

# Refusing the Backseat: Women as Drivers of the Arab Uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen

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Georgetown University  
School of Foreign Service in Qatar

Name: Aminah Kandar  
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Advisor: Prof. Kai-Henrik Barth  
Class: INAF 382

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## Introduction

"The people want the fall of the regime" is a slogan that reverberated throughout the Arab Spring uprisings in the last two years. These interconnected protests were comprised of men, women and even children who demanded freedom, economic equality and democracy.<sup>1</sup> This paper examines the role of women in the protests and assesses the extent to which they drove the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. As seen through video footage, photos, news reports and eye witness accounts, women played a frontline role in the protests that swept across the Arab world.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I suggest that women were active participants in the Tunisian uprisings; whereas, in Egypt and Yemen, they were among the main drivers of the uprisings. The term *driver* indicates that women pushed, directed and guided the protests with vigorous determination, meaning they were key organizers and leaders

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<sup>1</sup> "The Arab Awakening: The Death of Fear," Video, 1:00:00, from Al Jazeera English, posted February 20, 2012.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2011/04/20114483425914466.html>; Michelle Penner Angrist, "Morning in Tunisia," in *The New Arab Revolt: What Happened, What It Means, and What Comes Next*, ed. Gideon Rose, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011), 75.

<sup>2</sup> *After the Revolution, Arab Women Seek More Rights*. Washington, D.C., United States: National Public Radio, 2011, ProQuest ID: 914956818; Isobel Coleman, "Women and the Arab Revolts," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 18 (2011): 228, 215, 226; Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012). 184; Mariama Diallo, *Women on Front Line of Arab Spring Protests* (Lanham, United States: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc., March 6, 2012), ProQuest ID: 926557800; Robin Morgan, "Women of the Arab Spring," *Ms*, Spring 2011, 21, ProQuest ID: 864279572; "Now is the time; Women and the Arab awakening," *The Economist*, October 15, 2011, ProQuest ID: 898518373; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Disquiet and despair: the gender sub-texts of the 'Arab spring'," *OpenDemocracy*, June 26, 2012, ProQuest ID: 1032623295; Janine Di Giovanni, "New Hopes in Arab World; Popular Revolts Energized Women Across Middle East, Raising Expectations," *The International Herald Tribune*, December 4, 2012, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>; Kathryn Blaze Carlson, "Still Fighting for Their Freedom; 'No Concrete Evidence' That Middle Eastern Women Are Better Off Because of Arab Spring," *National Post*, December 1, 2012, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

from the onset of the protests and throughout.<sup>3</sup> This paper demonstrates that, in Egypt and Yemen, women were more than simply supporters, enablers and participants, as the uprisings would have progressed and looked differently without them.

For the purpose of this paper, I use the following criteria to determine if women were drivers of the uprisings: first, women initiated the initial protests of the uprisings; second, women organized and led protests throughout the uprisings; and third, women managed communications and social media campaigns throughout the uprisings. These criteria determine the extent to which women drove the uprising in each case study. This research suggests that, while women in Tunisia were active protest participants in the uprising, women in Egypt and Yemen were among the main drivers in their uprisings.

Women-led initiatives in the uprisings varied and included cooking meals for protesters, nursing wounds, acting as security in the protests, managing and organizing social media campaigns, working as citizen journalists and leading large-scale demonstrations against the regime.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in Egypt and Yemen, the uprisings were initiated and spearheaded by women.<sup>5</sup> A YouTube video log (vlog) of Egyptian activist Asma Mahfouz, calling Egyptians to protest, played an important role in rallying the number of protesters that participated in the January 25th, 2011

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<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary.com*, "Driver," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/driver?s=t>

<sup>4</sup> Mariama Diallo, *Women on Front Line of Arab Spring Protests* (Lanham, United States: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc., March 6, 2012), ProQuest ID: 926557800; Isobel Coleman, "Is the Arab Spring Bad for Women?" *Foreign Policy*, December 20, 2011. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/20/arab\\_spring\\_women](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/20/arab_spring_women).

<sup>5</sup> "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution," YouTube video, 4:35, posted by Iyad El-Baghdadi, February 1, 2011, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk&feature=youtube_gdata_player); "Tawakkul Karman," *The Guardian*, October 7, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/07/tawakkul-karman-profile>.

“Day of Rage” in Cairo’s Tahrir, the first protest of such magnitude.<sup>6</sup> Her vlog gained immediate attention and became widely known as the “vlog that sparked the revolution”.<sup>7</sup> Tawaakul Karman, the first Arab female Nobel Peace Prize winner, was the first to take to the streets of Yemen in protest.<sup>8</sup> As discussed in the methodology section of this paper, an in-depth comparative analysis of women activists, women-led organizations and women managed social media initiatives will determine the extent to which women drove the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen.

The Bahraini, Libyan and Syrian uprisings will not be included in this analysis for three reasons: the intense military conflict, the block on media and the heavy internet censorship. First, all three uprisings faced a violent turn of events that, in Bahrain, led to intense military crackdown and, in Libya and Syria, spiraled into civil war, forcing women out of the frontlines and increasing the complexity of a comparative analysis, making it far beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>9</sup> Second, most

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<sup>6</sup> Melissa Wall and Sahar El Zahed, “‘I’ll Be Waiting for You Guys’: A YouTube Call to Action in the Egyptian Revolution,” *International Journal of Communication*, 2011, 1334. <http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1241/609>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1336.

<sup>8</sup> Samira Shackle, “The two revolutions of Yemen’s women,” *New Statesman*, March 26, 2012, 11, ProQuest: 962436972.

<sup>9</sup> “MSF Calls For End to Bahrain Military Crackdown on Patients,” *Doctors Without Borders*, April 7, 2011.

<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/press/release.cfm?id=5170>; “Bahrain crackdown on protests in Manama’s Pearl Square,” BBC News, March 16, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12755852>; “Gulf states send forces to Bahrain following protests,” *BBC News*, March 14, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12729786>; “Military Crackdown in Bahrain,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/20110218Bahrain.html>; Sima Barmania, “Undercover medicine: treating Syria’s wounded,” *The Lancet* 379, no. 9830 (June 26, 2012): 1936–7, 1936. <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/1019028993/13B90D6513A3E251336/8?accountid=11091>; “Reaching the Most Vulnerable Amid the Violence in Syria,” *Targeted News Service*, October 12, 2012, ProQuest ID, 1113810596; Peter Beaumont, “Syrian Regime Turns Its Wrath Against Women on the Frontline of Revolution: With so Many Men Falling Victim to a Brutal

media were barred from entering all three countries, leading to a lack of information on the role of women in the protests and causing an imbalance in sources compared to Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen.<sup>10</sup> Third, while internet censorship occurred in all Arab spring countries, Bahrain, Libya and Syria became known for their frequent censorship and brutality against social media activists.<sup>11</sup>

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Government, Mothers, Wives and Daughters Are Now Risking All to Protest,” *The Observer*, May 22, 2011, [http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T16405616504&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T16405616508&cisb=22\\_T16405616507&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=143296&docNo=10](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T16405616504&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T16405616508&cisb=22_T16405616507&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=143296&docNo=10); Jon Lee Anderson, “The War Within: Letter From Syria,” *The New Yorker*, August 27, 2012, ProQuest ID: 1035592823; “Women Have Emerged as Key Players in the Arab Spring,” *The Guardian*, April 22, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/22/women-arab-spring>; “Libya: War and Rape?” *Al Jazeera*, June 29, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/06/201162964345738600.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Rosie Bsheer, “Advocacy, Uprising, and Authoritarianism in Bahrain: An Interview With Ahmed Al-Haddad,” *Jadaliyya*, January 22, 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9674/advocacy-uprising-and-authoritarianism-in-bahrain>; Michelle Norris, “Syria Steps Up Crackdown on Protesters,” *All Things Considered* (April 25, 2011), ProQuest ID: 863315628; Michael Posner, *Human Rights in Syria*, State Department Documents (Lanham, United States: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc., July 12, 2011), ProQuest ID: 876105652; Andrea Morabito, “The Trouble With Syria,” *Broadcasting & Cable* 142, no. 9 (February 27, 2012): 10, Proquest ID: 925798889; Mona Alami, “Rights: Media War Blurs Picture in Syria,” *Global Information Network*, June 1, 2011, ProQuest ID: 869519978; Eric S. Margolis, “The Dangerous Mess in Syria Grows Murkier,” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 31, no. 3 (May 2012): 40, ProQuest ID: 1030129018; “Chronology: Syria,” *The Middle East Journal* 66, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 527–531, 528, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/1046136945/abstract/13B90D6513A3E251336/6?accountid=11091>; Mohammed Bamyeh, “Is the 2011 Libyan Revolution an Exception?,” *Jadaliyya*, March 25, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1001/is-the-2011-libyan-revolution-an-exception>; “Libya: A Media Black Hole,” *Al Jazeera English*, February 26, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2011/02/2011226111327860400.html>; “North Africa; At Least Six Libyan, Four Foreign Media Workers Held,” *Africa News*, March 23, 2011, [http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21\\_T16434142952&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29\\_T16434142956&cisb=22\\_T16434142955&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8320&docNo=19](http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/lnacui2api/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T16434142952&format=GNBFI&sort=BOOLEAN&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T16434142956&cisb=22_T16434142955&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8320&docNo=19)

To better understand the significance of the Arab Spring and the ongoing sociopolitical developments in the Arab world, it is imperative to study the Arab uprisings and their implications. To do this, it is important to research who protested, why they protested and how they protested. This paper focusses on how women protested. Some scholars state that “women are key to our understanding of activism under conditions of state repression,” because they are typically responsible for community and family care and are often considered nonpolitical and nonthreatening.<sup>12</sup> Since women played a role in the uprisings, analyzing their contributions and the extent to which they participated will assist scholars in formulating policies as well as develop and refine existing theories about women and protest. Such theories include the role that women play in relation to men, the effect of domestic responsibilities as well as the effect of openness in the polity on women’s protest.

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<sup>11</sup> “World Day Against Cyber Censorship,” *Reporters Without Borders*, 2011, <http://12mars.rsf.org/en/>; “No Concessions to Media as Indiscriminate Repression Continues in Countries with Pro-democracy Protests,” *Reporters Without Borders*, April 12, 2011, [http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-no-concessions-to-media-as-12-04-2011\\_40009.html](http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-no-concessions-to-media-as-12-04-2011_40009.html); “Bahrain Added to Web Censorship Blacklist,” *Al Jazeera English*, March 13, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/03/20123136140551889.html>; “Bahrain police go on trial over death of blogger,” *BBC News*, January 12, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16511685>; Hillary Clinton, “Shutdown of the Internet in Syria,” *U.S. Department of State*, June 4, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/06/165001.htm>; Zeina Karam, “Syrian Electronic Army: Cyber Warfare From Pro-Assad Hackers,” *The Huffington Post*, September 9, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/27/syrian-electronic-army\\_n\\_983750.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/27/syrian-electronic-army_n_983750.html); Elizabeth Flock, “Syria Internet Services Shut down as Protesters Fill Streets,” *The Washington Post*, March 6, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/syria-internet-services-shut-down-as-protesters-fill-streets/2011/06/03/AGtLwxHH\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/syria-internet-services-shut-down-as-protesters-fill-streets/2011/06/03/AGtLwxHH_blog.html); Jim Cowie, “Jim Cowie: Syrian Internet Shutdown,” *The Huffington Post*, March 6, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-cowie/syrian-internet-shutdown\\_b\\_870920.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-cowie/syrian-internet-shutdown_b_870920.html)

<sup>12</sup> Rita K. Noonan, “Women Against the State: Political Opportunities and Collective Action Frames in Chile’s Transition to Democracy,” *Sociological Forum* 10, no. 1 (March 1, 1995): 81–111, 107, doi:10.2307/684759.

The importance of this project is three-fold. First, women's participation in the uprisings reflects a growing intolerance of human rights violations, socioeconomic inequalities and political discontent.<sup>13</sup> According to Foreign Policy analyst Isabel Coleman, we saw much more of a mass mobilization of women in the Arab spring uprisings compared to past protests in the Arab world.<sup>14</sup> Second, women's activism in the protests signifies a change from the previous trend of Arab women's perceived political apathy.<sup>15</sup> Examining the role that women had in the uprisings will help scholars define how women frame their political participation during civil unrest. Third, some of the gravest human rights violations are against women, putting gender issues at the forefront of the global development agenda.<sup>16</sup> Women's rights and gender

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<sup>13</sup> Sara Abbas, "Revolution Is Female: The Uprising of Women in the Arab World," *OpenDemocracy*, December 2, 2012, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/1221054161/13AE2190A366F2D76B3/46?accountid=11091>; Isobel Coleman, "Arab Women Rising: An Uncertain Future," *National Public Radio* (January 1, 2012), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/913199503/13ADAD9018F7DF8BF37/69?accountid=11091>; Kinda Mohamadieh, "No Revolutions Without Equality and Justice: The Struggle for Women's Rights in Rethinking Development in the Arab Region," *Development* 55, no. 3 (September 2012): 369–381, 369, doi:10.1057/dev.2012.28.

<sup>14</sup> Isobel Coleman, "Arab Women Rising: An Uncertain Future."

<sup>15</sup> Carla Power, "Silent No More: The Women of the Arab Revolutions," *Time World*, March 24, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2059435,00.html#ixzz2PkLLfcQL>.

<sup>16</sup> Audrey R. Chapman and Benjamin Carbonetti, "Human Rights Protections for Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups: The Contributions of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (August 2011): 682–732, , 690, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/902827589/abstract/13AE5F0483A10E95041/1?accountid=11091>; Peter Clotey, *Former U.S. President Says Women "Pivotal" in Uprisings* (Lanham, United States: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc., April 5, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/860256755/13AE2190A366F2D76B3/2?accountid=11091>; "Short History of CEDAW Convention," *United Nations*, accessed December 9, 2012, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/history.htm>; Linda Tarr-Whelan, "The Impact of the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 to 2010," *Human Rights* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 2–23, 2; "Women's Rights," *Human Rights Watch*, accessed December 9, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights>.

equality are among the top priorities of human rights organizations, making women's grievances, and their resulting political mobilization, an integral subject of study.<sup>17</sup>

Within the research on women and protest, little analysis exists on the way, and the extent to which, women protest. There are no in-depth works that exclusively compare the role of women in the Arab uprisings of Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen; therefore, this research explores a unique and untapped angle of analysis. Most importantly, there are no theories specifically on Arab women and protest; this timely research project will therefore contribute to our understanding of the recent and ongoing uprisings. By examining key activists, organizations and the use of social media and communications, the conclusions of this analysis may also help us understand the role of women in future Arab protests and can serve as a base of analysis for a more accurate demographic assessments of the uprisings. More widely, as gender studies, particularly in the Arab region, is an evolving field, this research will help narrow the gap that currently exists in international and regional gender and politics studies.<sup>18</sup>

## Outline

The introduction of this paper highlights the core question of this research along with the conceptual framework used in the analysis. Also included is an

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<sup>17</sup> "United Nations Millennium Development Goals," *United Nations*, accessed November 5, 2012, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender.shtml>; "Women's Rights," *Amnesty International*, accessed December 9, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/womens-rights>; "Women's Rights." *Human Rights Watch*. Accessed December 9, 2012. <http://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights>.

<sup>18</sup> A. Abukhalil, "Gender Boundaries and Sexual Categories in the Arab World," *Feminist Issues* 15, no. 1–2 (1997): 91–104, 91, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12321268>.

explanation of the case study selections, the relevance of this research as well as the contribution this study will make to the currently existing scholarly discourse. Chapter two explains the theoretical framework (women and protest and social media theories) as well as the methodology. Chapter three, four and five include an examination of the roles women played in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, respectively. The first section of each case study provides an overview of women prior to the uprisings, with a focus on women's societal status and political participation. The second section analyzes the roles that women played in each uprising and provides a critical analysis of their participation. Chapter five includes a discussion of my research conclusions and theory implications, highlighting suggested amendments for each theory.

## **Theory and Methodology**

It is important to understand the role of women in the uprisings as they form approximately half of the population. An examination of women in the Arab protests

will help scholars better understand the varying roles of women, which is integral to any post-uprising analysis or policy making. Although the role of women in civil uprisings lacks scholarly attention, particularly in the Arab region, there are theories of women and protest which provide basic framework for this study.

## Theory Review

Guida West, a political sociologist and researcher, and Rhoda Lois Blumberg, a Professor at Rutgers University, assert that much of the literature available on social protest lacks gender analysis and fails to mention women.<sup>19</sup> They contend that some researchers agree about the importance of gender analysis but exclude it because of its complexity, while others do not see it as a “heuristic tool” in analyzing social protest. West and Blumberg theorize that women often lead and organize in the early phases of protest; however, as the protest movement grows in terms of visibility and scale, men tend to take-over the leadership roles, a theory they call the “iron law of patriarchy.”<sup>20</sup> This means that gender roles during times of civil unrest tend to be reversed as the scope and level of protest increases.<sup>21</sup>

Behavioral scientist Rita Noonan says that the role women play in the transition to democracy is poorly understood.<sup>22</sup> She critiques the insufficiency of traditional political theory analysis, arguing that women’s political power under authoritarian regimes is not well examined.<sup>23</sup> Her main contention is with the idea that there is a positive relationship between “the degree of openness in the polity” and women’s political participation. According to Noonan, this is not always the case, as

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<sup>19</sup> Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg. *Women and Social Protest*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Guida and Blumberg, *Women and Social Protest*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Noonan, “Women Against the State,” 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

we will see in the analysis of women in the Arab uprisings. She says that “less political ‘space’ can lead to “a greater ‘voice’ for women.”<sup>24</sup> By examining the case of Latin America and Chile’s transition to democracy, she demonstrates that the political power of women is often found in the non-electoral and “informal” arenas.<sup>25</sup> Noonan concludes that cultural opportunities and gender analysis are necessary to understanding nontraditional sources of power.<sup>26</sup>

In examining women and social movement theory, Sarah Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science, and Alana Jeydel, Assistant Professor of Political Science, assert that while women mostly join revolutionary movements out of concern for “larger struggles” of national self-determination or class, rather than for gender equality, they “have been and still are a minority in these movements.”<sup>27</sup> While women may have been a minority in comparison with men in the Arab protests, their role was just as significant.<sup>28</sup> Henderson and Jeydel also state that women’s duties in the private sphere often lead to their subordinate position in the public sphere, arguing that women’s domestic responsibilities prevent them from assuming lead roles in protests.<sup>29</sup> They further allege that women are often “unable to participate in the same ways that men do,” thereby drawing a correlation between the barriers women face in political and economic institutions and those faced while participating in political uprisings.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>27</sup> Alana S. Jeydel and Sarah Henderson, *Women and Politics in a Global World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 73.

<sup>28</sup> “Women Have Emerged as Key Players in the Arab Spring.”

<sup>29</sup> Jeydel and Henderson, *Women and Politics in a Global World*, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Political alignment theory provides insight on why women protest and, to some degree, how they align themselves during uprising movements. Lisa Baldez refers to three models to describe the types of mobilization and alignment women undertake in protest: “tipping, timing, and framing.”<sup>31</sup> For the purposes of this research, the “tipping” theory is most relevant. In the “tipping” model, Baldez asserts that mobilization occurs as a result of how individual activists respond to one another’s actions, meaning a “tip” in protest will occur when a large number of people protest, which influences others to join.<sup>32</sup> This theory is relevant to the assessment of whether or not women were drivers, as the first criterion of assessment is that they must have initiated the first protests. This paper will show that in the case of Egypt and Yemen, the “tipping” occurred as a result of women’s activism.

In this examination of the role of women in the Arab uprisings, the research conclusions drawn will be assessed in relation to the cited theories on women and protest. While policy analysis is important to the future study of women and protest in the Arab world, the instability and ongoing developments in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen make political assessments and implications difficult. Therefore, this paper suggests amendments to current theories in the theory implications section.

### **Social Media**

While some analysts assert that social media had little to do with the uprisings, considering low internet penetration rates in the Arab world, others argue that is has

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<sup>31</sup> Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest : Women’s Movements in Chile*, (Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/georgetown/docDetail.action?docID=10021408>.

<sup>32</sup> Baldez. *Why Women Protest*, 7.

had a considerable effect.<sup>33</sup> Many analysts, however, argue that social media played an instrumental role in the uprisings. Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain argue that one of the most consistent narratives has been from civil society leaders in the Arab world who say:

The Internet, mobile phones, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter made the difference this time. Using these technologies, people interested in democracy could build extensive networks, create social capital, and organize political action with a speed and on a scale never seen before.<sup>34</sup>

Other analysts, such as Serajul Bhuiyan, say that social media “enhanced and ignited people’s desire for democracy.”<sup>35</sup> According to Peter Beaumont, social media, as a medium, shapes and defines: “The instantaneous nature of how social media communicates self-broadcast ideas, unlimited by publication deadlines and broadcast

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<sup>33</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, “Does Egypt Need Twitter?,” *The New Yorker*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/02/does-egypt-need-twitter.html>; Laurie Penny, “Revolts Don’t Have to Be Tweeted,” *NewStatesman*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/laurie-penny/2011/02/uprisings-media-internet>. David Kravets, “What’s Fueling Mideast Protests? It’s More Than Twitter,” *Wired UK*, January 28, 2011, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2011-01/28/middle-east-protests-twitter>; Peter Beaumont, “The Truth About Twitter, Facebook and the Uprisings in the Arab World,” *The Guardian*, February 24, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya>; Rikia Saddy, “‘Social Media Revolutions’ by Rikia Saddy,” *Journal of Professional Communications*, February 26, 2011, <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/jpc/vol1/iss1/5/>; Blake Hounshell, “The Revolution Will Be Tweeted,” *Foreign Policy* no. 187 (August 2011): 20–21, 21, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/875232157/abstract?accountid=11091>; Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (July 2011): 35–48, 35, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/878630939/abstract/139962DD3526A8DF192/21?accountid=11091>; Courtney Radsch, “Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and the Role of Women in the Arab Uprisings,” *Rice University*, May 17, 2012, <http://news.rice.edu/2012/05/22/social-media-and-the-internet-allowed-young-arab-women-to-play-a-central-role-in-the-arab-spring-uprisings-new-rice-study-says/>.

<sup>34</sup> Howard and Hussain, “The Role of Digital Media,” 35

<sup>35</sup> Serajul Bhuiyan, “Social Media and Its Effectiveness in the Political Reform Movement in Egypt,” Abstract. *Middle East Media Educator* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 14–20.

news slots, explains in part the speed at which these revolutions have unraveled, their almost viral spread across a region.”<sup>36</sup> Bhuiyan further asserts that social media created a “platform for discussion of ideas, experiences, and knowledge exchange.” Networks like Twitter, Facebook and blogs, he says, powerful tools which helped people communicate, bypass censorship and “mobilized millions of citizens to participate in political action.”<sup>37</sup> Where there was no internet access, word of mouth in the streets of Egypt as well as text messages picked up on technological information snippets which helped deliver the message to those who were “unplugged.”<sup>38</sup>

Egypt is a perfect illustration of the integral role social media played in the uprisings. By 2009, Egypt’s internet penetration rate was 24.3%.<sup>39</sup> Over 50 million Egyptians owned mobile phones, many of which were pre-equipped with the mobile Facebook application, and there are five million Facebook users in Egypt out of 17 million in the Arab world.<sup>40</sup> Egypt’s first large-scale protest on January 25<sup>th</sup> was organized through Facebook, an event page which had 80,000 attendance confirmations.<sup>41</sup> According to Ashraf Alsayed, an Egyptian protester, social media was “crucial” to the uprising: “it helped maintain the revolutionary spirit as it spread blogs and news articles that revealed the atrocities that the old regime was committing against the people.” In Egypt, protest information was circulated through Facebook, Twitter and e-mail, including the activists’ 12-page guide to confronting the regime.

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<sup>36</sup> Beaumont, “The Truth About Twitter, Facebook and the Uprisings”

<sup>37</sup> Bhuiyan, “Social Media and Its Effectiveness in the Political Reform Movement in Egypt,” 14.

<sup>38</sup> Beaumont, “The Truth About Twitter, Facebook and the Uprisings”

<sup>39</sup> Sahar Khamis, Paul Gold, and Katherine Vaughn, “Arab Media & Society,” *Arab Media & Society*, Spring 2012, <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=791>; Bhuiyan, “Social Media and Its Effectiveness in the Political Reform Movement in Egypt,” 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Kravets, “What’s Fueling Mideast Protests?”; Nourhan Elsayed (20 year-old Egyptian student), interview by Aminah Kandar, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

When the internet was shut down, social media was replaced by what Beaumont calls “the analogue equivalent of Twitter: handheld signs held aloft at demonstrations saying where and when people should gather the next day.” Twitter was so important in Egypt that it inspired a best-selling book, ‘Tweets from Tahrir’.<sup>42</sup> While men were also at the forefront of the protests, women participated in unprecedented ways in terms of social media and the breaking of gender barriers.<sup>43</sup>

## Methodology

I use comparative analysis as the primary method of research to assess the role of women in the uprisings of Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. Through a qualitative analysis that examines women activists, women-led organizations and women-managed social media initiatives, I establish the extent to which women drove the protests in all three country cases.

The most effective way to assess whether women were among the main drivers of the uprisings is to analyze individuals and women-led organizations; as such an assessment entails the collection and analysis of large amounts of data. This research primarily focuses on individual women and does not seek to draw broad conclusions about women as a social group, which would be impossible to deduce. The women examined in this study are remarkable and their activism reflects the level of engagement of many other women. However, this paper aims to establish if some

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<sup>42</sup> Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle, *Tweets from Tahrir* (New York: OR Books, 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Adam Morrow and Khaled Moussa al-Omrani, “Egypt: Using Facebook, Young Women Take to Political Activism,” *Global Information Network*, May 15, 2009, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/457538724/13C33AB4BD07004004C/17?accountid=11091>; Cleo Fatoorehchi, “Egypt: Women in Protests Breaking Gender Barriers,” *Global Information Network*, February 26, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com/pqrl/docview/854066341/13B8583FD2A7E300E7F/5?accountid=11091>.

women—not all women—played a crucial role in driving the uprisings. Considering the importance of social media, we can deduce that many activists used social media; therefore, most of the women examined in this paper used social media extensively.

The uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen have relatively well-defined time frames which are used for this analysis; Tunisia's protests began on December 17, 2010 and lasted approximately 21 days; Egypt's protests erupted on January 25, 2011 and spanned over a period of 18 days; and Yemen's protests started on January 11, 2011 and continued for nearly a year.<sup>44</sup> The ever-evolving post-protest period for all three cases is not included in this research as it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Primary documents serve as the basis of this study. Because social media played an integral role in the uprisings, it is an important tool of assessment for political scientists. The tools employed for this research include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, as well as interviews.<sup>45</sup> By assessing popular social media, I examine how women used these tools to engage in their activities.<sup>46</sup> I rely on the Facebook pages of women activists and women-led organizations to analyze how instrumental their profiles were as a medium for organizing and mobilizing protests. I assess the number of "likes" or "followers" their page has, whether a page has been used to organize protests or promote other anti-regime activity and what others are saying about the page (through the number attributed to "how many people are talking about

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<sup>44</sup> Ryan Rifai, "Timeline: Tunisia's Uprising," *Al Jazeera English*, January 23, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/tunisia/2011/01/201114142223827361.html>; "Timeline: Egypt's Revolution," *Al Jazeera English*, February 14, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>; "Yemen Profile - Timeline," *BBC News*, Accessed January 17, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704951>.

<sup>45</sup> Henry E. Brady and David Collier, ed. *Re-thinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 115.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew R. Auer, "The Policy Sciences of Social Media," *Policy Studies Journal* 39, no. 4 (November 21, 2011): 709–736, doi:10.1111/j.1541-0072.2011.00428.x.

this” on Facebook). I use Twitter to track social media connections and followers, which provide an indication of women’s activities and their influence on other protest participants. Topsy Pro, a program that provides comprehensive analysis of twitter and other social media, is also used to track twitter accounts, tweets and “re-tweets” (tweets that are shared from one individual to another individual’s network). YouTube videos and analytics provide information on widely viewed videos from women activists, the details of viewership and testimonials of female protest participants. Personal and collective blogs are examined to establish how women used web-space to transmit photos, videos and information and publish opinion pieces.

While Facebook “likes,” YouTube “views” and Twitter “followers” cannot illustrate the definitive impact of social media use, they can offer valuable insight as to the importance users attach to a profile. New programs that measure social media influence exist; however, because they are still new and developing, this research relies on the aforementioned methodology.<sup>47</sup> In the case of Facebook and Twitter, when a user “likes” or “follows” they are making a connection which then becomes public information seen by the user’s network.<sup>48</sup> Any information from the “liked” or “followed” profile will also become a part of the user’s newsfeed which consumes the user’s time and attention. Therefore, to make a connection through social media means more than a simple click and reflects the popularity of a certain event, idea or

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<sup>47</sup> Belle Cooper, “5 Tools That Help Measure Your Social Media Influence,” *Social Media Examiner*, June 30, 2011, <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/5-tools-that-help-measure-your-social-media-influence/>; Paul Chaney, “5 Influence Measurement Tools,” *Practical Ecommerce*, June 28, 2011,

<http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/2879-5-Influence-Measurement-Tools>.

<sup>48</sup> “Liking Things on Facebook,” *Facebook*, accessed April 16, 2013,

<http://www.facebook.com/help/like>; “What Does It Mean to Like a Page or Content Off of Facebook?,” *Facebook*, accessed April 16, 2013,

<http://www.facebook.com/help/131263873618748/>.

person. As influence on social and new media sites is manifested as popularity, the number of “likes,” “re-tweets” and “views” is an indicator of impact—even more so considering the pivotal role attributed to these platforms during the revolutions.

Traditional assessment tools are used as complementary indicators to social media. News sources and data are used significantly to provide information on the pre-uprisings status of women as well as the most noteworthy and celebrated women and organizations in the uprisings. Scholarly journals and books on women and protest theory contribute to shaping theoretical frameworks. Statistics offered by international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, are referred to for the assessment of women’s societal status and political participation prior to the uprisings. While international recognition and awards cannot be used as a single concrete measure of significance, they are used as an indicator of activism. Overall, this comparative analysis of women’s protest activity is formed qualitatively using social media and traditional news and information sources.

## **Tunisia: Women and the Uprisings**

Tunisia's uprising, known as the Jasmine Revolution, was the first of a series of protests that spread across the Middle East. Protests began on December 17, 2010 and continued until January 14, 2011, when Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia.<sup>49</sup> The uprising began with the self-immolation of a fruit vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi and the first protest was led by his mother.<sup>50</sup> This chapter will demonstrate that while Tunisian women were active in the protests, they cannot be categorized as being a main driver of the uprising.

### **Women in Tunisia before the Uprisings**

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<sup>49</sup> Ryan Rifai, "Timeline: Tunisia's Uprising."

<sup>50</sup> Yasmine Ryan, "How Tunisia's Revolution Began," *Al Jazeera English*, January 26, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html>.

While pre-revolutionary Tunisia was one of the most politically repressive countries in the Middle East, it is also among the most progressive in terms of gender equality.<sup>51</sup> Tunisian women enjoy many rights that women in other Arab nations have yet to acquire, such as civil status laws.<sup>52</sup> Women's relatively higher status in Tunisia is reflected in their development ranking. According to the United Nations Arab Human Development Report, Tunisia scores 0.335 on a scale of 0.1 to 0.9 (0.9 marking the worst off), and ranks the best off out of 17 Arab countries on the Gender Inequality Index for 2005.<sup>53</sup> Foreign Policy analyst Elisabeth Coleman says that "Tunisia has always been at the forefront of women and women's rights in the Arab world."<sup>54</sup> The rights that Tunisian women enjoyed at the time of liberal and secularist leader Habib Bourguiba, were further protected by his successor president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.<sup>55</sup> From their social, educational and economic status to their strength of political participation, Tunisian women are seen as an example for women in the Arab world.<sup>56</sup>

Saloua Terzi Ben Attia, president of the National Union of Tunisian Women, says Tunisian women have played a "full role" in Tunisian society and enjoy equality

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<sup>51</sup> Shadi Hamid, *The Arab Awakening*, 111.

<sup>52</sup> Pat Lancaster, "Tunisian Women Take up the 21st Century Challenge," *Middle East*, July 2010, 54, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/docview/612854145/13AE90794B4456AA50F/2?accountid=11091>.

<sup>53</sup> "Human Development Data for the Arab States: GII: Gender Inequality Index," *United Nations Development Programme*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/data/indicators/2012-34.aspx>.

<sup>54</sup> Isobel Coleman, "Is the Arab Spring Bad for Women?"

<sup>55</sup> Sami Zlitni and Zeineb Touati, "Social Networks and Women's Mobilization in Tunisia," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 5 (2012): 46–58, 49, [http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Vol13\\_no5/article6.pdf](http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Vol13_no5/article6.pdf); Pat Lancaster, "Tunisian Women Take up the 21st Century Challenge," 53.

<sup>56</sup> "Leaders: Let the Scent of Jasmine Spread; Tunisia and the Arab World," *The Economist*, January 22, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com/pqrl/docview/846915775/13CD3EA9D2D54F448FD/9?accountid=11091>.

in nearly all areas of public life, including education and their choice of career.<sup>57</sup> Women's position in society and the equality they enjoy is a result of reforms implemented by President Bourguiba.<sup>58</sup> Pat Lancaster, Editor of the *Middle East* magazine, argues that women's position in society changed for the better once President Bourguiba, a key historical figure in Arab liberal secularism, took office.<sup>59</sup> One of his many reforms is the Civil Status Code; promulgated in 1956, it was the backbone to guaranteeing women's rights.<sup>60</sup> More specifically, women's societal status was greatly elevated by reforms in family law. In 1993, a presidentially-sponsored committee reformed legislations pertaining to polygamy, divorce, domestic violence, obligatory child support and other such laws.<sup>61</sup> Some scholars correlate equality in society to equality in the classroom, citing that women in Tunisia are not just achieving the same successes as men but, in the case of university graduates, they are becoming more academically successful.<sup>62</sup>

Tunisia's surpasses many of its regional neighbors with its focus on education.<sup>63</sup> The Tunisian education system was reformed in 1991, making attendance compulsory for girls and boys between the ages of 6 to 16.<sup>64</sup> The Tunisian government also invested heavily in education. Approximately 7.2% of Tunisia's GDP was spent

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<sup>57</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 56.

<sup>58</sup> Zlitni and Touati, "Social Networks and Women's Mobilization in Tunisia," 49.

<sup>59</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian Women Take up the 21st Century Challenge," 54.

<sup>60</sup> Zlitni and Touati, "Social Networks and Women's Mobilization in Tunisia," 48.

<sup>61</sup> "World Report 2012: Tunisia," *Human Rights Watch*, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-tunisia>; Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 59.

<sup>62</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 57.

<sup>63</sup> Sangeeta Sinha, "Women's Rights: Tunisian Women in the Workplace," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2013): 185–200, 195, <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol12/iss3/12/>.

<sup>64</sup> "Reply of Tunisia to The Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of The Beijing Platform for Action," United Nations, (2005): 2-45, 8, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/TUNISIA-English.pdf>

on education in 2007, nearly two times the 3.8% of GDP that Egypt spent on education in 2008.<sup>65</sup> In general, Tunisian women outperform men in education. In 2010, nearly 60% of university and college students were women.<sup>66</sup> Females also dominate attendance in secondary schools, as girls make-up 67.6% of enrollment.<sup>67</sup> These numbers reflect educational equality between men and women that is rare in the Arab world. In Yemen, for example, female enrollment in basic education was 36.8% in 2002; whereas, an approximate 97.6% of Tunisian girls are enrolled in primary education institutions.<sup>68</sup> According to a World Bank development report, Tunisia outperforms most Middle East countries and all North African countries in female literacy, among other development indicators.<sup>69</sup> Such successes in the realm of education have translated into economic successes for women.

Much like their rates of education, Tunisian women surpass many Arab countries in terms of women's employment and economic rights. According to sociologist Sangeeta Sinha, Tunisia affords the most legal and economic rights to women among all Arab states.<sup>70</sup> Such rights are in part reflected in the labor force

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<sup>65</sup> Sinha, "Women's Rights: Tunisian Women in the Workplace," 195

<sup>66</sup> "Education statistics: Tunisia," UNICEF, (2008): 1-3, 3, [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MENA\\_Tunisia.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MENA_Tunisia.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Yemen: Basic Education," YouTube video, 2:52, posted by *WorldBank*, September 15, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=layVFxs9h-M&NR=1&feature=endscreen>; "National Report on Women's Status in Yemen," United Nations, (2004): 2-20, 7, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/YEMEN-English.pdf>;

Marlaine Lockheed and Cem Mete, "Tunisia: Strong Central Policies for Gender Equity," *Exclusion, Gender and Education. Case Studies from the Developing World* (2007): 205–225, 207, <http://www.cgdev.org/doc/books/lewis-lockheed-eduCaseStudies/lewis-lockheed-chapter8.pdf>; Lancaster. "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 58.

<sup>69</sup> Mina Bali moune, "The Making of Gender Equality in Tunisia and Implications for Development" (2012): 2-40, 2, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9228>.

<sup>70</sup> Sinha, "Women's Rights: Tunisian Women in the Workplace," 2

participation rate of Tunisian women. In 2009, men's labor force participation dropped from about 95% to 90%; whereas, women's labor force participation increased from 25% to almost 30%.<sup>71</sup> Such figures illustrate the economic gains women made in Tunisia. Tunisian women have a notable presence in various fields in the economic sector. They represent more than 50% of the working population and about half of the medical, paramedical and teaching professions.<sup>72</sup> They also account for approximately 30% of judges, 31% of lawyers, one third of university professors and 23% of government officials.<sup>73</sup> The Tunisian constitution, labor law and family law allow women to own and control income, property and land.<sup>74</sup> In fact, over 18,000 Tunisian women lead businesses and nearly 40% of micro-finance projects and National Employment programs beneficiaries are women.<sup>75</sup> Not only are women thriving in leading their own businesses, but women-owned businesses have a survival rate nearly two times that of men's.<sup>76</sup> Further, an estimated 40% of men entrepreneurs have secondary education or higher; whereas, women fare better at 54%.<sup>77</sup> These figures simply reflect the educational success and the prominence of women in the economic sector compared to other Arab countries.

Owing in great part to their educational status, Tunisian women are active political participants. According to a 2012 World Bank development report: "Female

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>72</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 54; Sinha, "Women's Rights: Tunisian Women in the Workplace," 191

<sup>73</sup> "Tunisia: Government," *GlobalEDGE*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/tunisia/government>; Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 52.

<sup>74</sup> Valentine M. Moghadam, "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa - Tunisia," *The UN Refugee Agency*, October 14, 2005, <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=topic&tocid=4565c22547&toid=4565c25f569&publisher=&type=&coi=TUN&docid=47387b702f&skip=0>.

<sup>75</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 56.

<sup>76</sup> Moghadam, "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa - Tunisia."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

education and the reduction in women's subordination allowed women to gain significant political territory which allowed them to play a role in Tunisian politics and policymaking.<sup>78</sup> This political participation is evident through the various governmental positions which women occupy. In May 2010, the President Ben Ali ordered the ruling Democratic Constitution Rally to emphasize the role of women in politics after instructing them to grant women 30% of the electoral slots.<sup>79</sup> Prior to the uprisings, the Chamber of Deputies had 22.7% women members, including the Chair of Parliamentary Commission and the Vice-Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>80</sup> Municipal councils included 31.7% women members and about 13.6% of government members are women.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, women represented 22.8% of the economic and social council, 12% of the ministerial cabinet and 44.3% of civil servants, approximately 25% of which were in senior positions.<sup>82</sup> These numbers show that women were active in the government, especially compared to other Arab spring countries, as will be shown later in this paper.

Party politics and government, however, were not the only form of women's political participation, as many women found their political footing through civil society. President Ben Ali publicly urged women's participation in society, stressing that it is a "driver of progress and democratization."<sup>83</sup> Such statements can be seen as simple rhetoric as civil society organizations were generally repressed under his rule, unless they operated in the interest of the regime; therefore, secular women's movements operated with much more flexibility than others.<sup>84</sup> Islamist groups in particular were highly repressed under Ben Ali's

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<sup>78</sup> Balamoune, "The Making of Gender Equality in Tunisia and Implications for Development," 5.

<sup>79</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 55.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>81</sup> "Reply of Tunisia," 9; Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 54.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Lancaster, "Tunisian women take up the 21st century challenge," 56.

<sup>84</sup> "Civil Liberties - Tunisia," *Freedom House*, 2012, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2012/tunisia>; "Tunisia," *Oxfam International*, accessed January 27, 2013, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/tunisia>.

regime, to the extent that the *hijab* (Muslim women's head covering) was banned in public.<sup>85</sup> According to Sarah Gilman, researcher and author of *Feminist Organizing in Tunisia*, state-sanctioned women's organizations were few at the time of Ben Ali and heavily controlled by the regime.<sup>86</sup> She asserts that the Tunisian state "promotes a paradoxical vision of a vibrant yet controlled civil society" as only those who had close ties with Ben Ali's ruling party received legal status.<sup>87</sup> Gilman labels Tunisian non-governmental organizations as "governmental non-governmental organizations," referring to the heavy limitation and surveillance placed upon them.<sup>88</sup> According to Global Voices, Anonymous and the Committee to Protect Journalists, activist Lina Ben Mhenni and many others were targeted by the government.<sup>89</sup> Her Facebook page was deleted and her Yahoo account pirated, further demonstrating that Ben Ali's push for women's participation in the sociopolitical sphere was obviously selective.<sup>90</sup> While not surprising, it is evident that Ben Ali's advocacy for women's participation in society was geared towards public, more so international, appeasement and limited to those in alignment with his regime. It is therefore no surprise that women joined the uprising that brought Ben Ali's twenty four years of rule to an end.

## Women and the Tunisian Uprisings

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<sup>85</sup> "Tunisia Ends 20-year Ban for Islamist Party," *The Guardian*, March 1, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/9524217>;  
Sam Bollier, "Who Are Tunisia's Political Parties? - Features - Al Jazeera English," *Al Jazeera English*, October 27, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/201110614579390256.html>;  
Heba Saleh, "Tunisia Moves Against Headscarves," *BBC*, October 15, 2006, sec. Africa, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6053380.stm>.

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Gilman, "Feminist organizing in Tunisia," in *From patriarchy to Empowerment: Women's participation, Movements, and Rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*, ed. Valentine Moghadam, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 99.

<sup>87</sup> Sarah Gilman, *From patriarchy to Empowerment: Women's participation, Movements, and Rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia*. 99

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> R Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisia's Bitter Cyberwar," *Al Jazeera*, January 6, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/20111614145839362.html>.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

Many analysts were surprised that Tunisia was the birthplace of the Arab spring since it was one of the more economically successful Arab spring countries; however, it was also one of the most politically repressed and economically corrupt.<sup>91</sup> While January is known as “protest month” in Tunisia, a month during which past economic strikes often occurred, the January 2010 protests were a larger scale and included participation from all classes.<sup>92</sup> Women were active protesters and were involved from the onset.<sup>93</sup> Through the analysis of individual women, the involvement of women-led organizations and well as women-led social media and communication campaigns, this section will determine whether women were among the main drivers in Tunisia’s uprising.

Activist Lina Ben Mhenni, the blogger who dedicated her award winning blog space “A Tunisian Girl” to freedom of speech and human rights advocacy.<sup>94</sup> Ben Mhenni was one of the social media activists present in the protests which began in Sidi Bouzid and she was the only blogger present in Kasserine and Regued during the massacre by security forces.<sup>95</sup> Since the regime blocked international media from

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<sup>91</sup> Linette Lim, “The Curious Case of the Tunisian Uprising: Leaked US Embassy Cables Confirmed Corruption by President’s Family, Cronies,” *The Business Times*, February 1, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/docview/852594792/13AE923F3C539122893/4?accountid=11091>; Christopher Alexander, “Tunisia’s Protest Wave: Where It Comes From and What It Means for Ben Ali,” *Foreign Policy*, January 3, 2011, [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/02/tunisia\\_s\\_protest\\_wave\\_where\\_it\\_comes\\_from\\_and\\_what\\_it\\_means\\_for\\_ben\\_ali](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/02/tunisia_s_protest_wave_where_it_comes_from_and_what_it_means_for_ben_ali).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Carol Giacomo, “Women Fight to Define the Arab Spring,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/opinion/sunday/women-fight-to-define-the-arab-spring.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/11/opinion/sunday/women-fight-to-define-the-arab-spring.html?_r=0).

<sup>94</sup> Lina Ben Mhenni, “A Tunisian Girl / بنينة تونسية: To Tunisian Students in Jail,” Blog, *A Tunisian Girl / بنينة تونسية*, jeudi décembre 2009, <http://atunisiangirl.blogspot.com/2009/12/to-tunisian-students-in-jail.html>.

covering the protests, her video recordings and photographs of the dead and injured were among the only ways international media and activists became aware of the violence.<sup>96</sup> To expedite media attention, she used her trilingual blog space to disseminate photos and eye-witness accounts of the regime's brutality against protesters.<sup>97</sup> She relied heavily on social media to raise awareness of the government's repression tactics, highlighting the spread of protests throughout Tunisia and creating a space through which activists mobilized. She asserts that videos showing the clashes and Bouazizi's burning body immediately circulated on the web.<sup>98</sup> People captured the scenes using their mobile phones, recorded them and posted them on Facebook.<sup>99</sup> According to Ben Mhenni, "social media was critical at a time when everything else was censored."<sup>100</sup> The Ben Ali regime quickly caught on to Ben Mhenni's activity, and her task became increasingly difficult, as she describes:

I did, however, want to spread the word about the horrifying incident. I was already in touch with lawyers and a large network of cyber-activists, so I contacted them to collect information, verify it, write about developments and share everything online.... At the time, I was also assisting foreign media by giving phone and Skype interviews. On January 8 last year, some French journalists asked me to assist them in the protest areas. I did not think about it at all. I just packed and accompanied them.<sup>101</sup>

Ben Mhenni has more than 17,000 Facebook subscribers and over 22,000 Twitter followers.<sup>102</sup> According to journalist and author Courtney Radsch, Ben Mhenni was

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<sup>95</sup> Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisian Blogger Becomes Nobel Prize Nominee," *Al Jazeera*, October 21, 2011,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/2011106222117687872.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Radsch. "Unveiling the Revolutionaries," 12.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan, "Tunisian Blogger Becomes Nobel Prize Nominee."

<sup>98</sup> Lina Ben Mhenni, "How the Web Fed Our 'Dignity Revolution'," *CNN*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/23/opinion/lina-ben-mhenni-opinion/index.html>.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Beaumont. "The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings."

<sup>101</sup> Ben Mhenni, "How the Web Fed Our 'Dignity Revolution'."

one of the first to document and write about the protests, “she turned her blog, Twitter, and Facebook page into a virtual newsroom.”<sup>103</sup> Without Ben Mhenni’s citizen journalism, it is likely that the protests would not have received as much media coverage as swiftly as they did; however, there is not enough evidence to determine how significant her contribution was to the uprising.

In recognition of Ben Mhenni’s instrumental participation in the Tunisian uprising, she was among the 2011 Nobel Peace prize nominees, which speaks to the importance of the impact that she has made in Tunisia’s transition towards democracy.<sup>104</sup> She was awarded the first prize of *le Prix Alsacien de l’Engagement Démocratique*, an award granted in recognition of democratic engagement.<sup>105</sup> She also won Italy’s *Prima Minerva* award for her “support in the Arab Spring and revealing the massacres which took place under dictatorial regimes.”<sup>106</sup> Such awards document the importance of female activism within the Tunisian uprising and serve as encouragement for other activists. Ben Mhenni and others like her became information hubs through which the regional and international community was

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<sup>102</sup> Lina Ben Mhenni, “Twitter / Search - Lina Ben Mhenni,” *Twitter*, accessed December 10, 2012,

<https://twitter.com/search?q=Lina%20Ben%20Mhenni&src=typd>.

<sup>103</sup> Radsch. “Unveiling the Revolutionaries,” 12.

<sup>104</sup> Ryan, “Tunisian Blogger Becomes Nobel Prize Nominee.”

<sup>105</sup> “La Bloggeuse ‘A Tunisian Girl’ Lina Ben Mhenni Récompensée Par Le 1er Prix Alsacien De L’engagement Démocratique,” *La Region Alsace*, October 2012,

<http://www.region-alsace.eu/communiqué-presse/la-bloggeuse-tunisian-girl-lina-ben-mhenni-recompensee-par-le-1er-prix-alsacien-de>;

Samia Errazzouki, “The Tunisian Revolution Continues: An Interview with Lina Ben Mhenni,” *Jadaliyya*, October 15, 2012,

[http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7859/the-tunisian-revolution-](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7859/the-tunisian-revolution-continues-an-interview-wit)

[continues\\_an-interview-wit](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7859/the-tunisian-revolution-continues-an-interview-wit); Lina Ben Mhenni, “Le Prix Alsacien De l’Engagement Démocratique,” *Facebook*, November 2013,

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.408490385883371.96126.124793554253057&type=3&l=401efeff8f>.

<sup>106</sup> Lina Ben Mhenni, “Premio Minerva Award,” *Tunisian Girl*, November 27, 2012,

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.432536093478800.101364.124793554253057&type=3&l=19b019ad3f>.

informed of the regime's crackdown.<sup>107</sup> According to Ben Mhenni, the flooding of news through social media networks was a reflection of women's participation: "Women were present in every stage and each action of the uprising."<sup>108</sup> Such mass information dissemination made women activist instrumental in helping others stay abreast of the protests' evolution. Eymen Gamha, a 23 year old Tunisian male who works for an organization promoting women's economic integration, said: "the Facebook updates of several bloggers, Lina Ben Mhenni among others, helped me to continuously follow the evolution of the protests in Tunisia."<sup>109</sup> While Ben Mhenni and others like her were active in the social media sphere, they cannot be considered main drivers as they did not initiate the first protests, the first criterion of what constitutes a driver.

Some of the key women who also played an integral role in the Tunisian uprisings are part of an award-winning independent blog called *Nawaat*, a group which boasts nearly 5000 YouTube subscribers, over 68,000 Twitter followers and over 123,000 Facebook subscribers.<sup>110</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, co-founder of Global Voice, says "sites like *Nawaat* were critical in identifying content posted on Facebook, tagging, time stamping and categorizing it and making it accessible to other media organizations... *Nawaat* used a blog to identify over 400 videos, many of which were used by Al Jazeera," one of the many channels that depended heavily on citizen journalism feeds for investigative reporting on the Arab Spring.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Radsch. "Unveiling the Revolutionaries,"10.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>109</sup> Eymen Gamha (23 year-old male working on Tunisian women's economic empowerment), interview by Aminah Kandar, April 9, 2013.

<sup>110</sup> "Nawaat - Tunisia," accessed April 16, 2013, <http://nawaat.org/portail/>.

<sup>111</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, "Civic Disobedience and the Arab Spring," *My Heart's in Accra*, May 6, 2011, <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2011/05/06/civic-disobedience-and-the-arab-spring/>.

It was citizen journalist feeds, such as those provided by Ben Mhenni, *Nawaat* and others that became a main source for Al Jazeera when their offices and media outlets were shut down.<sup>112</sup> *Nawaat* has nine female team members and has won three awards for their work, including the Reporters Without Borders 2011 Netizen Prize, the 2011 Index Free Expression Awards, the 2011 Electronic Frontier Foundation Pioneer Award and the 2012 Digital Power Index Award, among others.<sup>113</sup> One of *Nawaat's* main contributions to the uprising was the publication of TuniLeaks, a selection of Wikileaks cables that “revealed the extent of the corruption deeply entrenched in many aspects of Tunisian life.”<sup>114</sup> Despite the regime’s attempts at blocking their site, the cables spread quickly and *Nawaat* helped informal media networks connect with communities that faced government censorship.<sup>115</sup> The role *Nawaat* played in content dissemination coupled with their large number of subscribers and followers made them a leading hub of information throughout the uprisings.

According to Newsweek’s “150 Fearless Women: They’ve started revolutions, opened schools, and fostered a brave new generation” report, Lena Ben Mhenni and Sihem Bensedrine, a journalist and human rights advocate, were among the names listed.<sup>116</sup> Sihem Bensedrine has been advocating for freedom of speech and human

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<sup>112</sup> Zuckerman, “Civic Disobedience and the Arab Spring.”; Yasmine Ryan, “Tunisia’s Dissident Blog Stays True to Form,” *Al Jazeera English*, May 13, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/05/20115121940342156.html>.

<sup>113</sup> “Awards,” *Nawaat*, Accessed December 11, 2012, <http://nawaat.org/portail/about/awards/>; “Emna EL HAMMI (Psycke) on Twitter.” Accessed February 3, 2013. zotero://attachment/307/.

<sup>114</sup> “Free Expression Awards 2011: New Media,” *Index on Censorship*, March 11, 2011, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2011/03/free-expression-awards-2011-new-media/>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Anonymous, “150 Fearless Women: They’ve Started Revolutions, Opened Schools, and Fostered a Brave New Generation. From Detroit to Kabul, These Women Are

rights in Tunisia for the last twenty years.<sup>117</sup> In 2009, as a result of constant harassment, extreme abuse and imprisonment by the Ben Ali regime, she went into exile in Germany and did not return to Tunisia until after the 2011 uprising.<sup>118</sup> She is the co-founder of the National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT), an active human rights monitoring organization in Tunisia, as well as the Observatory for Freedom of the Press, Publishing, and Creation (OLPEC). She also founded *Kalima*, an independent radio station and news web-site that was often censored by the government and boasts over 90,000 Facebook followers.<sup>119</sup> Through *Kalima*'s web-site and Facebook page, she uploaded pictures and videos of the protests and protesters. While she was not physically present during the Tunisian protests, Bensedrine also played a leading role in political analysis and advocacy for regime change. At the onset of the uprising and throughout, she was featured on *Al Jazeera* news, alongside other prominent political figures, where she staunchly opposed the authoritarian government. Despite the concessions President Ben Ali made in order to appease the Tunisian people, Bensedrine was among those who advocated for the full ouster of Ben Ali and his regime on public television that was broadcasted in Tunisia and internationally.<sup>120</sup> With *Al Jazeera*'s estimated 40 million person viewership, the

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Making Their Voices Heard.,” *Newsweek*, March 12, 2012, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/927577021/13B1FE092C65607E434/15?accountid=11091>.

<sup>117</sup> “Human Rights Defenders: Sihem Bensedrine,” *The Carter Centre*, August 2007, [http://www.cartercenter.org/peace/human\\_rights/defenders/defenders/tunisia\\_sihem\\_bensedrine.html](http://www.cartercenter.org/peace/human_rights/defenders/defenders/tunisia_sihem_bensedrine.html).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> “Sihem Bensedrine,” *Canadian Journalists for Free Expression*, 2004, [http://www.cjfe.org/cjfe\\_gala/award\\_winners/Sihem\\_Bensedrine](http://www.cjfe.org/cjfe_gala/award_winners/Sihem_Bensedrine); “Radio-kalima-tunisie,” accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/radio.kalima>.

<sup>120</sup> “تونس في الأوضاع تطورات - مفتوح ر,” YouTube video, 50:20, a report by Al Jazeera TV, posted by aljazeerachannel, January 25, 2011.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3v4YU9TZJw&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3v4YU9TZJw&feature=youtube_gdata_player); “Tunisie: Sihem Bensedrine S’exprime,” YouTube video, 10:39, a report by Al Jazeera TV, posted by DarnaTelevision, January 19, 2011.

approximate 60,000 on-line views of her news interview and nearly 11,000 Facebook followers, Bensedrine was able to reach a wide audience, locally and internationally, relative to Tunisia's 17% internet penetration rate.<sup>121</sup>

In recognition of her longstanding activism, Bensedrine has been granted the Danish Peace Fund Prize; an International Press Freedom Award from Canadian Journalists for Free Expression; the IPI Free Media Pioneer award for the promotion of democracy, free press, and human rights in Tunisia and the rest of the Arab world, and the *Alison Des Forges Award*, a prestigious honor that "celebrates the valor of individuals who put their lives on the line to protect the dignity and rights of others."<sup>122</sup> Countering pro-regime voices were those such as Sihem Bensedrine, yet another advocate who spoke out to help dismantle Ben Ali's regime.

Emna El Hammi is another women activist amongst the Tunisian blogger community whose blog is entitled "Ma Tunisie sans Ben Ali" (My Tunisia without Ben Ali).<sup>123</sup> El Hammi is a main contributor on the subject of the Tunisian uprising on

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[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNJXSdoba0&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNJXSdoba0&feature=youtube_gdata_player);  
"Sihem Bensedrine S'exprime," YouTube video, 10:39, a report by Al Jazeera TV,  
posted by AlgeriaSon, January 21, 2011.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNJXSdoba0&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNJXSdoba0&feature=youtube_gdata_player);  
"Sihem Bensedrine." *Facebook*. Accessed February 3, 2013.

<http://www.facebook.com/sihemBenSedrin>.

<sup>121</sup> "Al Jazeera Viewership Profile," *Allied Media Corp.*, accessed April 16, 2013,

[http://www.allied-media.com/aljazeera/al\\_jazeera\\_viewers\\_demographics.html](http://www.allied-media.com/aljazeera/al_jazeera_viewers_demographics.html);

"Sihem Bensedrine." *Facebook*. Accessed February 3, 2013.

<http://www.facebook.com/sihemBenSedrin>; "Tunisia Internet Usage and  
Telecommunications Market Report," *Internet World Stats*, 2008,

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/tn.htm>.

(Tunisia has a population of 10,732,900. In contrast, the United States' internet  
penetration rate is 78.3% for a population of over 300,000,000 in 2008).

<sup>122</sup> William Granger, "Sihem Bensedrine," *World Association of Newspapers and  
News Publishers*, January 9, 2012. [http://www.wan-  
ifra.org/articles/2012/01/09/sihem-bensedrine](http://www.wan-<br/>ifra.org/articles/2012/01/09/sihem-bensedrine); "Sihem Bensedrine" *Human Rights  
Watch*, August 13, 2012, [http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/13/sihem-bensedrine-  
tunisia](http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/13/sihem-bensedrine-<br/>tunisia).

the *Nawaat* web-space and, with nearly 9000 followers on Twitter, was active in disseminating information on the protests through social media.<sup>124</sup> El Hammi has been writing on the democratic transition in Tunisia for the French newspaper *La Liberation* since February 2011 and was invited to speak about the Arab revolutions at the “Young Media Summit 2011,” among 18 German and Arab bloggers.<sup>125</sup> El Hammi and other activists like her continued in their pursuit of social justice.<sup>126</sup> Individually, women bloggers and social media activists could not have had the impact they did; it was their collective activism through the social media that helped give the Tunisian uprising the international and local media attention that the Ben Ali regime tried to shut out.

It was not only a few social media activists who participated in the uprisings. Many other women activists and organizations were directly involved in the protests. January 14, 2011 was a day where not only select activists engaged in protest; Tunisian women from all backgrounds joined the uprising in pursuit of democratic change.<sup>127</sup> Video footage of that day and subsequent protests show women engaged in different protest activities. While some women led protest chants, others captured the

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<sup>123</sup> Emna El Hammi, “Ma Tunisie Sans Ben Ali,” Blog. Accessed February 3, 2013. <http://tunisie.blogs.liberation.fr/>.

<sup>124</sup> “Emna El Hammi,” *Nawaat*, Accessed February 3, 2013, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2012/01/07/freedom-of-expression-in-post-revolution-tunisia-moral-and-legal-new-basis-for-censorship/>; “Euro-Arab Seminar on Empowerment of Youth Organizations and Led Civil Society Initiatives,” Accessed February 2, 2012, <http://www.poplas.org/Euro/pdf/participants%20biographies.pdf>. 4. “Emna El Hammi on Twitter.”

<sup>125</sup> Emna El Hammi, “Euro-Arab Seminar on Empowerment of Youth Organizations and Led Civil Society Initiatives,” *Nawaat*, 4.

<sup>126</sup> Nesrina Hamaici, “Emna El Hammi: ‘J’ai Peur Qu’il y Ait Des Alliances Douteuses,’” *Les Observateurs De FRANCE 24*, October 23, 2011. <http://tunisie.france24.com/2011/10/23/emna-el-hammi-jai-peur-quil-y-ait-des-alliances-douteuses/>.

<sup>127</sup> “Women’s Rights: The Tunisian Experience, Thus Far,” YouTube video, 7:18, posted by Tunisia Live, March 8, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3x-dsibXl3o>

audience of protesters by leading with song. Emel Mathlouthi, a Tunisian singer, sang “I Am Free, My Word is Free” during the January 14, 2011 candlelight vigil in remembrance of lives lost in the Jasmine Revolution.<sup>128</sup> NPR titled their interview with Mathlouthi as “Emel Mathlouthi: The Voice of the Tunisian Revolution.”<sup>129</sup> While a simple protest song may seem insignificant to the development of the protests, Mathlouthi’s words worked as sustaining factor in the Tunisian protests, became an anthem during the Egyptian uprising and inspired Libyans and Syrians throughout their uprisings.<sup>130</sup> Prior to the protests, Mathlouthi was in self-exile in France where she wrote and performed political songs against the regime that had been censored in Tunisia.<sup>131</sup> In 2007, Mathlouthi sang an earlier rendition of her song “Kelmti Horra” (“My Word Is Free”) in concert at the Place de la Bastille in Paris, the iconic platform where the French Revolution began.<sup>132</sup> She returned to Tunisia during the uprising to play in underground concerts and joined the protests.<sup>133</sup>

Covered by *Al Arabiyah* news and other media outlets, Mathlouthi’s sang during the protests and proclaimed her solidarity with the uprising. According to journalist Jonathan Curiel, her protest song would often echo from demonstrators; protesters were so moved by her song that they memorized the lyrics and the melody:

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<sup>128</sup> “Tunisian Girl Singing I Am Free My Word Is Free During Candle Vigil,” YouTube video, 2:44, posted by 2NISFOOT, January 30, 2011. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uWbASQLSGI&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uWbASQLSGI&feature=youtube_gdata_player); Betto Arcos, “Emel Mathlouthi: Voice Of The Tunisian Revolution,” *NPR*, January 5, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/2013/01/05/168627909/emel-mathlouthi-voice-of-the-tunisian-revolution>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> “Tunisian’s Emel Mathlouthi Sings ‘My Word Is Free’.” *PRI’s The World*, June 5, 2012. <http://www.theworld.org/2012/06/video-tunisian-singer-emel-mathlouthi-sings-my-word-is-free/>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Betto Arcos, “Emel Mathlouthi: Voice Of The Tunisian Revolution.”

<sup>133</sup> Faiza Ghozali, “Songbird of a Tunisian Spring,” *Africa Report*, June 15, 2012. <http://www.theafricareport.com/north-africa/songbird-of-a-tunisian-spring-emel-mathlouthi.html>.

Don't forget the rights of our bread, don't forget the igniter of this story/revolution (Mohammed Bouazizi), I am the voice of the free, I am the voice of the uprisers, our voice will not die, I'm the voice of the uprisers who are not afraid, I'm the secret of the red rose (Tunisia), the people who felt and mourned for her for years and rose up with fire.<sup>134</sup>

The YouTube view count on the videos of her song, while in protest and elsewhere, exceeds 500,000, while her Facebook page has over 53,000 likes.<sup>135</sup> These numbers do not reflect a concrete impact on the protests; however, they do show that, in consideration of Tunisia's internet penetration rate, Mathlouthi's song became relatively popular among Tunisians. Mathlouthi played an active role in the protests despite her being in exile before they began: "I was posting my songs on the social media, and I was trying to reach a larger audience, especially in Tunisia," she says.<sup>136</sup> When she returned to Tunisia in 2010 to join the protests, she says she realized the power of song: "The power is to write songs, because the songs are eternal; the melodies will be here like witnesses."<sup>137</sup> Mathlouthi went on to release her first album "Kelmti Horra" (My Free Word) in 2012, titled after the song she sang in protest on January 14, 2011.<sup>138</sup> Mathlouthi cannot be considered a main driver of the uprisings; however, in consideration of Tunisia's internet penetration rate, through she helped sustain and fuel them.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> "Tunisian Girl Singing I Am Free My Word Is Free During Candle Vigil.," Jonathan Curiel, "Emel Mathlouthi: The Arab Singer Who Inspired Tunisians in Revolution," *KQED Public Media*, May 9, 2012.

<http://www.kqed.org/arts/music/article.jsp?essid=93432>.

<sup>135</sup> "Tunisian Girl Singing I Am Free My Word Is Free During Candle Vigil" YouTube, uploaded 2011; "Emel Mathlouthi." *Facebook*.

<sup>136</sup> Betto Arcos. "Emel Mathlouthi: Voice Of The Tunisian Revolution."

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>138</sup> Curiel. "Emel Mathlouthi: The Arab Singer Who Inspired Tunisians in Revolution."

<sup>139</sup> "Tunisia Internet Usage and Telecommunications Market Report," *Internet World Stats*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/tn.htm>.

The mother of Bouazizi, the street vendor who set himself on fire, was the first person to lead the first Tunisian protests that were aired on *Al Jazeera Mubasher* (live) that same evening.<sup>140</sup> In Tunisia's case, the first protests erupted spontaneously at Bouazizi's funeral and were not organized by anyone; therefore, women did not initiate and organize the uprising which is the first criteria this research uses to classify a protest driver. According to Affi Fethi, a teacher who was interviewed by Al Jazeera, "the major driving force behind these protesters is the Sidi Bouzid union, which is very strong."<sup>141</sup> When asked about whether women were main drivers in Tunisia's uprisings, Eymen Gamha said:

Women were not main drivers in the protests, yet their role was very important. They were side by side with men in marches and sit-ins, making masses bigger. This made other Tunisians more self-confident and convinced them to join the movements and have the courage to face the authoritarian regime. On another hand, women were helping civilians and soldiers who were guarding their neighborhoods by motivating them and giving them food, tea and coffee.<sup>142</sup>

While women may not have been among the main drivers of the uprising, their contributions through social media and communications with media outlets helped enable and support the uprising. Voices outside Tunisia, like human rights and political freedom advocate Sihem Bensedrine were often featured in major news reports that analyzed the unfolding events and, in consideration of Al Jazeera's 40 million people viewership, helped represent and the anti-regime sentiment internationally as well as locally.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, social justice activists and bloggers like Emna El Hammi and Ben Mhenni were not only active voices through their personal

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<sup>140</sup> "Al Jazeera Viewership Profile."

<sup>141</sup> Ryan, "How Tunisia's Revolution Began."

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Eymen Gamha.

<sup>143</sup> "Al Jazeera Viewership Profile."

networks, but they also contributed to organizations such as *Nawaat*, helping to keep Tunisians informed with news they would not hear through state television.

The citizen journalism efforts of women like Lina Ben Mhenni gave social media sites the most up-to-date footage of the Tunisian protests; however, this research suggests that women cannot be classified as main drivers of the uprising based solely on their social media activism. Khaled Koubaa, president of the Internet Society in Tunisia, says “social media was absolutely crucial” to the uprising.<sup>144</sup> He asserts that three months prior to Bouazizi burning himself, a similar case occurred in the city of Monastir but that no one heard about it because it was not video recorded. He says that social media made the difference this time since “the images of Bouazizi were put on Facebook and everybody saw it.”<sup>145</sup> The role of social media’s impact on the Tunisian uprising is debatable, however. Yasmine Ryan, a reporter for *Al Jazeera*, says that “Tunisian protesters relied on Facebook to communicate with each other”; however, she further asserts that “aside from a solid core of activists, most Tunisians did not dare repost the videos [of the first protests] on Facebook or even to “like” them, until president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's final hours.”<sup>146</sup> Such assertions raise questions about how significant of a role social media played in the Tunisian uprising.

Wael Haffar, a 27 year old Tunisian male lawyer, says that women “were in the front lines of all the manifestations motivating the protesters by their speeches. They helped guard the neighborhoods and prepar[ed] food for the men patrolling.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Beaumont. “The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world.”

<sup>145</sup> Peter Beaumont. “The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world”. The Guardian. February 25, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya>;

<sup>146</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html>

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Wael Haffar on April 10, 2013

While this paper argues that women were not drivers of the uprising, it has shown that women were actively engaged and stood alongside and in support of men throughout the protests. According to one interviewee, “there were as much women protesters [sic], female journalists or bloggers [sic] as men journalists or bloggers.”<sup>148</sup> While women in Tunisia may not have occupied “the front seat” in the uprising, this research suggests that their “passenger seat” role was important in supporting the protests. The activism of women inside Tunisia, as well as those who took on leadership roles while still in exile, reflects determination that led these women to being active participants and sustainers of their uprising.

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Anonymous interviewee on April 5, 2013

## Egypt: Women and the Uprisings

The Tunisian uprising acted as a catalyst for the uprisings in Egypt and Yemen.<sup>149</sup> “Tunis is the force that pushed Egypt, but what Egypt did will be the force that will push the world,” according to Walid Rachid, a member of the April 6 Youth Movement.<sup>150</sup> The Egyptian uprising began on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and continued for 18 days, until February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011.<sup>151</sup> The protests were initiated by female protester Asma Mahfouz and the April 6 Youth movement and was in great part driven by their leadership and activism.<sup>152</sup> This section will demonstrate the role of women in the Egyptian protests, a role that analysts say was “vital” to the protests.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> “Tunisia’s Protest Wave.”

<sup>150</sup> David Sanger and David Kirkpatrick, “Egyptians and Tunisians Collaborated to Shake Arab History,” *The New York Times*, February 13, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/world/middleeast/14egypt-tunisia-protests.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/14/world/middleeast/14egypt-tunisia-protests.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0); Aya Khalil, “Egyptian Youth Inspired by Tunisian Revolution, Hope to Follow Suit,” *Aya A. Khalil*, February 26, 2011, <http://ayakhalil.blogspot.com/2011/02/egyptian-youth-inspired-by-tunisian.html>.

<sup>151</sup> Hazem Fahmy, “An Initial Perspective on ‘The Winter of Discontent’: The Root Causes of the Egyptian Revolution,” *Social Research* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 349–376, 350,

<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/1081203725/abstract/13B8FCB375B2FB35D6E/3?accountid=11091>

<sup>152</sup> “Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution.”

### Women in Egypt before the Uprisings

In contrast to women in Tunisia, Egyptian women suffer from greater political and socioeconomic inequalities as well as massive government corruption. According to the United Nations Arab Human Development Report, Egypt scores 0.599 on a scale of 0.1 to 0.9 (0.9 marking the worst off) and ranks 13<sup>th</sup> out of 17 Arab countries on the Gender Inequality Index for 2005, with 17<sup>th</sup> being the worst off.<sup>154</sup> Egyptian women's status and activism fluctuated greatly in the past century. From Gamal Abdul Nasser's advocacy of women's rights, through Anwar Sadat's debilitating economic liberalization plan to Muhammad Hosni Mubarak's narrowing of women's opportunities, Egyptian women have undergone severe sociopolitical and economic difficulties.<sup>155</sup>

Under Abdul Nasser's rule, the development of state feminism was a strategy that ushered in changes to women's societal status and gender relations in general. The 1956 constitution guaranteed women equal opportunity; however, in reality, Egyptian women still faced major obstacles in their societal status and political participation.<sup>156</sup> Despite some progress, independent feminist organizations were

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<sup>153</sup> "Egyptian Women Play Vital Role in Anti-Mubarak Protests," *Radio Free Europe Documents and Publications*, February 7, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/docview/849651998/13AEDC850E06B3A3E68/26?accountid=11091>.

<sup>154</sup> "Human Development Data for the Arab States: GII: Gender Inequality Index,"

<sup>155</sup> Pippa Norris, "Strengthening Gender Equality in Egypt," Briefing paper for the UNDP Regional Conference on Women's Political Participation at *Harvard University*, April 4 2013, 2, [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/var/ezp\\_site/storage/fckeditor/file/pdfs/centers-programs/centers/wappp/events/UNDP%20Scenario%20Briefing%20Paper%20Women%27s%20Empowerment%20in%20Egypt.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/var/ezp_site/storage/fckeditor/file/pdfs/centers-programs/centers/wappp/events/UNDP%20Scenario%20Briefing%20Paper%20Women%27s%20Empowerment%20in%20Egypt.pdf).

<sup>156</sup> "Women in Politics," *Egypt State Information Service*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Story.aspx?sid=2258>; Norris, "Strengthening Gender Equality in Egypt," 2.

repressed.<sup>157</sup> Additionally, during Sadat's time, women suffered from the country's economic erosion, causing them great societal and economic pressures.<sup>158</sup> While Mubarak repealed the 1979 personal status laws and reserved 67% of 500 parliamentary seats women.<sup>159</sup> Egyptian women's societal status has seen some progress in the past decade. According to Freedom House, "Social taboos" that were a hindrance to women's access to some professions have diminished and women now have better legal access.<sup>160</sup> In 2004, women's right groups succeeded in changing the citizenship laws in Egypt, enabling children of Egyptian women who marry non-Egyptian to gain nationality.<sup>161</sup> In 2008, several reforms occurred including the age of marriage being increased to 18, female genital mutilation became illegal and, for the first time in history, women were allowed to become judges.<sup>162</sup> However, until today, women suffer greatly from sexual harassment, a widespread problem that has faced international condemnation.<sup>163</sup> While their social status improved, laws were not always implemented, and women continue to face gender discrimination.<sup>164</sup>

Egyptian women have improved their rates of education throughout the past decade. In 2007, 92% of girls were enrolled in primary school, compared to men's

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<sup>157</sup> "Nasser Elected President," History.com, accessed April 16, 2013

<sup>158</sup> Fouad Ajami, "Retreat from Economic Nationalism: The Political Economy of Sadat's Egypt," *Journal of Arab Affairs* 1, no. 1 (October 31, 1981): [27].

<sup>159</sup> Adam Morrow and Khaled Moussa al-Omrani, "Egypt: First Woman Presidential Candidate Kicks Off Campaign," *Global Information Network*, October 31, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/901131108/13C33AB4BD07004004C/51?accountid=11091>.

<sup>160</sup> Mariz Tadros, "Egypt" in Report on Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa, *Freedom House* (2010): 1–32, 1, [http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline\\_images/Egypt.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Egypt.pdf)

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> "Violence Against Women in Egypt," The Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights, [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/ngocontribute/Egyptian%20Center%20for%20Women\\_s%20Rights.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/ngocontribute/Egyptian%20Center%20for%20Women_s%20Rights.pdf)

<sup>164</sup> Tadros, "Egypt," 3.

95% enrollment rate.<sup>165</sup> Girls represent approximately 49% of the enrollment at the secondary school level, which is of high importance as it is the platform from which one competes for work or university.<sup>166</sup> In the past decade, Egyptian women's presence in higher education institutions has increased and most recently accounts for approximately 46% of enrollment.<sup>167</sup> While their level of education is relatively comparable to that of men's, women's literacy rates lag behind, with the former at 58% and the latter at 75%.<sup>168</sup> Among the obstacles women face in seeking education are economic pressures, particularly among female headed households where the drop-out rates are much higher than average.<sup>169</sup> While female enrollment in schools has increased for women in the past decade, they continue to face economic hurdles.

Women in Egypt, like men, suffer economically. Implemented by Sadat, and carried through Mubarak's rule, Egypt's economic liberalization plan ultimately led to inflation, corruption and the erosion of economic opportunities for the working class and the poor. This left few opportunities for the lower classes while the economic elite profited from increased international trade.<sup>170</sup> Unemployment in Egypt was about 9.4% in 2009 with women's unemployment at about 23%.<sup>171</sup> Most Egyptian women

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<sup>165</sup> "Women in Egypt: Still Struggling," *The Economist*, October 21, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/10/women-egypt>.

<sup>166</sup> Nagwa Megahed, "Access to the University and Women's Participation in Higher Education in Egypt |," *Middle East Institute*, October 13, 2010, <http://www.mei.edu/content/access-university-and-women%E2%80%99s-participation-higher-education-egypt>.

<sup>167</sup> Megahed, "Access to the University and Women's Participation in Higher Education in Egypt."

<sup>168</sup> "Women in Egypt: Still Struggling."

<sup>169</sup> "Egypt," Report by the National Council for Women, *United Nations*, 1-23, 7, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/EGYPT-English.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> "Economic Woes at the Core of Egypt's Struggle," *The National*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/editorial/economic-woes-at-the-core-of-egypts-struggle>.

acquire jobs "in an effort to escape the cycle of poverty," demonstrating the economic hardship and difficult lifestyle of many women belonging to the vast Egyptian underclass.<sup>172</sup> Not only do Egyptian women continue to face difficult social and economic barriers, but they are also underrepresented in the political arena.

Similar to their societal status, Egyptian women's political participation predictably lags behind that of men. In 1956, Nasser granted women the right to vote and to run in elections, granting women full political opportunity.<sup>173</sup> Despite such advancements, however, women remain underrepresented in government. Between 1981 and 2010, women's participation –voting and running- in national elections was merely 5%; throughout that time, only 2% of parliamentary seats and less than 5% of the municipal councils were occupied by women.<sup>174</sup> It was not until the post-uprising elections that Egypt witnessed its first female presidential candidate.<sup>175</sup> While women's representation in government and party politics is low, Egypt boasts a vibrant civil society with many women-led nongovernmental organizations as well as individual activists.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> "Female Unemployment Rate," *The World Bank*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS/countries/EG-XQ-XN?display=graph>.

<sup>172</sup> Sharon Otterman, "Egypt's Changing Career Climate," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 31, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0331/p18s02-hfes.html>.

<sup>173</sup> "Nasser Elected President," *History.com*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/nasser-elected-president>.

<sup>174</sup> Morrow and al-Omrani, "Egypt: First Woman Presidential Candidate Kicks Off Campaign."

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Magdalena Delgado, "Egypt's Civil Society Crackdown: a Test for US-Egyptian Relations," *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, February 3, 2012, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2012/02/egypts-civil-society-crackdown-a-test-for-us-egyptian-relations/>; "NGO Law and Regulation in Egypt," *NGO Regulation Network*, accessed April 13, 2013, [http://www.ngoregnet.org/country\\_information\\_by\\_region/Middle\\_East\\_and\\_North](http://www.ngoregnet.org/country_information_by_region/Middle_East_and_North)

Egyptian women have long played an active role in civil society. According to Denis Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, authors of *Islam in Contemporary Egypt*, Egypt is “known as the birthplace of the Arab women’s feminist movement.”<sup>177</sup> The Egyptian feminist movement began after Egypt ceased to be a British protectorate in 1922.<sup>178</sup> One of the earliest women’s civil society groups, the Egyptian Feminist Union, was founded by Huda El Shaarawi in 1924.<sup>179</sup> While women were actively engage in civil society, their activism became more charity-focused and less political from about the 1950s until the 1970s, due to state repression.<sup>180</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increase in civil society activism and the number of civil society organizations in Egypt.<sup>181</sup> This expansion of civil society, however, did not usher in any substantial steps forward. According to Maha Abdel Rahman, a political science researcher, in the absence of other means of political expression, Egyptian civil society organizations “provide space for political contestation where different groups, otherwise excluded from prospects for power sharing, try to establish and protect their interests and to mobilize the support of the masses around their political programmes.”<sup>182</sup> There has been an increase in women’s political participation through

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[Africa/Egypt.asp](#); Denis J. Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society Vs the State*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 98

<sup>177</sup> Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society Vs the State*, 98

<sup>178</sup> Nada Sherif Ali Ramadan, “Envisioning and Defining a New Egypt: Women and Gender in the January 25th Uprising and Transitional Process” (M.A., Georgetown University, 2012), iv,

<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/1040725739/abstract/139EB351F16305663E/23?accountid=11091>.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>180</sup> Nadjie Al-Ali, “The Women’s Movement in Egypt, with Selected References to Turkey,” *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, April 1, 2002, 8, <http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/9969203536F64607C1256C08004BB140?OpenDocument>.

<sup>181</sup> Maha Abdel Rahman, “The Politics of ‘UnCivil’ Society in Egypt,” *Review of African Political Economy* 29, no. 91 (March 1, 2002): 21–35, 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4006858>.

civil society in Egypt and many civil rights activists attribute this change to modern technologies like social networking sites, such as Facebook.<sup>183</sup> While women's rights and human rights groups were under closer surveillance under Mubarak, Sullivan and Abed-Kotob assert that civil society in Egypt would not be as rich and broadly developed without the involvement of women.<sup>184</sup> An assessment of women's rights in Egypt by Freedom House stresses that "Egyptian women have made advances during the last few decades through the work of an active civil society."<sup>185</sup> Whether on an individual level, through social media or nongovernmental organizations, Egyptian women have cultivated space in the political sphere through civil society engagement.

Women in Egypt have a long history of political protest. The Egyptian women's movement and the nationalist movement were heavily intertwined at the time of the 1919 anti-colonial revolution protests, which worked to the advantage of women by helping them voice their demands.<sup>186</sup> Women were also active in the antiwar and prodemocracy movements in 2003, the labor movement protests in 2006 as well as the ongoing student movements.<sup>187</sup> Women activists such as Israa Abdel-Fattah and Asma Mahfouz were among the co-founders of the "April 6 Youth", a grassroots movement named after the April 6, 2008 labor strike which grew into

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society Vs the State*, 98; Morrow and al-Omrani, "Egypt: Using Facebook, Young Women Take to Political Activism."

<sup>184</sup> Delgado, "Egypt's Civil Society Crackdown."; Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, *Islam in Contemporary Egypt: Civil Society Vs the State*, 98.

<sup>185</sup> Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa - Egypt," *The UN Refugee Agency*, October 14, 2005, <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=country&category=&publisher=FREEHOU&type=COUNTRYREP&coi=EGY&rid=&docid=47387b6a46&skip=0>.

<sup>186</sup> Ramadan, "Envisioning and Defining a New Egypt," 20.

<sup>187</sup> Lila; El-Mahdi Abu-Lughod, "Beyond the 'Woman Question' in the Egyptian Revolution," *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 683–691, 684, <http://hdl.handle.net.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/2027/spo.0499697.0037.310>

nationwide protests; the same group later led the Arab spring protests.<sup>188</sup> Elisabeth Coleman, Foreign Policy Analyst, argues that although women participated in the anti-colonial protests, their involvement in the Arab spring protests in Egypt differed:

What is different today though, I think, is you see much more of a mass mobilization of women. You have much higher levels of education and engagement of women. Across the region now, women make up a majority of college graduates. And in some countries, it's not by a small amount, it's by a large amount... women are engaged both physically - marching in the streets, they're engaged as bloggers, they're engaged in all different ways in the unrest that's going on.<sup>189</sup>

This research suggests that in addition to the mass mobilization of women in the uprising, women initiated the first protests and were actively organizing and leading protests through social media and on the ground.

### **Women and the Egyptian Uprisings**

“The most encouraging feature of the current upheaval is the massive participation of women,” said Dalia Ziada, an Egyptian activist and protester, on the third day of the Egyptian uprising. Women’s civil liberties activists like Ziada used their blogs, “tweeting” power, Facebook pages and other mediums of communication to disseminate information and encourage fellow Egyptians to protest.<sup>190</sup> Women and men were frustrated by widespread corruption, massive economic inequalities, rising prices and a lack of freedom, factors that the BBC and other news sources say caused the protests.<sup>191</sup> Beginning January 25<sup>th</sup> and lasting only 18 days, millions of Egyptians

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<sup>188</sup> Morrow and al-Omrani. “Egypt: Using Facebook, Young Women Take to Political Activism.”

<sup>189</sup> Coleman, “Arab Women Rising: An Uncertain Future.”

<sup>190</sup> Dalia Ziada, “#Jan25: Egypt’s Revolution... How Does It All Start?!” *Dalia Ziada* (blog), February 3, 2011, <http://daliaziada.blogspot.com/2011/02/jan25-egypts-revolution-how-does-it-all.html>.

<sup>191</sup> Martin Asser, “Q&A: Egyptian Protests Against Hosni Mubarak,” *BBC News*, February 11, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12324664>; “Egypt,” *Center for Economic and Social Rights*, accessed April 16, 2013,

took to the street in protest demanding that their president, Hosni Mubarak, step down.<sup>192</sup> The uprising was inspired by the Tunisian protest but was initiated by the protests of the well-known female activist, Asma Mahfouz. While many Egyptian women were in the media's top headlines, I will primarily focus on the most prominent examples of female revolutionary activism that drove the uprisings.

Prior to discussing women's roles during the Egyptian uprisings, it is important to examine social media in Egypt. Egypt is a unique case when it comes to social media as there are 160,000 bloggers in Egypt, mostly between the ages of 20 and 35 years old, and they account for 30% of all blogs in the Arab world.<sup>193</sup> Egypt's internet penetration rate is 21.1% for a population of nearly 80 million people, much lower than most Arab countries and an important figure to note while analyzing Facebook likes, YouTube view counts and Twitter followers.<sup>194</sup> In her empirical study on Egyptian blogs, Journalism Professor Nagwa Fahmy says that the "Egyptian blogosphere is more than a news source; it represents an alternative public space and acts as a bridge between events on the streets and Internet."<sup>195</sup> Such statements highlight the importance of social media in the Egyptian uprising, as it was used to connect the virtual sphere with action on the ground.<sup>196</sup> Melissa Wall, Associate

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<http://www.cesr.org/section.php?id=60>; Fahmy, "An Initial Perspective on 'The Winter of Discontent'," 350.

<sup>192</sup> Mariama. *Women on Front Line of Arab Spring Protests*; Ramadan, "Envisioning and defining a new Egypt," 49.

<sup>193</sup> Nagwa Abdel Salam Fahmy, "Revealing the 'Agenda-cutting' Through Egyptian Blogs: An Empirical Study," in *11th International Symposium on Online Journalism*, 2010, 23–24, 3,

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.189.5435&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

<sup>194</sup> "Egypt Internet Market and Telecommunications Reports," *Internet World Stats*, 2009, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/af/eg.htm>.

<sup>195</sup> Fahmy, "Revealing the 'Agenda-cutting' Through Egyptian Blogs," 3

<sup>196</sup> Bhuiyan, "Social Media and Its Effectiveness in the Political Reform Movement in Egypt," 33.

Professor at California State University, and Sahar El Zahed, a doctoral student, agree, stressing that “researchers have repeatedly identified the Egyptian blogosphere as having helped create[sic] an alternative public space where activists could network and distribute information absent in Egypt’s mainstream media.”<sup>197</sup> This quickly became clear in the Egyptian uprising, with the social media activism of Asma Mahfouz and many others like her. Rikia Saddy, author and marketing and political strategy specialist, says “social media has changed everything.”<sup>198</sup> In her analysis of Egypt’s protests, she argues that “Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were a vital channel... hundreds of thousands of supportive “likes”, comments, tweets, blogs and video blogs from around the world, formed a hopeful chorus that made change seem inevitable.”<sup>199</sup> According to Samantha Shapiro, writer for the New York Times, “in most countries in the Arab world, Facebook is now one of the 10 most-visited Web sites, and in Egypt it ranks third, after Google and Yahoo.”<sup>200</sup> This illustrates how central Facebook is to Egyptians who are on-line. While not all activism took place through social media, this section examines the role that Egyptian women played in the protests and highlights the ways in which social media assisted them in their activism.

Among the most notable female contributors to the revolutionary effort is Asma Mahfouz, who is known for her video log (vlog) that spread through YouTube in January 2011.<sup>201</sup> Mahfouz was one of the first protesters in the Egyptian uprising

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<sup>197</sup> Wall and El Zahed, “I’ll Be Waiting for You Guys,” 1335.

<sup>198</sup> Rikia Saddy, “‘Social Media Revolutions’ by Rikia Saddy,” *Journal of Professional Communications*, February 26, 2011, <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/jpc/vol1/iss1/5/>, 33

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Samantha M. Shapiro, “Revolution, Facebook-Style,” *The New York Times*, January 25, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html>.

and with videos receiving hundreds of thousands of views, became one of the leading voices calling for the first massive protests on January 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>202</sup> Her video was dubbed the “Vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution.”<sup>203</sup> In her video, Mahfouz calls upon all Egyptians to protest on January 25<sup>th</sup>, but she particularly targets men in her speech:

People have some shame! ... I am going down on January 25<sup>th</sup>, and from now till then, I am going to distribute fliers ... If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25<sup>th</sup>. Whoever says women shouldn't go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25<sup>th</sup>. Whoever says it is not worth it because there will only be a handful of people, I want to tell him that you are the reason behind this and you are a traitor just like the president or any security cop who beat us in the streets. Your presence with us will make a difference, a big difference... Go down to the street, send SMSs, post it on the net, make people aware... If each of us manages to bring 5 or 10 to Tahrir square and talk to people and tell them, this is enough. Don't be afraid of the government, fear none but God. Come down with us and demand your rights, my rights, your family's rights. I am going down on January 25<sup>th</sup> and I will say “no” to corruption and “no” to this regime!<sup>204</sup>

Some analysts say that Mahfouz was instrumental in garnering the estimated 80,000 Egyptians that gathered for the January 25<sup>th</sup> protests in Tahrir square, the first protest of such magnitude.<sup>205</sup>

Mahfouz's first video was posted on January 18<sup>th</sup> and quickly spread across various networks outside of her own and news of her vlog was picked up by major news outlets, including the New York Times and Washington Post.<sup>206</sup> In their

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<sup>201</sup> Bhuiyan, “Social Media and Its Effectiveness in the Political Reform Movement in Egypt.”

<sup>202</sup> “Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution.”

<sup>203</sup> Wall and El Zahed, “I'll Be Waiting for You Guys?,” 1334.

<sup>204</sup> “Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution.”

<sup>205</sup> Fahmy, “An Initial Perspective on ‘The Winter of Discontent’,” 373; Juan Cole, “Egypt's New Left Versus the Military Junta,” *Social Research* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 487–510, 489,

<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/1081203764/abstract/13B8FCB375B2FB35D6E/1?accountid=11091>.

<sup>206</sup> Wall and El Zahed, “I'll Be Waiting for You Guys?,” 1333.

examination of Mahfouz's four YouTube videos, Wall and Zahed assert that Mahfouz's first video was mostly viewed by Egyptians, according to YouTube analytics.<sup>207</sup> Her second call to action was posted on the eve of the January 25<sup>th</sup> uprisings and cumulatively her videos received hundreds of thousands of view.<sup>208</sup> Mahfouz used her twitter account, Facebook page and blog to garner support for the uprisings. She has 116,000 Facebook followers and over 380,000 twitter followers.<sup>209</sup> Foreign policy analysts suggest that Mahfouz "understands viral marketing. She was able to mobilize the million that turned up in Cairo and the thousands that showed up in other cities like Alexandria and Suez."<sup>210</sup> According to researchers Melissa Wall and Sahar El Zahed, the "Egyptian blogosphere helped create an alternative public

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 1336.

<sup>208</sup> Note: while this research estimates the cumulative YouTube view counts of Asma Mahfouz's vlogs, there are numerous versions and some have been taken down while others reposted. The following is simply a sample: "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution.," "Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog on the Eve of the Revolution," YouTube video, 3:24, posted by Iyad El-Baghdadi, February 2, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UUbVr3eB9c>; "Asmaa Mahfouz & the YouTube Video that Helped Spark the Egyptian Uprising," YouTube video, 7:13, a report by DemocracyNow, posted by mediagr19, February 8, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JW3m8uwcL4>; "Asmaa Mahfouz describes Jan 25th and gears for the big Friday," YouTube video, 6:21, posted by Iyad El-Baghdadi, February 2, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndb5RPUPCs4>; "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution (fixed subs)," YouTube video, 4:36, posted by Iyad El-Baghdadi, February 2, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBg7O48vhLY>; "Asmaa Mahfouz mirror of 3 vlog post that helped Spark the Revolution in Egypt," YouTube video, 15:01, posted by mmxanonymous, January 4, 2011, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcSs9\\_FY0Cs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcSs9_FY0Cs); Asmaa Mahfouz- عشان كرامتي كمصرية 25أنا نازلة يوم , YouTube video, 4:32, posted by MowatenMasery, January 19, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unG5WAdksQM>.

<sup>209</sup> Asmaa Mahfouz's Facebook Page, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/asmaa.mahfouz>; Asmaa Mahfouz (AsmaaMahfouz), Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/AsmaaMahfouz>; "Who Said the Arab Women Arab Oppressed?," *Asma Mahfouz*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://asmamahfouz.com/index.cfm>.

<sup>210</sup> Aimée Kligman, "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz: The Woman Who Organized Egypt's Historic Demonstrations," *Examiner.com*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.examiner.com/article/meet-asmaa-mahfouz-the-woman-who-organized-egypt-s-historic-demonstrations>.

space where activists could network and distribute information that was absent in Egypt's media."<sup>211</sup> This is important because social media became an outlet for women who faced patriarchal confines to voice their opinions and mobilize people into action.

Mahfouz was not only recognized locally, but also globally. She was one of five activists who received the European Parliament's 2011 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought; an annual prize that recognizes "individuals or organizations that have made an important contribution to the fight for human rights or democracy."<sup>212</sup> Such awards reflect the important role that Mahfouz played in the uprisings. If Mahfouz, and others like her, did not play a prominent role in initiating, organizing and leading protests through social media and on the ground, they would not have received international attention and recognition.

Israa Abdel Fattah, Egyptian internet activist and blogger who is known in Egypt as "The Facebook Girl," is co-founder of the April 6 Youth Movement in Egypt. With over 10,000 Facebook subscribers and 240,000 twitter followers, Abdel Fattah along with other April 6 Youth Movement founders were the first to lead the call for protests on January 25<sup>th</sup>, primarily through Facebook.<sup>213</sup> According Kristian Berg Harpviken, head of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, Abdel Fattah and the

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<sup>211</sup> Wall and El Zahed. "I'll Be Waiting for You Guys," 1335.

<sup>212</sup> "Sakharov Prize," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 2 (2012): 177–179, doi:10.1353/jod.2012.0022.

<sup>213</sup> "Israa Abdel Fattah," *Equal Voice - À Voix Égales*, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://equalvoiceuottawa.wordpress.com/woman-of-the-month/israa-abdel-fattah/>; "Israa Abdel Fattah's Facebook page - اسراء عبد الفتاح" Accessed April 13, 2013. <http://www.facebook.com/EsraaAbdelFattahOfficial>; "أبريل 6 شباب حركة" (shabab6april) on Twitter." Accessed December 20, 2012. <https://twitter.com/shabab6april>; "مش هبطل أحلم لمصر (Esraa2008) on Twitter." Accessed April 13, 2013. <https://twitter.com/Esraa2008>; Dale Sprusansky, "Egypt the Revolution? Conference," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 31, no. 1 (February 2012): 55–56, 55

April 6 Youth Movement played a “key role in maintaining the direction and non-violent character of the Egyptian uprising.”<sup>214</sup> He further asserts that Abdel Fattah became “a central representative of the movement for a peaceful transition in Egypt, a staunch critique of the previous regime, a principled democrat, a proponent of non-violent means, and a local pioneer in the use of social media.”<sup>215</sup> Abdel Fattah was not only active through social media and on the frontlines in Tahrir, she also appeared on *Al Jazeera* and other media outlets to inform viewers of the uprising’s progress.<sup>216</sup> Human Rights First, an non-profit international human rights organization, invited Abdel Fattah to Washington where she gave talks to high school students about leadership and activism, spoke to technology executives and met with United States officials, including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.<sup>217</sup> Abdel Fattah was also featured in a documentary called “A Whisper to a Roar,” a film that follows political leaders and pr-democracy activists in five countries, and was invited to speak about her leadership and activism at Harvard University along with film’s director.<sup>218</sup>

In recognition of her “exceptional courage and accomplishment” in the “struggle for reform in the Arab World,” Abdel Fattah was presented with an award by Freedom House and was recognized at the Middle East Institute’s 65<sup>th</sup> annual conference.<sup>219</sup> She was also named one of the most powerful Arab women of 2011 by

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<sup>214</sup> “Nobel Peace Prize May Recognise Arab Spring,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/27/norway-nobel-idAFL5E7KN36P20110927>.

<sup>215</sup> “PRIO Director’s Nobel Peace Prize Speculations 2011,” *PRIO*, Accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.prio.no/About/PeacePrize/PRIO-Directors-Speculations-2011/>.

<sup>216</sup> Marc Climaco, “Egypt’s ‘Facebook Girl’ Visits D.C.,” March 29, 2011; “Israa Abdel Fattah.”

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> “‘A Whisper to a Roar’ Sparks Discussion,” *Harvard Gazette*, Accessed April 13, 2013, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2013/01/a-whisper-to-a-roar-sparks-discussion/>.

Arabianbusiness.com and Woman of the Year by Glamour, in recognition of “the courageous grass roots work she achieved in the years leading up to the demonstrations this spring.”<sup>220</sup> Abdel Fattah, along with Asma Mahfouz, also became 2011 Nobel Peace Prize nominees.<sup>221</sup> While awards organizations may reflect particular political leanings, they nevertheless recognized the activism of Abdel Fattah which stood above thousands of other uprising leaders. According to journalist and author Courtney Radsch, Abdel Fattah and the April 6 Youth Movement became “hubs, receiving enormous amounts of media attention and ranking among the most influential blogs and media outlets in the region.”<sup>222</sup> Marc Jayson Climaco, from Human Rights First, says that Abdel Fattah “played a leading role in the mass protests in Tahrir Square and is a prominent spokesperson for the youth protest movement in Egypt.”<sup>223</sup> Through the international recognition she received and the ranking of the blog she uses for advocacy, Abdel Fattah is one of the many Egyptian women who played an important role in the protests.

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<sup>219</sup> “The Middle East Institute (MEI) - Conference,” *The Washington Daybook*, November 15, 2011, <http://search.proquest.com/pqrl/docview/903929958/13B1EA0767572966300/6?accountid=11091>; “Freedom House Honors Human Rights Activists from Middle East,” *Targeted News Service*, June 2, 2010, <http://search.proquest.com/pqrl/docview/356952390/13B1DE73EE93E3EFC85/2?accountid=11091>.

<sup>220</sup> “100 Most Powerful Arab Women 2011,” *ArabianBusiness.com*, Accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/100-most-powerful-arab-women-2011-384182.html?view=profile&itemid=384031#.UWmafTccOjc>; Sarah Robbins, “Esraa Abdel Fattah, ‘Facebook Girl: The World-Changer,’” *Glamour*, Accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.glamour.com/inspired/women-of-the-year/2011/esraa-abdel-fattah>.

<sup>221</sup> Ute Schaeffer and Loay Mudhoon, “Egypt’s Women Insist on Their Rights,” *DW*, September 21, 2012, <http://www.dw.de/egypts-women-insist-on-their-rights/a-16252990-1>; “Nobel Peace Prize May Recognise Arab Spring.”; “PRIO Director’s Nobel Peace Prize Speculations 2011.”

<sup>222</sup> Radsch, “Unveiling the Revolutionaries,” 10.

<sup>223</sup> Climaco, “Esraa Abdel Fattah: Organizing Egypt’s Revolution.”

Some of the most prominent women in the Egyptian uprising were members of the April 6 Youth Movement, a group of young activists which boasted 70,000 Facebook supporters at the time of their 2008 strike against government nepotism and economic stagnation.<sup>224</sup> In 2011, with over 363,000 Facebook followers, the movement garnered support through Twitter and organized the first large-scale protest of the uprising on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011.<sup>225</sup> Many analysts and observers highlight that the April 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement as the driving force behind the uprising.<sup>226</sup>

April 6, Kifaya and other New Left groups had pioneered a success full set of repertoires of collective action, centered on putting tens of thousands—and sometimes hundreds of thousands—of demonstrators in city squares... deploying a range of communications technologies to mobilize for crowd action. These methods included not only social media such as Facebook and Twitter but instant messaging, smart telephone SMS, sharing videos on smartphones, and using interviews on Arab satellite stations to promote their message and encourage demonstrations. They also deployed old media, including wall graffiti, chanting from balconies in densely populated neighborhoods, and pamphleteering. Speech making and poetry reading at central demonstration sites such as Tahrir Square contributed to movement esprit de corps.<sup>227</sup>

Through their leadership, the Aril 6 Youth Movement and its women members played a leading role in mobilizing the hundreds of thousands of protesters

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<sup>224</sup> Samantha M. Shapiro, “Can Social Networking Turn Disaffected Young Egyptians into a Force for Democratic Change?” *New York Times Magazine*, January 25, 2009, 36,

<http://search.proquest.com/pqrl/docview/215460424/abstract/13B1DE73EE93E3EFC85/1?accountid=11091>

<sup>225</sup> “أبريل 6 شباب حركة” (shabab6april) on Twitter.”; Sprusansky, “‘Egypt the Revolution’ Conference,” 55.

<sup>226</sup> Schaeffer and Mudhoon, “Egypt’s Women Insist on Their Rights.”; Robert Dreyfuss, “Who’s Behind Egypt’s Revolt?” *The Nation*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/blog/158159/whos-behind-egypts-revolt#>; Mona El-Naggar, “Equal Rights Takes to the Barricades,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/02/world/middleeast/02iht-letter02.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/02/world/middleeast/02iht-letter02.html?_r=0); “April 6 Youth Movement - Revolution in Cairo,” *PBS Frontline*, February 22, 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>.

<sup>227</sup> Cole, “Egypt’s New Left Versus the Military Junta.”

that sustained the uprising throughout the 18 days of protest. Featured on PBS Frontline and other news sites, April 6 Youth is heavily credited for initiating the Egyptian uprising and propelling it forward.<sup>228</sup> In an interview with PBS frontline, Egyptian activist Mona Eltahawy argues that the April 6 Youth were a connector between the different classes: the affluent on-line youth with the disenfranchised Egyptians.<sup>229</sup> According to Eltahawy:

The Internet did not invent courage in Egypt. The Internet did not invent activism in Egypt. But what April 6 was trying to do was it was trying to attract a generation, young people in Egypt, the majority, basically, that are politically disaffected, that are marginalized, and who recognize that they have no future in the country, no political future, no economic future under the Mubarak regime.<sup>230</sup>

The April 6 Youth galvanized support from the workers they had spent year's protesting on behalf of as well as many of the Egyptian youth who were on-line. It is movements like April 6 Youth that supported and strengthened the leadership and activism of Egyptian women like Asma Mahfouz and Israa Abdel Fattah.

Egyptian women living outside Egypt were also active in leadership roles, despite their physical distance during the uprising. Mona Eltahawy, a female Egyptian American Columnist and public speaker on Arab and Muslim issues, was active in following and communicating with international media about the uprising's progression.<sup>231</sup> During the protests in Egypt, Eltahawy was one of the voices of the

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<sup>228</sup> "April 6 Youth Movement - Revolution in Cairo."

<sup>229</sup> "Interview with Mona Eltahawy - Revolution in Cairo," *PBS Frontline*, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/interviews/mona-eltahawy.html>.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> "Mona Eltahawy," (blog), accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.monaeltahawy.com/>; Melissa Jeltsen, "Mona Eltahawy, Egyptian-American Activist, On The Power Of Protest," *The Huffington Post*, February 16, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/16/mona-eltahawy-on-protest\\_n\\_2538094.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/16/mona-eltahawy-on-protest_n_2538094.html); "Women Play Vital Role In Egypt's Uprising," *NPR*,

Egyptian people outside of Egypt. While she has been a controversial figure due to her article “Why Do They Hate Us” in *Foreign Policy*, describing what she calls the war on women in the Middle East, she frequently wrote news pieces for various outlets such as the *New York Times* and was featured on popular news channels such as CNN and the BBC.<sup>232</sup> When discussing the uprisings on BBC Newsnight, Eltahawy asserted that dignity and freedom must prevail in the “democracy vs. stability” debate. In her interview on CNN, she pressed further by urging the media to use the words “uprising” or “revolt” when discussing the events in Egypt, rather than framing it in the context of “crisis” and “chaos.”<sup>233</sup> According to a report in the *New York Times*: “Less than an hour after Mona Eltahawy, an Egyptian blogger and journalist, appealed to CNN to stop focusing on looting and security problems in Egypt following the government’s decision to withdraw the police from the streets, the broadcaster has changed its onscreen headline from “CHAOS IN EGYPT” to “UPRISING IN EGYPT.”<sup>234</sup> These instances of national media coverage helped shape the discourse surrounding the uprisings, both internationally and in Egypt. Public figures, such as Michael Moore who boasts nearly 1.5 million twitter followers, “tweeted” Eltahawy’s plea to CNN and other media outlets. His tweet was “re-tweeted” over 600 times by his followers which then extended through other networks.<sup>235</sup>

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February 4, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/04/133497422/Women-Play-Vital-Role-In-Egypt-Uprising>; Mona Eltahawy, “We’ve Waited for This Revolution for Years. Other Despots Should Quail,” *The Guardian*, January 29, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/29/egypt-mubarak-tunisia-palestine>.

<sup>232</sup> Mona Eltahawy, “Why Do They Hate Us?,” *Foreign Policy*, June 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/23/why\\_do\\_they\\_hate\\_us](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/23/why_do_they_hate_us).

<sup>233</sup> “CNN, Newsnight and NYTimes.com,” *Mona Eltahawy* (blog), accessed February 13, 2013, <http://www.monaeltahawy.com/blog/?p=399>.

<sup>234</sup> Robert Mackey, “Updates on Saturday’s Protests in Egypt,” *The Lede* (blog), *The New York Times*, January 29, 2011, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/29/latest-updates-on-protests-in-egypt-2/>.

With over 170,000 followers on twitter, over 18,000 subscribers on Facebook, and 1000 tweets during the 18 day Egyptian uprising, Eltahawy was an outside voice causing continuous buzz in the media, especially at the onset of the uprising.<sup>236</sup> Although she resides outside Egypt, activism like Eltahawy's helped keep the world abreast of the rapidly unfolding events in Egypt. While the extent of her influence on the uprising cannot be concretely established, Eltahawy was among the leading female Egyptian voices in the international media.

Best known as the first female presidential candidate in Egypt, Buthaina Kamel, television anchor and, more recently a politician, was involved in the Egyptian uprisings. In 2005, while part of the Kefaya (Enough) movement, Kamel and two friends created an election monitoring group called "We're Watching You" to document Hosni Mubarak's first ever elections.<sup>237</sup> Previously a news anchor for Egyptian state television and an evening radio program called "Nighttime Confessions", the most popular program in Egypt, Kamel was widely known across

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<sup>235</sup> Michael Moore, "Egyptian Mona Eltahawy on CNN Telling CNN & Media 2 Stop Using Words 'Chaos' 'Unrest' 'Looting,'" Twitter, *Topsy Pro Analytics*, <https://pro.topsy.com/account/login?next=/>. (According to this social media data analysis program, out of the 623 re-tweets, 124 were labeled influential. Meaning they have to be actively cited by other authors). For details see:

<http://help.topsy.com/customer/portal/articles/669115-influence-methodologies>

<sup>236</sup> Mona Eltahawy (monaeltahawy), Twitter posts, Accessed February 13, 2013, <https://twitter.com/search?q=mona%20eltahawy&src=typd>; Mona Eltahawy's facebook page, accessed February 13, 2013,

<http://www.facebook.com/MonaEltahawyPage?fref=ts>; Mona Eltahawy, Tweets, *Topsy Pro Analytics*. Accessed February 13, 2013. <https://pro.topsy.com/#/activity>.

<sup>237</sup> Nadia Oweidat et al., "The Kefaya Movement," Product Page, 2008, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG778.html>; Jack Shenker, "Bothaina Kamel: Egypt's First Female Presidential Candidate," *The Guardian*, August 5, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/05/bothaina-kamel-egypt-woman-president>; Peter Goodspeed, "Bothaina Kamel Aims to Bring a Social Revolution to Egypt in Run for President," *National Post*, March 30, 2012, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/03/30/unveiled-female-former-television-broadcaster-aims-to-bring-a-social-revolution-to-egypt-in-run-for-president/>.

the Egyptian nation.<sup>238</sup> Prior to the uprisings, she quit her job for state television as she no longer believed in, and was unable to continue reading, the “propaganda bulletins” of Hosni Mubarak’s government.<sup>239</sup> While Kamel carved out her political participation in Egypt early on, she played an active role in Tharir Square at the time of the uprisings, joining protesting men and women from all over Egypt.<sup>240</sup> Kamel used her Facebook page and twitter account to bolster support for the uprising.

With over 316,000 twitter followers, Kamel created a relatively large following through her social media activism and political commentary.<sup>241</sup> According to Kamel, women played a great part in the protests: “They helped plan for it and participated in it and we also gave many female martyrs. We have a share in this revolution, in our revolution.”<sup>242</sup> In an interview with France 24, Kamel describes the support she received, both during and after the protests, as a result of her being a woman.<sup>243</sup> By April 2011, before a date for elections was set, she announced her presidential candidacy and her “Egypt is My Agenda” campaign, revealing her intent to be a voice for the Coptic Christians, Bedouins, the disabled and the poor.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> “Bothaina Kamel Aims to Bring a Social Revolution to Egypt in Run for President.”

<sup>239</sup> Catriona Davies, “The Woman Who Wants to Be Egypt’s First Female President,” *CNN*, September 16, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/09/13/world/meast/egypt-bothaina-kamel>; “Bothaina Kamel Aims to Bring a Social Revolution to Egypt in Run for President.”

<sup>240</sup> “Bothaina Kamel Aims to Bring a Social Revolution to Egypt in Run for President.”

<sup>241</sup> الاخوان خراب مصر (bothainakamel1), Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/bothainakamel1>.

<sup>242</sup> “Bothaina Kamel, Egypt’s First Female Presidential Candidate.”; “Bothaina Kamel, Egypt’s First Female Presidential Candidate,” *France 24*, March 29, 2012, <http://www.france24.com/en/20120328-bothaina-kamel-egypte-elections-place-tahrir>; “Bothaina Kamel Aims to Bring a Social Revolution to Egypt in Run for President”, “بثينة كامل,” Bothaina Kamel, <http://www.bothainakamel.org/>

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> “Bothaina Kamel Aims to Bring a Social Revolution to Egypt in Run for President.”

Buthaina Kamel, much like Mona Eltahaway, used her political and journalistic talents to feed public opinion through the media.

Gihan Ibrahim, better known as Gigi Ibrahim, is a citizen journalist, political activist and blogger who became a well-known face of the Egyptian uprising.<sup>245</sup> Ibrahim spent some of her school years in America and returned to Egypt in 2008, when she began her social media campaign against the Mubarak regime. Like many of the other activists, and as seen in a documentary by PBS Frontline, Ibrahim used her social media networks and connections on the ground to help mobilize protesters.<sup>246</sup> Her work primarily revolved around the labor movement, anti-censorship, anti-police brutality as well as the promotion of human rights, equality and democracy.<sup>247</sup> Through her twitter account, which has over 83,000 followers, her Flickr photo stream and otherwise, Ibrahim actively documented the developments and government brutality in and around Tahrir during the days of protest.<sup>248</sup> She became so well known that, until today, she speaks on panels at conferences and has also been invited as a guest on television, including the prominent and widely watched program *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.<sup>249</sup> Ibrahim was involved in the uprisings from the onset and became one of the most prominent social media activists as a result of her presence in Tahrir Square on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 during what was known as the largest public protests in the history of Egypt.<sup>250</sup> Her prominence led her

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<sup>245</sup> “Gigi Ibrahim,” *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 7:42, April 25, 2011, <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-april-25-2011/gigi-ibrahim>; “Gigi’s Revolution,” *Frontline PBS* video, 11:43, accessed April 13, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/video-gigis-revolution/>.

<sup>246</sup> “Gigi’s Revolution,”; “Gigi Ibrahim,” *Conference on World Affairs*, accessed February 18, 2013, <http://www.colorado.edu/cwa/bios.html?id=20&year=2012>.

<sup>247</sup> “Gigi Ibrahim.”

<sup>248</sup> Gigi Ibrahim (Gsquare86), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/Gsquare86>; Gigi Ibrahim, “25 Jan 2011: The Day of Change,” *Flickr*, January 2011, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gigiibrahim/sets/72157628713654359/>.

<sup>249</sup> “Gigi Ibrahim.”

to be featured on PBS Frontline, CNN, *Al Jazeera*, The New York Times and her photo made the cover of Time magazine.<sup>251</sup> Like many of the other activists, Ibrahim was primarily an on-line personality as the Egyptian uprising was heavily influence by and organized through social media; however, the role that she played in capturing the developments on the ground using social media became a source of information for media outlets and Egyptians who were on-line.

In analyzing the roles that women activists played in the Egyptian uprisings, it is clear that the female leaders and participants of the revolution did not form a homogenous group. The Egyptian women activists come from various backgrounds but all seem to have had one goal in mind: to drive the protests hard enough and oust the dictator with the hope of democratic reforms. Unlike in Tunisia, it was women who initiated the first protests that began the uprising.<sup>252</sup> Men, of course, were also at the forefront of the protests; however, women participated in unprecedented ways in terms of their initiating role and use of social media, both ways in which they attempted to break gender barriers.<sup>253</sup> Asma Mahfouz of the April 6 Youth Movement

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<sup>250</sup> Gigi Ibrahim, "How Can the Egyptian Revolution Win," YouTube video, 28:07, posted by swpTvUk, February 1, 2012,

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U9LLB1N\\_4k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U9LLB1N_4k)

<sup>251</sup> "Gigi's Revolution," "Gigi Ibrahim on John King," YouTube video, 7:01, *CNN* interview, posted by JFhsfohhMN, May 19, 2011,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPQ39w-wAbM>; "Gigi Ibrahim on the military crackdown on Tahrir," YouTube video, 1:18, *Al Jazeera* interview, posted by ScarceMedia, February 26, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbT1azZmR2M>;

"NYTimes interviews Gigi Ibrahim via Skype," YouTube video, 9:40, New York Times interview, posted by ScarceMedia, February 21, 2011,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtfaSNFQ-28>.

<sup>252</sup> Ryan, "How Tunisia's Revolution Began,"; Wall and El Zahed, "I'll Be Waiting for You Guys,"; Sarah El Deeb and Ahmed Al-Haj, "Nobel Peace Prize Winner Tawakkul Karman Profile: 'The Mother Of Yemen's Revolution'," December 7, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/07/nobel-peace-prize-winner-karman-profile\\_n\\_999774.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/07/nobel-peace-prize-winner-karman-profile_n_999774.html).

<sup>253</sup> Morrow and al-Omrani, "Egypt: Using Facebook, Young Women Take to Political Activism,"; Fatoorehchi, "Egypt: Women in Protests Breaking Gender Barriers."

took to the streets with only a few individuals and, as a result of her frustration, she uploaded “the vlog that helped spark the revolution”, her video call to protest which quickly spread across YouTube and other social media sites.<sup>254</sup> Both Mahfouz and Israa Abdel Fattah were co-founders of the April 6 Movement which was among the main driving organizations behind the protests. Abdel Fattah’s social media activism led the organization and the movement of women protesters throughout the 18 days of the uprising until Mubarak stepped down.

Activists like Mona Eltahaway, despite residing outside of Egypt, helped shape international public opinion through prominent media outlets, creating a buzz inside and outside of Egypt.<sup>255</sup> Within an hour of her interview with CNN, media outlets changed the way they were reporting on the “chaos” and the term describing Egypt’s uprising became the “revolt” for which Eltahaway advocated.<sup>256</sup> Political activists and prominent figures such as Buthaina Kamel gave the uprising the media exposure through her television appearances and commentary. Her advocacy for disadvantaged groups made her appealing to those who have often been sidelined from the mainstream notion of the “Muslim Egyptian”. Finally, activists such as Gigi Ibrahim, who, like many other female activists, was interviewed by well-known media outlets, were able to reach the youth inside Egypt and outside through their continuous documentation of the protests. These women are only a sample of the numerous female voices that protested, wrote, recorded and tweeted throughout the uprisings of Egypt.<sup>257</sup> This research suggests that because Egyptian women satisfy the

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<sup>254</sup> Wall and Zahed. “‘I’ll Be Waiting for You Guys,’” 1334.

<sup>255</sup> Mona Eltahawy (monaeltahay), Twitter, *Topsy Pro Analytics*.

(There were over 2000 tweets about Eltahaway throughout the 18 days of the Egyptian uprising, inside and outside of Egypt.) <https://pro.topsy.com/#/activity>

<sup>256</sup> “CNN, Newsnight and NYTimes.com.”; Moore, “Egyptian Mona Eltahawy on CNN Telling CNN & Media 2 Stop Using Words ‘Chaos’ ‘Unrest’ ‘Looting.’”

criteria set forth in this research for what constitutes a driver. Since women initiated the first protests, organized and led protests throughout the uprisings and managed social media campaigns, they are among the main drivers of the Egyptian uprising.

## **Yemen: Women and the Uprisings**

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<sup>257</sup> For additional information on the various women who led and participated in the Egyptian protests, see “Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution”:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NamUZHWJem0><http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NamUZHWJem0>

The Yemeni uprising began on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2011 and continued until February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012.<sup>258</sup> The first protests in Yemen were initiated by female protesters and, from the onset, were heavily pushed forward by their leadership and activism.<sup>259</sup> One of the unique features of Yemen's uprising was that media coverage frequently focused on women's mobilization and their organization into women-only protests.<sup>260</sup> Yemen's case differs from that of Tunisia and Egypt due to Yemeni women's poor societal status and low rate of political participation. This research suggests, however, that Yemeni women are the strongest case illustrating women's participation in the uprisings.

### **Women in Yemen before the Uprisings**

In comparison to Tunisia and Egypt, Yemeni women score even lower on the societal and political status scale. Economically, Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world.<sup>261</sup> Not only are women economically disadvantaged, they also have the added challenge of a highly conservative society, both culturally and religiously.<sup>262</sup> According to the United Nations Arab Human Development Report, Tunisia scores 0.769 on a scale of 0.1 to 0.9 (0.9 marking the worst off), and ranks the worst out of 17 Arab countries on the Gender Inequality Index.<sup>263</sup> In fact, Yemen has ranked the worst out of all the countries listed on the Global Gender Gap Index report

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<sup>258</sup> Mary Schwoebel, "Women in Yemen's Protests," *United States Institute of Peace*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.usip.org/publications/women-in-yemens-protests>.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> "Human Development Data for the Arab States: GII: Gender Inequality Index," *United Nations Development Program*, 2011, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/data/indicators/2012-34.aspx>.

<sup>262</sup> Jessica Childs, *Yemeni Women Find Voice in Revolution* (Lanham, United States: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc., July 22, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/878736307/13/B9575D6A21FA2F93E/15?accountid=11091>.

<sup>263</sup> "Human Development Data for the Arab States."

for the last six years.<sup>264</sup> With a heavily divided tribal society, Yemen is unique in its political make-up which caused the uprising to extend over approximately a year.<sup>265</sup> While Yemen's protests did not achieve immediate elections, they managed to depose President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was president of Northern Yemen since 1978, unified Yemen in 1990 and was the first president to be elected in Yemen's reunification in 1999.<sup>266</sup> After a year of protests, President Ali Abdullah Saleh was officially replaced by his vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al-Hadi, who is currently interim president until elections are held in 2014.<sup>267</sup>

Yemeni society is highly stratified and conservative, causing girls and women to face numerous societal pressures from a very young age, such as early marriage and socially conservative confines.<sup>268</sup> Health and reproductive issues remain one of the biggest challenges Yemeni girls and women face, as it is the family or the male guardian who make most decisions.<sup>269</sup> Among the many challenges is the issue of child marriage, especially in the rural areas. Ten year old Nujood Ali was the youngest known girl to have filed for a divorce after being married to a man three times her age. As a result of international pressure, the Yemeni government raised the legal age of marriage to 17.<sup>270</sup> Domestic abuse is also rampant in various forms, although it is socially unacceptable for women to talk about.<sup>271</sup> Additionally, the

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<sup>264</sup> "The Global Gender Gap Report 2012," *World Economic Forum*, 2012: 1-381, 358, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf).

<sup>265</sup> "Yemen Profile - Timeline," BBC News, November 28, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14704951>.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Anne Meneley, "Living Hierarchy in Yemen," *Anthropologica* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): 61–73, 64, doi:10.2307/25605958.

<sup>269</sup> Amal Basha. "Yemen." In *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice*, edited by Sameena Nazir and Leigh Tomppert. (Oxford: Freedom House, 2005).

<sup>270</sup> "Yemeni Child Bride Dies of Bleeding After Intercourse," *News.com*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.news.com.au/world-old/yemeni-child-bride-dies-of-bleeding-after-intercourse/story-e6frfkyi-1225851585843>.

practice of female circumcision is used to control female sexuality.<sup>272</sup> Until today, most women in Yemen wear *niqab*, a full face veil, which is usually black, and it is a cultural taboo for them to leave the house of their husband or family, as well as raise their voices in public in many areas.<sup>273</sup> Despite being known for championing women's rights, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's accused women of "mingling with men" during the uprising, an attempt to garner support from the traditional tribal leaders and consequently deter women from protesting.<sup>274</sup>

The social hurdles women face are exacerbated by their lack of education.<sup>275</sup> School attendance among girls and young women is extremely low, especially in rural areas. In 2002, female enrollment in basic education was 36.8%.<sup>276</sup> Because schools are often distant and have a mixed gendered setting, many girls and women are not allowed to attend because of societies' traditional views on women leaving the home alone and gender segregation.<sup>277</sup> As a result of early child marriage, many girls and young women are stripped of educational opportunities and drop out early.<sup>278</sup> Females spend an average of seven years in school.<sup>279</sup> Approximately half of girls at the primary school level do not attend school and two out of every three Yemeni women

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<sup>271</sup> "National Report on Women's Status in Yemen," United Nations, May 2004: 2-20, 8-9, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/YEMEN-English.pdf>

<sup>272</sup> Meneley, "Living Hierarchy in Yemen," 64.

<sup>273</sup> Shackle, "The two revolutions of Yemen's women," 11

<sup>274</sup> "Tawakkul Karman – Profile," The Guardian, October 7, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/07/tawakkul-karman-profile>.

<sup>275</sup> "At a Glance: Yemen - Promoting Girls' Education in Yemen," UNICEF, May 25, 2012, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen\\_25167.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen_25167.html).

<sup>276</sup> "Yemen: Basic Education," YouTube video, 2:52, posted by "WorldBank," September 15, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=layVFxs9h-M&NR=1&feature=endscreen>

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Lorraine Hawkins, "Women's Lives and Social Change in Old Sana', the Republic of Yemen" (Ph.D., State University of New York at Binghamton, 2007), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/pqrl/docview/304722421/abstract?accountid=11091>.

<sup>279</sup> "The Global Gender Gap Report 2012," 359.

are illiterate.<sup>280</sup> While education for girls and women is improving, they still lag far behind. As student increase in age, so does the education gap between boys and girls.<sup>281</sup> According to UNICEF, “girls accounted for only 38.9% of children enrolled in basic education in 2004/5... and by ninth grade, only 44 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys.”<sup>282</sup> Such low rates of education are not only a reflection of women’s societal status, but they also reflect the economic inequalities Yemeni women face.

Plagued by corruption, Yemen also fares low on the economic scale.<sup>283</sup> As a result of social discrimination towards women and higher illiteracy amongst them, Yemeni women tend to be disproportionately affected by the Yemen’s dire economic situation.<sup>284</sup> In general, 34.8% of Yemenis live below the poverty line.<sup>285</sup> As a result of scarce resources, population growth and declining oil reserves, Yemenis face difficulties with regards to their economic growth.<sup>286</sup> The decrease in economic growth results from rising inflation (13%), high population growth (3.02%) and an increasing unemployment rate (20-40%), especially among Yemeni women and youth.<sup>287</sup> According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Yemen’s female adult unemployment rate currently sits at 41 percent.<sup>288</sup> Perhaps not surprising is that only 6% of women work in the non-agricultural sector, a figure that reflects society’s

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<sup>280</sup> “At a Glance: Yemen - Promoting Girls’ Education in Yemen.”

<sup>281</sup> “Accelerating Girl’s Education In Yemen,” *UNICEF*, 2007: 1-31, 8, <http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/Policy-Paper-Girls-education-Yemen.pdf>.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> “Yemen,” *Freedom House*, 2012, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/yemen>.

<sup>284</sup> Amal Basha, Rana Ghanem, and Nabil Abdulhafid, “Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa - Yemen,” *The UN Refugee Agency*, October 14, 2005, <http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=47387b712f>.

<sup>285</sup> “Millenium Development Goals: Republic of Yemen,” *United Nations Development Programme*, July 7, 2012, [http://www.undp.org/ye/yemen\\_mdgs.php](http://www.undp.org/ye/yemen_mdgs.php).

<sup>286</sup> Basha, Ghanem, and Abdulhafid, “Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa – Yemen.”

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> “The Global Gender Gap Report 2012,” 359.

generally conservative stance against gender mixing.<sup>289</sup> While women are allowed to work, societal traditions and views of women in the workforce has led to weak female economic participation.<sup>290</sup> Yemeni women also suffer from a lack of property rights which, along with their generally low income, is often controlled by their male family members.<sup>291</sup> Yemeni women suffer as a result of their economic position and are disenfranchised by their economic dependence, societal status and low levels of education.

Much like their societal status, women in Yemen have a weak presence in the political sphere. While women received the right to vote in 1967, they generally remained confined to the domestic sphere.<sup>292</sup> According to the United Nations assessment of Yemen's progress towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, women's participation in parliament is "very low" and "deteriorating".<sup>293</sup> In 1990, there were 11 women in parliament, which declined to two women in 1993 and 1997. This number ultimately decreased to one woman in parliament in 2004.<sup>294</sup> In contrast, however, women voters increased from 15% in 1993 to 42% in the parliamentary election in 2003.<sup>295</sup> Governmental representation may be low; however, women in Yemen have found the ability to participate politically through civil society.

Despite the limitation they face in the public sphere, Yemeni women have found ways to be politically active through civil society. The first women's

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Basha, Ghanem, and Abdulhafid, "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa – Yemen."

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> "The Global Gender Gap Report 2012," 359.

<sup>293</sup> "Millenium Development Goals: Republic of Yemen."

<sup>294</sup> Basha, Ghanem, and Abdulhafid, "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa – Yemen."

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

organizations were created in the 1940's and 1950's by the British, and were later taken over by women from business families.<sup>296</sup> Women are active in non-governmental organizations (NGO) in Yemen. According to an assessment by Society of Development for Women and Children in Yemen, there are approximately 200 women's NGOs throughout 19 Yemeni governorates.<sup>297</sup> Tawakkul Karman, the woman who initiated the Yemeni uprising, is one of many women who found their political footing through civil society. Karman founded Women Journalists Without Chains in 2005, an NGO dedicated to freedom of expression and women's rights.<sup>298</sup> It is through such civil society outlets that, while limited, women were able to exert their political activism.

Yemen scores low on the scale of civil liberties, according to Freedom House, as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are highly repressed.<sup>299</sup> Women were more politically active through protests in the South of Yemen, particularly during the revolutionary struggle, which led to independence from the British in 1967.<sup>300</sup> In a rare interview with three members of the General Union of Yemeni, we learn that Yemeni

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<sup>296</sup> Afrah Nasser, "Yemen Is Experiencing Two Revolutions, Says Female Activist," *Voices of the Arab Spring*, November 17, 2011, <http://www.voicesoftheabrspring.org/1/post/2011/11/yemen-is-experiencing-two-revolutions-says-female-activist-cnn.html>.

<sup>297</sup> "Institutional Assessment of Women Local Non-Governmental Organizations in Yemen," Report for the *Society for the Development of Women and Children*, November 2002, <http://www.soul-yemen.org/userfiles/files/Institutional%20Assessment%20of%20Women%20LNGOs%281%29.pdf>.

<sup>298</sup> "Laureate Lights: Women Journalists Without Chains," *Nobel Peace Prize Forum*, August 22, 2012, <http://nobelpeaceprizeforum.org/laureate-lights-women-journalists-without-chains/>.

<sup>299</sup> "Yemen," *Freedom House*.

<sup>300</sup> Maxine Molyneux, Aida Yafai, Aisha Mohsen and Noor Ba'abadd. "Women and Revolution in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen." *Feminist Review*, No. 1 (1979): 4-20, 5, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/stable/pdfplus/1394747.pdf?acceptTC=true>

women were actively involved in the revolutionary process towards independence.<sup>301</sup> According to Aida Yafai, the women active in the struggle had to try and convince the religious leaders and their families that they should leave their homes and be part of the struggle with their male counterparts, as social customs, tradition and religious interpretation were against such activism.<sup>302</sup> Yafai says that “women led demonstrations, they were active in support of the trade union movement, or in campaigns against British bias in the school curricula.”<sup>303</sup> She described women taking up arms and fighting with the revolutionaries as they would often get caught in the crossfire while delivering food to their fighting husbands; some of these women died.<sup>304</sup>

Women have not been involved in any large scale revolutionary protests since the struggle for independence, with the exception of smaller-scale human rights and free speech protests that were organized by NGOs throughout the 2000s, typically in the capital Sana’aa and with minimal impact.<sup>305</sup> As the following section will show, the overwhelming and somewhat surprising surge of women in protest was marked by the 2011 uprising, which witnessed women as catalysts alongside men.

### **Women and the Yemeni Uprisings**

“In Taghir [change] Square, women were among the most energetic participants in the protests,” argues Khaled Fattah.<sup>306</sup> In his analysis of what he calls Yemen’s “social *intifada*” (uprising), Fattah asserts that “for the first time in decades,

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Shackle, “The Two Revolutions of Yemen’s Women,” 11.

<sup>306</sup> Khaled Fattah, “Yemen: A Social Intifada in a Republic of Sheikhs,” *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 79–85, 81

there was public mixed interaction between men and women” and, he believes, “the breaking of that barrier, which prevented Yemeni women from fully participating in the public sphere, is one of the most impressive socio-cultural achievements of Yemen’s social intifada.”<sup>307</sup> More than six months after the Tunisian revolution, the same slogans erupted in the streets of San’aa: “The people want the fall of the regime” along with other chants such as, “Yesterday Tunisia, today Egypt, tomorrow Yemen.”<sup>308</sup> Clearly, a large proportion of Yemeni’s felt a sense of solidarity with Tunisia and Egypt. In a symbolic act, the regime and its supporters countered protesters by occupying Yemen’s historic Tahrir Square (the square Saleh’s supporters occupied; a different square than Taghir). It is worth noting that Yemen’s Tahrir was named after Tahrir Square in Cairo and constructed by Egyptians during the 1960s Yemeni Republican-Royalist civil war.<sup>309</sup> Through an analysis of key women and active organizations, it will become clear that women in the Yemeni uprisings not only supported and sustained the protests, but they initiated the popular uprising and kept it alive for a year.

Described as “the mother” and face of the revolution, Tawakkul Karman has become widely recognized as an icon for resistance and change.<sup>310</sup> In 2005, Karman founded the human rights group Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), a human rights organization focused on democratic rights and freedom of expression.<sup>311</sup> Prior to the peaceful protests that WJWC held since 2007 and up until the uprising, Karman held weekly protests at the Girl’s College of Sana’a University.<sup>312</sup> She was

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 81

<sup>310</sup> “Tawakkul Karman – Profile,” *The Guardian*.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

the first to camp in protest in Yemen's Taghir (change) square in 2011 but, shortly after, was arrested and imprisoned.<sup>313</sup> Soon after her imprisonment, approximately 200 female supporters protested for her release, which was "a key moment in Yemen's uprising," and a time when "the tide began to turn against Saleh."<sup>314</sup> The next day, January 24, 2011, she was released and was leading yet another protest by the afternoon.<sup>315</sup>

After her release from prison, Karman called for a "Day of Rage" protest, which resulted in 20,000 people flocking to the streets in mass civil uprising on February 3, 2011.<sup>316</sup> Her activism and leadership in initiating the first protest of such magnitude helped direct the uprising.<sup>317</sup> With nearly 80,000 followers on Twitter and 375,000 Facebook subscribers, Karman was clearly one of the leading female figures of the uprising as her popularity spread rapidly.<sup>318</sup> She is praised by Egyptian journalist Mona Eltahawy and other fellow tweeters, with thousands of followers, as being the leader of Yemen's protests, Yemen's "Joan of Arc" and Yemen's "Asma Mahfouz".<sup>319</sup> Karman is not loved by everyone, however, as she is a member of

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<sup>312</sup> Sahar Taman, "Tawakul Karman, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Talks the Talk and Walks the Walk," *The Huffington Post*, October 8, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sahar-taman/tawakul-karman-nobel-peace-prize-laureate\\_b\\_1001166.html?](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sahar-taman/tawakul-karman-nobel-peace-prize-laureate_b_1001166.html?)

<sup>313</sup> "Tawakkul Karman – Profile." *The Guardian*.

<sup>314</sup> El Deeb and Al-Haj "Nobel Peace Prize Winner Tawakkul Karman Profile."

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> "Profile: Tawakul Karman," *Al Jazeera English*, October 7, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/10/201110711019647156.html>.; Taman, "Tawakul Karman, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate."

<sup>317</sup> "Tawakkul Karman – Profile." *The Guardian*.

<sup>318</sup> Tawakkul Karman, Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/TawakkolKarman>; "توكل كرمان" Tawakkol Karman's Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/Tawakkol.Abdulsalam.Karman>; "Tawakkul Karman – Profile." *The Guardian*.

<sup>319</sup> Mona Eltahawy, Tweet, March 11, 2011, <https://twitter.com/monaeltahawy/status/46273419603492864>; Arie Amaya-

Yemen's leading opposition party, *Al-Islah*, making her an influential political figure.<sup>320</sup> Her successes and supporters far outweighed her opponents as she succeeded in becoming the youngest and first Arab woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, an achievement which gained rapid and widespread international recognition.<sup>321</sup> In the history of the Nobel Peace Prize, 101 individuals have received the reward and only 15 of those people have been women, including Karman.<sup>322</sup> Karman sidelined her domestic responsibilities as a mother of three and remained dedicated to the Yemeni uprisings, by celebrating her peace prize achievement in Taghir Square where she received congratulatory visits in her tent.<sup>323</sup>

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Akkermans, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/Dilmunite/status/122529448317816833>

<sup>320</sup> "Tawakkul Karman – Profile." *The Guardian*.

<sup>321</sup> Information retrieved using Topsy Pro Analytics:

CNN, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/cnnbrk/status/122236808540065792>; Al Jazeera, Tweet, December 18, 2011, <https://twitter.com/AJEnglish/status/148634952370634754>; The Associated Press, Tweet, October 7, 2011, <https://twitter.com/AP/status/122253659429019648>; BBC News, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/BBCWorld/status/122244666631536640>; MSNBC News, Tweet, October 7, 2011, <https://twitter.com/NBCNews/status/122262337922154496>; Reuters, Tweet, October 7, 2011 <https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/122237360573390848>; ABC News, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/ABC/status/122236349850988544>; The Washington Post, Tweet, October 7, 2011, <https://twitter.com/washingtonpost/status/122238031569752065>; France 24, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/France24/status/122236815947210752>; Daily Telegraph, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/TelegraphNews/status/122236663333269504>; Guardia World, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/guardianworld/status/122235564194922496>; US Department of State, tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/StateDept/status/122384902359486464>; Al Arabiyah, tweet, October 7, 2011, [https://twitter.com/AlArabiya\\_Eng/status/122237486234738688](https://twitter.com/AlArabiya_Eng/status/122237486234738688); Euronews, Tweet, October 7, 2011,  
<https://twitter.com/euronews/status/122237404735209473>; Global post, Tweet, October 7, 2011, <https://twitter.com/GlobalPost/status/122323239321083904>; Spiegel, Tweet, October 10, 2011,  
[https://twitter.com/SPIEGEL\\_English/status/123340033842360320](https://twitter.com/SPIEGEL_English/status/123340033842360320)

<sup>322</sup> "Tawakkul Karman Visits Mason," YouTube video, 39:19, a lecture at George Mason University, posted by masonWeb, October 27, 2011,  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsZeu7Zyhf0&feature=share>

Karman's new status granted her the leverage needed to continue her struggle in advocating for a peaceful uprising toward the ultimate goal of democracy. She became an icon of the Yemeni uprising as her photo was displayed throughout the protests, in tents and even held and hailed by men, despite women's pictures not being heavily used in public across Yemen.<sup>324</sup> Time magazine named her one of history's sixteen most rebellious women, attesting to her courage in leadership.<sup>325</sup> According to Abubakr Al-Shamahi, a British-Yemeni freelance journalist and editor of Comment Middle East, Karman was integral to the Yemeni protests movement:

In all honesty, the Yemeni protest movement that we see today would not be the same without Tawakkol Karman. Throughout the nine months of the ongoing Yemeni uprising it has become normal to walk through Change Square and hear her voice over the loudspeaker, leading the youth in chants. She was one of the first to support the youth in their protests, joining protests following the fall of Ben Ali of Tunisia and then Mubarak of Egypt. In January, the Yemeni government moved to silence her, but her subsequent arrest led to even larger protests demanding her release.<sup>326</sup>

Karman gained international attention as result of her activism; she met with former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and traveled to New York, lobbying various actors to support the Yemeni uprising.<sup>327</sup> In a

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<sup>323</sup> "Yemen Live Blog," *Al Jazeera*, 2011,

<http://blogs.aljazeera.com/topic/yemen/yemen-oct-7-2011-1400>.

<sup>324</sup> Atiaf Alwazir, "Yemen: No Spring Without Women," *Al Akhbar English*, February 14, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/yemen-no-spring-without-women>; Abubakr Al-Shamahi, "Tawakkol Karman: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate," *Al Jazeera English*, October 9, 2011,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/10/201110813924645224.html>.

<sup>325</sup> "16 of History's Most Rebellious Women - Photo Essays," *TIME*, accessed April 17, 2013,

[http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2057714\\_2251980,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2057714_2251980,00.html).

<sup>326</sup> Al-Shamahi, "Tawakkol Karman: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate."

<sup>327</sup> "Congratulations to Female Nobel Peace Laureates," *U.S. Department of State*, October 7, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/10/175164.htm>; "Ban and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Discuss Human Rights Situation in Yemen," *UN News Centre*, 2011,

message of congratulations for the Nobel Prize from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Karman was praised as a “shining” example of the difference that women can make and the progress they can help achieve”.<sup>328</sup> Clinton stressed the “unflinching courage, strength and leadership” of Karman and the two other female Nobel Prizes winners, calling them an inspiration for women’s rights due to their “extraordinary accomplishments” in the promotion of peace and security.<sup>329</sup> Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama honored Karman with the International Women of Courage Award for her “exceptional leadership and courage in the area of women’s rights and equality.”<sup>330</sup> In her meeting with Ki-Moon on October 2011, Karman discussed human rights, the situation of Yemeni’s amidst the uprisings and how peace and political stability can be achieved.<sup>331</sup> Karman says that she believed her Nobel Peace award would help accelerate the revolution and garner more support and a higher number of protesters.<sup>332</sup> Karman was right, as she was celebrated all across Yemen and was recognized by prominent celebrities, news anchors and rights organizations for her

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<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40116&Cr=yemen&Cr1=#.UW1XI6DWrK>; “Exclusive: Nobel Laureate Tawakkul Karman on the Struggle for Women’s Rights, Democracy in Yemen,” *Democracy Now* video, 59:05, October 2011,

[http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/21/exclusive\\_nobel\\_laureate\\_tawakkul\\_karman\\_on#.Tq8Cn1vm0nc.twitter](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/21/exclusive_nobel_laureate_tawakkul_karman_on#.Tq8Cn1vm0nc.twitter).

<sup>328</sup> “Congratulations to Female Nobel Peace Laureates,” *U.S. Department of State*

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>330</sup> Nadia Al-Sakkaf, “Renowned Activist and Press Freedom Advocate Tawakul Karman,” *Women Journalists Without Chains*, June 17, 2010,

<http://womenpress.org/articles.php?id=309>.

<sup>331</sup> “Ban and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Discuss Human Rights Situation in Yemen,” *UN News Centre*; “Karman Pushes United Nations to Exile Saleh,” *Yemen Post*, January 29, 2011AD,

<http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=6476&MainCat=3>.

<sup>332</sup> “Nobel Peace Laureate Tawakkul Karman: ‘The Prize Will Accelerate Our Revolution’s Victory,’” *Spiegel Online*, October 2011,

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nobel-peace-laureate-tawakkul-karman-the-prize-will-accelerate-our-revolution-s-victory-a-790877.html>; “Tawakkul Karman Interview: Nobel Peace Prize Could Help Arab Spring,” *The Daily Beast*, October 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/10/09/tawakul-karman-interview-nobel-peace-prize-could-help-arab-spring.html>.

Nobel Prize and her leading role in the uprising.<sup>333</sup> By initiating the first demonstrations, leading and mobilizing the protests throughout the uprising and using social media to garner support, Karman became one of the most prominent leaders of Yemen's uprising.<sup>334</sup>

Blogger and freelance journalist Afrah Nasser has been writing about democracy, women's rights and the politics of Yemen since 2010. CNN named her blog as one of the Middle East's top 10 must-read blogs and The Monitor's top 35 Middle East blogs.<sup>335</sup> The International Journalist Network also labeled her one of the most active women journalists on Twitter.<sup>336</sup> She boasts nearly 14,000 twitter followers and nearly 5000 Facebook followers, a significant number considering the low internet usage rates in Yemen.<sup>337</sup> In 2010, Yemen's internet penetration rate was 1.8% for a population of 23,495,361, second lowest in the Arab world; therefore, social media statistics must be assessed relative to the usage.<sup>338</sup> Social media's role should not be diminished; however, as there are nearly 500,000 Facebook subscribers in Yemen and activists also used SMS to disseminate protest information.<sup>339</sup> In fact,

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<sup>333</sup> Mia Farrow, Tweet, <https://twitter.com/MiaFarrow/status/12235915827519488>; Christiane Amanpour, Tweet, <https://twitter.com/camanpour/status/122279962567905280>; Global Fund for Women, Tweet, <https://twitter.com/GlobalFundWomen>.

<sup>334</sup> "Exclusive: Nobel Laureate Tawakkul Karman on the Struggle for Women's Rights, Democracy in Yemen," *Democracy Now*; "Tawakkol Karman: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate," Al Jazeera English.; Taman, "Tawakul Karman, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate."

<sup>335</sup> Catriona Davies, "Ten Must-read Blogs from the Middle East," *CNN*, April 20, 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/04/14/bloggers.middle.east/>; "Afrah Nasser: A Young Yemeni Lady Who Was Born To Write," *Afrah Nasser* (blog), accessed February 13, 2013, <http://about.me/afrahnasser>.

<sup>336</sup> "Afrah Nasser: A Young Yemeni Lady Who Was Born To Write."

<sup>337</sup> Afrah Nasser, Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/AfrahNasser>; Afrah Nasser's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/afrah.nasser1>

<sup>338</sup> "Yemen Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports," *Internet World Stats*, 2010, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/ye.htm>.

mobile users can receive tweets directly through SMS, a service offered by Twitter for when users are not connected to the internet via their mobile.<sup>340</sup>

Nasser lived in Sana'a where the protests erupted in Yemen and, according to Global Voices Online, had been uploading videos and photos in a call for revolution.<sup>341</sup> She was active in blogging about the uprising and provided updates of the unfolding events in Taghir Square.<sup>342</sup> She has written about Yemen through various news outlets, including CNN, The National and others. In one of her articles, she writes about the progress of the Yemeni uprising, citing that women's exceptional participation is one of the uprising's greatest merits:

I have been astonished by the growing numbers of female protesters as the uprising has proceeded. It started with just a few women; then day after day the number multiplied. Thousands of female protesters have been actively participating in demonstrations across the country since February 2011. Female doctors have been playing an important role treating wounded protesters and female activists have been running seminars on political issues.<sup>343</sup>

While the supporting role female doctors played cannot classify them as drivers, women's leadership in running political seminars suggests that women were active in

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<sup>339</sup> "Yemen Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports,"; Atiaf Alwazir, "Social Media in Yemen: Expecting the Unexpected," *Al Akhbar English*, December 30, 2011, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/social-media-yemen-expecting-unexpected>.

<sup>340</sup> "Receiving SMS Notifications for Tweets and Interactions," *Twitter*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://support.twitter.com/articles/20169920-receiving-sms-notifications-for-tweets-and-interactions#>.

<sup>341</sup> "Yemen: A Life-Threatening Message to Blogger Afrah Nasser" *Global Voices*, March 2011, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/03/14/yemen-a-life-threatening-message-to-blogger-afrah-nasser/>.

<sup>342</sup> Davies, "Ten Must-read Blogs from the Middle East."

<sup>343</sup> Afrah Nasser, "Yemen Is Experiencing Two Revolutions, Says Female Activist," *Voices of the Arab Spring*, November 17, 2011, <http://www.voicesoftheabrspring.org/1/post/2011/11/yemen-is-experiencing-two-revolutions-says-female-activist-cnn.html>.

training other women. Through such seminars, women were in part directing and guiding smaller groups of female protesters which became part of the masses. Nasser was an active protester in the uprisings and says that women's activism proved they have as much right to demand democracy as men, a message to lift what she calls "gender apartheid".<sup>344</sup> Nasser moved to Sweden in self-exile in May 2011 after receiving threats for her anti-regime opinions and writing; she announced through twitter that she would be leaving to Denmark where she "will be representing Yemen's experience through cyber-activism."<sup>345</sup> Despite her self-exile, Nasser continued her advocacy, writing and media campaigns.

Researcher and blogger Atiaf Alwazir was among the key female figures that helped drive the Yemeni uprisings. Alwazir was an active leader in the protests, particularly through the use of social media. According to Yemeni female activist Shatha Al-Harazi, Alwazir was active in the protests from the beginning; "working as part of a youth group on various events, talking to the media to spread information on the revolution, organizing with women on how to guarantee women's rights in the future government, translating documents, helping with awareness raising events and mainly documenting the revolution in all its aspects."<sup>346</sup> She used her blog "Woman from Yemen" and Twitter account for commentary and to document and share photos, videos and eye witness accounts.<sup>347</sup> According to Alwazir, the perception of male

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<sup>344</sup> Nasser, "Yemen Is Experiencing Two Revolutions, Says Female Activist."

<sup>345</sup> Afrah Nasser, "Let's Learn to Go Without Qat, Say Yemenis," *CNN*, April 12, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/12/opinion/yemen-qat-opinion-afrah-nasser/index.html>.

Afrah Nasser, "In the Face of a Political Storm, Yemen's Women Stand Firm," *The National*, August 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/news-comment/in-the-face-of-a-political-storm-yemens-women-stand-firm>; Afrah Nasser, Tweet, May 7, 2011, <https://twitter.com/afrahnasser/status/66804486387146752>

<sup>346</sup> Shatha Al-Harazi, "Faces from Yemen's Revolution Atiaf Al-Wazir," *Shaza171's Blog*, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://shaza171.wordpress.com/2011/07/08/faces-from-yemen%e2%80%99s-revolution-ati-af-al-wazir-by-shatha-al-harazi/>.

public dominance in Yemen changed with the uprising as thousands of married and single women took to the streets. She believes that “the visibility of these women in the public arena became an iconic symbol of women’s empowerment. In comparison to other Arab Spring states, the sheer number of Yemeni women in the streets for a period of 12 months became a point of pride for Yemeni citizens.”<sup>348</sup> While a massive number of women protesting in the streets does not make women drivers of the uprisings, it is one indicator of the active participation of women as a collective social group in a country where women’s public participation is often unwelcome.

Alwazir says that women were on the frontlines of the protests; they documented the uprising, volunteered for committees and nursed the wounded.<sup>349</sup> Alwazir was one of these women; however, she went beyond organizing and leading protests and became an active analyst, public advocate and citizen journalist through social media. Alwazir has over 10,000 twitter followers and, as a result of her leadership in the uprisings, received invitations to speak at conferences such as Trust Women –a conference by Thomas Reuters foundation and the International Herald Tribune- and The London Conference on Cyberspace.<sup>350</sup> She has been interviewed by

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<sup>347</sup> Atiaf Alwazir’s Twitter Photos, *PhotoSugar*. Accessed March 11, 2013, <http://www.photosugar.com/t/womanfromyemen>; “Woman from Yemen: Images from Friday of ‘Sincere Friday,’” *Woman from Yemen*, September 16, 2011, <http://womanfromyemen.blogspot.com/2011/09/images-from-friday-of-sincere-friday.html>.

<sup>348</sup> Atiaf Alwazir, “A Long Road Ahead for Yemeni Women,” *Open Democracy*, December 3, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/atiaf-zaid-alwazir/long-road-ahead-for-yemeni-women>.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Atiaf Alwazir (WomanfromYemen), Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/WomanfromYemen>; “A Conference by Thomson Reuters Foundation and the Interantional Herald Tribune,” *Trust Women*, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://www.trustwomenconf.com/speakers/>; “London Conference on Cyberspace Gets Underway,” *Gov.uk*, August 28, 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/london-conference-on-cyberspace-gets-underway>.

the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and has contributed articles to news sites such as *Jadaliyyah*, *Open Democracy*, *Al Akhbar English*, the Arab Reform Initiative, *The Guardian* and *Foreign Policy*.<sup>351</sup>

In one of her articles, she argues that despite the low internet penetration rate in Yemen and the rest of the Middle East, social media cannot be discounted or underestimated as an effective tool, as the majority of on-line users are youth ages 15-24 and account for about 66% of Yemen's population.<sup>352</sup> Media and Wi-Fi tents were set-up during the protests and those who accessed the internet throughout the uprising –be it in an internet café, by phone or otherwise- disseminated the information they acquired through SMS, word of mouth, flyers and other means.<sup>353</sup> According to Alwazir, the lack of independent media in Yemen has caused Yemeni's to turn to alternative media sources such as blogs, Facebook and twitter which has resulted in a significant increase in citizen journalism.<sup>354</sup> While she does not believe that “women's participation in the protests has led to greater female participation in social and

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<sup>351</sup> “ISD Interview with Yemeni Activist Atiaf Al Wazir,” YouTube video, 3:03, posted by Institute4SD, March 7, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmoMXSCfHos&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmoMXSCfHos&feature=youtube_gdata_player); Atiaf Alwazir, “Garbage Collectors and the Struggle for Workers' Rights in Yemen,” *Jadaliyya*, June 10, 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5788/garbage-collectors-and-the-struggle-for-workers-ri>; Atiaf Alwazir, “A Long Road Ahead for Yemeni Women,” *Open Democracy*, December 3, 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/atiaf-zaid-alwazir/long-road-ahead-for-yemeni-women>; Atiaf Alwazir, “Atiaf Alwazir's Articles,” *Al Akhbar English*, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/2087>; Atiaf Alwazir, “Atiaf Zaid Alwazir's Articles,” *Arab Reform Initiative*, accessed April 17, 2013, <http://www.arab-reform.net/atiaf-zaid-alwazir>; Atiaf Zaid Alwazir, “Yemen: Time for Hadi to Move Beyond Managing Power Struggles,” *The Guardian*, October 13, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/oct/13/hadi-power-yemen>; Tom Finn and Atiaf Al-Wazir, “A House Divided,” *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2011, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/a\\_house\\_divided](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/a_house_divided).

<sup>352</sup> “Social Media in Yemen: Expecting the Unexpected.”; “Yemen,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2010,

<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/country-profiles/pdf/887.pdf>

<sup>353</sup> “Social Media in Yemen: Expecting the Unexpected.”

<sup>354</sup> “ISD Interview with Yemeni Activist Atiaf Al Wazir.”

organized political life,” she does argue that “there is no doubt that women’s participation was a leading factor in the [protest] movement.”<sup>355</sup> The active engagement and participation by leaders such as Alwazir increased the exposure of women in the uprising.

Rasha Jarhum is yet another female activist who undertook a leading role in the Yemeni uprisings. Jarhum began a career in development, coordinating activities on women's empowerment with the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights. She acted as an outreach liaison for the Coalition of the International Criminal Court in the region and worked as a communication consultant for UNICEF under the Girls Education and Equality Programme.<sup>356</sup> In response to the hardship and violence Yemeni’s faced during the uprising, Jarhum launched a youth-led humanitarian response coalition called Yemeni Youth for Humanitarian Relief (YYHR). It was initially formed to grant support to injured protesters from Aden, but quickly expanded relief efforts to Hasaba and Abyan.<sup>357</sup> She was active in raising much needed funds for the injured protesters and was among a slew of female citizen journalists that exposed the regime’s aggression through the use of social media. She has nearly 3,000 twitter followers and over 1,000 Facebook followers.<sup>358</sup> While her social media network is not extensive, it was only of many ways in which she was active.

Jarhum is credited by Ginny Hill, an Associate Fellow at Chatham House, for having created a map of military positions in the capital city of Sana’a.<sup>359</sup> The map

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<sup>355</sup> “Yemen: No Spring Without Women.”

<sup>356</sup> “Rasha Jarhum,” *LinkedIn*, accessed April 16, 2013, <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/rasha-jarhum/38/19/564>.

<sup>357</sup> Interview with Rasha Jarhum by Aminah Kandar on April 8, 2013.

<sup>358</sup> Rasha Jarhum (rrj\_934), Twitter account, [https://twitter.com/rrj\\_934](https://twitter.com/rrj_934).

provided protesters and activists with a blueprint of shelling and clashes as well as neutral forces and areas of political stability.<sup>360</sup> She has been publicly recognized for her support by UNDP Yemen and has had her calls to protest re-tweeted by prominent activists such as the co-founder of Support Yemen media campaign's Atiaf Al Wazir, a researcher and blogger who has over 10,000 twitter followers.<sup>361</sup> While she considers her contribution to be "a fraction" of what her "fellow sisters" did, her founding of a relief organization and political mapping initiative make her contribution during the protests of importance.<sup>362</sup> Jarhum continued her activism after the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Her most recent assignment was with UNDP/Yemen as a communications and visibility for the Joint Electoral Assistance Project.<sup>363</sup> She cites the promotional video Sawa Nebnehah as the core of her campaign, a video which received nearly 10,000 likes when posted by the "Your Vote Protects Yemen" group on Facebook.<sup>364</sup> It is women like Jarhum who led the uprising until the day President Saleh resigned.

Female leadership is not limited to individual figures, but also groups such as Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), a non-profit organization dedicated to human rights and the promotion of freedom of opinion and expression. WJWC was

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<sup>359</sup> *Topsy Pro Analytics*. Accessed March 10, 2013. <https://pro.topsy.com/#/dashboard>.

<sup>360</sup> "Sana'a Clashes Map - Google Maps." Accessed March 10, 2013. [https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF&msa=0&msid=216935770293944581886\\_0004ad594d98b6b2f07f3](https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF&msa=0&msid=216935770293944581886_0004ad594d98b6b2f07f3).

<sup>361</sup> UNDP Yemen (UNDPYEMEN), Twitter account, *Topsy Pro Analytics*, <https://twitter.com/undpyemen>; Atiaf Alwazir (WomanfromYemen), Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/womanfromyemen>.

<sup>362</sup> Interview with Rasha Jarhum.

<sup>363</sup> Interview with Rasha Jarhum.

<sup>364</sup> "Sawa Nebnehah with English Subtitle," YouTube video, 7:41, posted by Assamaye Ala'a, February 23, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnmgjyhieCc&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnmgjyhieCc&feature=youtube_gdata_player); "Sawa Nebnehah With..." Accessed March 10, 2013, [http://www.facebook.com/yemenelections/posts/392842964076300?comment\\_id=5452462&offset=0&total\\_comments=9](http://www.facebook.com/yemenelections/posts/392842964076300?comment_id=5452462&offset=0&total_comments=9).

founded by current chairwoman Tawakkul Karman and seven other female journalists in 2005.<sup>365</sup> Among its main goals is to provide journalists with skills, especially women and youth, and improve media efficiency.<sup>366</sup> Since its inception, and due to a lack of independent journalism in Yemen, WJWC publishes an annual report in which it documents attacks against newspapers and journalists. As a result, the organization is under continuous scrutiny by the Yemeni authorities.<sup>367</sup>

WJWC was at the forefront of the pro-democracy protests in Yemen's uprising.<sup>368</sup> Female activist Nadia Al-Sakkaf describes the activities of WJWC in an article which has seen nearly 40,000 views on the official WJWC web-site.<sup>369</sup> According to Al-Sakkaf and other news outlets, Karman and fellow female leaders from WJWC had been leading sit-ins and demonstrations in Yemen's public squares since 2007.<sup>370</sup> These demonstrations continued weekly, often outside the cabinet building in Sana'a, and were focused on human rights abuses, political prisoners and drone attacks, among other issues.<sup>371</sup> While the number of protesters fluctuated, they were persistent until January 14, 2011, the day that Yemen's streets received news of

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<sup>365</sup> "Women Journalists Without Chains."; "Laureate Lights: Women Journalists Without Chains Nobel Peace Prize Forum."; "Women Journalists Without Chains قیود بلا صحفیات" *Facebook*. Accessed March 11, 2013.

<http://www.facebook.com/Women.Journalists.Without.Chains>.

<sup>366</sup> "Yemen - Tawakkol Karman and Women Journalists Without Chains." Accessed March 11, 2013. <http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/womens-rights/wr-middle-east/wr-yemen/607-yemen-women-journalists-without-chains.html>.

<sup>367</sup> "Laureate Lights."

<sup>368</sup> "Yemen - Tawakkol Karman and Women Journalists Without Chains."; "Women Journalists Without Chains - WJWC - قیود بلا صحفیات"; Fatma Naib, "Karman: Peaceful Revolution 'Only Solution,'" *Al Jazeera English*, October 8, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/10/2011107172033851656.html>; Abubakr Al-Shamahi, "Tawakkol Karman: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate," *Al Jazeera English*, October 9, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/10/201110813924645224.html>.

<sup>369</sup> "منظمة صحفیات بلا قیود."

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>371</sup> "Tawakkol Karman: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate."

the fall of Tunisia's president Ben Ali.<sup>372</sup> According to the National Endowment for Democracy, WJWC initially used an SMS service to send human rights violation notifications to cell phones; however, the government shut down the service within a year. After the fall of Ben Ali, WJWC's chairwoman, Karman, used Facebook to call for a rally of solidarity with the Tunisian people.<sup>373</sup> Thereafter, the protests continued, in conjunction with WJWC, until the time Karman was detained. Her detention resulted in approximately 200 supporters protesting for her release, which was the main spark that ignited the massive uprising.<sup>374</sup> It was not simply the leadership and activism of individual women that drove the uprisings, but also women-led organizations, such as WJWC that initiated and led the protests.

It is clear that women played a role in the Yemeni protests; however, the question is how far their participation went in terms of driving the uprising. When asked about the role women played in the uprisings, Hanaa Saleh, a female Yemeni film director, said that women contribution was "decisive". Saleh stresses that women played an "effective role and the proof of that is Tawakul Karman; from my point of view she ignited the first spark of Yemeni revolution."<sup>375</sup> Tawakkul Karman, Afrah Nasser, Atiaf Al Alwazir, Rasha Jarhum and Women Journalists Without Borders are not the only female individuals and organizations that helped drive the uprisings. There are many other women who were leaders, organizers and social media activists,

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<sup>372</sup> Tawakkol Karman, "Our Revolution's Doing What Saleh Can't – Uniting Yemen," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2011,

[http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/08/revolution-saleh-yemen-peace-historic?CMP=twt\\_gu](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/08/revolution-saleh-yemen-peace-historic?CMP=twt_gu).

<sup>373</sup> "Tawakkol Karman and Women Journalists Without Chains," National Endowment for Democracy. Accessed March 11, 2013. <http://www.ned.org/reporters/tawakkol-karman-and-women-journalists-without-chains>.

<sup>374</sup> "Tawakkol Karman and Women Journalists Without Chain.," "Yemen Frees Protest Activist," Al Jazeera English, January 24, 24, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/20111241029655943.html>.

<sup>375</sup> Interview with Hanaa Saleh by Aminah Kandar on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

such as Bushra Al-Maqtari, Shatha Al Harazi, Ghaida Al Absi, Sarah Ishaq, Sahar Ghanem, Hend Aleryani, Nadia Al-Sakkaf and Sarah Jamal, all of whom contributed to the evolution of the protests. In describing the protests during the time of the uprising, Yemeni journalist Abubakr Al-Shamahi says:

Women are a sizeable part of the protest movement, and are visible throughout the various protest squares around the country, and on marches. Female protesters have stood atop government vehicles during protests, and faced water cannon and bullets. They have kept the field hospital running around the clock. There was a recent show on Arab satellite television debating the various issues concerning women in the Arab world. A Saudi woman spoke of wanting to drive, a Yemeni woman of overthrowing a dictator.<sup>376</sup>

Through their organization of women-led protests such as “no spring without women”, to their unified approach in setting the agenda for the national women’s conference, Yemeni women were a force to be reckoned with during the uprisings.<sup>377</sup>

Abdulkader Al Guneid, a Yemeni social media activist with over 3,000 twitter followers, tweeted that women were at the frontlines of the protests in Taiz, Yemen citing one of many video clips wherein Yemeni women are shown at the forefront of the protests.<sup>378</sup> A From the countless news reports, videos and pictures showing women protesting in massive groups, women-only protests to women leading men in protests chants, women were active leaders and organizers in the uprising.<sup>379</sup>

With the exception of a few incidences of government crackdown on protestors, Yemen’s uprising remained relatively peaceful, a feature promoted by its

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<sup>376</sup> “Tawakkol Karman: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.”

<sup>377</sup> “Yemen: No Spring Without Women.”

<sup>378</sup> Abdulkader Alguneid (alguneid), Twitter account, *Topsy Pro Analytics*, <https://twitter.com/alguneid>; بالشعب عليهم اعتدى الذين تعز حرائر بعض, YouTube video, 1:28, posted by FreedomTaiz, September 15, 2011, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kUVR7NnUOw&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kUVR7NnUOw&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>379</sup> “Yemeni Women Protesters - Photo.” Accessed March 10, 2013.

<http://www.arabianbusiness.com/thousands-of-yemeni-women-protest-over-saleh-remarks-394150.html?tab=Article>.

women activists.<sup>380</sup> In a country where tribal alliances run deep with the second highest rate of gun ownership in the world, this was no easy feat.<sup>381</sup> Dr. Khaled Fattah, guest lecturer at the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University in Sweden, asserts that “Yemen’s social intifada created a new space for women’s empowerment, networks, courage and voices.”<sup>382</sup> Alwazir agrees, believing that the extent of women’s activism in the public sphere during the uprisings broke boundaries in Yemen, although women continue to face many challenges. Despite the obstacles, Alwazir is hopeful, stating that “the revolution gave women a voice, boosted their self-confidence and made them believe that the impossible is possible.”<sup>383</sup> Without the activism and leadership of women, the Yemeni uprising would not have begun with such vigor, nor would it have been sustained for as long as it was.

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<sup>380</sup> “Tawakkol Karman and Women Journalists Without Chains.”; “Tawakkul Karman Says Yemenis Will Continue with Their Peaceful Revolution,” Al Arabiya News, November 10, 2011, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/11/10/176398.html>.

<sup>381</sup> “Tawakkul Karman Says Yemenis Will Continue with Their Peaceful Revolution.”; Max Fisher, “What Makes America’s Gun Culture Totally Unique in the World, in Four Charts,” The Washington Post, December 15, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/15/what-makes-americas-gun-culture-totally-unique-in-the-world-as-demonstrated-in-four-charts/>.

<sup>382</sup> Fattah, “Yemen: A Social Intifada in a Republic of Sheikhs,” 81.

<sup>383</sup> Atiaf Alwazir, “A Long Road Ahead for Yemeni Women,” *Open Democracy*, December 3, 2012. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/atiaf-zaid-alwazir/long-road-ahead-for-yemeni-women>.

## Conclusion and Theory Implications

The Tunisian, Egyptian and Yemeni uprisings share many similarities; however, each differs not only in terms of the duration of the protests but, more pertinently, in the extent to which women drove the uprisings. It is important to remember that the term *driver* indicates that women were not only supporters, enablers and sustainers of the protests, but they satisfied three main criteria; namely, they initiated the first protests, led and organized protests throughout the uprising and led and managed social media campaigns and media communication. This means that women pushed, guided and directed the protests, significantly contributing to their formation and evolution.

Convention would dictate that since Tunisia had long been viewed as an example of an Arab country dedicated to women's rights, Tunisian women must have played the most significant role out of the "Arab Spring" uprisings. This, however, was not the case. In Yemen, where there was significantly less female political participation than Tunisia and Egypt, particularly in government, the force with which women protested and drove the uprisings was greater than Egypt and far greater than in Tunisia. While women were undoubtedly active in the Tunisian uprising, the number of female activists and, more importantly, the impact of their protest efforts does not compare with the unlikely candidate: Yemen.

Discussing why there are differences in the extent of women's activism is beyond the scope of this paper; however, I will highlight a few possible factors. First, the Tunisian uprising was spontaneous, whereas Egyptians and Yemenis planned and

organized their protests. This spontaneity minimized the planning time and decreased the opportunity for Tunisian women to engage on the same level and scale as Egyptian and Yemeni women. Second, Tunisian women enjoyed many rights in comparison with Egyptians and, worse off, Yemenis; therefore, women may not have felt as compelled to take the risk of political dissent. Third, as established earlier in this paper, President Ben Ali safeguarded many of the rights afforded to women by his predecessor Habib Bourguiba; therefore, women's rights activists and organizations may not have seen any immediate incentives in taking to the streets in protest. On the contrary, their lower level of participation can be linked to fears of an Islamists government rising to power and compromising their rights.

In Tunisia, women generally enjoyed equality in most areas of public life and were making in-ways in the political sphere prior to the uprising. While Tunisian women still face some patriarchal confines in their status in society, they have made significant strides in terms of their level of education in comparison with men as well as their economic status. In terms of their political participation, Tunisian women have long been active in civil society, governmental institutions as well as in protest history. Overall, Tunisian women fare very well in terms of their sociopolitical status and were generally better off than their counterparts in Egypt and Yemen. While it was Mohamed Bouazizi's mother who first protested after he set himself on fire, there is not enough substantial evidence to indicate that Tunisian women were among the main drivers of the Tunisian uprising. Indeed, Tunisian women played an important role as protesters, leaders, citizen journalists and social media activists, but it appears that they played a complimentary role whereby they helped support and sustain the uprising.

Women in Egypt were on very different footing than Tunisian women prior to the uprisings, which may be an indicator of the extent to which Egyptian women drove the Egyptian protests. As has been established, women in Egypt face many societal pressures, educational hardships and often dire economic conditions. In terms of their political participation, Egyptian women are generally active in civil society but have much less power in the formal governmental sphere. They do, however, boast a long history of active protest since the onset of the women's movement that began during the breakdown of British colonial rule. Similar to Tunisia, women were among Egypt's first protesters. Asma Mahfouz, the young lady who appeared in "the vlog that sparked the Egyptian revolution", was among the few who initiated the first mass demonstrations by calling for protest by way of social media. The difference between Tunisia and Egypt is that women not only initiated the protests but, in Egypt's case, they took on a frontline role in organizing and leading the protests both on the ground and on-line. In Tunisia, evidence for the former lacks, indicating that women were not as much drivers as the Egyptian women were.

The most interesting conclusions to be drawn from this research are from Yemen. Prior to the uprisings, women faced numerous societal challenges and, like their male counterparts, they lacked access to proper education and suffered greatly economically. Similarly, while women have been politically active, particularly in civil society, they were not as involved as women in Egypt and Tunisia. Additionally, women are severely underrepresented in government in comparison to Tunisia and Egypt, with only one woman in parliament. Although Yemeni women have historically been active in public protests, the extent and public activism and leadership in the recent uprising was unprecedented. In the case of Yemen, women were among the main drivers of the uprising. Women leaders such as Tawakkul

Karman along with organizations such as Women Journalists Without Chains started and led the protests from day one until the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Overall, this paper suggest that women's roles as initiators of the first protest, leaders and organizers and social media manager makes them among the main drivers of the Yemeni uprisings.

In looking more closely at Egypt and Yemen, women not only faced greater societal challenges, but also rank low in their political participation. Egyptian women's activism through civil society can be considered one of the main factors that brought so many active women leaders to the forefront of the protests. In Yemen, it appears to have been the opposite. The repression of women's activism in the public sphere, along with the poor societal status of women are the two main factors that led Yemeni women to drive the uprising with such determination. The pattern deduced from this research is that higher levels of education, economic prosperity and governmental participation amongst women are connected to lower levels of participation in protest. This hypothesis offers a new dimension to Arab women and protest that should be further explored.

While much more research needs to be conducted in the realm of Arab women in protests, particularly with regards to the recent wave of protests in the Middle East, this paper lays out guiding framework which can be used for further research. Yemen, the country that seemed least likely to produce women drivers was in fact the country with the most active women leaders. Therefore, this research concludes that the more marginalized women are, the more likely they are to adopt prominent roles in protest.

### **Theory Recommendations**

Three main theories were examined for the purpose of this research; women and protest theory, social movement theory, and political alignment theory as they offer a perspective that can be analyzed through the role of women in the Arab uprisings.<sup>384</sup>

In relation to women and protest theory, Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg are correct in that social protest theory lacks gender analysis.<sup>385</sup> Rita Noonan's critique of the insufficiency of traditional political opportunity models is in alignment with this research as women's political power under authoritarian regimes is not well examined.<sup>386</sup> Her argument against the idea that there is a positive relationship between "the degree of openness in the polity" and women's political participation holds true for this research as Tunisia, the country with the most "openness in the polity" did not necessarily lend for more active or greater political participation of women; whereas, Egypt and Yemen did. Furthermore, Noonan's theory of "less political 'space' can lead to "a greater 'voice' for women" holds true and helps with understanding the way in which Yemeni women protested under strict societal pressures, a great lack of political autonomy and under an authoritarian regime.<sup>387</sup>

Sarah Henderson and Alana Jeydel's analysis of women and social movement theory is not convincing for the case of women in the Arab uprisings. Their theory of women generally joining revolutionary movements out of concern for "larger struggles" of national self-determination or class, rather than for gender equality, is

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<sup>384</sup> Lisa Baldez. *Why Women Protest : Women's Movements in Chile*. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/georgetown/docDetail.action?docID=10021408>.

<sup>385</sup> Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg. "Women and Social Protest." New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.7

<sup>386</sup> Rita Noonan, "Women Against the State", 84

<sup>387</sup> Rita Noonan, "Women Against the State", 84

largely correct; however, in many instances, women who joined the Arab uprisings have expressed that their role in the protests was with dual intent: to topple a dictator and bring about justice and democracy as well as gain a double revolution in terms of women's rights.<sup>388</sup> While Henderson and Jeydel are correct in that women "have been and still are a minority in these movements", their driving role, particularly in the case of Egypt and Yemen, is just as significant.<sup>389</sup> In the Arab world, their theory of women's duties in the private sphere leading to their subordinate position in the public is generally correct; however, their generalized assumption that women's domestic responsibilities prevent them from assuming lead roles in protests was disproven throughout the Arab uprisings, again, particularly in the case of Egypt and Yemen.<sup>390</sup>

Similarly, their allegation that women are often "unable to participate in the same ways that men do" is also flawed. Women in the Arab uprisings, Yemen particularly, greatly defied the odds of societal expectations and domestic responsibilities. The authors' drawing of a correlation between the barriers women face in political and economic institutions and those faced while participating in political uprisings is untrue for the Arab uprisings as the protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen are precisely what lent women the space and opportunity to make their voices heard and drive the uprisings to their intended goals.<sup>391</sup> Such opportunities

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<sup>388</sup> "Yemen Is Experiencing Two Revolutions, Says Female Activist."

<sup>389</sup> Alana S. Jeydel and Sarah Henderson. *Women and Politics in a Global World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 73 ; "Women Have Emerged as Key Players in the Arab Spring." *The Guardian*, April 22, 2011.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/22/women-arab-spring>; "Women Have Emerged as Key Players in the Arab Spring." *The Guardian*, April 22, 2011.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/22/women-arab-spring>.

<sup>390</sup> Alana S. Jeydel and Sarah Henderson. *Women and Politics in a Global World*. 72

<sup>391</sup> Alana S. Jeydel and Sarah Henderson. *Women and Politics in a Global World*. 72

were clearly not found within the political institutions; otherwise, women probably would not have revolted as strongly from the start.

Finally, West and Blumberg's "iron law of patriarchy" theory, which asserts that women lead in the initial phases of protest but men tend to take over as the scope and visibility of the protest increases, was disproven in the case of Egypt and Yemen.<sup>392</sup> In Yemen, it was precisely the time when the protest movement gained visibility that women activists, such as Karman, gained the spotlight and further international recognition. Therefore, in the Arab uprisings, women leading and organizing in the early phases of protest did not lead to men taking over the leadership roles as the movement grew in terms of visibility and scale.<sup>393</sup> In the Arab uprisings, the "iron law of patriarchy" is certainly not applicable to all cases.

In her theory of women and protest, Lisa Baldez discusses the types of mobilization and alignment women undertake in protest.<sup>394</sup> In the "tipping" model, Baldez asserts that mobilization occurs as a result of how individual activists respond to one another's actions, meaning a "tip" in protest will occur when a large number of people protest, which influences other women to join.<sup>395</sup> This research suggests that the "tipping" theory cannot be applied as a standard model for all cases of women and protest. In Tunisia's case, there are two main reasons the tipping model cannot be applied: first, the spontaneous nature of the protests did not afford women as much time to frame their alignment as women in Egypt and Yemen, and second, because women's rights were safeguarded by President Ben Ali they did not quickly mobilize

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<sup>392</sup> Guida and Blumberg, *Women and Social Protest*, 39

<sup>393</sup> Guida and Blumberg, *Women and Social Protest*, 39

<sup>394</sup> Lisa Baldez. *Why Women Protest : Women's Movements in Chile*. Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/georgetown/docDetail.action?docID=10021408>.

<sup>395</sup> Lisa Baldez. *Why Women Protest*.

at the “tipping” unlike Egypt and Yemen, where women were among the main orchestrators of the uprisings and suffered more under failed economic and social policies. More broadly, the theory of political alignment cannot be applied to women, or men, in “flashpoint” revolutions such as those considered in this paper, where political groupings are rare in movements divided in binary terms between anti- and pro-regime factions.

The Arab uprisings are ongoing, and while there has been very preliminary research on the role of women in the uprisings, there is still a substantial amount of basic scholarly work that must be done in order to move further into why women protested, if such protest activism differed significantly from what would have been expected based on the situation of these women prior to the uprisings and how such protest behavior differed from country to country in the Arab uprisings. Questions such as: How do the recent Arab uprisings differ from protests past? What makes women as a social group unique and important to the study of protest? And, of course, what did this trend in women’s protest behavior mean for the societal status of Arab women and their role in the future political landscape? The final conclusions of this paper are based on qualitative research; therefore, the findings are subject to further development and can benefit from quantitative analysis such as post-revolutionary polling data. The final conclusions of this study provide a basic theoretical framework for further studies on Arab women and protest and the socio-political status of women in the Arab world in a post-Spring context.

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