don't present any power. None of these NGOs represent any power. They are a facade.

This illustrates a disbelief in the conventional political participation and inclusion strategies as it is merely symbolic, AR4 argues:

[...] there is a false image that has been created, I think, since the last few, maybe three-four years, that civil society has more access

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<sup>7</sup> During one of the interviews I was told that the draft law on domestic violence is going to be adopted. According to Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR, 2016), EU and Armenia signed the EU Human Rights Budget Support Program 2016-2018, granting Armenia 11 million euros in which one condition is the adoption of a domestic violence law this year. As of today (20/5-2016), no law is adopted.

to the state and decision-making processes. Because it's kind of a false image of the emerging democracy, state that want to show that 'yes, I have created all this democratic necessary mechanisms, so that civil society come, and raise its voice, and that we're gonna listen to civil society and make the considerations' that's why they have sometimes public hearings, certain draft laws.

AR1 and AR3 explain that change cannot happen through inclusion in the state because the democratic system is merely imitating a democratic model. AR1 argues that just because state institutions are in place, does not mean that they are functioning. She says:

People think that since we have, you know, set up institutions and if you start doing formal cooperation with these set up institutions you will change the politics. No. That has been the case in developing countries and in Armenia. By being in this council or by being in formal platform you don't change anything. Those forums are not real power forums.

So by being included in the state, women's organizations in Yerevan risk having their agenda co-opted and becoming a part of the system that is in fact oppressing them. This can be connected to the second dimension of power in which the Armenian state is controlling the agenda by the political participation of women's organizations inclusion in the state, presenting an image of a democratic and inclusive state, only to disregard the input presented by the women's organizations. In other words, there is no power sharing and there are no instrumental gains. According to Dryzek (1996), this is a democratic loss because through the inclusion in the state, civil society become less independent and partly loses its oppositional position.

Some women's organizations use strategies of both inclusion and exclusion and the activists were mostly advocates of exclusion strategies in their own activities, but

even in these instances, there is a risk of having the agenda co-opted by the state. Ishkanian (2015) argue that Armenian officials have attempted to appropriate the success of civic initiatives, with the intent to “[...] boost the regime’s democratic credentials” (Ishkanian, 2015:1224) R4, representing an organization that are involved in both conventional and unconventional political participation, argue:

[...] it is a very good position for them, because when they go to some international meetings, they say ‘yeah, we have a civil society, and they are doing several actions, they are protecting and protesting about different kind of things’. It is a very comfortable position, showing that you have an activism here.

With that, it can be said that in Yerevan, regardless of choosing inclusion and/or exclusion as political participation strategies, there is a risk of having the agenda co-opted by the state. “Politicians across the ideological spectrum have embraced the language of civil society for different purposes” (Howell, 2007:424) and thus, civil society activities can prove to be a double-edged sword for women (Ibid.). Dryzek (1996) argues that oppositional groups may be included in policymaking processes only to have their input ignored. Inclusion, can be used as a non-decision making strategy in which the Armenian state is co-opting women’s organizations and individual women activist’s political agenda, only to assure dominance.

## 6.4 The Third Dimension of Power

[...] you’re not only fighting against the government, you are not only fighting against the stereotypical society, you are fighting against your family as well. And there is so much emotional stuff on that (AR2).

The third dimension tackles the unobservable; the structures influencing and determining people's wants. This is, according to Lukes (2005), the most effective dimension of power because it is a socializing process that ultimately affects how people perceive themselves and others. Although this is unobservable power expressions, it creates observable consequences and obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activists in their political participation.

#### 6.4.1 Patriarchy

Williams (1997) and Howell (2007) point out the importance of exploring gender relations in the relationship between civil society and the state. During the interviews, it became very apparent, just how much the patriarchal and traditional values has immediate effects on the work of women's organization and individual women activists. R8 says: "We need to do first of all very thorough search for nobody would tell us that you've done it emotionally". What she is referring to is that women's organizations need to present research as "proof" that an issue exists, i.e. domestic violence. This illustrates that patriarchy influence the way in which women's organizations strategically think about their work. The notion of women acting "emotionally" is rooted in traditional gender roles, which women's organizations and individual women activist consistently work against. R4 claims:

Armenia is a very traditional country, and I would say that the impact of the church is not that big as the impact of traditions, and every gender roles are very strict. So, the main role of a woman is being a nice girl, and getting a family, and the emancipation of women and realization of women is when she has a family and has a children. This is, kind of, the role of the woman.

These gender roles, assigned to women are according to AR4 restricting women's lives, she says: "[...] every aspect of women in my country is being controlled by male family members". This can be exemplified by projects that two organizations had (R6, R8) where husbands had been reluctant to allow their wives to participate. The husbands were, because of that, invited to see what they were doing and after that, the wives were allowed participation; a success according to the organizations. However, it does indicate a larger problem; the patriarchal structures that shape the lives of women. The third dimension of power presumes the existence of dominant structures of power which influence the way in which women and men perceive themselves (Lukes, 2005). The fact that men perceive themselves as having the authority to "allow" their wives to participate in a training or project can be seen as an expression of this structural power. But what does the relationship between husband and wife in determining the wife's participation in a project, have to do with women's organizations and individual women activist political participation? Well, these patriarchal and traditional gender roles have not appeared out of thin air and does not exist in a vacuum within the restriction of the family. In fact, an important role in this is played by the Armenian state. R4 says:

And the problem is that the government itself, and the people who are representing the government are very -- share the patriarchal values themselves. For instance, like, the Youth Chamber of the Republican Party, which is in lead positions already several years, they wrote a statement about womanhood, saying that Armenian woman should be first of all Armenian, and then a woman. So, say, like, all your needs should be aside, and you should represent a national understanding of a womanhood, which is, like, being obedient, being, like, modest, shy, connected with the familyhood, and etc. So, which, of course, harden our work a lot, because when you have people who don't see any problem in this kind of spheres, it's very challenging to [...] beat [the patriarchal stereotypes].

As the quote illustrates, the government promotes these types of patriarchal values

by including them in discourses connected to nationalism, making it difficult for women's organizations and individual women activists to make political claims.

AR4 says:

[...] we are challenging things that haven't been challenged widely and systematically before, so, it's kind of natural that they would oppose to what we are doing, they say 'you want to ruin our families, our national identity', 'you are not Armenians', 'in Armenia man is a man and woman is a woman, and a man is the decision-maker, and the woman has to obey [...].

With that, gender hierarchies move from one sphere to another (Williams, 1997). The husbands' reluctance to let their wives participate, can be connected to patriarchal discourses, utilized by the state. These together, create both practical obstacles for women's organizations when conducting projects and structural obstacles by making it difficult for women's organizations and individual women activists' to make political claims that goes against the national identity, highly connected to the role of the mother. When asked about what attitudes she receives when telling people about her job, R1 states:

Some of them are very critical, they think that you're also destroying the families and also you are just against all the national – nationality, against Armenia, against the national values and they don't want to understand that all you want is love and harmony in family [...].

Harding (1997:384) addresses that dominant groups have better opportunities in formulating (including and excluding) ideas of how social relations and nature "really work". In the Armenian state's promotion of traditional gender roles, they are simultaneously creating barriers for women's organizations and individual women's activist political participation, through socialization. By using this type of discourse, the state can ensure that political claims from women's organizations

and individual women activists have no support in the broad population and by that, status quo can be sustained. Further, it ensures that the lack of priority of issues related to women in the parliament does not seem to be problematic, as they are not seen as important issues in the first place. Using Lukes's (2005) terminology, it is an exercise of power according to the third dimension as it shapes and determines people's wants. When asked if there are members in parliament that prioritize issues related to women, R7 responded: "No, prioritize, no. Maybe they are, there are a few that are not against but I wouldn't say there is anyone who prioritize". On the contrary, R6 said: "There are some members of the parliament [...] they are prioritizing the women issues. The issue [is] that we need to have more representation in the parliament, of course". Opinions on the low representation of women in politics, (only 10,7 % in the parliament) seemed to divide the respondents. Some believed that without women in parliament, the needs of women will not be heard and by that, it is an important first step (R6, R7). In a patriarchal society like Armenia, where women as a group are subjugated, the underrepresentation of women may further minimize the odds of issues related to women becoming politically prioritized. The emancipatory potential of civil society actors (Dryzek, 1996) can thus be said to be minimized by the disinterest in issues related to women. However, other respondents claimed that women in parliament are, just as men, patriarchal (R3, R5, R8, AR3). R3 states:

No, I don't think it matters at all. Unfortunately, [...] quantity does not equate to quality. We don't have feminists. If women in power are not feminists, or at least advocate for women's rights, they do more damage than good.

This is an example of internalized patriarchy of parliament members, ensuring a mobilization of bias in which certain groups benefit at the expense of others (Lukes, 2005). R8 says: "Even those who we have in the parliament, except one, [...] nobody does anything for women or at least for human rights, nothing. They [are]

just tokens for different political parties”. AR4 agrees by stating:

The political arena is the most male-occupied, male-centered area in Armenia, and it’s the hardest and the biggest patriarchal unit, I would say, so, whenever you want to understand what is happening in Armenian politics [...] you have to understand that you are entering in a purely male-dominated sphere, where even women, who are rarely present there, are imitating men, and are being another unit, and another element of the patriarchal chain [...]. There is no single politician, female politician who would think that there are some problems when it comes to women’s rights in Armenia.

This is important to mention because if there are members of parliament that do prioritize issues related to women, it is plausible to believe that political participation, be it conventional or unconventional, would be easier for women’s organizations and individual women activists. It is not so much about the sex of the parliament members, but rather the notion that issues related to women, according to most respondents, are not politically prioritized. This can be seen as a result of an internalization of patriarchal values which ensures that political demands opposing these values have limited support, both in parliament and in the general population. The lack of parliamentary support for issues related to women, as a result of patriarchal structures, thus presents itself as an obstacle for women’s organizations and individual women activists’ political participation and influence.

Beyond creating obstacles and thereby sustaining status quo through patriarchal discourses, the Armenian state simultaneously vilify and create mistrust against women’s organizations and individual women activists, portraying them as anti-national and traitors. R1 argues:

[...] you are not [perceived as] national, kind of, you don’t --

you're just destroying everything that are national, because you are bringing something that's come from outside. You bring some values that are not for us, strange for us, it's not our society, not our national values.

As the Armenian nuclear family is based on very traditional gender roles and considered to be the core of the nation, anyone trying to challenge this, are seen as anti-national (Ishkanian, 2003, Ishkanian, 2007). Armenian nationality is extremely important because of its history of being occupied, the genocide and the ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan. By creating an image of women's organizations and individual women activists as enemies of Armenia, the political demands coming from them, can be framed as a threat of the national identity. The configuration of nationalism and traditional gender roles can be seen as a structural exclusion of women's organizations and individual women activists' political participation, both conventional and unconventional. If there is no broad support in the general population, and if women do not perceive their oppression, it is hard to make political claims opposing that oppression. This is what Lukes's refers to as a manipulated consensus by which issues are kept out of politics through socialization. According to R4: "[...] this is the way that the government kind of shuts our mouths". Patriarchal discourses can have detrimental effects for women's organizations and individual women activists because working for women's rights and the emancipation of women become equalized with working against Armenia and that brings different types of resistance. AR4 says:

I just understood that I am psychologically not healthy anymore. I got super-tired of the pressure that I was experiencing in my country, I was blacklisted by a newspaper, my photo was disseminated in a number of social networks, saying that I am an enemy for Armenia and that they have to get rid of me -- it happens not only to me, but also to some of my colleagues, and we have experienced a lot of difficulties. I had so many problems with my own family, who just said that 'you have to quit your job and activism', and, you know, 'you have to choose between us and

your work', and I -- of course I was saying, I cannot choose, because you're saying I have to choose between you or myself, because my activism is me.

The resistance coming from the private and public sphere is psychologically strenuous for the individual women activists, who according to AR4, experience burnout periods. Eliminating oppositional political demands by systematically breaking down individual women activist can be seen as a way that the state use gendered power structures to ensure their power. The quote also highlights an important aspect, significant for this whole theme, namely that patriarchy comes both top-down, from the state, and bottom-up from the family. The interplay of patriarchal values flowing between the spheres creates structural obstacles of women's organizations and individual women activists' political participation.

#### 6.4.2 Media and Political Discourse

As Lukes (2005) noted, media is a powerful tool in the socialization process and as TV is the main source of information for Armenians, the information and knowledge spread through these channels can have large impacts on people's perceptions. The lack of knowledge in the Armenian population was a recurring theme during the interviews. The respondents claimed that many Armenian women are not aware of their rights. R1 says that women may not even know that they are victims of violence because they think that it is their husband's right to have sexual intercourse whenever they please. Although recognizing that there has been some progress in writing about domestic violence, R1 claims that there is a lack of knowledge about the topic and journalists may add further stigma by questioning the victim. R4 says:

[...] they are blaming the victim for staying and resisting in the situations of violence, and we see that the whole system has lack

of information and understanding of the cause of domestic violence [...].

The media plays a vital role in the lack of understanding domestic violence, partly by blaming victim but also, according to AR3, by media's attention to sensational cases, keeping people uninformed of how widespread the problem is, R3 says:

Now, unfortunately the journalists are very much influenced by the sensational, I mean they are very much focusing on the sensational aspect of the domestic violence, and do not give an explanation for these things, or do not analyze the issue.

Domestic violence is an example of how mainstream media does not educate, but rather cement patriarchal stereotypes. The respondents did recognize that there are some online media paying attention and covering topics related to women's rights. However, mainstream television, from which most Armenians get their information, is very patriarchal (R4, AR1, AR3). This relates to the third dimension of power in which patriarchal values are permeated through mainstream media to uphold the structures by which women are subordinated. AR1 argues that mainstream TV never invite people who challenge the traditional and patriarchal discourses, she says:

So, media is the same, even women journalists. It's very low level of consciousness about feminism, about all these issues, women's rights. It's the information that is represented, lot of prejudices and of course the mainstream politics. Who wants the women, 70% of population, to be aware of their rights and they start demanding their rights? Can you imagine? The whole system will collapse. The whole families will collapse. They don't want. And the media is very forceful.

What this quote tells us is that the state's usage of mainstream media, is a controlling of the mind, ensuring a continuation of women's subjugated position. By that, women's organizations and individual women activists are faced with structural obstacles to political participation, resulting from patriarchal structures. In comparison to the second dimension of power which is about controlling the agenda, this is rather a way for the Armenian state to use media as a socializing tool, making them not question their current situation. But according to R1, it is:

not only [that] men don't want to give the space, also women don't want to take it and are very passive and think that their place is at home doing some home works, bringing up their children.

This illustrates that the personal is political and that gender hierarchies existing in the family, has immediate effects on women's political participation and in extension influence on the political agenda. The information spread in the mainstream media is controlled by the state, AR3 claims: "[...] they are just ruled by those parties, by their mission, by their thinking, by their attitudes". By feeding the notion of women's roles as mothers and caretakers, potential political claims of women become non-existent; they are eliminated before they even arise. Promoting patriarchal stereotypes by controlling media is an effective way for the state to make sure that women's organizations and individual women's activists political claims are not connected to the broader population. This is significant of the third dimension of power where a manipulated consensus can be generated through socialization and control of the mass media and by that, eliminating potential political issues that may jeopardize the state's power (Lukes, 2005:27).

### 6.4.3 Geopolitics

There was an expressed concern of Russia's increasing influence on the NGO environment which is politicizing women's organizations (R4, R7, AR2, AR4). Russia's civil society environment is very harsh since 2012 when they adopted a "foreign agent law" in which NGOs accepting foreign funding and engaging in

“political activity” are forced to register as foreign agents (HRW, 2016b). Since then, Russia has been encouraging Armenia to adopt similar legislation (Sahakyan, 2015). R8 states:

Today if you've seen Russia has published draft law on politicization of NGOs and how they can call agent, international agent. You know, the funny -- when you read this document you think that everyone in the country is agent because it speaks about social -- policies. If you help children it's a social policy. If you help elderly it's a social policy. How you can do things without being involved in a policy? So, every area is policy.

This type of discourses, originating in Russia, is increasing in Armenia and it is way for politicians to create mistrusts against NGOs by calling them western spies or agents and grant eaters (R1, R6, R7, AR4). The lack of trust for NGOs, as discussed in the second dimension of power, facilitates the Armenian government targeting of NGOs through these discourses. But it is related to the third dimension of power due to the nature of the discourse which is intertwined with patriarchal and nationalist values; a forceful socializing mechanism to ensure resistance against women's organizations and individual women activists.

As noted in the case context section, Armenia is of interest for both the EU and Russia, making them into a brick in geopolitical games (AR2, AR4, R7). AR2 argues: “[...] a lot of policies are coming from Moscow. Now Moscow is the capital of Armenia [...]”. R7 states:

[...] this EU Association Agreement and -- Eurasia Union Agreement, like all this things in 2013, when it started. It was so obvious that how women's rights agenda presented, manipulated and it was done by state completely. It was very obvious. Of course, you can't see their names there but there are people hired by the state to do this. To show that how pervert Europe, you know

how like, spreading homosexuality, all kind of you know, like incest [...] And then there is this moral portrait of Russia with family values and we all were used in that way, like these NGOs are pro-western because these [take] grants.

This quote summarizes the obstacles women's organizations and individual women activists face in the geopolitical games. It illustrates the impact Russia has on public policy in Armenia by using patriarchal discourses as well as casting suspicion against women's organizations and individual women activists, claiming that they promote Western values, incompatible with Armenian identity. This can be seen as an example of what Fioramonti and Fiori (2010) noted, that internal power balances can be altered by external actors. As previously noted, most Armenians get information from mainstream television in which there are many Russian TV-channels that, according to AR2 is spreading Russian propaganda. She claims:

[...] it's increasing; it's definitely increasing after we became Eurasian Economic Union. And they are promoting retarded stereotypes and just trying to make pressure, shutting down, on progressive adults, [...] attacking people who are promoting women's rights and LGBT and even environmental stuff.

The activities and actions of women's organizations and individual women activists are in one way or another trying to work against the patriarchal stereotypes, encouraged by Russia and channeled through media, resulting in socializing processes in which they are perceived as grant eaters and foreign agents. Russia's influence over political discourses and public policy in Armenia can be seen as a structural power exercise creating obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activist's political participation. The work women's organizations and individual women activists do is disconnected from the general population because of the imported discourses creating perceptions of them as deviant and opposing Armenian national identity. If the broader population

perceives them as threats or enemies, the likeliness of their social actions, through unconventional political participation, to gain cultural attachment is limited. In line with Dryzek's (1996) reasoning, this disconnection is restricting civil society to be a potential sphere for democratization and the ruling regime remains unchallenged.

#### 6.4.4 Civil Society Collaboration

The patriarchy theme illustrated how the state and family are spheres where patriarchy is upheld and produced; contributing to structural obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activist's political participation. But patriarchal ideas and values are not isolated to the sphere of the state and the family, rather, as this section will illustrate, patriarchy exist in a constant flow between the state, the family and civil society in Armenia. By that, it is necessary to explore potential obstacles the different civil society actors in this study (women's organizations and individual women activists) create for each other. Because, "Just as the state and the market are not free of ideas, civil society is also permeated by material and coercive logics" (Glasius & Ishkanian, 2015:2623).

First, not so surprisingly, the activists have more radical perceptions in comparison to the women's organizations who all work with the state in one way or another. But in between women's organizations, the level of inclusion in the state seemed to cause critique, R8 says:

But sometimes we are criticized by many NGOs that we are pro-governmental. We are not pro-governmental, we are pro-transformational and that what we're trying to do. We are pro-institutional that we need that institute, but we need institute that works for us. And by opposing we would not change anything. It would be like oppose, that's all, what else. That's why in many projects we have cooperation with local authorities, with local government, you know, the government, the federal government. We invite all them, we invite to lectures, the parliamentarians. It's

important.

This type of reasoning correlates with Young (2000) in that civil society has limits to what they can do as an oppositional sphere and to undermine injustice requires some type of dialogue and cooperation with the state institutions they wish to transform. However, AR1 argues that women's organizations, through their inclusion in the state, is becoming part of a corrupted and non-functioning system of oppression, that is not working for women. She says: "I am against the representative system. I am against the representative democracy. It's not functioning anymore. It never -- it was never for women". She continues:

[...] we are reproducing the same system without being conscious in our own feminist groups or in our own women groups or organizations, which is counterproductive or becoming part of the system which is gonna tie [...] our hands because when you are within the system very close to the system, then you are not outspoken.

According to Lukes (2005), if individuals or groups move upwards within the very structural system that has oppressed them, it means an acceptance of that oppressive system. It is merely the receiver of that oppressive power that has changed. Inclusion in the state can be what Lukes (2005) calls perceived opportunity, in which women's organizations may only be symbolically included, but that inclusion may prevent them from being critical against the state and its patriarchal practices which women's organizations are trying to work against. Fioramonti & Fiori (2010) argue that power struggles within civil society can generate rivalry which may not be beneficial regarding democratization if the result is a less vital civil society for unconventional political participation as an oppositional sphere against the state. By inclusion in an oppressive system, groups are forced to adapt a more hierarchal structure to enable stable relationships with government officials

which Dryzek (1996) argue, is a democratic loss. This can be seen as a way in which women's organizations creates obstacles for individual women activists as civil society at large becomes less vital with state inclusion.

As illustrated, there are some tensions in between women's organizations and individual women activists, on their method of working. Beyond methodology disagreements, two activists argued that some women working in women's organizations are patriarchal themselves. In fact, AR2 was told by a woman, working for a women's organization:

[...] she was asking me, "Yeah, it's very strange. Are you married?" and I said no, I'm not and she said, "Feminist is not good [...] I think you have to get married and then you will forget the feminism" and she said "you know there are some nice boys".

This quote indicates what Howell and Pearce (2001:3, 424) was claiming; that civil society can be a sphere where power relations are both challenged and produced and can be a progressive and conservative force for women and men. Further, it shows that civil society, just as the private sphere and the state, is a sphere where patriarchal values exist. As previously mentioned, feminism has been constructed as anti-national and it can be said that these patriarchal discourses of the traditional gender roles, have been internalized even by women, working against the same stereotypes. This illustrates, in line with Lukes's third dimension, that the exercise of power in which potential issues are kept out of politics through socializing, exist also within the civil society sphere.

Despite disagreements, there seems to be a want for greater participation among the different civil society actors. Four of the six interviewed women's organizations collaborate in the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women since 2010. R1, R4 and R7 said that the women's organizations are more effective when working together and four of the six interviewed women's organization stated that they

collaborate with individual women's activists from time to time. R4 says:

[...] we all the time try to strengthen collaboration with different groups, individuals, organizations, because we believe that only through unity we can bring some change. But it's also, it's not an easy job, because especially individuals, in some initiatives they are more radical in their statements, and they don't like organizations, because they see that they are part, also, of this capitalistic, institutionalized activism, and it creates some challenges.

R1 said that activists are more free and flexible in their activities, while organizations have to stay within certain frames. When you are in an organization, according to R1: "you have to [...] think about your organization because you're representing organization. You cannot just go and do whatever you wanna to do". She adds that activists can bring awareness to an issue without having to worry about an entire organization being targeted for it. According to Glasius and Ishkanian (2015:2636), NGOs are restricted by their relationship to the state and donors in how critical they can be, and activists are thus seen as useful because they bring attention to issues concerning the NGOs without having to pay the consequences. This correlates with R7's statement:

I think we need both, my opinion is that we need both. We need individual activist, we need more organized groups and we need registered a little bit yes, sometimes a lot bureaucratic NGOs. We need everything. I don't think, cause I know we have a constant discussions with individual activists as well, that NGOs are kind of killing the movement, you know that there is genuine movement coming from activists but then there is, there are NGOs that are still they have some kind of obligations, they're -- responsible to their, accountable to their donors, etc. But I think we need both and individual activists, I think they can do, sometimes more than NGOs can do because they are free from a

lot other obligations.

Ultimately, women's organizations and individual women activists are all working for the goal; the emancipation, liberation and empowerment of women, but using different methods in their work. Unconventional political participation which the activists and some of the women's organizations participate in, is also beneficial for women's organizations only working with conventional political participation. If the unconventional political participation would get cultural attachment, as argued by Dryzek, it could mean less resistance for the political participation of women's organizations. Hooks (1986) argued for feminist standpoints, in which unity can be found in shared resistance and oppression. This relates to the wants expressed by some of the respondents, a want for a "women's movement" where different strategies are used but working towards the same goal. This is what AR1 refers to as finding your own constituency in which instead of becoming a part of someone else's agenda through state inclusion, you create your own agenda in a joint struggle against oppression. She says:

Get politicized but not in terms of formal politicizing [but] changing power system. Lot of ideas we are sharing, but I think maybe it's not time. They are not ready. And the time will come.

## 6.5 The Three Dimensions of Power

The analysis illustrated how power operates in dynamic processes of bottom-up, from the private sphere, to top-down, from the state, while simultaneously circulating in the civil society sphere. Although the different themes were placed under the different dimensions of power, they are all clearly interrelated. The three dimensions of power operate in a constant process in which the socializing (third dimension) makes issues into non-issues (second dimension), creating observable

conflicts (first dimension) against those opposing the message of that socializing.

In the first dimension, violence, as the most direct and observable expression of power, is exercised when the topic of the political participation is deemed controversial by the ruling regime. The level of controversy is connected to the third dimension of power; namely practices that go against the normative system enabling the government to remain in power. That normative system entrenched with patriarchal and nationalist values is used as a socializing mechanism which is assisted by mistrust and corruption, funding difficulties and co-opting the agenda of women's organizations and individual women activists. Altogether, the three dimensions of power have illustrated that both conventional (inclusion) and unconventional (exclusion) political participation presents different obstacles. Further, the obstacles for women's organizations and individual women's activist's political participation is not merely a product on the state's practices and discourses but is rather reproduced in all spheres of society. This creates a difficult environment for women's organizations and individual activists to make political demands against a ruling regime benefiting from the gendered power system that they are trying to dissolve.

## 7. Conclusion

In the absence of political priority of issues related to women, the vital role of addressing and promoting these issues rely on women in civil society. In that work, women's organizations and individual women activists in Yerevan are entangled in a web of violence, mistrust, corruption, patriarchy and nationalism; creating obstacles for their political participation.

The aim of this study was to explore how the exercise of power creates obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activist's inclusion and/or exclusion from political participation. What has been illustrated is that there are practical (first dimension), systematic (second dimension) and structural (third dimension) obstacles for women's organizations and individual women activist's political participation in Yerevan; making it hard for them to be a force in democratization. Women organizations and individual women activists who challenge the prevailing gender oppression face high levels of resistance and obstacles from all spheres of society; creating an environment in which they are just trying to survive.

This study may paint a gloomy picture, but it should be noted that I have focused on the obstacles arising from women's organizations and individual women activist's political participation. It would be interesting for future research to focus on the opportunities the same actors find through political participation. This could contrast the obstacles identified in my study, which ultimately could generate a more cohesive answer, than my study alone can, to the questioned posed initially; is inclusion the solution? If deriving an answer to that question from my analysis, put simply; the conclusion is that inclusion is not the *only* solution. Rather, as civil society is a dynamic sphere, it requires a constant evaluation from women's

organizations and individual women's activist of how to best pursue their agenda. But as of today, there are so many obstacles that it is hard for women's organizations and individual women activist to pursue an agenda challenging the existing power structures; ultimately restricting the lives of women in Armenia.

As a final note, I would like to add that although there were methodological disagreements between women's organizations and individual women's activists, there is still a mutual respect between them. Further, several women expressed a want for a joint struggle, which does give hope for the future of women's organization and individual women activists political participation in Yerevan.

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# Appendix 1



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Charlotte Tapani and I am a master student in Development Studies at Lund University, Sweden. I am in Yerevan to conduct thesis fieldwork that is funded by a research grant awarded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Department of Political Science of Lund University.

Women's organizations play a vital role in promoting women's rights and addressing issues affecting women in Armenia. The aim of my research is to answer the question: How are women's organizations in Armenia included and/or excluded from political participation? By doing so, I hope to get an understanding of the circumstances under which women's organizations in Armenia work, and how power exercised on different levels affect possibilities for political participation and influence.

You have been asked to participate in my research through semi-structured interviews which will be recorded and transcribed. The recordings will be erased after the transcription and participants will be anonymized in the analysis process, meaning that no personal information will be included in the final thesis that will be published in Lund University Publications during the spring of 2016.

By agreeing to the interview, participants have given me permission to use the information from the interview in my study. You have the right to withdraw from my research or end the interview at any point in time and if so, the provided information will not be used in my research. If questions or concerns arise after the interview, please contact me using the contact information below.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your participation.

Charlotte Tapani  
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(+374) 091002787

# Appendix 2

## Interview Guide - Women's Organizations

### **Standardized information**

Name, age, organization and position. How long? Level of education?

### **The Organization**

Can you tell me a bit about the organization you work for?

Aims and mission?

How did you become involved? Why?

How many people work for the organization today?

Do you have projects in different parts of the country or centered in Yerevan?

Do you have a specific target audience?

Funding?

### **Political Participation**

Can you describe a normal working day for you? Activities.

What is the most important issue you work with according to you? Is that a political priority?

**Do you think the organization has any impact on changing public attitudes?**

**Example?**

How do your organization work with the public? Advocacy?

Do you think there are generational differences in attitudes towards the issues you work with?

In your personal opinion, has there been any changes in the NGO environment.

New opportunities or new challenges?

### **Power**

**Do the organization have access to the political arena? Methods to reach the political arena?**

**Do you feel that you have possibilities to influence/impact the political agenda? How?**

Are certain issues met with more resistance and controversy among politicians?

Can you tell me about a time: when your voices were heard/were included? when you experienced resistance/were excluded?

Are there local or national policy helping or obstructing your organizations work?

### **Inclusion/Exclusion**

How would you describe the relationship between the state and women's organizations?

**Do you collaborate with the government, through government agencies or ministries? How?**

Do you believe that there are women and men in parliament today that prioritizes the issues you work with?

Do you think it will help you if more women are in parliament? Why?

**What is your opinion of the state? Do you trust the state?**

Has the relationship between state and women's organizations (civil society) changed? How?

**What do you think is women's organizations most important role in Armenia?**

### **Collaborations**

How would you describe the relationship between the media and women's organizations? Collaborations? Do the media write about the issues you work with?

**Does the organization collaborate with other women's organizations? What are the benefits and/or obstacles of collaboration?**

Does the organization collaborate with authorities like police, military, school, church? How is that?

**Do you collaborate with activist groups? Why/why not? What role do you think activists have?**

### **Changes/Suggestions**

- What would make it easier for your work as a women's organization? What would you like to see changed?

# Appendix 3

## Interview Guide – Activists

### **Standardized information**

Name, age, NGO experience? Level of education?

### **Personal commitment**

What is activism to you and would you call yourself an activist?

Can you tell me a bit about how you became an activist and why?

What is the most important issues in your opinion? Political priority?

### **What kind of activities do you participate in?**

What is the goal with your activism? Target Audience?

### **Political Participation and Inclusion/Exclusion**

#### **What would you say is the most important role of activism in Armenia?**

Do you think activism has an impact on changing public attitudes? How? Ex?

#### **Do you believe that you, through your activism have possibilities to influence the political agenda? How?**

Can you tell me about a time: when your voices were heard/were included? when you experienced resistance/were excluded?

#### **Which issues are met with most resistance?**

### **Power and Collaboration**

How would you describe the relationship between the state and civil society?

#### **What is your opinion of the state? Trust?**

Why do you think women are underrepresented in the parliament and politics in general? Do you think it will help you if more women are in parliament? Why?

Do you believe that there are women and men in parliament today that prioritize issues related to women?

#### **What is your opinion on women's organizations? Trust?**

Do you collaborate with women's organizations? How is that experience?

#### **How would you describe the relationship between women's organizations and activists?**

What is your opinion on: 1) international donors? 2) media?

### **Changes/Suggestions**

What is the most important political change you would like to see in Armenia