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Targeting change for women's rights

An analysis of how the women's rights movement in Kosovo has developed its strategies for gender equality in response to political realities

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ABSTRACT

In the newly founded state Kosovo, the women's rights movement has become a strong voice on gender equality and contributes in important ways to strengthening women's rights. At the same time, highly gendered political structures restrict the movement's access to political influence. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the political opportunities and challenges that the movement faces have shaped its strategies for promoting women's rights. By using the theory of political opportunity structure and the perspective of feminist institutionalism, the thesis sets out to answer the question: "*How have political opportunity structures in Kosovo affected the women's rights movement's strategies for promoting gender equality?*". A qualitative case study was carried out where 12 representatives of the women's rights movement shared their experiences in semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that while there are formal access points to political institutions and policymakers supportive of gender equality, informal patriarchal norms within the political system limit the transformative power of the movement. To overcome this challenge, the movement employs three different approaches; it engages with policymakers in institutional settings to increase gender awareness, it raises awareness among the population to hold policymakers accountable, and it advocates for international actors to put pressure on Kosovo's elite.

Key words: Women's rights movement, gender equality, strategies, Kosovo, political opportunity structure, feminist institutionalism.

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1. Introduction

In times of transition to democracy, such as in the case of Kosovo moving from war to peace, women's movements mobilise to demand equal participation in new governance structures (Baldez 2003: 253; Haug 2015). Where state structures and political institutions are being rebuilt, there is a unique opportunity to transform gender unequal power relations and create a political system that is accountable and responsive to women (Castillejo 2011: 1). Gender-inclusive development where women's realities and needs are given equal consideration is an integral part of any democratisation process (Mahmud & Nazneen 2014; Hawkesworth 2016: 215). However, gendered institutional structures limit the transformative impact of women's demands and restrict women access to political power (Beckwith 2007: 318). The promise of democratic governance where women are free to take part of opportunities for political innovation without repression from the society or the state often fail materialise (Hawkesworth 2016: 215-216). In fact, political elites may continue to control women's access to the political sphere as a way of maintaining a gendered hierarchy and male dominance (Krook & Mackay 2011).

In this regard, women's rights movements fill a central function as challengers of the state and powerful actors to bring about social and political change, challenging "political, social and other power arrangements of domination and subordination on the basis of gender" (Beckwith 2007: 314). Their oppositions take different forms depending on the movement's relationship to the state (ibid. 313).

In Kosovo, the political space is highly gendered and women lack equal access and opportunity to organise and make their voices heard. Women's participation in public life is still very limited after 20 years of reconstruction efforts following the armed conflict in 1999 and 10 years of state building since the state's independence in 2008. As Haug (2015: 147, 154) points out, deeply rooted patriarchal power structures are an important obstacle. She further explains that the national traditionalist discourse of Kosovar Albanians, important in the fight for independence from Serbia, has limited the development of the women's rights movement. The discourse, built on patriarchal values, has left little room to question or challenge traditional gender roles. Women

have been expected to show solidarity with the call for state independence and speaking up about gender discrimination within the ethnic group has been perceived as unpatriotic.

Nevertheless, change can be observed in recent years as more women are demanding equal inclusion in the development of the country. The women's rights movement in Kosovo, consisting of both activists, informal networks, grassroots groups and non-governmental organisations (NGO), has become a strong voice on gender equality and has contributed in important ways to furthering the women's rights agenda in the public sphere (Haug 2015: 147). At the same time, the movement operates in and has to cope with a political environment characterised by corruption, inefficiency, weak rule of law and highly politicised state structures (Rrahmani 2018: 108; Farnsworth & Banjska 2018: 9). These challenges in the political system along with institutional resistance to women's political participation, have shaped the ways in the women's rights movement mobilises and seeks change. An increased understanding of how the political reality in Kosovo affects this social movement is an important step in identifying how to ensure a future open and enabling environment for all actors based on democratic principles.

1.1. Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse how contemporary political opportunity structures in Kosovo affect the women's rights movement's choices of strategy to promote gender equality. Political opportunity structures can be defined as "consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources" (Tarrow 1996: 54). These signals are inherent in political structures and influence the attractiveness of undertaking collective action (ibid). The thesis does not intend to evaluate the success or lack thereof with regards to the women's rights movement's strategies. Rather, the focus is on what courses of action the movement has sought in response to the opportunities and challenges that they face at the political level. Therefore, the research question is as follows:

How have political opportunity structures in Kosovo affected the women's rights movement's strategies for promoting gender equality?

2. Contextualisation

2.1. Kosovo war, international intervention and state-building

20 years have passed since the outbreak of the Kosovo War in which the Kosovo liberation army (KLA) from the ethnic Albanian majority population demanded independence from the government of Serbia. Kosovo had been part of the Yugoslavian state during the 20th century but became a Serbian autonomous province in 1989. Discrimination against ethnic Albanians under the authority of Serbian leaders was one of the factors contributing to escalating ethnic tensions ultimately resulting in violent clashes between Serbian security forces and the KLA (UCDP).

During the conflict, an estimated 1.5 million Albanian Kosovars had to leave their homes as refugees and between 6000-11000 were killed by Serbian armed forces (NATO 1999; Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia 2019; Ronayne 2004). Sexual violence as a weapon of war was a common strategy among Serbian forces, as was the burning of Albanian houses and schools (Panagiota 2002). The minority population of Kosovar Serbs living in the country were in turn subjected to retaliation from their Albanian neighbours and had to flee (HRW 1999). Today, Kosovar Serbs mainly live in their own communities, making up nearly 8 % of the population (MRGI 2018).

The armed conflict came to an end in 1999 after international military involvement led by NATO (UCDP). With the adoption of resolution 1244 by the United Nations (UN) Security Council, Kosovo was placed under international civil administration under the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (Rahmani 2018: 101-102).

After the war, Kosovo faced several challenges in transitioning from war to peace and from Yugoslav communist structures to free market economy and democracy (Beha & Selaci 2018: 106). Kosovo has received a massive amount of assistance and funding from the international community but the hopes for a democratic state have not been

realised (Elbasani 2018: 149-150). The political leaders that entered state institutions after the war brought with them patronage networks from the Yugoslav era, a social order where leaders reward party members and private companies for their loyalty by giving them access to public jobs, state resources or contracts (Tadic & Elbasani 2018: 188-189; Coelho 2015: 11; Ernst 2011: 126).

In its quest to ensure short-term stability, the international community did not challenge the political elite or existing corrupt power structures out of fear of social unrest. Hence, corruption in the political system was legitimised by the silence of the international community as well as by the subsequent democratic elections (Coelho 2015: 11; Beha & Selaci 2018: 97; Ernst 2011: 126).

2.2. Kosovo in the post-independence period

Although the country became independent in 2008, the international presence is still strong in Kosovo and efforts to develop democratic institutions continue (Cimmino, 2018: 12). Kosovo has been described as a neopatrimonial and captured state, meaning that private interests are advanced through patronage relations within formally democratic institutions (Elbasani 2018; Tadic & Elbasani 2018: 188; Beha & Selaci 2018: 98). These power structures have facilitated the emergence of electoral authoritarianism where the control of the political elite over political institutions, the judiciary, media and strong influence on civil society is legitimised by democratic elections (Keil 2018: 59, 69).

The public administration is very politicised and inefficient with overlapping responsibilities between departments (Beha & Selaci 2018: 113). The parliament has limited capacity to debate and reform legislation and its parliamentary oversight and control functions are undermined as it is often side-lined by the government (Ernst 2011: 126). The government is the centre of power, but its effectiveness is hampered by internal contradictions (ibid. 126; Pula 2018).

International recognition is a key priority for the political elite along with membership in major international institutions such as the UN and EU, as this is seen as a step towards increased independence, stability and economic development (Visoka &

Bolton 2011: 201). Kosovo is currently working with the EU in preparation for an eventual EU accession (European Union Office in Kosovo 2016). Beha & Selaci (2018: 107) claim that national politicians feel more accountable towards international actors and their own party than they do towards their voters. Citizens have little power to hold policy makers responsible due to extensive corruption on all levels (ibid).

However, while policymakers seem to be responsive towards external international pressure, they often fail to allocate adequate resources for implementation of policies they have committed to due to lacking political will (Beha & Selaci 2018: 115; Elbasani 2018: 156). In fact, politicians may try to actively weaken state institutions as to not jeopardize informal power structures (Coelho 2015: 11; Tadic & Elbasani 2018: 188).

Following the war, international democracy promotion programs invested a lot of resources in Kosovo's civil society expecting that it would become a major force in furthering democracy and holding policy makers accountable (Kostovicova & Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013: 9; Strazzari & Selenica 2013: 123). Civil society is here defined as a sphere separated from the family, state and market where action to influence society takes place (Strazzari & Selenica 2013: 118). However, these hopes, based on western liberal assumptions, failed to consider the realities of the post-conflict and post-communist context in Kosovo (ibid; Hahn-Fuhr & Worschech 2014: 17, 21; Kostovicova & Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2013: 7). Privatisation of the political arena where state resources are used for private interests, as is the case in Kosovo and other states of former Yugoslavia, blurs the line between different sectors and increases the risk of political interference in civil society (Kostovicova & Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2013: 6, 10; Beha & Selaci 2018: 98; Strazzari & Selenica 2013). Rather than being a separated and independent sphere, civil society to a varying degree becomes part of a patronage system in such a setting (Ernst 2011: 126).

Civil society in post-conflict Kosovo is also closely connected to international actors, relying on these for funding and support. The international community plays a significant role in state-building and in shaping civil society, without being directly accountable to the beneficiaries of the intervention. This is something that further

undermines the autonomous agency of civil society (Kostovicova & Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013:1, 6-7, 9; Strazzari & Selenica 2013: 123).

In summary, the post-communist and post-conflict context do not provide the conditions necessary to enable an open and democratic state and civil society (Kostovicova & Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013: 15). The legal framework¹ supporting civil society, along with formalised democratic practices, are not being implemented due to lacking political will and insufficient allocation of resources. As a result, both state institutions and civil society is vulnerable to corruption and its transformative potential weakened (ibid; KCSF 2018).

2.3. The women's rights movement in Kosovo

Women in Kosovo have been organised in various forms before, during and after the war. In the pre-war period, the activities of women's groups were mainly framed within the fight for liberation and autonomy rather than women's rights. During the war, several women were part of KLA as combatants or the main political party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). Women were also organised in grassroots movements to improve living conditions for women in their communities or advocating for peace (Haug 2015). Despite the various and active roles of women in this period, very few women and women's organisations were included in the peace process, political negotiations or reconstruction efforts in the early 2000s. Gender equality was formally highlighted as a central building block, but in reality international and national actors failed to secure women's participation in the new political institutions (Abdela 2003: 210-211; Cal & Bhatia: 2016: 6).

Women's rights have received increased attention in later years. However, similarly to the development in other post-socialist countries in the region, there has been a certain degree of 'NGOization' of the women's movement. It is a development that

¹ A selection of laws and procedures relevant to civil society are: The freedoms of association and of assembly are protected in Kosovo's Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo). The Law on Freedom of Association in NGOs is specifically designed to strengthen civil society organisations (Kosovo Law on Associations, No.04/L-057). Access to public information is guaranteed by the Constitution and by Law No. 03/L-215 on Access to Public Documents (CoF 2018). The Government's Rules of Procedure stipulates that civil society should be consulted on all policy and law proposals (KCSF 2018: 53). Kosovo law on Local Self Government (Law No. 03/L-040) also requires civil society to be consulted in policy-making processes at the local level.

has taken place as a result of international donor's ambition to create a vibrant civil society, thereby directed resources away from more grassroots movements (Waylen 2007). The majority of women's rights organisations in Kosovo rely heavily on international funding and accessing funding is one of the main barriers to their survival and sustainability (Farnsworth & Banjska 2018: 4-6; Fagan 2011: 724)

Women in Kosovo have little cultural and social capital compared to men. Public and political institutions are based on patriarchal structures, making the public sphere male dominated and tying women to the household and their roles as mothers and wives (Siemienska 2016: 83). The lack of access to formal political platforms have made women turn to more informal channels and groups in civil society when advocating for peace and stability in their communities (Cal & Bhatia: 2016).

Whereas the women's rights movement has significantly contributed to raising awareness on gender equality in Kosovo, coordination with state institutions continues to be poor and strained with tensions (Haug 2015: 160-161). Political leaders often lack commitment to the issue of gender equality. The legal framework for women's equal rights² has been put in place in an effort to comply with international demands. The framework is supported publicly by the political elite, but promises and discussions often fail to produce any real implementation or enforcement of laws. In practice, women are prevented from accessing their rights as patriarchal social norms continue to be prevalent in the society (ibid: 161, 163; Siemienska 2016: 87).

As part of the research conducted for this thesis it has been a challenge to find gender disaggregated data or research that provides an overview of the women's rights

²Kosovo's Constitution, the highest legal authority, protects gender equality and highlights the United Nations Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW (Constitution of the republic of Kosovo). Kosovo Law on Protection from Discrimination (No. 05/L-021), adopted in line with EU directives, prohibits discrimination based on gender in both the private and public sphere including with regards to employment. Kosovo law on gender equality (No. 05/L -020), along with Kosovo law on protection against domestic violence (Law No.03/L -182) provides an important framework for protecting the rights of women. However, the legal framework for women's rights has been criticised by the women's rights movement for its lack of harmonisation between laws and inconsistencies in definitions and sanctions (Banjska et al. 2019).

movement in Kosovo, e.g. with regards to its actor such as women's rights activists and organisations. However, in interviews with women from the movement, carried out in preparation for the thesis, a general picture has emerged. Respondents in the study described the women's rights movement as concentrated to the urban setting of Pristina, made up of mainly Kosovar Albanian women with similar backgrounds.

Things are mostly happening in Pristina, and the debates are mostly happening here. It is the same people that goes to the same events, so it's like a circle. [A]

The problem is that women in the movement speak on behalf of women without consulting. They have a very limited perspective from their big bubble of Pristina. And they can say a lot of things that just tailor to one class of women, not the village lady (...) not either women from minorities. [C]

These statements give an image of the women's rights movement as divided along ethnic and class lines. This description is supported by the fact that attitudes towards gender equality are more progressive in urban settings than in rural ones. In the capital young women and men have more liberal views on women's freedoms while stereotypical gender roles continue to have a strong hold in rural areas (Kushi 2015; Agency of gender equality 2014: 15). In addition, poor infrastructure and lack of security are factors preventing rural women from engaging in the public sphere (Agency of gender equality 2008: 106).

Rural women's groups struggle to secure sustainable funding. Language barriers and lack of education make it difficult for these women to apply for grants (Färnsveden & Farnsworth 2012: 13). Furthermore, the fact that international donors mainly channel funds and attention on projects in Pristina further cements the division between rural and urban women (UNDP 2014: 6).

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework presented in the following chapter investigates the theory of political opportunity structures in relation to its effects on social movements and their strategies for collective action. The theory will assist in identifying political opportunities and constraints in Kosovo. However, the categories of political opportunity structures are gender blind, unconcerned with gender power dynamics in the political system. Hence, in evaluating the impact of political opportunity structures on the strategies of the women's rights movement, the thesis will rely on insights from the feminist institutionalist approach concerned with gender norms within institutions. This chapter will open with a brief discussion on social movements to conceptualise the women's rights movement. In a next step, political opportunity structures will be explored in the section *political opportunity structure theory*. The chapter concludes with tying the theory on political opportunity structures to movement strategies.

3.1. The women's rights movement as a social movement

Social movements can be defined as communities, networks, organisations and independent individuals mobilising for social change (Rucht 1996: 186). They are rarely bound by space or time, instead it is their common understanding of the world framed into a shared identity and values that constitute the foundation for joint collective action (Oberschall 1996: 97). Action may take place within different mobilising structures, such as in family and friendship networks, informal networks with activists or formal networks such as NGOs (Kreisi 1996: 152). Waylen (2007: 53) defines women's rights movements as social movements organised around feminist understandings of women's subordinate position in society and the need to change it. As understandings of how change should be brought about varies, women's rights movements can look very different.

Social science research on civil society and on social movements are often treated as different fields as these categories tend to be defined as oppositions (della Porta 2014: 136, 137). Civil society is commonly described as an autonomous sphere outside of the state and market, acting within the confines set up by the state and economy, and

pursuing moderate and consensual agendas. Social movements engage in conflict and are radical, they carry out disruptive actions such as protest to challenge the state, political system and division of power (ibid 140-141; Esteves, Motta & Cox 2009: 7). However, della Porta (2014: 137, 141) points out that there are both empirical and theoretical overlapping between these categories. Civil society and social movements are intertwined and both form part of democratisation processes from below (ibid: 141). According to Habermas (1992: 443), social movements are among the actors that make up civil society and that “amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it on to the political realm or public sphere”.

Social movements engage in different levels of political participation in the public sphere, influencing the development of democratic and non-democratic states by promoting new political agendas (della Porta 2017: 1; Diani 1992; Bourne 2017). Their success in furthering social change are affected by factors outside of their direct control, including the response of the state. When a social movement challenge a social order the state will act in different ways, e.g. by ignoring, accommodating, repressing or co-opting the movement. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is an interactive relationship and that the actions of the social movement will influence what responses are available to the state (Bloom 2014: 360; Stearns & Almeida 2004: 479- 480).

Patriarchal power structures within institutions and in society as well as the political setting play a significant role in the relationship between women’s rights movements and the state and the challenges that women’s rights movements face (Kostovicova & Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2013: 11, 13). For example, women’s rights movements are likely to suffer from marginalisation where the state is heavily induced in a patronage system, as it restricts women’s access to resources and male dominated networks (Aoláin, Haynes & Cahn 2011).

In transition contexts moving from war to peace, new governance structures are influenced by previously existing power structures. Patriarchal norms from the war and pre-war period are likely to prevail and limit the transformative potential of women’s movements in society (Aoláin Haynes & Cahn 2011: 229). Women’s movements are under such circumstances often excluded from participation in male

dominated political institutions and have to resort to organising in civil society. Women's rights organisations, networks and activists are given "soft" civil society roles in a space that is seen as more neutral. This cements traditional gender roles where men operate in the public sphere to which women have limited access and where women's concerns are overlooked (ibid. 6, 231). Dominant discourses deprioritise the needs of women in line with a masculine construction of what topics and policies are seen to be most relevant for the greater good of the nation. Reconstruction efforts in transition contexts focus on civil and political rights rather than social and economic dimensions that more directly relate to women's lives (ibid. 5, 10, 21).

3.2. Political opportunity structure theory

The theory on political opportunity structures is concerned with the opportunities or lack of opportunities that political structures offer social movements and how these shape strategies for collective actions (Koopmans 1999; McAdams, McCarthy & Zald 1996). An opportunity is defined as a possibility to act that is available or constrained depending on the context. As there are risks connected to all opportunities, social movements are likely to undertake the action that is available and that is expected to be most successful (Koopmans 1999: 97).

Although there are differences to the extent that social movement actors are rational and responsive to opportunities, social movements are assumed to adjust their strategies in relation to the choices perceived to be available (ibid. 96; Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1464). Importantly, what explains collective action is the attractiveness of undertaking action, and not if political opportunities are enabling or inhibiting. For example, in a context with few political opportunities, social movements may be motivated to protest to bring about change (Koopmans 1999: 104).

Political opportunities are connected to the interaction between social movements and political actors and institutions. They are considered structural as they are outside of the direct control of social movements, and can be fixed over a longer period of time

or be temporary (Koopmans 1999: 99; Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1459; McAdams, McCarthy & Zald 1996: 3).

Feminist institutionalist scholars also highlight that political structures are formed within institutions which are often highly gendered. Institutions, generally established by men, operate according to a masculine patriarchal bias and reproduce gender inequality through its structures and procedures (Franceschet 2011: 62; Krook & Mackay 2011:3, 6). Political institutions are here defined as “‘relatively enduring collection[s] of rules and organized practices’ that are ‘embedded in structures of meaning and resources’” (Franceschet 2011: 61).

Feminist institutionalism distinguishes between formal institutions such as electoral rules and formal division of power, and informal institutions that consist of internal norms and dynamics e.g. how assignments are divided within parties (Franceschet 2011: 62). The informal institutions are derived from traditions and culture and emerge in settings where formal procedures do not conform with the views of actors within institutions. For example, gender equality may be formally part of institutional structures but is undermined by patriarchal informal practices. Similarly, while political opportunities may be open to women’s rights movements, informal institutions may prevent these movements from having any substantial political influence (Krook & Mackay 2011: 11).

It is important to recognise that there are many non-political factors such as social or cultural ones that shape social movements with regards to their form and actions. For example, many women’s rights organisations struggle with securing funding to carry out their activities (Mahmud & Nazneen 2014: 216). Hence, a movement’s motivations or lack of financial resources also play an important role in shaping collective action. Consequently, the existence of political opportunities alone does not automatically translate into the rise of social movements (Koopmans 1999; McAdams, McCarthy & Zald 1996: 3). However, the claim of political opportunity structure theory is that the structural characteristics of the political arena have a major impact on the form and actions of social movements (Koopmans 1999: 97-98, 100).

The political opportunity structure approach is best suited for studies of social movements engaged in a political agenda, such as policy changes. The approach is less relevant for analysis of other types of social and cultural movements that are not dependent on political authorities (ibid. 98). The theory on political opportunity structures has however been criticised for being too vague and for having become a concept to which scholars ascribe a wide array of meanings that are neither political nor structural (McAdams 1996: 24; Koopmans 1999). Hence, to ensure that the tool is analytically useful, it is important to clearly define what the political opportunity structures being analysed are and what they are expected to explain (McAdams 1996: 24-25, 31).

3.2.1. Political opportunity structure framework

Political opportunity structures are context-based and affect social movements differently. While some political opportunity structures give rise to certain social movements, the same structures may suppress other movements (Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1461; Tarrow 1996: 51). Political institutions are not a homogenous entity, there are different platforms and some are more responsive to the demands of women's groups than others (Waylen 2011: 160; Mahmud & Nazneen 2014: 222). As political opportunities are context-specific, different structures will be relevant depending on context (Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1459). McAdams, McCarthy and Zald (1996) proposes four dimensions of political opportunity structure:

- a. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system.
- b. The presence or absence of elite allies.
- c. The stability of elite alignments that undergird a polity
- d. The state's capacity and propensity for repression

Only two of these dimensions will be analysed as they were significant in the data collected and of relevance to the case. The dimension *stability of elite alignments that undergird a polity* relates to the process where politicians become more responsive to their electorates to survive in times of unstable political alignments (McAdams, McCarthy & Zald 1996) This is a process that is more relevant to the liberal democratic context and less important where political power is maintained through corruption (Kolb 2007). This dimension, along with the dimension *the state's*

capacity and propensity for repression will not be analysed in this thesis. It does not mean that these dimensions are irrelevant, only that they did not emerge as significant in the data collected.

A fifth dimension suggested by Tarrow (1996), McAdams (1996) and Kolb (2007), will be added in the analysis as it constitutes an important aspect of the political system in Kosovo, namely:

- e. The relationship between international actors and domestic elites.

3.2.2. Political opportunity structure dimensions

a. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system

The level of openness of the political system with regards to input, as well as the state's ability to implement policies, has an effect on the opportunities for action available to social movements (Tarrow 1996: 46). In a more closed environment, social movements will have to adapt and chose a more confrontational approach to achieve their objectives, the focus is then often broad aiming for general system transformation (ibid. 44; McAdams 1996: 30). In an open system where there is an interest on the political level for a certain topic, e.g. political rights, social movements tend engage in activities within institutional channels rather than protests, focusing on institutional reform (Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1475; McAdams 1996: 29). However, a "policy window" may open unexpectedly and can be exploited by social movements through engaging in immediate protests rather than focusing on long-term institutionalised actions (Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1482; Tarrow 1996: 57).

Political elites are not neutral in front of all social movements, and depending on political ideology their perception of these groups will differ (Tarrow 1996: 51). The level of openness also varies within the state depending on informal norms present in a specific space. There is a gendered hierarchy that affects what issues and priorities are considered important. Topics perceived to be the expertise of men, such as national security and finance, are more prestigious. 'Women's issues' such as social welfare, are often treated as less urgent (Franceschet 2011: 65). It is problematic that politics tend to be defined in relation to issues in the public sphere, such as elections and the government. Many social issues that have a great impact on women's lives are seen as 'private' and not pertaining to the state. This is something that affects the

openness and responsiveness of the policy environment to the demands of women's movements, as well as their access to formal forums (Krook & Mackay 2011: 4; Franceschet 2011: 62; Mahmud & Nazneen 2014).

b. The presence or absence of elite allies

Allies within political institutions is an important advantage for social movements in the quest for political influence (Tarrow 1996: 55). The presence of allies in political institutions has been found to be connected to an increase in collective action. When social movements have allies, they are more likely to pursue a strategy of more institutional forms of collective action in order to collaborate with policymakers (Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1475-1476).

A large number of women present in political institutions does not automatically translate into increased influence of women's rights movements on policies (Thomson 2018: 181; Franceschet 2011: 61). Rather, research suggests that key influential individuals will have a greater impact on gendered political outcomes. These individuals, also called femocrats, may themselves take action to bring about changes, or they can mobilise others within institutions to promote gender equality (Thomson 2018: 181-182; Mahmud & Nazneen 2014: 217). However, the attitude towards gender equality within institutions and in the society affects women's rights movements' ability to gain allies. Often there needs to be a momentum for women's rights or pragmatic reasons before women's rights claims are made a priority by politicians (Mahmud & Nazneen 2014: 223). Moreover, public officials have access to different resources which is something that may limit their roles as allies (Franceschet 2011: 64). Castillejo (2011: 5) also emphasises that women officials within patronage systems often are more dependent on their party leaders than the electorate to get elected, which contributes to their reluctance to challenge the party.

e. The relationship between international actors and domestic elites

Given the increasingly global character of the world of politics it is important to consider foreign actors' influence on national structures when studying political opportunity structures (Tarrow 1996: 53). International actors and norms influence the national context, a dimension that will play an important role depending on the context and susceptibility of national political institutions (McAdams 1996: 34).

International actors may expand or limit domestic opportunities for social movements by implementing international policies, or by influencing national power structures (McAdams 1996: 35; Kolb 2007: 91). International norms and consensus on certain topics, e.g. the importance of preventing violence against women, can create a space for women's rights movements to advocate for change as it legitimises their claims and make it easier to mobilise allies (Mahmud & Nazneen 2014: 223; Franceschet 2011: 67).

3.3. Social movement strategies for collective action

Political opportunities structures will impact on the attractiveness of a specific course of action. With the objective of reaching maximal social and political impact, social movements employ strategies for their activities in response to these realities (Meyer & Staggenborg 2008: 2). For example, in political systems where there are many access points and more tolerance in institutions, social movements are less likely to choose confrontational strategies (ibid: 8).

A strategy links the objectives of a movement with its actions; it is a tactic choice about how to undertake action as to achieve an objective (Downey & Rohlinger 2008: 5-6; Smithey 2009: 660-661). Actors are rarely able to choose freely from unlimited options of strategies, they have to adapt according to political realities. Hence, when trying to understand a social movement and its strategy, it is important to first understand the political context where social movements are active (Meyer & Staggenborg 2008: 2; Downey & Rohlinger 2008). When pursuing a specific line of action, social movements will have to consider the potential allies they will gain such as authorities and supporters, and the actors they will alienate (Meyer & Staggenborg 2008: 3). They make decisions on what the goal is, in what institutional or non-institutional arena the action will take place as well as the form of the action, such as demonstrations, lawsuits or seminars. The strategy will reflect the level of the action, if is intended to rally public support or to target authorities to bring about change directly (ibid. 4-6).

Social movements will adjust their strategies under political opportunity structures based on their understanding of how political change takes place. Kolb (2007)

presents five different mechanisms explaining the process of political change that social movement can strategically target through collective action (ibid: 72). These are:

The disruptive mechanism where social movements bring about political change through disruptive actions, forcing politicians to make concessions to restore public order. *The public preference mechanism* is a process where social movements mobilise public opinion to influence politicians, assuming that politicians adjust their policy preferences as to not lose public support. In *the political access mechanism*, social movements gain access to formal policy platforms and institutions and influence policies from within, e.g. if an activist is appointed to an institutional position or through partnerships with political elites. *The judicial mechanism* is when social movements use the leverage of courts to put pressure on politicians in systems where there is a separation of powers between the branches. With *the international politics mechanism* social movements mobilise the support of international actors to hold national policymakers accountable, e.g. an international organisation can demand that a signatory country comply with an international convention (Kolb 2007).

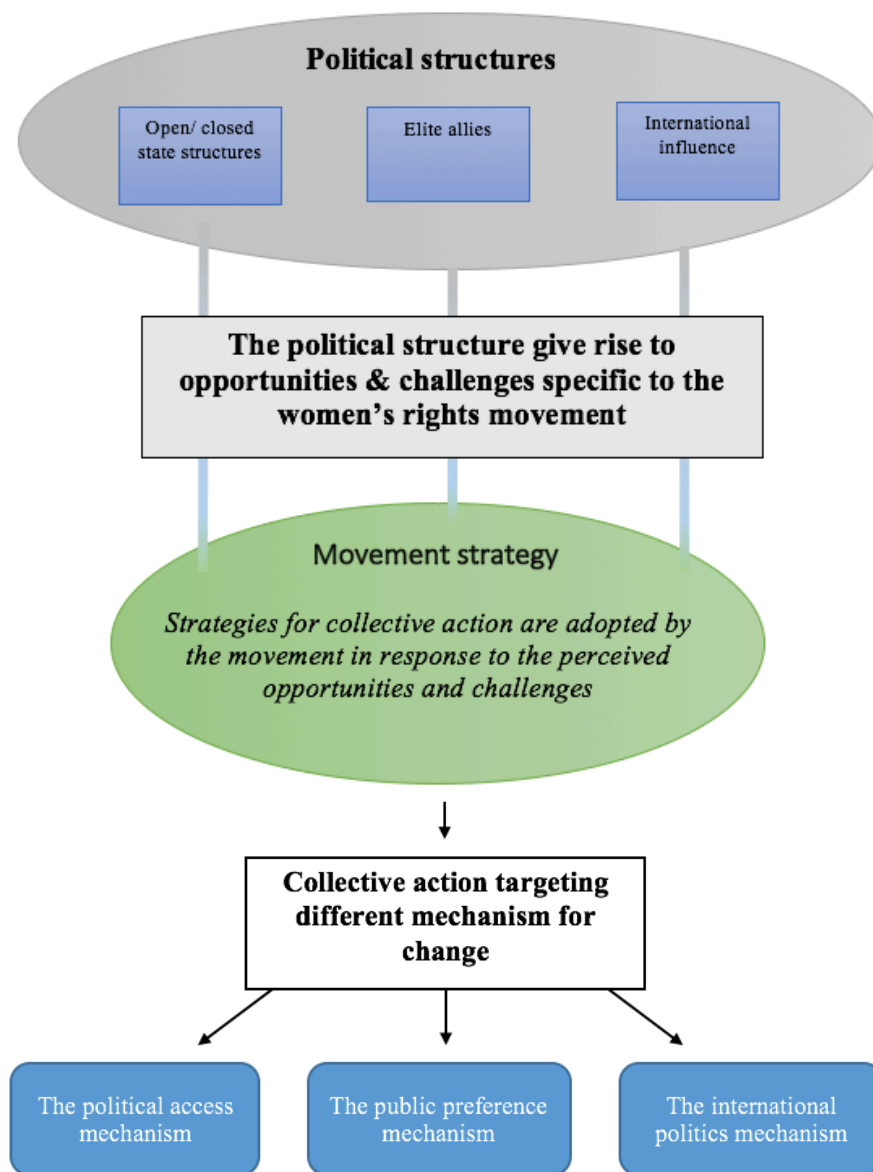
While the purpose of this study is not to analyse the political outcomes of collective action undertaken by the women's rights movement in Kosovo, Kolb's framework can help us understand how the movement react to political opportunity structures. By looking at what mechanisms for change the movement is seeking to trigger through its activities, it will be possible to identify the strategic choices made in response to political realities.

Although strategies are purposively planned, they can be more or less formalised (Smithey 2009: 660-661). Furthermore, actors within a social movement are rarely unified behind one strategy, consequently strategies are often the result of extensive debates and are frequently reconsidered (Meyer & Staggenborg 2008: 1-2). The thesis will focus on the strategies highlighted in interviews with the participants of this study. Formal strategic planning documents adopted by organisations in the movement will not be analysed due to the limited scope of the thesis.

3.4. Analytical framework

The analytical framework below (Figure 1) illustrates how the different theoretical components provided by the literature are connected, and serves as the basis for structuring the analysis. As shown in the framework, political opportunity structures give rise to different opportunities and challenges for collective action. The movement will develop responses in the form of strategies based in how it perceives these opportunities and challenges. The strategy seeks to trigger a mechanism for political change. The illustration shows the three mechanisms from Kolb's (2007) framework that emerged as significant in the analysis on the women's movement in Kosovo.

Figure 1: Analytical Framework



4. Literature review

As demonstrated in the theoretical framework chapter, political opportunity structure theory provides the tools to analyse structural conditions around social movements. However, this theory lacks the gender perspective. As argued by feminist institutionalist scholars, political institutions are in fact highly gendered. So what use has the theory for investigating women's social movements? Moving from a theoretical discussion on political opportunity structure, this chapter seeks to investigate how the theory has been applied to empirical cases of women's movements. The objective is to understand how political opportunity structures relate to women's social movements, in particular in non-democratic and transitioning contexts. This will allow to identify what gaps might exist in the field and how this study may contribute to fill that.

The early studies that started to explore the relationship between social movements and political opportunity structures played significant role in developing the political opportunity framework that came to guide subsequent research. To these influential works count, among others, the study on social movement riots in American cities during the 1960's (Eisinger 1973), a longitudinal study of the civil rights movement in the US (McAdams 1982), the research on anti-nuclear movements in France, Sweden, the US and West Germany (Kitschelt 1986), 'new' social movement mobilisation in Western Europe (Kriesi et al. 1992; Kriesi et al. 1995, Koopmans 1996) and a comparative study of violent social movements in Italy and Germany in the 1960-1990's (della Porta 1995).

Common for all of these studies is the focus on western countries. The political opportunity structure framework developed through this early research is often criticised for not being well suited to analysis of non-western, non-democratic contexts and for lacking a gender perspective (Choe & Kim 2012; Ray & Korteweg 1999; Noonan 1995). Critics argue that the core assumption of a stable state does not apply in many developing states undergoing change, e.g. from colonial to post-colonial or communist to democratic (Ray & Korteweg 1999: 53, 63). Hence, to

understand the realities of women's movement, one also has to be attentive to the historical change within each state (ibid).

This point was also highlighted by Noonan (1995: 83-84) who further explained that political opportunity structures often fail to address the informal power of women's movements. In her research, Noonan (1995: 82) has focused on why the women's movement in Chile was able to mobilise and successfully promote women's agenda during the authoritarian rule from the 1980's. At that time, the military regime in Chile was very repressive and restricted women's freedoms as part of endorsing traditional gender roles (Noonan 1995: 82). Noonan (ibid 104) found that the severe situation and grievances created the necessity for women's mobilisation across class lines. The movement was successful in influencing the political elite due to the fact that it framed its struggle in accordance with the ruling political ideology. They drew on their roles as mothers and wives, mobilising as the "good women" of the nation, protesting for the sake of the family. Ray and Korteweg (1999: 54-55) explain that the state's repressive policies on women created a space and an identity for women to organise around. Similar developments also took place in Argentina and Guatemala (ibid: 54-55).

Francis and Macdonald (2004: 5-6) have also looked at this adaptation strategy in their comparative study on the women's movements in Chile and Mexico. What they found was that the women's movement in Mexico did not have the same success as in Chile because political opportunity structures were more open. The state in Mexico was less repressive of women's rights and could co-opt the women's movement rather than alienate it. As a result, the women's movement was not able to find a strong enough common objective to organise around, which weakened its influence (ibid. 20-21).

Women's movements' responses to governments that are seemingly closed to their influence have been explored in several contexts. In some cases, the women's movements have moderated their feminist identity and their demands to appease the state. This was the case for women's movements in four American cities in the beginning of the 2000's where the movements chose to downplay ideological differences with patriarchal institutions expecting that it would increase the political

acceptance of their engagement and make their demands more acceptable to policymakers (Staeheli 2004: 368). Joachim (2003: 247) made similar observations when examining how women's organisations and activists have advocated for women's rights in the UN. He discovered that once women engaged in dialogue with stakeholders in institutional settings, they had to give up a certain degree of ownership in the framing process of their demands. The requests they ended up advocating for were a result of aforementioned encounters, reflected what the UN was likely to be most receptive to (2003: 269).

However, not all movements compromise their identity or demands to assimilate with ruling political elites. Meyer and Sawyers (1999: 194, 189) and Valiente (2015: 260, 262) make the important observation that social movements may also chose not take advantage of an opportunity to mobilise out of self-preservation. During the conservative leadership of Ronald Reagan in the US in the 1980's, the women's movement did not engage with political institutions (ibid. 194). By choosing a less confrontational approach the movement's influence decreased but it was also able to preserve its identity and organisation without having to make any concessions (ibid. 187, 193-194).

However, there are also social movements that cannot afford to make compromises or to await more favourable conditions. Murtagh's (2008) research provides an interesting example of how a women's movement becomes part of the institutional setting when it is not able to influence from the outside. When the all-party talks on a peace agreement began in Northern Ireland in 1996, political institutions were male-dominated and women's political representation very limited. The women's movement had a strong role in informal politics but lacked access to formal arenas. Realising that its impact on the formal talks would be minimal, the sheer need to have a political voice resulted in the women's movement's formation of a new political party NIWC.

The relevance of the ideology of the party in power when it comes to institutions' openness towards women's movements, as has been implied in all the above mentioned studies, was investigated by Pini et al. (2008). In their work on the agricultural women's movement in Australia they established that policymakers were

more receptive to the movement's demands when the government was oriented towards social justice and equity (Pini et al. 2008: 174, 181). When the government became more concerned with industries and economic efficiency, the agricultural women's movement lost many of its allies and influence (Pini et al. 2008: 187).

Finally, a number of scholars have taken an interest in how women's movements have targeted international actors to indirectly influence political opportunities at the domestic level (Negrón-Gonzales 2016; Poloni-Staudinger & Ortals 2014; César & Vráblíková 2010; Joachim 2003; Monteiro & Ferreira 2016).

In Portugal, the international women's year in 1975 presented a unique political opening for the women's movement. In preparation for an international conference in Mexico, the women's rights movement and the state's official mechanism for gender equality started to collaborate successfully. Due to this collaboration, an advisory council was established that granted entry to an institutional and political platform previously closed to the movement (Monteiro & Ferreira 2016: 465- 467).

In Negrón-Gonzales's (2016) study on Turkey and César and Vráblíková's (2010) work focused on the Czech Republic, the positive impact of the EU accession process when it comes to strengthening the political influence of women's movements was explored. Both studies found that the EU with its more progressive view on gender equality could pressure national policymakers to adopt a gender equality agenda. Joachim (2003: 247-248, 250) likewise concluded that by influencing the UN agenda on women's rights, women's movements gained legitimacy to their claims also at a domestic level.

Poloni-Staudinger and Ortals (2014) explored this topic with a different approach. Through a quantitative study based on data from France, Germany and the UK, they found that women's groups turn to international arenas to make demands when political opportunities at the national level are disadvantageous. (ibid: 68-69). Women's groups were less likely to turn to international forums when their government was leftist and had a strong agenda on equality (ibid: 69, 75). This also relate to Staeheli's (2004) claim that the ideology of the state plays a significant role.

The previous research demonstrates that the responses of women's groups to opportunities and challenges in the political system are context specific. Nonetheless, some general observations can be made. From the studies discussed above, it is clear that political opportunity structures effect women's movements in gendered ways. In contexts with repressive political opportunity structures, women's movements have been targeted in specifically on the basis of representing the interest of women. The responses of the women's movements range from challenging the state, giving up their feminist identity or not mobilise. Hence, when researching the impact of political structures, it is crucial to apply a feminist perspective as the impacts of political structures are not genderless.

Transition contexts moving from authoritarian rule to democracy have been explored in previous research. Císar and Vráblíková's (2010) work on the Czech Republic was the only study that could be located on this topic with regards to a communist state transitioning to democracy. However, in their research they focused on EU and not on political opportunity structures at the national level. Given that the post-socialist context is highly relevant for the makeup of the political system, e.g. with regards to patronage networks, this is an area that needs to be further addressed in academic research. The women's movement in Kosovo is an under-researched topic within academia, most importantly with regards to political opportunity structures. No such study could be located. Therefore, this thesis seeks to contribute to the research field on the effects of political opportunity structures on the women's movement in a post-communist transition state.

5. Method

5.1. Philosophical worldview

Feminist epistemology, the theory of what we know and how we know it, builds on the view that there is a gender bias in how knowledge is constructed and acquired. All facts are value tinged and values shape how we understand the world (Doucet & Mauthner 2016: 37). Rather than there existing an objective truth, knowledge is subjective and constructed in relation to social conditions (Harding 1987; Beckman 2014: 165). Women, with their specific perspectives and experiences, have precedence to claims of knowledge about their worlds. These claims also have to be understood in the wider context of power and social structures (Doucet & Mauthner 2006: 37). However, women have different experiences resulting in diverse and sometimes competing feminist understandings of the world (ibid. 40-41; Harding 1987: 7). This understanding of knowledge production has been fundamental in how the research for this thesis has been carried out. Knowledge about how the women's rights movement in Kosovo has developed strategies in response to perceived political opportunities is derived from the testimonies of women's experiences in the movement. As there is not 'one truth' to women's realities, women's different understandings and experiences will be presented Chapter 6 Findings and Analysis, on p. 33.

5.2. A case study research

A single case study research design was used with the intention of exploring a specific case with all its complexities in relation to its context (Yin 2014: 16. Silverman 2010: 124; Creswell 2007: 73). To this end, this study has relied on a qualitative research strategy to gain a subjective understanding of the world. Qualitative research takes an interest in how social structures impact on people's attitudes and behaviour and seeks to answer the question of why individuals and groups behave in a certain way (Brockington & Sullivan 2003; Bryman 2012). The phenomenon of interest is observed in its natural setting which gives an in-depth data understanding of what is analysed (Stewart-Withers et al. 2014: 59). Importantly, this study is guided by a

feminist methodology. Rather than using a specific set of methods, feminist methodology is about having an underlying feminist understanding of how and why research is conducted (Beckman 2014: 165). Feminist principles have been guiding the research decisions and placed women's voices and experiences at the forefront when constructing an understanding of women's lives and hardships (ibid. 167; Harding 1987: 7).

The case being researched is the women's rights movement in Kosovo's capital Pristina. There were several reasons for selecting this case. Firstly, the women's rights movement in Kosovo has received very little attention in academic research (Cal & Bhatia 2016: 13), in particular with regards to political opportunity structures. No such study could be located during the work with this thesis. Hence, this research seeks to fill that gap. Secondly, looking at the recent history of Kosovo, the importance of researching the women's movement and its access to the political system becomes clear. Women in Kosovo were excluded by international actors during the peace process and subsequent state building project, and women's rights organisation and activists still struggle to gain entry to political forums (Haug 2015). In light of the fact that Kosovo has received more aid per capita than nearly all other major international interventions, including Afghanistan (Elbasani 2018: 149), it is crucial to examine the results if this internationally supported democratisation process. How well does the new political system in fact comply with democratic principles and human rights? Women's equal rights and political participation is central to democratisation, sustainable peace and development (Hawkesworth 2016).

5.3. Data collection

Sampling

The sampling strategy targeted women's rights advocates in Kosovo. These are defined as individuals actively working to promote gender equality and women's rights, e.g. by trying to influence policies or the behaviour of others (Woodroffe 2011: 5, 8). In total, 12 participants were sampled through a combined approach³. A little over half of participants were sampled purposively based on their profile and

³ For an overview of the participants, see Annex 1, p. 59.

experience deemed relevant to answering the research question (Bryman 2012: 418). The remaining participants were sampled using snowball sampling where the initial participants referred to other women's rights advocates in their network (ibid: 424). Initially, individuals from women's rights organisations were targeted as they were more visible in media and reports available online. These women were then contacted via email. Through snowball techniques, the pool of participants came to include women from the movement that were either working in less known organisations or were part of informal activist networks. All participants in the research were women. In an effort to maintain a clear focus in the thesis due to the limited scope of the research, this was motivated by two facts. Firstly, men vocal in the women's rights movement are a clear minority. Secondly, the political structures of interest in the thesis affect women in particular ways different from male experiences due to patriarchal power relations.

Semi-structured interviews

The analysis is based on empirical data collected in Kosovo in April 2019 through semi-structured interviews⁴. The interviews, conducted one-on-one, lasted between 30-60 minutes and took place in the office of the interviewee or in a café chosen by the participant. All participants consented orally to the interview being audio-recorded and transcribed, and quotes being used in the thesis. All interviews were conducted in English for practical reasons given that all women were proficient in the language, often due to overseas studies or regular contact with international donors.

Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed using the software Sonocent. As some interviews had been recorded in cafés, the audio quality of these files was improved using software features. The majority of interviews were transcribed directly afterwards, allowing to note down reflections still fresh in memory and connect them to the transcripts. This is a useful method to early on identify common themes or unexpected findings (Stewart- Withers et al. 2014: 75).

⁴ The interview guide can be found in Annex 2, p.60.

When analysing qualitative data, the aim is to identify patterns and causality in the material. Initially, the transcriptions were read through with a 'clear mind', employing an inductive approach when listing the main themes. The material was then read through with the themes in mind highlighted from the theory, here using a deductive approach of testing the theory against the material (Hammett & Twyman & Graham 2015: 259). The analysis was an iterative process, going back and forth between data and analysis and altering between an inductive and deductive approach (Bryman 2012: 26; Stewart- Withers et al. 2014: 75). The data was then coded using the feature of organising text into categories in the software Sonocent.

Limitations

All interviews were conducted in Pristina with women working in the capital. This was partly due to the sampling strategy where participants referred to other women in their network, something that allowed the research to focus on a group of individuals with similar experience (Bryman 2012: 424). The drawback is that this strategy excluded individuals from outside of the network that potentially could have contributed with different perspectives. The second reason for research being conducted in Pristina is that the majority of women's rights organisations and activists that are engaged in advocacy work are located there. The women's rights movement is more developed there compared to other regions in the country (Kushi 2015; Agency of gender equality 2014: 15). Finally, practical reasons, such as limited time and a lack of access to networks of women outside of Pristina, contributed to the research focus being on the capital.

There are important differences between rural and urban areas in Kosovo, in particular with regards to women's economic opportunities, access to education and to political forums (Cal & Bhatia 2016: 26; Agency of gender equality 2008: 106). Women's groups in rural areas struggle more with securing funding and enhancing capacities (Färnsveden & Farnsworth 2012: 13). Nearly all participants in the research were well-educated middle/upper-class Kosovars Albanians (the majority ethnic group in Pristina), with the exception of one foreigner. The majority of women working with women's rights in Pristina know of each other after having regularly attended the same conferences. Several participants described the women's rights movement in Pristina as a "bubble" disconnected from other regions.

With this in mind, it is important to point out that the views and experiences highlighted in this research are representative of the urban and privileged woman. Overall, it is problematic that the organisations and activists that are the most visible in Pristina are biased towards a specific class of women. This means that other voices, e.g. from rural women and women from minority groups, are often not heard.

5.4. Ethical considerations

Researching marginalised issues such as gender equality and women's rights is sensitive and at times controversial in a patriarchal post- conflict context. In addition, the society and political life in Kosovo is still divided along ethnic lines between the majority population of ethnic Albanians and the minority group of ethnic Serbs (Cimmino 2018: 12). Awareness and sensitivity to ethnic tensions and gender relations has been important when conducting this research to avoid reinforcing discriminatory power structures through interaction. This is particularly important for me as a foreigner, not being part of the society or belonging national ethnic groups (Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens 2003: 149, 151). All meetings with participants were planned and carried out with considerations to the realities of Kosovar women. Interviews were conducted in safe environments chosen together with participants as to avoid threats or pressure from community members or local authorities.

As a researcher, due considerations to one's own positionality is necessary to better understand how the researcher's inherent bias influences the data collection, findings and analysis (Stewart-Withers et al. 2014: 60). Reflexivity alone, the process of continuously reviewing one's position in relation to the research, does not remove tensions but it can be a tool to keep an 'open mind' and make informed decisions about the research (Funder 2005: 7-8).

As a young woman from a foreign country without personal ties to Kosovo and visiting for the first time, gaining participants' trust risk being a challenge. My young age might, by participants, be perceived as a factor impeding my ability to understand sensitive topics. The fact that I come from a different cultural background could also be seen as a factor hindering me from relating to their lives.

Some of the participants are employed in organisations that rely on funding from a major donor that I am loosely connected to as a previous intern. That can on the one hand contribute to confidence in my position as a researcher and the research. On the other hand, it risk resulting in individuals being hesitant of expressing certain views that could damage the relationship with the donor. Finally, as pointed out by Scheyvens and Leslie (2000: 120) women may be reluctant to share experiences of being in a disadvantaged position, which could restrict access to data.

The nature of the research, its purpose and the use of the data was clarified before the interviews to gain informed consent from participants. The right to withdraw participation, along with guaranteed anonymity, was also explained in the beginning of every meeting (Scheyvens et al. 2003).

6. Findings and analysis

6.1. Political opportunity structures

6.1.1 The relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system

The majority of women in the study reported that the political system is open to women. Numerous access points are formally available at the political level, allowing the women's rights movement to influence political actors, institutions and policies. According to many of the participants, recent years have brought positive developments in terms of the movement being given more opportunities to comment on policies. Moreover, gender equality issues are becoming a recurrent topic in formal political discussions. The inclusion of women and women's issues has become 'normalised':

There has been progress, with the elections it is being talked more about women's issue and gender. So there is more public pressure and from organisations and from the society as a whole to include these issues. So I think that it is becoming something that they [politicians] know that they have to do. [G]

There are a number of formal procedures in place to facilitate the women's rights movement's political influence, in particular with regards to commenting legislation and policies. For example, one of the women highlighted an online consultation mechanism where draft laws and policies can be read and comments and feedback be posted directly to the institutions. Political institutions also invite actors from the women's rights movement to attend meetings where draft policies are being discussed, which is an opportunity for women to provide their input. However, several participants reflected that these opportunities are available in theory but that there are barriers to accessing them in practice: "One of the challenges is that those documents are very technical and very long, and usually the time we have to give input is very short, so it is a burden" (L). And, as pointed out by another participant with regards to providing comments to laws online, the lack of knowledge is an issue:

That is inaccessible to many women's rights groups, in particular outside of Pristina, and not only because... They have internet, but I have seen, they consider just even reading a law or a policy to be 'oh like you have to be a lawyer'. [H]

According to these accounts more could be done to ensure that access points to institutions, such as mechanisms for giving input, are adjusted to the capacities of different users, as it would increase their effectiveness.

It is important to point out that all women in the study agreed that there are underlying patriarchal norms in political institutions that restrict the transformative potential of the women's rights movement. One woman argued that politicians and institutions only care about women's rights at a formal level, but lack the willingness to actually follow through on promises:

I have the feeling that people with power only take into consideration, when it is like more formal. I doubt their honesty and their real commitment. But at least they know that they formally need to have it institutionalised, they have to have it on document. [E]

Another participant referred to this tendency as “gender washing” claiming that the state wants to appear to be more progressive than it is. She clarified by saying that “there are rules on paper and then there are the rules that actually are implemented” (B).

In line with the argument of feminist institutionalism, it is here possible to distinguish between the formal institutions that are open to the movement and have specific procedures in place facilitating women's political participation, and informal institutions with norms restricting women (Franceschet 2011: 62). The following statements display an underlying reluctance within the political system to the women's movement's participation and its demands. One participant claimed, with regards to women, that “their participation in itself is seen as, it is not welcome, by the majority and by men in this case” (A). Several examples of situations where the participants felt that their opinion did not matter were also highlighted: “When I meet male politicians they have this tendency of being on their phone and being like,

whatever you are talking about it is not so important” (C). As for implementation of laws and policies, women’s rights are often not a priority;

So until this becomes a national agenda, even though the government and other policymakers says that it is, but until it becomes a topic like the Kosovo- Serbia dialogue, then people will not really take it seriously and our laws will not be implemented. [A]

Francechet (2011: 65) underlines that social issues that more directly relate to women’s lives are frequently deprioritised in favour of ‘male’ issues such as national security. Moreover, women’s issues are seen as private and outside of the realm of the state. The statement above gives an example of this where the ongoing security-related dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is treated as more important than gender inequality in the society. Political elites lack of responsiveness to certain topics, such as women’s rights claims, is a factor that negatively affects the openness of the political system to social movements (Krook & Macay 2011: 4; Francechet 2011: 62).

To sum up, there are access points to the political system that the women’s rights movement can take advantage of at a formal level but informal attitudes among the political elite make it difficult for women to have any real political impact. All women in the study agreed that there are underlying patriarchal norms in political institutions that restrict the transformative potential of the women’s rights movement. Some women felt that politicians listen to them because it is required, but that politicians are not truly concerned with the feedback they are given. Krook and Mackay (2011: 11) state that informal institutions are derived from traditions and culture. Evidence of this in the case of Kosovo was suggested by one of the women:

There are challenges, usually they come from this, as I said, this patriarchal norm. For example, when we send recommendations to include domestic violence, there was a deputy who said ‘this is against our traditions’. [D]

6.1.2 The presence or absence of elite allies

Women in this study had varying experiences of mobilising and collaborating with allies from political institutions. Generally, women employed in larger women’s

rights NGO's had more positive experiences of collaborating with allies while smaller NGOs and activists had a more sceptical outlook.

Women from larger NGOs confirmed that the government reached out to them to ask for their advice and to invite them to working groups within ministries. In some cases, specific individual allies were pointed out, by Thomson (2018: 181) called femocrats that function as forces of positive change from within. One such example was a government official previously part of the women's movement and another was the current national coordinator on domestic violence:

Because he saw that in the ministry where he works there is nobody knows on these issues, nobody cares, so whatever it is related to the strategy on domestic violence (...), he always calls us and ask for our support and he says that 'you know best', so it depends on like the person. [D]

Some of the participants had positive experiences of collaborating with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture on specific projects. One NGO had reached a memorandum of understanding with courts to monitor cases of gender-based violence. Several participants in the study pointed to the importance of building relationships with staff members not regularly replaced in elections to ensure sustainability in collaboration with authorities. Another tactic to mobilise the support of allies was to approach with a conciliatory attitude: "When you go and say 'but you are important, we are doing this for you to promote you' oh then they feel kind of nice and then they see you differently and they see you as a partner" (G).

Although the lack of allies was more stressed among independent activists and women from smaller NGOs, all women in the study gave examples of situations where they struggled to gain the support of institutions or elites. Mahmud and Nazneen (2014: 223) makes the observation that negative attitudes towards gender equality in institutions and in society, impacts on women's movements' ability to gain allies. An example of how a conservative mind-set made it difficult to mobilise the support of policymakers was given by one of the participants:

In the ministry of justice, the working group, because all those experts who are old professors of the university of Pristina, who have all these mind-sets that we are giving too much rights for women (...), and they were against adding gender violence into the criminal code. We tried there and there we saw that it was impossible to influence.

[D]

A recurrent theme was the disappointment in the lack of support from female politicians, many participants felt that these policymakers, from their experiences of being women, should be more dedicated to women's causes: "If all the women in Kosovo in power, there are very few, did this, if they just spin their debates about other women, it would be much more impactful" (C). However, women politicians seem to lack agency as one of the participants pointed out "women politicians they are more saying whatever the party leaders are saying" (K). Castillejo (2011: 5) clarifies that women in official positions are often vulnerable in male dominated institutions, in particular in patronage systems where they are dependent on male dominated network to be elected. This could explain why women in political positions in Kosovo are reluctant to deviate from their party's position on women's rights issues.

Overall, many participants expressed scepticism towards allies and their motives. One participant even confessed to not wanting "their direct involvement. Otherwise we would not have our independence (...) You cannot work directly and be like equal partners with these kind of institutions" (F). Corruption among elites was highlighted as a barrier to mobilising allies, as well as lack of trust in their intentions: "They can say something very misogynic in those public debates, and then they come to the women's march. You see the hypocrisy there" (E). According to Mahmud & Nazneen (2014: 223) it is common that politicians ally with social movements for pragmatic reasons when they have something to gain from it. Hence, finding a momentum for the women's rights agenda is key to successfully mobilise allies.

6.1.3 The relationship between international actors and domestic elites

The fact that the government and political institutions in Kosovo rely heavily on international actors was a theme highlighted in all interviews⁵. The European Union (EU) was pointed out as having a major influence over Kosovo as it controls the EU accession process. In order to become an EU member, Kosovo has to fulfil certain requirements with regards to its political and economic institutions as well as social development.

According to several women in the study, the EU is encouraging women's equal participation in political processes and the union's leverage in this issue has contributed to the women's rights movement's increased access to political forums in Kosovo: "We have good relations with the EU commission house, because they kind of push for our involvement and our participation in the accession, and that also helps us" (E).

When discussing why the international community has so much influence over the political elite in Kosovo, financial motives and international recognition were highlighted as the main reasons. Kosovo receives a lot of international aid and it was suggested that a substantial amount of that goes directly to corrupt stakeholders rather than to the intended beneficiaries: "You have the funding, but the funding goes into higher people in the government" (B). Moreover, international recognition is important for the newly independent country in order to connect it to the rest of the world and spur economic development. According to one of the participants, that is "that is the only reason they talk to us, to look politically correct" (L).

To sum up, the women in the study acknowledged that the relationship between international actors such as the EU and Kosovo's political elite had opened up an opportunity for them to become politically involved. It is an example of how international norms on gender equality contribute to expanding a political opportunity

⁵ Kosovo entered the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2016, in preparation for a future accession to the EU. The agreement contains specific requirements that Kosovo has to fulfil in order to become an EU member (European Union Office in Kosovo 2016).

for women to become involved (Mahmud & Nazneen 2014: 223; Franceschet 2011: 67). As McAdams (1996: 34) points out, the susceptibility of national political institutions to foreign influence is central in this regard. When international actors make gender equality in decision-making a condition for their collaborations with Kosovo, it can have a positive effect on the women's rights movement's access to political debates and policy consultations. Participants in this study argued that international actors support of women's participation in the political sphere has resulted in an increase of women's inclusion, specifically in the EU accession process.

However, in the interviews several women expressed concerns. Although Kosovar institutions are perceived as very susceptible to the opinions of international actors, some of the participants were hesitant of how significant this opportunity is. The honest intentions of the elite are doubted, as participants believe that women's presence is only allowed to comply with international demands. What is implied here goes in line with the argument of feminist institutionalism. The political opportunity forms part of formal institutions, but informal institutions consisting of underlying patriarchal norms and practices could limit the potential impact of the women's rights movement's participation in political processes (Franceschet 2011; Krook & Mackay 2011).

6.2. Strategies for collective action

Looking at the political opportunity structures in Kosovo, the openness of the political system, allies and the influence of international actors, it became clear that the women's rights movement has had to adopt different strategies for influencing the political elite and institutions and getting through with their demands for women's rights. As pointed out by Waylen (2007: 53) there are various actors within a social movement and there are differences in how they perceive and respond to political opportunity structures. Nonetheless, based on the accounts offered by the women in the study, three major strategies employed by the movement to promote the women's rights agenda could be distinguished. These were; mobilising the public and exert pressure on politicians' bottom-up, engage directly with policymakers in institutional settings and advocate for international actors to hold Kosovo's policymakers accountable top-down. Each of these strategies foresees change in different ways,

below categorised into Kolb's mechanisms for change. Some actors within the women's rights movement engaged with all three strategies while others focused on one or two.

6.2.1. The political access mechanism - Influencing political actors and institutions

As has previously been established (p. 33) Kosovo's institutions are relatively open to the women's rights movement and there are several access points allowing women to influence political policies. Women have also been able to mobilise allies within the political system (p. 35). These allies support the women's rights agenda and invite the movement to provide input on policies. As a result of these favourable political opportunities that at a formal level are accessible to the women's rights movement, women in this study have pursued a strategy of trying to influence stakeholders directly by engaging with them in institutional settings. This is what Kolb (2007: 81) labels the political access mechanism for change. He defines it in terms of movements gaining access to policy processes and being able to bring about change from within institutions through the mobilisation of allies in power positions.

Meyer and Staggenborg (2008: 4-6) explain that a strategy is a tactic choice about how to achieve an objective. The form of the collective actions will be adjusted according to the intended arena and targeted actors (ibid). From descriptions given by participants in the study, it is clear that the interactions between the movement and institutions in Kosovo take on different forms that are appropriate to the institutional arena. Actors from the movement request meetings with policymakers, provide input on law proposals, participate in working groups hosted by ministries, prepare reports and recommendations to share with institutions, and advocate in the parliament for deputies to become gender equality supporters. When interacting in the formal political setting, the women's movement has adopted a non-confrontational approach, that, as highlighted by Meyer and Staggenborg (2008: 4-6), is intended to gain the cooperation of policymakers:

We found through one- on-one meetings where you are not criticising but you are trying to productively suggest in a friendly way, as an ally, changes, usually, most of the institutions

here in Kosovo are very receptive. I can name a few exceptions, but most are very willing to accept suggestions. [H]

Meyer and Minkoff (2004: 1475) along with McAdams (1996: 29) explain that when there is a political opening for a certain topic, e.g. in the form of policymakers displaying an interest in that topic, social movements are more likely to pursue non-confrontational actions in institutional channels, such as in this case in Kosovo. Disruptive actions, such as violent protests, would challenge the authority of the state and risk alienating policymakers (Meyer & Minkoff 2004: 1475; McAdams 1996: 29).

Several women highlighted the importance of making evidence based recommendations when communicating with policymakers: “We have a saying, in front of a wall you don’t have anywhere to go, this is what we try to do with all these arguments we bring all these facts, all the data, so they can’t say no” (D). The women’s movement draw on scientific research and international conventions and best-practices to support and legitimise their claims. One of the participants gave an example of this process:

We have for example [name] she is a lawyer here, and she prepares these more in a legal aspect of these recommendations, and we sent them always backing them up with best-practices in the world, always backing up with different kind of conventions and regulations of the EU, or laws. So, we try to give as much evidence as possible so that when they read our recommendations they will not... They will be convincing. [D]

The significance that is placed on having evidence to support their demands could be attributed to the fact that many women have experienced that their concerns are not taken seriously and are not prioritised by the political elite (see p. 34). Although there are political opportunities open that enable women to give input on policies, they feel that it is necessary to have strong arguments in place in order to convince those with power: “Women have to fight a lot to take space in these tables where policies are discussed and decided to” (A).

When discussing the interactions with policy makers, several women underlined the importance of ensuring that the legal framework for women's rights is in place as this gave the women something specific to measure the work of institutions against and hold them responsible:

We are very focused on legal framework, (...) so that we make sure that there is everything. And once we find someone that is breaking those, then it is easier to react and to advocate and to change. [G]

In summary, a relatively open political system has allowed the women's rights movement to approach institutions and engage in activities with policymakers. However, as was previously discussed with regards to the openness of the political system p.33, and allies p.35, there are underlying patriarchal norms within institutions that negatively affect the responsiveness of policymakers and mobilisation of allies. To overcome this challenge, actors within the movement work hard to legitimise their claims by presenting convincing evidence.

6.2.2. The public preference mechanism – strategy raise public awareness

In the case of Kosovo, it is possible to argue that political opportunity structures are, to a certain extent, favourable to the women's rights movement, in particular on a formal level. Women have engaged with this opportunity, as discussed above p. 40. However, frustration with underlying norms restricting women's influence at the political level has made the women's rights movement turn to a second strategy; targeting the public. The movement engages in various public awareness raising activities with the purpose of spreading awareness about women's rights in Kosovo's society. Reaching out to the public to gain the support of people from outside of the movement was in interviews highlighted as an important step to put pressure on the political elite from below. All women in the study had themselves participated in awareness raising initiatives such as protests, and several had been part of planning and organising public events. As one woman stated; "if many people come to the protests, because it shows it is important, then they [politicians] have to listen to what

we think” (I). Another participant suggested that if change cannot be reached through institutions, change can come about by targeting the public:

We were trying to encourage citizens to vote for women, as the laws says 50 % -50 %, and to encourage the political parties to make lists with 50- 50 representation of men and women, but they lack the willingness and so we thought we should work the other way around and work with voters. [D]

What can be noted is that the women’s rights movement, through its actions, is targeting what Kolb (2007) calls the public preference mechanism; the movement seeks change at the political level by mobilising the power and influence of the people. In order to exert public pressure on politicians and for citizens to hold policymakers accountable, the movement has set out to enhance public understanding of gender unequal power relations and the importance of addressing these. A number of activities with regards to awareness raising were highlighted in the study, including panel discussions, campaigns, protests and interactive theatre performances in public spaces such as universities to highlight issues of sexual harassment and oppression against women. Some of the more established women’s rights organisations in the movement conduct research on topics related to women’s lives and distribute their findings in different media channels.

Although the process of changing cultural norms in the society takes time; “because attitudes are more difficult to change, we usually see the impact maybe after many years” (F), all women in the study claimed that there has been progress in how the public perceives gender equality in recent years. As an example, some women highlighted the international women’s day where hundreds of people, including men, are now joining public protests compared to only a handful of participants some years earlier. The belief that changing gender norms in the culture has a positive impact on how these issues are prioritised at the political level was expressed in the study:

So to make them [politicians] prioritise women’s topics, because they follow patriarchal thinking, we must start with the culture. We must work with youngsters because the younger generation now is more open. Because if everyone is for woman in the culture (...) it will also come out in the political aspect. [J]

The fact that more people in Kosovo's society are supportive of women's equal access to rights has created a leverage towards politicians, making it easier to pressure them. One of the participants gave the example of how they were able to influence judges to change a verdict through public pressure:

Or we organise protests, for example, just recently, it never happened before, we had 2 life-time imprisonments for murders of women due to domestic violence, usually they were sentenced like 5, 6, 10 years (...). But because we were protesting, we were inviting people in the streets, (...) we had 2 life-time sentences imprisonment. We see that our pressure and our strategic litigation, brought the attention to the judges. [D]

6.2.3. The international politics mechanism- strategy advocacy towards international actors

As previously established (p.38), international norms and directives influence the behaviour of Kosovo's political elite, in turn creating opportunities for the women's rights movement to promote their agenda. By undertaking advocacy work towards international actors, the women's rights movement can push them to become more proactive with regards to gender equality issues in their communication with Kosovo's elite.

An example of this concerns the EU accession process. The state's commitment to becoming an EU member is something that the women's rights movement in Kosovo has identified as an opening to advance women's rights. Two of the participants in the study highlighted an ongoing regional project that they were part of where women's rights organisations and activists joined forces from Kosovo and other Western Balkan countries. The purpose of the project is to ensure that national laws in Western Balkan countries currently in an EU accession process are harmonised with EU laws and requirements. This network of women travels to Brussels regularly to meet with EU officials and advocate for EU to make women's rights a key priority in the negotiations with accession countries. One of the women explained that "it is a very effective mechanism, like I saw your question regarding how we are able to influence institutions and policymakers, and this is definitely one of the ways" (E).

The European Commission prepares a report each year with its assessment of how well the candidate country has addressed EU requirements (European Commission 2019). The woman continued to explain that the effectiveness of approaching EU stakeholders directly is due to the fact that the government and national institutions are very responsive to EU directives presented in these reports:

We try to give input on what is not working, discrimination, (...) we try to push for what we want in the country reports. Because it is very fortunate when we manage to have something in the report that we push for, then it gets a priority for our institutions, and then we can push for that EU implement it, and that our institutions they commit to that issue.

[E]

Another participant expressed that the approach of targeting the EU in advocacy projects has resulted in greater attention to women's issues over the years. By raising their voice and making demands, activists and organisations in the movement have been able to establish a working group on gender equality together with the EU office in Kosovo and the national ministry of European integration: “[W]e provide input from the gender perspective on those documents that are very important for the EU enlargement process” (G), one woman explained.

Apart from probing the EU to make gender equality a priority in its negotiations with Kosovo, the women's rights movement also uses the leverage of the EU accession process to put pressure on political institutions directly:

So we kind of go into our institutions and we tell them we have to do this because we want to go to the EU and it is a requirement. So it's easier because they know that it is a win-win situation. [K]

Looking at the previously discussed relationship between the EU and Kosovo, it is clear that the EU in its role as a gatekeeper to membership has power over political institutions in Kosovo. By demanding that gender equality receives increased attention in accession talks and that Kosovo's institutions comply with EU directives, the women's rights movement is trying to strengthen women's equal rights.

However, the women's rights movement does not only seek to legitimise its demands on gender equality through targeting the EU and the EU accession process. Nearly all participants in the study gave examples of how the influence of international actors and donors could be used to put pressure on political elites or institutions. The following example was narrated by one of the participants.

The law for civil society was being changed. They were trying to do this really terrible change, and we stuck together and asked for the support from other international organisations and embassies (...). Now it [the law] got passed the way we commented. So it is very successful to stick together. [E]

As pointed out by Kolb (2007), a social movement acts in accordance with what it perceives to be a political opportunity and how it believes that change comes about. In this case, the women's rights movement acts in line with the expectation that political change is likely to take place following pressure from international actors. With the help of Kolb's framework mapping mechanisms for change, it is possible to identify that the women's rights movement has adopted a strategy aiming at activating the international politics mechanism (Kolb 2007: 89-94). International actors have access, power and authority to influence Kosovo's elite, which is something that the women's rights movement can benefit from when they mobilise international support for their causes. By seeking out international actors and recruiting them as allies, the movement is able to gain a momentum and increase the pressure on political institutions to accommodate their demands.

7. Concluding remarks

This thesis has sets out to answer the question of: “*How have political opportunity structures in Kosovo affected the women’s rights movement’s strategies for promoting gender equality?*”. The findings suggest that the political system in Kosovo is formally open to the women’s movements. There are access points to institutions facilitating the movement’s political influence. The movement has also been able to mobilise political allies within institutions that act as gatekeepers, inviting the women to comment on law proposals and policies. However, underlying patriarchal norms and attitudes within the political system negatively impact on the movement’s ability to effectively make use political opportunities for action. For example, women in the movement claimed that women’s rights are not a political priority. As a result, policymakers only acknowledged women’s rights claims at a formal level to maintain an appearance of being politically correct. Informally, however, many politicians lack the political will to allocate adequate resources to the implementation of gender equality laws and policies. In response to these political realities, the women’s rights movement engages in three different strategies to promote the women’s rights agenda.

Firstly, the movement takes advantage of the formal access points to institutions to engage directly with stakeholders. The goal is to ensure that the legal framework for women’s rights is adequate. Once it is on paper, the movement can use it to hold policy makers responsible. Secondly, the movement targets the public and seeks to stimulate change bottom-up. By spreading awareness on the relevance of gender equality and encouraging citizens to take action, such as voting for women in election or joining protests, the movement wishes to increase pressure on policymakers to prioritise the women’s rights agenda. Finally, the movement has identified a political opening for advocacy work in the close relationship between international institutions such as the EU and Kosovo’s elite. The movement advocate for international actors to make gender equality a condition for their collaboration with Kosovo’s elite. For example, the movement demands that the EU oversees Kosovo’s compliance with gender equality provisions in the EU accession process.

The women's rights movement's approach is threefold; it seeks change bottom-up, top-down and through direct discussion with policymakers within institutions.

7.1. Suggestions for further research

This thesis has focused on how political opportunity structures impact the women's rights movement's choice of strategy when pursuing the women's rights agenda in Kosovo. The findings build on the experiences of an urban class of women. As established, the actors within a social movement are diverse and there are important differences between women's freedoms and opportunities in Kosovo depending on background. Hence, to further contribute to these findings, future research should focus on rural and minority women. Moreover, this thesis has not evaluated the impact of social movement strategies. However, as suggested in the theory of political opportunity structures, social movements influence political structures through their actions. Therefore, this would also be an important topic for further research.

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ANNEX 1: Overview of participants

Interview	Pseudonym	Role in the movement	Length of interview
1.	A	Activist	55 min
2.	B	Volunteer at WRO*	45 min
3.	C	Activist	40 min
4.	D	Employed in WRO	1 h 7 min
5.	E	Employed in WRO	35 min
6.	F	Employed in WRO	1 h 20 min
7.	G	Activist	1 h 4 min
8.	H	Employed in WRO	32 min
9.	I	Activist	38 min
10.	J	Activist	30 min
11.	K	Employed in WRO	50 min
12.	L	Activist	60 min

*Women's rights organisation (WRO)

** The date of the interview was omitted to preserve anonymity.

Annex 2: Interview Guide

The following interview guide served as a basis for the semi-structured interviews. However, it is important to note that interview questions were adjusted depending on the experiences and background of the participant, and that unexpected themes were followed up with questions not part of the original interview guide.

Interview guide

- Presentation of me and my project. Present the research topic and purpose.
- Ask the participant to present herself.
- Practical details (confidentiality & anonymity).

Introduction

1. Describe your engagement in the women's movement. How do you work with women's rights?
2. What are the objectives your engagement/the movement?
3. What are the main challenges that you/your organisation faces when it comes to fulfilling these objectives?

Theme: Political space for civil society

1. Do you feel that the topic of gender equality and women's right is prioritised by politicians?
2. Are there any opportunities for you/the movement/your organisation to influence political policies from e.g. authorities or the government?
3. How would describe the relationship between civil society actors engaged in women's rights/gender equality and authorities?
4. Do you experience any difficulties when interacting with authorities?

Themes to follow up: *Access to information; Feedback from authorities; Political opposition; Interference; Lacking implementation; Nationalism*

Theme: Social environment

5. How is your engagement/organisation viewed by the public? (And how does it affect you?)
6. How would you describe your interaction with other actors in the movement? Are you part of any network or do you collaborate with other organisations?

7. Have you ever encountered any hostility/antagonism from the public or from other movements in your work?

Theme: Mitigating efforts

1. You mentioned some challenges that you have encountered in your work. How do you deal with these challenges?
2. What changes would you like to see in the future? Do you find that the situation is improving compared to previously?