

Role of the Women in the “Arab Spring”

A Research Paper

Emily Jensen

Salt Lake Community College

Author Note:

This paper was prepared for Regional Geography 1300, in the fall semester, taught by Adam Dastrup.

Abstract

This paper explores the “Arab Spring” or the 2011 Middle East Uprising in search of the role women have played in these monumental events. In this paper, the specific role women have had in the demographics, economics, and social media will be discussed. In addition background information on the topic will be provided in attempt to inform the readers. The Role of Women will be explored through the different countries and will be explained in great detail.

Keywords: Women, Arab Spring, 2011

Role of the Women in the “Arab Spring”

A Research Paper

Throughout the world, newspapers, magazines, and many professors have looked into the Arab Spring and the potential effects and consequences that could follow. In addition to that, many geologists examine the role of women, youth, media, and other influences in the act and what could have happened had they not been a part of the movement. One major influence in the Arab Spring were the women in these countries. Women have played a very substantial role in the way things have played out and will continue to do so.

The Arab Spring

The term “Arab Spring” refers to the democratic uprisings that arose independently and spread across the Arab world in 2011. The movement originated in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly took hold in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. In Tunisia, the Tunisian Revolution, or Jasmine Revolution, began on Dec. 17, 2010 after Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old Tunisian man, set himself on fire in front of a local municipal office. Earlier that day, the same man had his cart confiscated by Tunisian police and was beat because he lacked a permit. This man had earlier gone to file a complaint, was ignored and then proceeded to set himself on fire to spread the idea through the country. This act of defiance set the scene for a country wide revolution whose effects have not yet been determined (Personal knowledge).

Women and Their Impact

During the Arab Spring, women rose up to take on leadership roles. According to *Today's Zaman*, while the reshaping of social and political structures was happening throughout the Middle East, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning activist from Yemen explained that women will acquire more influence in political and social landscapes in return for their great efforts in bringing down the authoritarian regimes. A story is explained where Karman, a mother of three, took to the streets with many university students to push for a regime change, as a response, the regime was brutal; however, they did not give up. Because of their pressure and their protesting, President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to give up his power to the vice president and fled the country. While Karman relates success to social media, she explained that the way it has portrayed Yemen has infuriated her, which was why she had to step up and do something. Karman explains that Arab women have achieved historic successes in redefining their position in the political and social aspect and that “Women set a good example by appearing at the forefront of the revolution.” In addition to this source, The Council on Foreign Relations explains that women's role has been just as important and meaningful, but in different ways. They explain that their participation brought legitimacy and attention to the movements that opposed what they were doing. These actions defined women and showed that they are more influential than originally anticipated. By women taking a stand and revolting against the governments that are causing them so many issues, women have voiced that they *can* have an impact on the issues that are happening. In this, women have begun to take on leadership positions that will eventually allow them to make an even bigger impact.

Women after the Arab Spring

On the contrary to the leadership roles women embraced during the Arab Spring, women also faced a different fate during this issue. According to the *Washington Post* women had to

endure much anguish in the form of rape, detention, and lack of respect and appreciation. The article explains how, in Syria, rapes and other assaults on women had increased during the last few months that the issue was going on, indicating an escalation of violence by the government and its allies. Families in Syria have been known to kill raped female members, and if they live, they are not allowed to marry; however, because of their role in the issue, a group of women have decided to challenge that rule and have pledged to marry many women who have been victims of rape. In Libya, a similar story of rape as a weapon of war has played out. An investigation by the International Criminal Court in early June found evidence that Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi ordered mass rapes. The findings came three months after a woman named Iman Al-Obeidi burst into a Tripoli hotel to tell journalists she had been raped at the hands of the Gaddafi's militia. Countless women across the region have also been detained or disappeared, including at least nine female doctors and four female nurses who were seized by authorities in Bahrain. Many women who have protested alongside men despite the dangers also feel that their efforts have gone unappreciated. One Egyptian protester told EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton during a visit to Tahrir Square: “The men were keen for me to be here when we were demanding that Mubarak should go. ... But now he has gone, they want me to go home.” In addition to this, *Huffington Post* explains how Arab Spring has “blown winds of change in the Middle East” and that there is no doubt that the direction of these countries will affect the personal rights of women involved in the Arab Spring. Currently, women can be seen on the streets as a consequence of participating, while some have taken to the streets to call for more rights. Many women participated in protests, but their momentum and efforts have not yet played out to become leadership roles or significant roles in the government. For example, female representation in parliaments after the Arab Spring has been either little or none at all. Though the rewards of their action has not yet been seen, it is bound to come and be something more amazing than anticipated.

Conclusion

Through researching and studying the effects and what took place during the Arab Spring, it is evident that women played a major part in the success and events that took place, although many are not sure of the effects yet, there is bound to be some positive effects that happened as a result of the many diligent and committed women. The Arab Spring will and has helped to shape the future of women.

Works Cited

Ayasun, A. (2012, March 15). *Women take leadership role in arab spring*. Retrieved from <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-274449-women-take-key-leadership-role-in-arab->

Coleman, I. (2012, March). *Women's voices in the arab spring*. Retrieved from <http://vitalvoices.org/blog/2012/01/womens-voices-arab-spring-isobel-coleman>

Flock, E. (2011, June 21). Women in the arab spring: The other side of the story. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/women-in-the-arab-spring-the-other-side-of-the-story/2011/06/21/AG32qVeH_blog.html

Sweis, R. (2012, March 16). Women after the Arab spring. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rana-f-sweis/women-after-the-arab-spring_b_1349604.html