WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PHNOM PENH

A Minor Field Study of Women in Cambodia

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Abstract

This study is about political participation of women in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. The study will attempt to understand women’s views on the matter. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to knowledge of how Cambodian women’s participation in politics displays in relation to their educational background. To research and analyze this problem area, I have travelled to Cambodia and used semi-structured interviews as a method. Hay’s types of political participation and intersectionality have been used as theoretical framework to form questions for the interviews and to analyze the findings to uncover potential differences in participation between women of different social classes. The findings show that both interviewed groups participated in politics in various ways, but the main differences between the two educational groups of women are mostly concerning opportunities in and knowledge of politics. For all women to feel empowered, to feel like their opinions matter and to feel comfortable to express their views, education for all women is a necessity. Actions for guaranteeing women education is critical for their participation in politics and for the Cambodian society to develop. Therefore, intersectionality needs to be applied in analyses to change these structures and education for women is a prerequisite to create equal opportunities for everyone.

Key words: Women, political participation, equality, social classes, intersectionality
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In contemporary society, the idea of men being superior to women is still generally an issue (Lilja, 2008, p. 29). Cambodia’s culture is no different, which is still nowadays afflicted with that idea (Phorn, 2013, p. 9), which has contributed to an underrepresentation of women in political decision-making and public sector (ibid) and a low level of women’s participation in elections (Lilja, 2009, p. 139). The norm has been a notion of inappropriateness for women to be active in politics (ibid, p. 136). Cambodia’s norms of appropriate behavior of women is imbued with requirements of women to act politely, avoid vulgarity, to quietly move around the house and to submit to the husband’s will (Gillespie & Perry, 2018, p. 7). Women are encouraged to tolerate unacceptable behavior from their husbands to show him respect and to keep the family together (ibid). Women face many challenges, particularly affecting their political participation through leadership and elected positions (GIZ Cambodia, 2013). Society is undermining women’s abilities of leadership and the importance of women’s contributions and ideas. Women are commonly discouraged to participate in politics by their parents as well, who argues the dangers of joining politics, such as imprisonment, going into exile or loss of lives. The number of women is thus limited in political representation and positions, and those who are active are questioned. Although, the participation is not only about becoming elected officials, but about uniting voices, identifying underlying issues and to demand improvements through collective efforts, so that women can exercise their democratic freedoms and rights (ibid). Women experience discrimination due to deep-rooted gender stereotypes directly and indirectly in society, even though having judicial equal status as men (Ministry of Women’s Affairs of Cambodia, 2014). According to the Cambodian constitution:

“Khmer citizens of either sex shall be given the right to participate actively in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation.” (Constitution of Cambodia, article 35, 2017)

One of the most important foundations for a process towards democratization and development is an increased participation of women in public life (Ministry of Women’s Affairs of Cambodia, 2014) and political participation by women is essential for gender equality (UN Women). Yet, women remain underrepresented in Cambodian politics (Narin, 2018). Out of 1621 commune council chiefs during 2013, only 8 of them were young women and of the 11 450 commune council members there are only 281 young women (GIZ Cambodia, 2013).
In the *National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018* the status of women in decision-making in public sector and politics is presented, where non or minor changes in female representation is shown, in some cases with a declining female representation such as in the legislative body from 21 percent in 2008 to 20 percent in 2013 (p. 76). The guideline of increasing the proportion of women within new recruits in public administration by 50 percent was not met, instead only increasing from 32 percent to 35 between 2007-2012. Considering gender disparity in education, the report states that it has reduced at all levels, but there are no numbers or percentages showing this change (ibid).

Nevertheless, Cambodia has been moving away from democracy considering for example the ruling party’s request to the Supreme Court to dissolve the competitive oppositional Cambodia National Rescue Party in 2018 (Thul & Lefevre, 2017). The government warned of a fine for everyone not voting because of the “Clean Finger” campaign in which people boycotted the election because of unfair treatments of journalists and opposition in the country (Petersson, 2018). According to a director of women’s rights NGO Silaka the effort of the government attention to gender issues has stalled due to the general political situation in the country (Kijewski, 2018). Female representation at the national level has dropped because of the replacement of the suspended Cambodia National Rescue Party’s seats, which were replaced by practically only men. Nonetheless, there is a governmental body for coordinating advice to the Cambodian government on issues related to women’s roles, status and welfare to reduce discrimination towards women, the Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW) (UN Women). Although the CNCW published that the political status of women has improved, this was criticized by NGOs stating that the results are not enough. This is because they are only affecting lower levels of public life since women are at the subordinate levels, instead of being represented at the decision-making level (ibid).

Another concern is the educational system. 68 percent of Cambodian girls start primary school but only 6 percent continue their studies to upper secondary school, resulting in 45 percent of Cambodian women being illiterate (GIZ Cambodia, 2012). The inequality in education results in women obtaining a lower representation in decision making processes (Kasumi, 2010, p. 7). To engage women in politics, there is a need for efforts on education involving knowledge of politics on an early stage to increase the understanding of participation and active involvement as essential (GIZ Cambodia, 2013).
1.2 Overview of the political system
Khmer citizens elect representatives for the parliament and Council of Ministers at national elections, taking place every five years (Opendevelopment, 2015). The elections for the senate occur every six years. Citizens elect their local representative at sub-national elections. Every five years the representatives of commune/Sangkat councils are elected and representatives of the capital, municipality, province and district councils have a six-year term. The members of the Senate are elected by the elected members of the commune/Sangkat and the capital, municipality, province and district councils (ibid).

Although, for over three decades, the country has been ruled by the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) with prime minister Hun Sen (Freedom House, 2019). In the past Cambodia have had semi-competitive elections, but the environment for the 2018 polls were extremely oppressive and provided no meaningful choice for the voters with the banned oppositional party and limited independent media (ibid).

1.3 Definition of political participation
As described above, participation is not only by becoming elected officials, but about uniting voices, identifying underlying issues and to demand improvements through collective efforts (GIZ Cambodia, 2013). This relates to the definition of political participation used for this study, which is based on Hay’s four types of political participation and is thus more than one short definition. Political participation refers to type 1 of formal participation through voting, communicating with politicians and membership of political parties (Hay, 2007). Hay’s type 2 is participation through impacting the agenda. Type 3 is participation through opposition to formal governmental practices, processes and outcomes and type 4 is about drawing public attention to political issues (ibid). This is presented to simplify the focus of political participation used in this thesis and will be explained further in the theoretical section.

1.4 Research problem
To understand the low political participation of women in politics, we must turn to the gender discourse permeated in Cambodia, which has been imbued with women as being unenlightened, subordinated and supposed to obey their male partners and parents (Lilja, 2009, p. 139)-140). Although, this view of women is not shared by everyone. There is internal mobilization as well as a growing presence of international organizations advocating gender equality (ibid, p. 138). There have been efforts to increase women’s role in the Cambodian society, proven by the two public bodies; the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and the Cambodian National Council for Women (CNCW). CNCW, as mentioned above, focuses on reducing discrimination against
women and MoWA advocate to encourage gender equality to policies and programs within civil society, public institutions and private sectors (Cooperation Committee for Cambodia).

Despite some efforts, little has changed and the lack of women’s participation in politics in Cambodia is still a critical issue and is why there is a need for further research. Sophy, a politician of the governing Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), believes that there should be more women that participate in politics since it would be better for the community (Narin, 2018). After six years in the Battambang commune of Klaing Meas, she is the only female councilor and is concerned that not enough women are promoted for leading roles in this sector dominated by men. She also states that common knowledge among women is very limited, which contributes to rare involvement in community work (ibid). Another commune chief, Soknov, talks about the need for changing perceptions and that people should not be afraid of discussing politics (GIZ Cambodia, 2013). She states that politics is everywhere and having greater female participation and representation in politics requires active commune work such as joining political parties and joining as candidates (ibid).

Even though women in Cambodia still suffer from political underrepresentation, the fact that outspoken women like Sophy have started to enter the political scene, speaks to that some women do engage in politics. However, there is still little knowledge of how women participate in and perceives politics in Cambodia and lack of research regarding differences between educational levels. There is therefore a need for more research within the field in order to investigate how women are participating in politics and what their opinions about it are. There is a need for investigating if there are different groups of women being underrepresented or if it concerns all women regardless of social group or educational background.

1.5 Aim and research question
The study concerns women’s political participation in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. Via in-depth interviews, this study will attempt to better understand women’s views on the matter. Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to the knowledge of how Cambodian women’s participation in politics displays in relation to their educational background. To research and analyze this problem area, semi-structured interviews will be used as method. Hay’s types of political participation and intersectionality will be used as theoretical framework to form questions for the interviews and to analyze the findings to uncover potential differences in participation between women of different social classes.
According to the theoretical perspective of intersectionality, political participation can be expected to differentiate between various social groups. This study will involve educated middle-class women and uneducated working-class women, to discover whether the political participation is different between these groups.

To fulfill the aim of this thesis, following research question will be analyzed and answered:

*What are the main differences in political participation between women from two different socio-economic groups in Phnom Penh?*

### 1.6 Delimitations

Hay’s forms of political participation through consumer politics, informal boycotting of goods, suppliers or brands for political reasons and ethical investment, included in Hay’s type 3 and 4, were not used for this thesis since it was regarded irrelevant for the focus of political participation in this study. To narrow down the scope of the research, only using the parts of participation that relates to the equality issue and intersectionality issue, this aspect was deselected.

Another theory for understanding political participation is Putnam’s theory of social capital. As Hay (2007) describes in chapter 1 of Why we hate politics it is a very influential theory which aims at describing the decreasing levels of political participation in the US in correlation with decreasing levels of general civic engagement. On the contrary, Hay discards what this theory assumes since for this theory to prove its point, it regards political disaffection because of voter apathy which Hay is highly critical of. As stated earlier, political participation can be viewed as actions of more than only the formal and conventional political actions, but also as informal political engagements (ibid). Additionally, it is not the decreasing level of participation in general that this thesis will study, but of female political participation in Cambodia. Therefore, the theory of social capital might not be as inclusive or useful as a theory for this thesis and is thus discarded.

### 1.7 Disposition

The disposition of the further sections will contain the theory section, where the intersectionality theory and Hay’s types of political participation will be presented and discussed in relation to this thesis. Additionally, the method and material will be presented and analyzed, and validity and reliability will be discussed. Then the empirical findings will be presented and analyzed under the discussion section. Lastly, the thesis will end with a conclusion and suggestion for further research.
2. Theory

2.1 Previous/former research

In this section previous research of political participation in relation to socio-economic background will be presented. Furthermore, the theories Intersectionality and Hay’s Political Participation will be presented and analyzed in context to this study.

2.1.1 Political participation in relation to socio-economic background

Socio-economic variables as a determining factor for women’s political representation is a widespread assumption, concerning ratio of literacy, participation in workforce or university-education amongst women (Iwanaga, 2008, p. 190). One positive effect on women’s level of political activity has consistently been shown through participation in labor force, although political activism has shown to increase with the level of education (Matland, 1998, p. 113). Research has also shown that female representation tends to increase when women reach the same level as men in terms of labor force participation, literacy and university education (ibid). Additionally, research suggests that higher income is also an increasing factor for political participation in relation to poverty which correlates to participation (Shala & Grajevci, 2018, p.1056). Research on political socialization shows that rich, male, white and educated citizens are more likely to possess political awareness than those who are less rich, female, not white and less educated (ibid).

2.1.2 Intersectionality

There is former research about intersectionality in relation to different social classes and social relations and that theory could give an explanation to why different social groups are treated differently. Although research of intersectionality connecting to the participation in politics by women in Cambodia was difficult to find, a lot of theoretical material for the theory of intersectionality in general was found.

Intersectionality does not just offer new ways to explore how different forms of inequality displays, but also contributes to an understanding of how institutionalized norms, rules, attitudes and beliefs creates vulnerabilities (de los Reyes, 2017, p. 14). Lilja (2008) argues that the categories of men and women are oversimplified and overgeneralized and that there is a need for dissolving them to show that other categories need to develop (p. 30). Diversity can extract challenges to gender theory and emphasizes that it is not enough to focus on gender equality or discrimination by themselves, but that there is a need to study and understand the variety of discrimination and inequalities (Bagilhole, 2010, p. 264). Feminist theory has pointed out the need of the concept of intersectionality, since it underlines the importance of the
interconnecting hierarchies of various discrimination grounds. The term intersectionality illustrates the intersecting, numerous and intertwining nature of multilayered social relations. It both studies between and within socially disadvantaged groups in society (ibid). Many inequalities are related to social class, they don’t just appear out of thin air, but are intersecting with other settings that creates differences (Fathi, 2017, s. 21). According to Lilja (2008) there are many female images of identities in which different ones are perceived as to have different values attached to them (p. 34).

De los Reyes (2017) is stating how it is not only the gender that determines one’s opportunities in working lives, but evidence shows that factors such as class, race, age, nationality and so on are also crucial (p. 14). Just like de los Reyes asserts that it is not just the gender that determines inequalities, but also other factors such as social groups, I am investigating if this is an assumption that fits my own study of women’s participation in politics in Phnom Penh, when comparing women of different educational backgrounds. That is the main parallel between de los Reyes article and my own study.

Bagilhole (2010) stresses how intersectionality can potentially be valuable for development and policy planning for diversity legislation and equal opportunities in the United Kingdom. The author argues that there is a need for a less homogenous grouping of inequalities and instead an acknowledge of that one can be discriminated because of more than one kind of discrimination ground or type of disadvantage category that one belongs to. For example, a person being discriminated not only because of gender, but also because of the color of the skin. This article is just like the former one relevant to explain how the theory of intersectionality displays in practice, but also to show how the theory explains the combination of different inequality categories (ibid). This might be helpful for my own research since I am not only investigating how women’s participation in politics could demonstrate in the capital of Cambodia, but also see if there are differences between different social groups which could be explained by the theory of intersectionality.

Cho et al (2013) is demonstrating that intersectionality is not only an academic disciplinary, but also praxis has shown vast importance of intersectional intervention and critique, and it is encompassing an extensive variety of occurrences pointing to the need of intersectionality in consideration. The authors are explaining what intersectionality is and the origins of it and how it has evolved throughout time within different research fields (ibid). This is a relevant view of the theory since it is a theory that has evidence of being relevant in practice as well as in theory, which might be helpful in analyzing the political practice of women in Phnom Penh. Also, this
source is explaining what intersectionality is on a general basis which is useful for the theoretical part of my thesis.

Lilja (2008) expresses in her work that she will encounter discourses maintaining gender stereotypes and hierarchies limiting women’s political identities to locate resistance (p. 30). Women have often had it difficult to gain power positions due to stereotyping because of these positions in formal decision-making structures are imbued with certain values. The image of a political agent of being autonomous, active and engaged in meeting the collective’s need does not match the image of Cambodian women who are portrayed as easily scared, uninformed and stupid. These stereotypes contribute to the limited choices of identities by women in Cambodia. These stereotypes are spread so widely that other female identities to adopt are few. The stereotyped images of politicians are a product of an educated elite, mostly consisting of men. Disadvantaged and poor people are constrained by structural factors and do not live up to the image of a political agent. The process of identification is controlled by stereotypes which inflicts the representation of certain groups in political institutions, in this case Cambodian women. The concept of intersectionality have become popular in relation to the different images of identity one may feel torn between, such as sex and class (ibid). Since the issue of stereotypes of women and images of identities affect their political role in society, this take on the matter might be useful for the analysis of women’s political participation in Phnom Penh to understand how the norms and identities affect female’s political role.

2.1.3 Political participation
Another theoretical framework useful for the field study of the thesis is in chapter 2 of Hay’s (2007) Why We Hate Politics, where different types of political participation are described to give an understanding of in what ways people may take part in politics. He describes four different ways of political participation, in which some of them being regarded as highly political and vastly covered by academic attention, whereas others are sometimes viewed as non-political, although being regarded by Hay as equally political as the others but in an alternative way. He also makes a distinction between two different kinds of arenas, where one kind consists of formal public/governmental arenas and the other of informal private/non-governmental political arenas.

Hay (2007) presents a form of political participation known as type 1 political participation, which is the type that has received the most attention by political analysts (p. 71). Type 1 orients towards the formal public/governmental arena where participation could constitute of voting in local and national elections, communication with political representatives and involvement in
or membership of political parties. What these examples have in common is that they are sanctioned by the state and mainly occurs on the state’s conditions. This kind of political participation in form of votes can be viewed as a right for the citizen or as an obligation in the contract between citizen and state, as it is in some countries, such as Belgium and Australia, where it is a duty to vote and in theory is punishable if not conducted (ibid, p. 72).

In type 2 the political participants try to impact the agenda setting by promoting for issues not currently politized. Another way for the participant to influence the agenda setting is by public protests, but also public supportive outpourings of formal political decisions or processes (ibid, p. 73).

Type 3 concerns opposition to formal governmental practices, processes and outcomes. Therefore, this type is connected to the non-governmental arenas where the participants politically express their views on the state of formal politics or issues that are under scrutiny and deliberation of formal politics. One form of this participation can be the “political non-participation” where one decides not to participate in formal political processes. This is done either by choosing not to register for voting or registering but choosing to not cast votes. Another less publicly form of participation is vocal expressions of frustration, exasperation, or even approval in social settings aimed towards political practices, processes and outcomes (ibid, p. 73-75).

Type 4 includes a very non-formal way of political participation to the extent that within political science it is considered especially non-political. It may undertake a such a vast variety of forms that it is impossible to make a detailed description within a few paragraphs. One example of political action within type 4 is attempts to draw formal political or public attention to issues earlier regarded as domestic or private matters. Examples of this might be by exposing unethical corporate practices or drawing attention to inequalities (ibid, p. 76).

Since it is participation in politics I will study, Hay’s examples of different types of political participation might help me to look at participation in different ways and to help me conduct the questions for my semi structured interview by taking these types of participation into consideration for my study. By knowing these types of political participation, it may also be useful to understand and categorize the responds from the interviews in order to analyze to what extent the respondents are participating in politics in Phnom Penh. Therefore, this theory is not only suitable for the theory of this thesis, but also to construct the analytical framework.
2.2 Differences between the theories
Initially, the differences between intersectionality and forms of political participation are striking, since the aim of the theories are focusing on different aspects of the research. The intersectionality theory is explaining that there are intersections of discrimination of people. The theory shows that discrimination may not be only on one ground, but there are different spheres of discrimination that are interconnecting. Therefore, it can clarify why political participation might differentiate between different societal groups. Hay’s theory of different forms of political participation on the other hand, is targeting another part of the study since it is specifically about the participation in politics. These theories can therefore complete each other by enlighten different spheres of this study and help me in the research by explaining different parts of it. Therefore, both theoretical frameworks can contribute to a broader understanding of the analysis of this study.

2.3 Analytical framework
The analytical framework employed in this thesis builds on Hay’s model on political participation and the perspective of intersectionality.

Due to the focus on female political participation in this thesis and the political conditions in Cambodia, there will be a focus on Hay’s type 1, 2 and parts of type 3 and 4. The aspect of consumer politics and informal boycotting in type 3 and consumer politics and ethical investments in type 4 will be deselected for the analysis. Instead, there will be a focus on political expressions and political non-participation of type 3 and the part of type 4 regarding drawing attention to political issues. As stated above, Hay’s theory of Political Participation will be of use not only for the theoretical framework of this thesis, but also as a guideline for the interview questions in the method of this thesis.

The theory that will be used as a theoretical instrument to understand the differences between women from different backgrounds is called intersectionality. I hope to contribute to the understanding of intersectionality as theoretical framework in relation to political participation when studying women’s participation in politics in Cambodia. Intersectionality may be useful for the theoretical part of my thesis since participation in politics by women of different educational backgrounds will be studied, analyzed and compared. The intersectionality perspective might be of help in analyzing and comparing potential differences since it is a theory acknowledging different spheres and aspects. In this study the theory will be used to study within the socially disadvantaged groups, which in this case are women and perhaps women without further educational backgrounds, depending on the findings of the study.
3. Method & material
In this section, the method and material for this thesis will be presented, motivated and analyzed in forms of validity, reliability and ethics. Presented shortly, the method consists of a qualitative field study where empirical material has been collected by semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Method
This thesis builds on empirical material that was collected during a Minor field in Cambodia’s capital Phnom Penh in April-May 2019.

The main method of data collection has been semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, one is dealing with problematic formulations which consists of visualization of a phenomenon, how it is portrayed (Esaiasson et al., 2007, p. 284), which how the issue of women’s participation in politics will be addressed. This is because I do not want to investigate how often a phenomenon occurs, but how the political environment is interpreted by Cambodian women. As Esaiasson et al., (2007) describes, the researcher strives for an understanding of the world in accordance to the interviewee’s perception of it (p. 286). It would be difficult to get enough representation for a quantitative research approach during only two months with only myself as the researcher and therefore qualitative research seemed like a more reliable and realistic approach. To get a deeper insight in how women’s political participation in Phnom Penh takes place and what the women’s views of this are, it is most suitable to conduct a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. This thesis provides a deeper understanding of how women from different social groups perceive political participation in today’s capital of Cambodia. As Esaiasson et al (2007) writes; semi-structured interviews are used to complement existing research by generating new ideas within research (p.289), which the enhanced knowledge of women’s perceptions can contribute with. The interviews are employed to let the interviewees speak freely to get the persons’ views of their realites (Hedin, 1996, p. 6). By using semi-structured interviews, the situation of the interview should create trust between the interviewer and interviewee and there are possibilities for follow-ups. More complex questions can be used (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2011, p. 99) since the researcher will be there if any difficulties occur and explanations of the questions are needed. Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul (2011) also explains that by being there one can notice if the body language matches the given answers (p.99). The downside of using interviews as a method
is risks of the interviewer effect (where the interviewer and interviewee might affect each other), it can be tough to ask more sensitive questions and lastly it could be difficult to schedule the interviews (ibid). In this research all these difficulties might have played a role, especially the last two. Although, by opening with less sensitive questions the more sensitive ones were not too difficult to talk about and although some trouble with getting interviews with working-class women it resolved by the end.

One challenge, or opportunity, is the vagueness of the questions and knowledge in preparation of the interview (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2011, p. 100). The more open the questions are, the less structured the situation of the interview will be. This could be intentionally for a professional interviewer who wants to dig deeper into an issue, or this could be by mistake due to bad preparations and bad use of available information (ibid). In this study a questionnaire is used, consisting of questions I have formulated partly based on Hay’s types of participation in politics and partly of questions formulated to investigate what the interviewees views on their own opportunities of political participation are and their views on differences between the sexes and between women of different levels of education, in order to analyze from the perspective of intersectionality. The questionnaire is attached as an appendix in this thesis. Another challenge is the association of the word “politics”, which can make people nervous and frighten them of expressing their minds (GIZ Cambodia, 2013). This was noticeable when talking to different people and academics in Cambodia, and perceptible in conjunction with the interviews.

I am aware that the number of interviews that this research is based on does not validate as a representation of all women in Phnom Penh. This is not a quantitative study where the findings are representative, but a qualitative study which gives insight in how the political reality considering participation are for some Cambodian women in Phnom Penh and how it differentiates between women of different social backgrounds. Thanks to the semi-structured interviews I have gained deeper insights of how the political situation is for some Cambodian women, which has helped me understand the reality that these women live in. Before the interviews the presumptions of the women’s political life were only based on literature and did not give a deeper insight until meeting the women who live under circumstances.

3.2 Validity and Reliability
According to Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2011) validity is defined as the ability of a measuring instrument to measure what is intended to measure (p. 60). By mapping out how political participation may take shape by operationalizing Hay’s theoretical framework of
political participation, the validity strengthens. This is because this thesis is concentrating on Hay’s kinds of political participation when collecting the empirical research findings. The interview questions are organized according to these, which makes the research concentrating on what it is set out to do, thus the validity strengthens. Consequently, this makes the questionnaire measure what it is supposed to measure, in this case Hay’s types of political participation. Other questions used referred to differences in political participation between men and women and women within two different educational groups, which will give a foundation for the analysis of the responds in relation to the intersectionality theory.

Reliability is the requirement for the instrument of measurement to give trustworthy and stable findings (Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 2011, p. 61). The method should be independent of the researcher or the examined units, such as people or organizations, in order to have a high degree of reliability (ibid).

Considering the reliability, it is more complicated to conclude since it is a semi-structured interview. Although, on one hand the questions are following a structure in accordance to Hay’s types of political participation, it is on the other hand still aiming at asking open questions and the answers are then interpreted, which might be differently interpreted by various investigators or interpreted differently by various interviewees. Although, the questionnaire is used as an instrument to get answers for the intended questions to gather information about women’s participation in politics according to Hay’s types and the women’s own perspectives. Considering the interviews as a method, it could be difficult to reach a high degree of reliability, which I am aware of. This is because there is always the risk of “interview effect” as well as getting different results depending on researcher and the interviewee, which is important to keep in mind while dealing with the results of this study. In efforts of getting as reliable interpretations of the results as possible, an interpreter was used for the language barrier, empirical material was compiled shortly after the interviews and the answers were recorded and notes were taken to ease the process of compiling the material the interviews.

3.3 Material
3.3.1 Interviews: selection and structure
The material used for this thesis is primarily the empirical findings from the conducted interviews.

The interviewees in this study are four middle-class women with law degrees in Human Rights working with research at an institution and four working-class women with no further education
working as maids for international employers. This selection was made to get women of both social classes to study whether there might be differences between the two groups and to get perspectives and insights of both groups. The number of eight interviewees made it possible to conduct all interviews within the time frame, to get more than just a couple of representatives from both groups and to get deeper views of the issue.

The approach to these women was through the Raoul Wallenberg Institute who gave me the contact information to professors and coordinators of universities as well as an institution in Phnom Penh. With these contacts I was able to get an interpreter and women willing to participate in the interviews.

The interviewees are therefore not randomly chosen but made from a strategic choice. The intention was to interview women, half of them from the middle-class and half of them from the working-class. This was needed to analyze if the educational background has an impact on women’s political participation from an intersectionality perspective.

The length of the interviews was approximately between 30-60 minutes. The locations were at the institution where the middle-class women worked and at the workplace of the maids, which were places suggested by the interviewees themselves and by those helping me organize the interviews.

To encounter the difficulty of asking sensitive questions in my interviews, I started with less sensitive ones, in order to make the interviewee feel more comfortable when the more sensitive questions arose. According to Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul (2011) interpretation is best made continuously and it eases the interpretation (p. 132). Therefore, the material was processed from the interviews shortly after they were conducted, not by transcriptions, but by descriptions and examples in the thesis to save time. Then, the empirical findings were analyzed by the theoretical framework, the previous research and the political situation of women in Cambodia.

3.3.2 The interpreter’s impact

To make the interviewees feel as safe and comfortable as possible, a female interpreter was used. However, having an interpreter one needs to be aware of the effects it might have on the results. Since it is not the interviewee who gives me the answers to the questions, but the interpreter who translates the responds to me, it might not be the exact sentences that the interviewee would have given me. Nonetheless, it was still important for the study to get the responds from women without further education and since most of them did not speak fluent English an interpreter was needed.
3.3.3 Ethical considerations

Because of promised anonymity to the interviewees I cannot reveal deeper information regarding how I got into contact with the women, the names of the women, the name of the institution, employers or location of the interviews due to their safety since that information might reveal their identities. Initially, the interviews with working-class women were booked with women employed as cleaners, but they got cancelled due to security issues. The woman who I was about to interview did not want to participate anymore, referring to a previous case of a cleaner being interviewed and then lost her job. She was therefore afraid to speak out in case it would lead to loss of her job. These cleaners worked for the same public institution as the middle-class women and is why I cannot mention which institution it is. Instead, I got help finding new working-class interviewees employed as maids but revealing more information about their workplace might risk their safety as well. This is the most important ethical aspect of my study, since revealing any of the women’s identities could cause serious harm to them.

To consider the ethical parts of interview as a method, a list of information was recited to the interviewees before the interviews started. This list included some points taken from Lund’s University’s website (2019) where research ethics concerning consent are presented. The used points of the information were regarding:

- Information about me
- The aim of the study
- Confidentiality of the results
- Voluntary participation of the interview and permission to interrupt
- Possibility to contact me for further questions
- Publicity of the results
- Option to receive the results when published
- Whether I could contact the interviewee for further questions regarding the interviews
- Whether I could record the interview

3.3.4 Complementary material

Additionally, a mix of method books for the writing process, book chapters used for explaining the theoretical framework of this thesis, peer reviewed articles explaining theories and articles explaining the political situation in general and for women in Cambodia were used. The constitution is used for showing the law that is supposed to maintain equality of political participation between the two genders in Cambodia and policy briefs from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs of Cambodia and the National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 are
used to show the results and aims of the public sector related to female participation and representation.
4. Empirical findings

This part will present the empirical findings from the conducted interviews. My general impression was that presumptions from the theoretical research were met in the empirical findings.

To structure the results, the answers are organized in separate sections. Firstly, the answers of the middle-class women are presented and then the working-class women. The first parts present the results from the questions asked concerning inequality, then findings related to Hay’s different kinds of political participation will be presented.

4.1 The middle-class women

4.1.1 Views on interest and participation in politics

This section and the next one will present questions asked in the interviews, formulated to get answers about women’s role in politics and are to be analyzed and connected to the intersectionality theory.

All middle-class interviewees are interested in politics, interviewee 1 when it comes to reading and following up on info and interviewee 2 answered that she was interested in politics in every way possible since everything is related to politics, which interviewee 3 agreed with. Although, interviewee 3 and 4 got interested first during their university studies.

Regarding the question if they are participating in politics, interviewee 1 answered that she is participating through voting. Interviewee 2 was participating in politics in multiple ways, but something interesting she mentioned took place during her high school. At schools there are political party’s membership clubs, connecting to the ruling party, where they forced everyone to join the club to access privileges like field trips or forums.

“I become a member because it was mandatory... So that is how I like forcefully entered into political participation.” (Interviewee 2, 22/4-19, Phnom Penh)

They had to join national meetings and such to welcome the prime minister or foreign ambassadors. Interviewee 3 said that she is participating in politics through voting and expressing ideas. Interviewee 4 answered no to the question regarding her participation in politics. She referred to the situation where she and other can only keep ideas within their minds and that she fears consequences for showing opinions and trying to claim their rights. Also, wanting to vote for the party that has been banned therefore limits her rights to vote for what she want.
Concerning civil society organizations all interviewees with a higher education are involved with these organizations. Interviewee 1 is currently volunteering in an organization working with mostly young women, but also males, to break the silence of women’s periods. When she has time, she joins meetings and engages in campaigns. While interviewee 2 is not engaged in the same way, she has still worked with organizations through research. Interviewee 3 is not a member of any organizations but has participated in events and workshops initiated by NGOs. In contrast, interviewee 4 has worked for two different NGOs and is still a member.

4.1.2 Views of opportunities and differences in politics
When I asked them about whether they thought that they are given the right opportunities to participate in politics both interviewee 1 and two agreed that only to a certain extent since it is not completely voluntarily, and people are not allowed to vote on just any party. Interviewee 1 stated that only few women can participate due to some husbands’ disapproval or the lack of time for involvement because of house chores. Interviewee 2 referred to the necessity for people to be careful about political expressions outside the household as a limitation of the opportunity to participate in politics. Interviewee 3 said that she can if she wants to. She also states that there might be consequences if she would express herself without thinking, but she is not sure in what way since she has not experienced any consequences yet. Regarding her family, she would have the opportunity if she would want to, even though not all of them would support her. Interviewee 4 thinks that she is given the right opportunities concerning her family’s allowance, but not by the government regarding the limit of expression, also she feels like because she is young her ideas are not acknowledged.

The answers varied concerning the question of whether they could imagine participating as candidates in an election. Interviewee 1 said that she would consider it when the family’s economy was stable enough since she would like to help the development of the village. Interviewee 2, on the contrary, would not like to be a candidate in the elections since she is afraid of the system.

“…because the transparency issue, the accountability issue is so deeply rooted in the system, and I feel like it is not the right time, yet”. (Interviewee 2, 22/4-19, Phnom Penh)

Interviewee 3 was imagining becoming a future candidate when she was younger. Now she would not, but maybe in the future depending on the situation and what conditions she would
have. Interviewee 4 have previously considered becoming a candidate but now she is afraid. Although, if the system was different, she would reconsider it.

Considering the question of whether they believe there are differences between men and women’s participation in politics, all middle-class interviewees agreed that there are more men involved than women. Interviewee 1 and 2 argued the reason for this was the social norms that discouraged women from participating because of the norms of women to be quiet and not speaking out. Interviewee 1 said that it is improving, but women’s voices are still limited, especially in rural areas. Interviewee 3 stated that in her opinion there should be no differences, but according to some norms the men are more suitable because they are stronger than women. Interviewee 4 stated that women’s education in general are lower than men’s because in the family concept women are considered to be married and they rather send men to school for higher education than women. She thinks this is one of the reasons why there are more men represented in politics than women. She believes women’s ideas are not acknowledged, except for women with higher education, but between them and men it is still unequal.

“I don’t know why they discriminate women” (interviewee 4, 9/5-19, Phnom Penh)

All interviewees believe that there are differences between middle-class women and working-class women regarding knowledge of politics. They believe there are different ideas and world views of the two groups of women. Interviewee 1 and 2 believe that women without university education generally are less critical and possess less knowledge before making political decisions. They are easier to manipulate and therefore believe in the ruling party who tries to persuade them. Interviewee 2 used the word “brainwashed” to describe how these women might have been manipulated into act in certain political manners. She also described how less educated women in poorer, remote areas can even be bribed to cast votes on the ruling party by being offered rice or even money for their votes. Interviewee 3 and interviewee 4 claimed they were not interested nor had much previous knowledge in politics before attending University. Interviewee 3 argues that it also depends on the place. She believes that people are more aware and possess more knowledge in politics in Phnom Penh than they have in rural areas, but it also depends on the conditions of the area.

“They [uneducated women] think their ideas are right, and they express it, but actually it’s really wrong.” (Interviewee 3, 9/5-19, Phnom Penh)
Interviewee 3 also believes that women with education are braver regarding speaking out about politics than those without further education. Interviewee 4 also stated that working-class women just work and fear talking about politics even if some would want to express themselves, whereas middle-class women talks more because they know how to express themselves in the right ways. She also mentions that women with no further education can express opinions without having enough knowledge to back up their arguments. Interviewee 1 on the other hand does not believe that there is a difference between the groups concerning the participation through voting. Interviewee 1 believes that educated women are braver regarding to raising their voices and that they are given more chances to speak. Interviewee 2 also believes there is a difference between the groups, especially considering the economic factors since poor people might receive rice, sarongs or money for their votes. Interviewee 3 believes it is different as in educated women are more likely to vote than uneducated since they do not know what to vote for. She thinks that some of them do not care about politics and that they believe that whether they vote or not it will remain the same. Interviewee 4 stated that women with higher education see the purposes and benefits of voting for a certain party, while women with lower education do not know about the objectives of the parties and the ruling party try to affect those people. She says they could not convince women with higher education in the same way. The ruling party offer gifts, money and sarongs, to convince the people to vote. Interviewee 4 has experienced this by being invited to meetings to get these gifts.

“Some political parties, they promise to them to build a road... then they [the voters] think that it’s good for their commune [...] and then they will vote for them and after that when the chief of the commune and Sangkat was elected, but after that there’s no something that they promised before” (Interviewee 4, 9/5-19, Phnom Penh)

When it comes to women’s membership of political organization both interviewee 1 and 2 believes there are differences between the two groups of women. They argue that women without further education are more silent and does not protest but always accept and follow others without critical thinking. Interviewee 2 added that regarding membership of political organizations women with education base it on rationality where they can base it on the benefits of the membership, whereas those without university education would just follow others, join the parties that neighbors or family joins. Interviewee 3 and 4 had no knowledge regarding this question.
Whether there are differences between the two social classes of women concerning membership in non-political organizations was more difficult for the interviewees to answer. Interviewee 1 was the only one thinking there are differences, stating that the educational level is a factor, but not the sole determining factor. To her knowledge, women with higher education would join a non-political organization because of their understanding of the current political system and those with lower education are more likely to choose organizations with clearer benefits for them. Interviewee 2 and 3 did not know. Interviewee 4 think it is the same between these two groups.

4.1.3 Hay’s type 1: Participation through voting, communication and membership
All interviewees with higher education have voted in elections, but regarding the membership in any political parties the answer of interviewee 1 was not a straight yes or no. On paper she was registered in the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), but not completely by free will. Her mother had registered her ID card by the chief of the commune where they live, which is CPP controlled, in order to make it easier for the family to get approval for taking loans or travel somewhere. Under different circumstance she would not voluntarily be registered in the party. The rest of the interviewees were not members of any party.

Both interviewee 1 and interviewee 2 had communicated with candidates from political parties within work-related circumstances. Interviewee 3 had not communicated with candidates of political parties intentionally because they are part of the parties, but some of her friends who favors parties might be members of those parties. Interviewee 4 had consciously communicated with party candidates through seminars and workshops which were work-related. For example, she has communicated with a minister regarding LGBT-rights. Although, considering personal relations with political candidates, none of the interviewees knows anyone personally.

4.1.4 Hay’s type 2: Participation through agenda impact
When I asked interviewee 1 and 2 what they had heard about protesting the answers were many, but none of them had protested themselves. Interviewee 1 stated that it is not a country of democracy in practice and gave an example of a friend protesting and then was blacklisted but continued to raise his voice. She had also heard about women protesting and gave an example of a girl she had seen on the news who is known for protesting. Interviewee 2 had a memory of her own where the family had to leave their house because of the violent protests outside which caused deaths, demonstrating potential consequences of protesting. Interviewee 3 had heard of the protests against the abolition of the oppositional party but did not know anyone participating and had not participated herself. While interviewee 4 had not known anyone protesting nor had
protested herself, she did consult workers before they went out on a strike by providing them with information.

Both interviewee 1 and 2 have tried to impact the agenda by academic means through their theses in hope of improving policies. Interviewee 1 promoted women’s rights where she gave recommendations for the government to improve policies within the field. Interviewee 2 urged for the freedom of associations. This was a very sensitive issue at the time due to laws concerning NGOs. Therefore, her academic supervisor was skeptical of the subject in concerns of her own security, but she thought it was an important matter and continued the research. Interviewee 3 had not promoted for any interests but said she had discussed certain issues with friends and family. On the contrary, interviewee 4 had lobbied for interests through negotiations with employers when working for the trade union.

There were difficulties receiving answers about whether the interviewees had openly supported any decisions from the government or not, likely because of their disagreement with the government. Interviewee 1 led the conversation towards criticism against the government and stated that the government created laws to benefit their own interest. Although, she ended up saying that the constitutional law is good, but it is not implemented in practice. Interviewee 2 admitted that she had openly supported some decisions to a certain extent, but also mentioned negative factors such as limited freedom of expression and rejection from the administration of the institution where they worked regarding discussion of certain issues, for example concerning LGBT rights. Registrations of Cambodian culture with the UNESCO world heritage and economics were decisions she had openly supported through social media and her thesis, in which she stated support for some laws. She means that the laws themselves are not a total failure, but normally some interpretations and implementations of them. Interviewee 3 has openly shown support with her friends concerning non-sensitive issues, for example she has supported the new law that punishes those who insults the king since many people have disrespected him, but she does not fully supporting it, she also oppose it to some extent. She has shown this support through social media. Interviewee 4 has not openly shown support but has discussed certain issues with friends and colleagues.

4.1.5 Hay’s type 3: Participation through opposition to formal governmental practices, processes and outcomes

When it comes to boycotting elections, it is an occurrence both interviewee 1 and 2 were aware of. Interviewee 1 had not herself participated in boycotting, nor known anyone personally that had boycotted elections. Although she had seen a lot of people doing it through social media.
Interviewee 2’s answer was similar, although her husband did boycott an election. She expressed that people have the right both to vote and to not vote. Interviewee 3 had also heard of boycotting since she had worked as an observer in the election and experienced people from the village who did not participate. She had not boycotted the election herself though. Interviewee 4 knew friends who had boycotted the election because of the oppositional party that was banned from participating as candidates in the election. During the national election interviewee 4 was abroad and could not participate, but she stated that if she would have been in the country, she would probably have boycotted the election.

The answers concerning expression of opinions in social settings were in general that it is something you keep within the family and carefully talk about due to insecurities if someone connected to the ruling party would hear or misinterpret any negative opinions about the CPP. Both interviewee 1 and 2 agreed to this and said that you should even be careful talking about politics among friends. Yet, interviewee 2 was organized in seminars and training for students where for example internet freedom and academic freedom was discussed. She had also taken part in discussions about how the government’s interference can affect in the justice of Khmer Rouge victims. Interviewee 3 used to share non-biased information about social issues on social media. Interviewee 4 explained similarly that she would sometimes express herself on social media in an acceptable way by “hiding the message”, meaning that people would understand the message but without her expressing it literally. She explained that some people who had posted something on social media would later get a phone call by the police and sometimes be imprisoned.

“We heard that some people, they post about the politics on social media and then the police call them to talk... and keep them in the jail” (Interviewee 4, 9/5-19, Phnom Penh)

Interviewee four 4 also expressed opinions with friends and co-workers.

4.1.6 Hay’s type 4: Drawing attention to political issues
Interviewee 1 has drawn public attention to the issue of women’s discrimination through her organization where she has been involved with campaigns and organized performances and gender training to eliminate women’s discrimination, where they reach out to the public for example through social media. Interviewee 2 has raised public attention to the issue of garment workers where she advocates to others about the social responsibility for global friends in other developing countries, such as the case with garment workers in Cambodia. She advocated for
this issue through her platform of colleagues and students. She has also raised awareness about the freedom of associations, which she has done through publications. Through publications she has also drawn attention to migrant workers in Cambodia, in which she has called for discussions to find solutions for these issues. Interviewee 3 said that she has done it before, but that she has forgotten what it was about. Interviewee 4 has exposed labor issues by helping workers with their reports to the government officer, explaining the laws to them and consulting them to help the workers getting what they want.

4.2 The working-class women
4.2.1 Views on interest and participation in politics
Interviewee 5 does not have an interest in politics, which interviewee 6 first answered as well, but after talking about it she realized that she does have an interest in politics regarding societal issues and trying to change these through political actions. Similarly, interviewee 8 said no to having an interest in politics but stated that she is interested in social issues. She added that she is not brave or strong enough to express herself.

“I’m not brave. When people don’t agree in any things or want to express anything openly, they might have problems, so they don’t do it.” (Interviewee 8, 8/5-19, Phnom Penh)

Interviewee 7 said she had a political interest but not enough time for it.

Interviewee 5 does not think of herself as participating in politics, except for voting which she considered as being a kind of politics. Interviewee 6 also answered no to the question of whether she was participating in politics, but when I asked her if she considered voting and campaigning for social justices as being politics, she did consider it as a kind of politics as well. Interviewee 7 did not consider herself as participating in politics. Interviewee 8 also said no first, but then said that voting relates to politics because she wants to change how the government leads the country, which is why she is boycotting.

Interviewee 5 is not a member of any non-political organization. The other interviewees were all members in non-political organizations such as a local community of housekeepers. Interviewee 6 expressed that they campaign on labor days and human rights days where they have banners and are walking around trying to advocate for better conditions for those working too much and with no vacations. Interviewee 8 described that they had campaigns to recruit more members, which she had not joined. She also stated that the community worked as support for their members also concerning private matters, giving an example of support given to an
employee whose husband left her while being pregnant. Interviewee 7 was organized within a trade union to protect workers’ rights and to increase their salaries.

4.2.2 Views on opportunities and differences in politics
Regarding opportunities for participating in politics interviewee 5, 6 and 7 stated that they do not have time to participate due to work. Interviewee 6 added the limitation of expression of opinions is also a restriction for participation because of fear. Interviewee 8 does not think she is given the right opportunities but did not go into detail.

Being a candidate in any election is nothing either one of interviewee 5, 6 or 8 would consider, only interviewee 7 would if she would have had more time. Interviewee 6 believed there was a need of possessing higher education to be a candidate, otherwise she would have wanted to, like interviewee 8 who said her competence in politics was too low.

Interviewee 5 and 7 believes that there are differences between men and women’s participation in politics. Interviewee 5 stated that the difference is when it comes to their points of views and women’s ideas are less supported in comparison to men’s ideas and interviewee 7 thinks it is because it is easier for men since women have the family to take care of. Interviewee 6’s opinion is that there should be no difference between the two sexes and interviewee 8 believes that there is no difference between the sexes but rather depends on their commitments in political participation.

Difference between women with higher and lower education is that the women with higher education possess more knowledge about politics and those with lower level of education might have less knowledge about politics according to interviewee 5 and 6. Interviewee 5 believes that women with higher education express themselves with reasoning and rationality in contrast to uneducated women who are more irrational concerning politics. Interviewee 5 states that she does not have much knowledge about politics since she has not participated in any meetings or received much information about politics and therefore has a hard time answering the question regarding whether there are differences between the different educational groups of tendencies to vote, membership in political organizations and non-political organizations, which corresponds to the opinions of interviewee 6 as well. Interviewee 7 agreed regarding knowledge of politics and said that women with lower education just follow others. Concerning differences between the two groups about voting, interviewee 7 thinks that those with higher education have their own perspectives on what good leaders are, whereas women with lower education might vote for the party that they have received gifts from. Interviewee 7 did not know about
differences of political memberships between the educational groups. Regarding differences of membership in non-political organizations she believed that women with higher education are strong enough to support their arguments with knowledge, different to women with lower education who are not strong enough and therefore afraid.

“Because I know of myself, in company... She [uneducated women] don’t know how to speak, so when she speaks, she is scared or maybe speak wrong, or something like that.” (interviewee 7, 8/5-19, Phnom Penh)

Interviewee 8 believed similarly that women with higher education have more knowledge of what is going on politically, can make predictions, they possess knowledge of research and are more aware of the outside world and what other countries look like. They have greater knowledge of how to develop the country. Those with lower education they don’t go anywhere so they have less knowledge of the outside world and regarding development of the country they have no knowledge. Concerning the tendency to vote and membership of political organizations she does not know if there are any differences, partly because she has never joined any political parties. She does believe that there are differences though relating to membership of non-political organizations, where she believes that women with higher education have more knowledge regarding policies and organizations.

4.2.3 Hay’s type 1: Participation through voting, communication and membership

Interviewee 5 of the working-class women responded “no” to many of the questions regarding Hay’s type one of political participation, except regarding voting. Interviewee 6, 7 and 8 also votes in elections. Interviewee 5 and 6 stated that they have voted for an oppositional party because they want the leadership of the country to change. Interviewee 7 and 8 do not support the ruling party either.

After receiving information from interviewee 2 from middle-class women about bribes from the ruling party towards poor people in rural areas to win votes, this question was added to the questionnaire. Interviewee 5 and 6 were aware of the bribes from the ruling party. Interviewee 5 was offered gifts until she joined a meeting and interviewee 6’s family has been offered sarongs, but they did not vote for the party.

“It is based on ourselves that we vote for them or not, it is up to us” (interviewee 6, 7/5-19, Phnom Penh)

Interviewee 7 and 8 had also heard of gifts from the ruling party for votes. Interviewee 8 had been offered gifts but did not vote for them.
Neither interviewee 5, 6 or 7 had any personal relations to candidates within the political parties, but interviewee 5 and interviewee 7 on the other hand knew who candidates were from the news. Interviewee 8 knows candidates from a political party who are all male leaders of the commune. None of the interviewees had knowingly communicated with anyone from a political party and none of them are members of any political organizations.

4.2.4 Hay’s type 2: Participation through agenda impact
Regarding protesting, interviewee 5 had not heard anything about it, interviewee 6 and 8 had heard that the police stopped protesters, but they neither know anyone joining nor have joined protests themselves. Interviewee 7 was the only one protesting herself. The protest lasted for three days and targeted towards the employers to improve workers’ rights and to increase their salaries.

Regarding impacting the agenda setting, interviewee 5, 6 and 8 said that they have not urged for any changes regarding social issues. However, even if interviewee 6 said she had not urged for social changes, she has done it unconsciously through a community of housekeepers. There she has joined campaigns on human rights days and labor days. She has walked around with banners and signs to draw attention to people working for the government and those who do not have the same rights regarding vacation and working hours as workers with international employers. Interviewee 7 has tried to promote interests through the union.

Concerning open support for political decisions it is not something interviewee 5 or 6 has done, interviewee 5 because she is not interested and interviewee 6 because she has perceived most decisions as negative. Interviewee 7 and 8 have not because they are not supportive of the ruling party.

4.2.5 Hay’s type 3: Participation through opposition to formal governmental practices, processes and outcomes
Formal boycotting of elections is not something interviewee 5 is able to do, despite her will to boycott, due to protection of her family. If she would not register to vote, this would show and any documentations that the family would need from the commune chief would be affected. Apart from her own perspective of boycotting she has not heard about it in society in general because she has been too busy working to be able to watch the news. Interviewee 6 and 7 have neighbors that have boycotted elections. Interviewee 6 also informed me about the differences of possibilities to boycott between different working fields. For example, if she would boycott, her employer would not check whether her finger has ink or not after the election since it is a foreign employer who would not judge her for boycotting. A factory worker on the other hand
who does not have ink on the finger after the election, might face consequences from the boss, such as receiving less in salary or other punishments. She did not know why, but this is what she knows. Interviewee 7 said that she would want to boycott but are too afraid. On the contrary, interviewee 8 had boycotted the election with her friends when the oppositional party got dissolved and they have not experienced any consequences.

Interviewee 5 had not openly expressed political opinions in any social setting because she is not interested in politics and if she would express her opinion about wanting to change the rulers of Cambodia, she is afraid that she might get problems. Discussions with neighbors before elections was interviewee 6’s way of expressing political opinions in social settings. Interviewee 7 stated that she was too busy with work to express opinions in social settings. Interviewee 8 discuss politics with friends supporting the same parties, she would never express opinions to neighbors since her area is full of soldiers, and she is afraid of consequences.

4.2.6 Hay’s type 4: Drawing attention to political issues
Interviewee 5 had not drawn public attention to any social matters. On the contrary, interviewee 6 has joined campaigns that aims at changing the conditions for workers and an environmental organization that tries to reduce plastic use by reaching out through campaigns and videos. Interviewee 7 said that she had not drawn any public attention to a social issue, but she has protested for workers’ rights through a union. Interviewee 8 also said no but concerning political matters she feels angry sometimes, but it is difficult for her to express herself publicly. The housekeeping community draws public attention to issues such as working hours and salaries for the workers, but interviewee 8 has not joined campaigns related to this.

4.3 Summary
To sum up the results, the women’s answers will be structured according to differences, similarities and mixed results between the educational groups.

4.3.1 Similarities
Almost all interviewees except one of the working-class women were interested in politics. All interviewees were, according to themselves, participating in politics except for one of the middle-class women and one of the working-class women, although there were differences in understanding the question where most of the women from the working-class changed their answer after an explanation of participation in politics. There were also similarities concerning membership in non-political organizations, where everyone but one woman from the working-class interviewees was involved somehow. All women agreed that there were differences between the educational groups of women regarding knowledge of politics and critical thinking.
which therefore means there are similarities in the views, but also refers to a difference between the two groups. Most of the interviewed women believed that uneducated women would vote for the ruling party because of the differences in knowledge, but none of the interviewed women supported the ruling party.

Both groups of the women were voting in the elections, but none of them for the ruling party. None of the interviewees except for one of the working-class women have had any personal relations to a political candidate. Considering impacting the agenda, the results were similar with three of the middle-class women and two of the working-class women had urged for interests concerning different issues. Most of the interviewees have not boycotted any elections except for one of the working-class women and one of the middle-class women would have if she had been home for the election.

4.3.2 Differences
All women agreed there are differences between the educational groups concerning knowledge of politics. Concerning their interest in politics, there were differences in understanding the question where most working-class women changed their answers after an explanation of what politics can include, such as raising social issues and voting in elections. Regarding the question whether there are differences between men and women’s participation in politics all middle-class women said yes, but only two working-class women did, another one of them referred to her belief that there should be no difference and one stating there is no difference. Another difference is conditions for voting, where the working-class women had experienced bribes from the ruling party for their votes, which only one of the middle-class women, coming from a rural area, had experienced. Most middle-class women had communicated with political parties, but none of the working-class had. Two of the middle-class women had openly supported decisions of the government, whereas none of the working-class women had.

4.3.3 Mixed results
Regarding opportunities for participation the results are mixed since the limit of free expression concerns both groups, but the ones of the middle-class mentioned it more than the women of the working-class, who mostly argued the lack of time as a limit of opportunities. Whether the women would consider becoming candidates depended on the political situation according to the middle-class women, whereas the working-class women referred to the lack of time and lack of ability and education. None of the middle-class women had protested, but two of the working-class ones had. Lastly, all middle-class women and two of the working-class women had drawn attention to political issues.
5. Discussion
In this section empirical findings will be discussed and analyzed in relation to intersectionality, previous research and the current political and equality situation in Cambodia.

5.1 Interest in and knowledge of politics
The overall impression after interviewing the women from the working-class is that the statements the middle-class women made about uneducated women not possessing much knowledge before making political decisions proved to correlate to the perceptions of all the working-class interviewees. Even two of the working-class women supported these presumptions by stating they would have wanted to participate as candidates if they had the ability and educational knowledge. Although, the preconceptions by the middle-class women of working-class women to be easier to manipulate by the ruling party, did not seem to correspond with any of the working-class interviewees who all were voting for oppositional parties and were aware of the political oppression of the ruling party. Whether the prejudice is accurate or not is difficult to say. On one hand, most of the working-class interviewees stated to not possessing much knowledge regarding politics. On the other hand, most of them seemed aware of the political climate and social problems in society and they participated to work against these issues. Another factor is the academical background, which enhances the middle-class women’s knowledge and confidence to speak out compared to the working-class women. This relates to another factor pointed out by most of the women – that less educated women were more afraid of speaking their minds concerning politics. Another difference shown in knowledge of politics was considering the questions, which were in general easier interpreted by the middle-class women than by the working-class women. This might be evidence of the middle-class women having more knowledge within the field due to their academical background.

Almost all women were interested in politics, with all middle-class women and all but one of the working-class women. The rest of the working-class women thought they were not interested in politics, but after explaining what politics could mean and include, they changed their minds since they are interested in social issues for example.

The high absence of women in the school system as presented in the introduction is alarming concerning gender equality and between social classes. No wonder the deficiency of empowerment the women feel with lack of knowledge and courage to participate in politics when not possessing any deeper knowledge to support opinions and ideas. An increase of
women within education is vital for them to feel more comfortable expressing concerns and participating in politics.

In relation to earlier research on differences of political participation between social groups it makes the analysis interesting since research has shown that women with higher education are more likely to be involved with political activism than women without further education, which is not the case concerning protests where only the working-class had done it. Although, as presented in the introduction, research has shown that women engaging in labor forces are also more likely to participate politically than unemployed, which correlates here since the demonstrations and other forms of participation had occurred amongst working-class women. Regarding drawing attention to political issues on the other hand, does connect to earlier research showing that educated women are more likely to engage in politics in this context than those without.

5.2 Opportunities for female political participation
As commune chief Soknov argues, as described in the introduction, there is a need for perception change, proven by the existing fear of discussing politics which was demonstrated in the interview responses. Her statement is that active commune work such as women joining political parties and being candidates is necessary to have greater female participation and representation in politics. With this said, there is an obvious need for change of the perceptions of women both by men and females, to change perceptions and increase female political participation. What complicates the issue further is the current political environment, which is not only unfair to specifically women, but to anyone opposing the ruling party or from certain social classes. None of the interviewed women agreed with the ruling party, which then complicates women’s participation as candidates and for political engagement through any of Hay’s types of participation since their opinions are prohibited. This fact makes it even more difficult for them to participate since they are frightened and cannot express their opinions due to the oppression of expression, and because of the feeling of deficient knowledge or discrimination.

Interviewee 4 of the middle-class group stated that she is not participating in politics because of the incapacity to vote for the party she wants, which is probably something other would agree with. Hay on the other hand, would mean that the statement to not vote by boycotting could also be an active statement, and a way of participating under circumstances where you do not agree with how the election is operating.
Possibilities to participate in politics differed between the two groups of women. While the middle-class women all participated, among the working-class women it differed but most of them stated not have time because of work. This shows that there are class-based differences for opportunities between these social groups regarding participation. The middle-class women seemed to have more time for politics in comparison. The women of higher education also seem to have better opportunities to affect politicians, both because of their level of education and social status and because of their careers where they get in contact with politicians more than uneducated women.

5.3 Norms and prejudices of working-class women
It is not only the middle-class women who believe the working-class women know less, have less to say about politics, and are more afraid, but also the working-class women themselves believe this. They do not only have a lower rank in society because they are women, but also because they are assumed to know less as a result of inadequate education. The working-class group are assumed both by the middle-class women, and by themselves, to vote for the ruling party, which none of the interviewed women would. This clearly shows the prejudice against uneducated working-class women of not possessing neither the knowledge, nor the bravery, to participate in politics, which is not completely true about the interviewed working-class women. Still, these women believe that those two factors determine the differences between educated and uneducated women. In parts it could be true, such as regarding the cleaners who were too afraid to partake in my interviews, or regarding the one of the working-class interviewees who had not much interest or knowledge of politics. All the other interviewees, on the contrary, participated in and had opinions about politics that are worth sharing. One of them had demonstrated, the others had joined organizations, all of them voted for oppositional parties – or even boycotted the election due to unfairness. This shows that they both have courage and knowledge for political decisions, but they all need the perceptions for empowerment and confidence in themselves. While two of the working-class women had even joined demonstrations, none of the middle-class women had, despite most of them arguing that uneducated women are less brave than women with further education.

5.4 The intersectionality perspective
The differences between the opportunities of the two groups of women’s as shown above shows that there is a need for intersectionality when analyzing this issue. Not only does women in general have a worse position in society, but the women without further education has an even worse one. Just like de los Reyes asserts that it is not just the gender that determines inequalities,
but also other factors such as social groups, matches the case of Cambodia. There is thus a need to understand that there is more than just one ground of discrimination when it comes to the women’s political rights since the discrimination of women occurs on one level, then discrimination of less educated women on another. Therefore, there is a need for this inclusive theory that consider combinations of different inequality categories. As Bagilhole stressed with intersectionality potentially being valuable for development and policy planning for diversity legislation and equal opportunities, this is an important consideration for the development of equality within politics of Cambodia.

Something noticeable during one of the interviews was the simplification made in this study by only using these two groups of women. Even if the maids had other conditions than the women with higher education, there are other groups that might have even worse conditions considering the political life, such as factory workers or professions working for the government. It is obvious that there is a need for intersectionality when analyzing the opportunities and realities for women within different social groups since there are differences in opportunities. As Lilja argues with the categories of men and women being oversimplified and overgeneralized shows that there is a need to evolve other categories, for example different social classes and professions, to find the roots of discrimination.

5.5 Courage of expression
Is there a difference in the courage of expression regarding political views between the two classes of women? One interesting opinion is the one of the middle-class interviewees who stated that women with no education to a greater extent would keep quiet about political opinions. This appeared true to some extent when the women without university education within an institute in Phnom Penh all declined or cancelled interviews with me about their political participation. Could the fact of the institution being public have played any role in this? One might ask why there was such a difference of willingness to participate in interviews between the women with and without university background within the same institution. Maybe it is easier for the employers to replace a cleaner than a researcher, or the researchers have more of a power role and more knowledge of research and the subject of political participation and therefore have the courage to speak out. Nonetheless, this presumption about uneducated to be quieter about political opinions correlated with the beliefs of the working-class women. Although this appeared to be true to some extent since the lack of education gave women less support for their opinions, they still participated and expressed opinions through different means.
5.6 Interviewer role

In the interviewer role it was difficult to question their answers too much under some circumstances; for example, with interviewee 7 of the working-class women; she said to have not drawn any public attention to social matters, but through organizing in a union for labor rights I believe that she has. When misunderstandings appeared maybe I should have stood my ground and continued to ask since it could have led to more answers, but I let go easily because I did not want to push too far. This might be easier to overcome after gaining more experience of gathering empirical material.

If similar studies are to be conducted in the future, there might be a need for more time for the interviews and more preparations regarding the questions for all interviewees to understand them better. There is a risk of questions not being understood accurately, which means that respondents could have been different under other circumstances. For example, regarding interviewee 7 who had protested and engaged in a trade union for workers’ rights. It is difficult to say why she responded like this, if it was because she did not see it that way, forgot or of other reasons. At the same time, it could be difficult to push too much with the questions since it is a difficult topic and because my fear for being interpreted as patronizing or insensitive.
6. Conclusion

The main differences between the two educational groups of women are mostly concerning opportunities in and knowledge of politics. However, due to the lack of knowledge in politics, they were not completely aware of themselves as participating. The educated women also thought that working-class women participate less, which contributes to the prejudice against uneducated women. Hence, the differences of opportunities and knowledge of political participation needs to be emphasized to change these structural discriminations against uneducated women. This shows that gender inequality is not the only problem in the political context of Cambodia. Major changes need to be done on several levels, for all social groups and for all genders. Norms and perceptions in the society needs to develop towards equal conditions for all citizens. The changes ought to occur in both men and women, for women to be more included and empowered in politics. How do we change norms and perceptions of a whole society? And how can the female participation increase if the political environment is intolerant of certain ideas and opinions? With the oppositional party being banned and people with oppositional opinions being punished there is a vast need for change in the freedom of expression and the political system as well.

Since the issue is not only concerning differences between men and women, but also between women of different educational groups, the importance of education must be emphasized to change the inequality between educational groups. For all women to feel empowered, to feel like their opinions matter and for them to feel comfortable to express their views, education for all women is a necessity. Actions for guaranteeing women education is critical for their participation in politics and for the Cambodian society to develop. Therefore, intersectionality needs to be applied in analyses to change these structures and education for women is a prerequisite to create equal opportunities for everyone.

Further studies/investigation

After conducting research of this issues within the capital of Cambodia, further studies could be of comparisons between rural and central areas or between workers from public and private sectors regarding women’s participation in politics. Other suggestions for further studies would be of how to practically change conceptions and norms of inequality in Cambodia, how to change the political climate towards democratization and how to ensure freedom of expression.
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List of interviews

Middle-class women
Interviewee 1, 22/4-19, Phnom Penh, 60 minutes
Interviewee 2, 22/4-19, Phnom Penh, 50 minutes
Interviewee 3, 9/5-19, Phnom Penh, 40 minutes
Interviewee 4, 9/5-19, Phnom Penh, 59 minutes

Working-class women
Interviewee 5, 6/5-19, Phnom Penh, 59 minutes
Interviewee 6, 7/5-19, Phnom Penh, 68 minutes
Interviewee 7, 8/5-19, Phnom Penh, 30 minutes
Interviewee 8, 8/5-19, Phnom Penh, 65 minutes