

Western Narratives, Themes and Memories of the Arab Spring:  
An Analysis of Western Newspaper Coverage of the Arab Spring and Meaning-Making  
through Social and Historical Memory

by

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## Abstract

The mass uprisings that occurred during the Arab Spring of 2011 changed the political landscape of the Arab-speaking world in a matter of months. Western newspapers of record, such as *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in France, *The New York Times* in the United States, and *The Times* in Britain, all provided extensive coverage of the events in the Middle East and North Africa. Through an analysis of the main themes found in the narratives established by the newspapers a general sense of Western impressions towards the Arab Spring can be discerned. Additionally, memories that were frequently remembered by the commentators of the Arab Spring shall be examined to determine what memories of the past were consulted in the service of meaning-making for writers featured in the four newspapers of record.

### Keywords

Revolution, Arab Spring, Western, Newspapers, Violence, Martyrdom, Social Media, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Middle East, North Africa, Terrorism, Memory, Narrative

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# Introduction

In mid-December 2010, a small but dramatic event in an unassuming North African nation instigated a series of uprisings and revolutions that spread across the surrounding countries like wildfire. The spark that ignited the flames of dissent came in the humble form of a Tunisian vegetable vendor by the name of Mohammed Bouazizi who lit himself on fire in an act of open defiance against a regime he deemed to be irreparably corrupt. His actions indelibly emblemized him as the symbol and the most recognizable martyr of the protests, uprisings and revolutions that would come to be known collectively as the Arab Spring. With the self-immolation of Bouazizi and the rising public outcry from the citizenry of Tunisia and surrounding countries such as Egypt a spotlight would be placed on the Middle East and North Africa and the long-standing autocratic regimes of the region were put on notice. Owing to the efforts of courageous protesters in Tunisia and the decision of the Tunisian army not to intervene on behalf of the government, Tunisians were able successfully to oust their president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled the North African country for decades.

What happened in Tunisia was just the beginning. Inspired by the success of the Tunisian revolution (which was called the Jasmine Revolution, after that country's national flower) many Arab-speaking countries in the Middle East and North Africa (hereafter referred to as the MENA) would follow suit. Some of these uprisings were initially successful, such as Egypt, while others are still reeling from the devastating impact of a failed revolution to our present day - best made evident through the ongoing humanitarian crises in Syria, Libya and Yemen, none of which appear to have an end in sight.

The high stakes of the uprisings in the MENA and the corresponding vested Western interests therein (especially those of the United States) caused heavy saturation of Western media coverage of the now famous Arab Spring. How and why so many seemingly stable regimes underwent such a flurry of protests, uprisings and revolutions will be discussed below. However, the heart of this paper focuses on the Western media coverage of arguably the most turbulent period of the Arab Spring from late December 2010 until the end of August 2011. More precisely, this paper seeks to unearth the narratives that were established by Western newspapers of record to help explain the unfolding events of the Arab Spring as well as the use of social memories by said newspapers to make sense of the chaos that was engulfing the MENA countries during this turbulent time.

Since many Western newspapers of record covered the Arab Spring, it is necessary to take a representative sample to provide a more thorough qualitative analysis of the media sources in question. Therefore, four prominent newspapers of record from some of the most important Western countries shall be analyzed: *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in France, *The Times* from Britain and *The New York Times* based in the United States (the three countries shall hereafter be referred to as the P3 conjointly because of their three permanent positions on the UN Security Council).

The reason behind choosing an analysis of the P3 countries is to work toward a wider understanding of Western coverage of the Arab Spring. By analyzing four of the most illustrious papers within the three countries in question, we can help lay the foundation for a broad understanding of Western perceptions regarding the Arab Spring.

Further, by examining these primary sources, it will be possible to highlight which memories were most conspicuously featured by Western commentators to make sense of the unfolding Arab Spring and whether these memories aligned with one another across the P3 nations.

It is important to note that the effects of the Arab Spring are still very much with us today as the revolutions and civil wars that took place in the MENA happened less than a decade ago: this is a work of very recent history. One need not look far to decipher the connections between the Arab Spring and some of the crises that permeate throughout the MENA in our present day. The most obvious examples can be drawn from both Syria and Yemen with their ongoing humanitarian crises which have created massive refugee flows worldwide and have subsequently prompted a perceived crisis of immigration and refugees across many Western countries.

However, although the issues in the MENA are still alive today, this paper is based on history and its temporal scope ranges from December 2010 to August 2011. December 2010 was chosen as the starting point of this inquiry because it was the clear *moment déclencheur* of the Arab Spring attributed to the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia. Conversely, August 2011 was chosen as the end point of analysis because that was when two of the most prominent strong men of the region - Mubarak and Colonel Gaddafi respectively - were either taken to court for their perceived transgressions (as was the case for Mubarak) or were militarily defeated and forced to abandon their seat of power (as was the case for Gaddafi). During this phase of the Arab



Spring the protests, uprisings and revolutions arguably blossomed, began to wilt, and finally faded away like the flowers of the Jasmine vine.

As mentioned, the Arab Spring drew a lot of international media coverage and much of this coverage revolved around themes of violence. Violent events were extensively covered from December 2010 to August 2011 and images of violence were published frequently by all four newspapers of record. Protesters and revolutionaries oftentimes found themselves at odds with the security forces of their respective countries and, therefore, bloodshed was commonplace throughout the Arab Spring. Moreover, concepts of martyrdom and martyrs were another constant trope of coverage for Western newspapers of record - most apparently in the person of Mohamed Bouazizi. Because of the largescale violence employed against citizens of the MENA countries, protesters and their testimonials were regularly featured within the newspapers of record that were researched for this paper. Oddly enough, there was not much coverage given to the opponents of the protesters - the state and state representatives from the MENA countries. Arguably violence permeated Western media coverage largely due to the matrix of the mass media itself which seeks to sensationalize and garner the attention of readers in any way possible which meant reporting on violence was mandatory throughout the Arab Spring.

Another wrinkle in the newspaper coverage of the Arab Spring was the rising influence of social media, especially on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. In fact, many articles tried to correlate the success of the initial phases of the Arab Spring directly to the reach of social media. For this reason, it will be necessary to devote some time in

considering the reasons why the newspapers of record focused so heavily on social media during the Arab Spring and, further, to consider its influence over news in general following the Arab Spring.

It must also be noted that there were many Western interests implicated during the Arab Spring and, for this reason, media outlets feverishly discussed these interests throughout the six-month period analyzed in this paper. No Western nation shared as many interests in the MENA as did the United States, which was made evident through the presence both of its primary allies in the region, Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia, as well as its own military presence, including both NSA Bahrain, which is home to both United States Naval Forces Central Command and the United States Fifth Fleet, and other installations. Further, although the West largely chose not to involve itself militarily throughout the unfolding of the Arab Spring during the first half of 2011, they did intervene in the Libyan civil war, and even implemented a no-fly zone using the forces of the Western military coalition, NATO. For this reason, the newspapers of record devoted much time and energy to the Western intervention in Libya.

Aside from chronicling the main stories that were featured by the newspapers of record, a large segment of this paper will be devoted to the more frequently used historical memories shared in these publications that connect the countries of the Western world with one another. Although the newspapers of record differed in terms of their social past (hailing from different parts of the world), they nonetheless shared many similarities especially in terms of their narratives and the memories referenced to make sense of the Arab Spring. The most glaring similarity that all the papers shared when discussing the

Arab Spring was their predisposition towards Islamophobia. Another (and closely-related) unifying theme among the newspapers of record was the fear of an Islamic fundamentalist seizure of power anywhere in the MENA. This can largely be traced to the tragic events of 9/11 and its potent effect upon the Western psyche. Many journalists reporting on the MENA countries also believed that an Islamist revolution could possibly succeed because of their shared memories surrounding the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The paper will address this issue along with others to best indicate the ways in which memory influences Western news coverage.

Although this paper is primarily a historical work, it also incorporates many interdisciplinary aspects out of necessity due to the sources being analyzed. The paper will drive down avenues that intersect with side-streets of political science, philosophy, communications, sociology and psychology, to name but a few, in order to properly address the complexities of analyzing widespread uprisings through media commentary. The political science approach will be needed when considering theories of revolution and how and why revolutions spread and/or are prevented by a given society and state. Communications scholarship will be utilized when considering journalism and forms of media communication and their goals. Sociological understandings will also be necessary when considering both MENA countries and Western countries, especially those of the P3, in order to grasp economic and demographic characteristics. Further, because this work adopts a cultural historical approach, it is necessary to explore avenues of anthropology and philosophy to best understand regional differences and for considering possible ways to remedy the problems that arise due to these differences.

Methodologically, this paper primarily adopts a qualitative approach when considering its main primary sources. Although quantitative analysis will sometimes be employed, the primary goal is to capture the points of view of different newspaper writers and the memories that they relied upon in the first half of 2011. For this reason, quotes will be assessed throughout the paper to demonstrate the personal relation a journalist shares with his or her work. However, the paper is not blind to the restrictions of publication mechanisms of the newspapers being analyzed, for example, the profit-oriented nature that are upheld by many newspapers.

The research conducted for this paper has been exclusively drawn from digital sources. Online archives of the newspapers of record were utilized to obtain the articles necessary for the investigation of the Arab Spring. Key search words utilized included the Arab Spring, revolution, and the names of the countries in question which yielded tremendous results. The timeframe for these searches were set from December 17, 2010 to August 31, 2011. Nearly a thousand articles were used as primary source evidence for this paper and the articles that were chosen needed to have the Arab Spring as its primary focus. Therefore, articles that only mentioned the events of the Arab Spring in passing were not used.

Structurally, this paper is divided into the following sections. First, revolutions will be considered from a general standpoint as the Arab Spring is often interpreted as a series of revolutions or attempted revolutions. The theoretical concerns of revolution will be addressed mainly through James DeFronzo's work on revolution, particularly those highlighted in his book *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements*. With some of

DeFronzo's more illuminating elements of revolution defined, a brief summary of the state of the MENA prior to the Arab Spring shall be provided. Following this section, an analysis of the events that unfolded during the Arab Spring from December 2010 until August 2011 will provide a bridge between its historical development and its corresponding media coverage. Once the Arab Spring has been properly summarized, it will be necessary to provide further analysis of one of the main inquiries of this paper, that is, memory. Following a discussion of memory and remembrance, a brief section will be provided concerning media which will also entail a simple summarization of the four newspapers of record utilized as primary sources for this paper and the reason why they were explicitly chosen as areas of focus.

The final portion of this paper will focus on the primary source evidence that was garnered through extensive research of the four newspapers of record. It will attempt to analyze, dissect and comment on the articles that were written by journalists and featured writers. Through an examination of the source work, we will be able to determine what main narratives (and the themes found therein) were disseminated by the newspapers of record during the most turbulent period of the Arab Spring. Further, the narratives will be analyzed in conjunction with the memories that were most frequently emphasized by Western commentators in the service of 'meaning making'. The goal of this paper will be to combine an analysis of both narratives and memories to determine larger cultural trends in the Western world, more specifically, the methods by which Western newspapers of record cover events in non-Western states which can alternatively be understood as a commentary on the 'other'. With this goal in mind, it will be suggested that Western

newspapers of record can show convergent trends in Western culture that demonstrate that despite cultural, lingual, geographical and political variances, Western culture does sometimes share inherent similarities which are facilitated by shared memories and experiences.

Due to the widespread extent of the Arab Spring and the large number of countries it impacted, it is necessary to reduce the scope of this paper to a select few cases. Therefore, this paper has chosen to examine the following four case studies: the ouster of Ben Ali in Tunisia; the January 25 Revolution in Egypt and the subsequent fall and trial of Hosni Mubarak; the outbreak and repression of protests in Syria; and the civil war in Libya. Analyzing these four countries rather than every country enables us to pinpoint precise trends much more proficiently and it is also indicative of the qualitative approach that this paper utilizes to observe Western newspapers' coverage of the Arab Spring. Further, the four countries in question were chosen because they received heavy Western media saturation throughout the Arab Spring

The supplementary initiative of this paper is to address Western remembrance of former events and their relation to the outbreak in the MENA. As the area in question was heavily saturated with media attention as well as overt Western intervention (in the case of Libya), it is important in terms of scholarly research to provide a better understanding of why the MENA seems to be in a constant state of chaos for the Western observer.

Due to the recent nature of the Arab Spring, it should come as no surprise that no major historical inquiries have been made. Most scholarly research done on the subject has focused on the impact of social media on the Middle East and/or political theories

explaining why the Arab Spring erupted. I argue that the topic of this paper is not only an important issue for historians to consider, but also for a larger audience including other members of academia such as political scientists and those concerned with international affairs. With a very real animosity and derision festering and perhaps even growing between the MENA and the Western world, it is important to bridge the divide and understand where Western biases are forwarded and what blocks the pathway to peaceful diplomacy and unifying principles based on international law and negotiation rather than by violent methods and stand-offish constraints. Understanding Western biases is crucial in comprehending how memory and remembrance contribute greatly to both the proliferation and dissemination of biases by the media, particularly, newspapers of record.

# I - Revolution and Revolutionary Theories

Revolution is a loaded term and it often encompasses a variety of processes. The complexity of revolution can be demonstrated by the vast amounts of literature written on the topic. For instance, noted historical figures such as Aristotle, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin have all had their hand in theorizing about revolution and its importance/impact on human societies at large despite their enormous temporal/social/cultural/political differences.<sup>1</sup> This wide array of writers focusing on the same topic suggests that revolution has been a very popular subject throughout history. Revolutionary movements in general may be guided by different aspirations, ideas and/or motivations but usually revolve around three fundamental aspects highlighted by noted revolution scholar, James DeFronzo, who says that a revolutionary movement “is a social movement in which participants are organized to alter drastically or replace totally existing social, economic, or political institutions.”<sup>2</sup> What is important to note about this conception is that it is rooted in a primarily sociological framework (which is conducive to this paper as the revolutions and movements that occurred during the Arab Spring were the result of

<sup>1</sup> See: Aristotle. *Politics, Book V*; Edmund Burke. *Reflections on the Revolution in France, And on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to Have Been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (London: J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, 1790); Alexis de Tocqueville. *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Translated by George Gerald Reisman (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856); Karl Marx. *Revolution and War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); Karl Marx. “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, pp. 31-127 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Vladimir Lenin. *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State & The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (Lenin Internet Archive, 1993)

<sup>2</sup> James DeFronzo. *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007): 8.



primarily sociopolitical processes).<sup>3</sup> Further, the definition provided by DeFronzo leaves open the possibility that revolutionaries may not necessarily agree over what the ultimate goal of a particular uprising may entail and, therefore, may have opposing ideals and/or desired outcomes.

Due to the complexity of revolution, historians may sometimes find it useful to utilize theories concerning revolution to explain why certain revolutionary movements occur. Although James Farr makes a good case that a predictive ahistorical theoretical model of revolution is not necessarily possible,<sup>4</sup> models nonetheless enable scholars to draw meaning and ground “a conceptual framework or interpretive schema that proposes a language or set of concepts within which we identify and describe political phenomena.”<sup>5</sup> Further, theories of revolution aid in the typology of certain political processes and help historians determine when a historical development could be described as a revolution.

With these aspects of revolution in mind, the Arab Spring can be conceived as a revolutionary movement because of its processes that can best be explained by DeFronzo’s theories on revolution through the application of his five critical factors. DeFronzo’s theory of revolution was chosen for this paper because the factors he enumerates provide a great deal of variability which is oftentimes missing in other theories concerning revolution. DeFronzo’s factors include: mass frustration resulting in popular uprisings among urban or rural populations; dissident elite political movements; unifying motivations; a severe

<sup>3</sup> Note that revolutions can also be conceptualized along other lines such as scientific or technological innovations and for an example of this process, consult: Irving Fang. *A History of Mass Communication: Six Information Revolutions* (Boston: Focal Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> James Farr. “Historical Concepts in Political Science: The Case of “Revolution”” in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Midwest Political Science Association: 1982): 690.

<sup>5</sup> Farr, “Historical Concepts in Political Science,” 691.

political crisis paralyzing the administrative and coercive capabilities of the state; and a permissive or tolerant world context.<sup>6</sup> The likelihood of the success or failure of a revolution may generally be measured through these critical factors. It is important to note that the presence of all five factors generally translates to a change in the social, economic or political structure of a regime, thus spelling a ‘successful revolution’.

The key element of revolution is marked by change. For instance, a society’s political structure is greatly altered if a revolution brings about a change of government based upon an inheritable right, such as an aristocracy/monarchy, to one governed through a representative democracy and the same can be true if the case was reversed. Moreover, this change of government also opens the door to alternative forms of economic systems—for example, a change from a feudalistic economy to one based on capitalism. This in turn causes changes in societal/cultural attitudes in that the citizenry of a given country will develop different value systems according to the form of political/economic structure they inhabit. These changes speak to a quote from DeFronzo whom relates that revolution, “has been described as involving a tremendous increase in mass participation in political activity, participation motivated by widespread opposition to existing conditions.”<sup>7</sup> These developments were integral to the Arab Spring and it will be revealed how these changes in social attitudes led to the explosion of uprisings, protests, riots and revolution across the Arab landscape.

<sup>6</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 22.

<sup>7</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 11.

Although the ways in which revolutions may be successful have been highlighted, it is crucial to recognize that revolutionary movements usually fail to reach their objectives. Regimes tend to defend themselves tenaciously through the deployment of counterrevolutionary violence, most prominent of which are counterinsurgency techniques.<sup>8</sup> It will be shown, through an analysis of the Arab Spring, that many rulers in the MENA were more than willing to employ the iron fist of counterrevolutionary violence to quell revolutionary aspirations. The following section will seek to contextualize the Middle East prior to the Arab Spring up until its eventual climax by primarily focusing on the case study countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Libya. However, other countries such as the diminutive yet strategically important Bahrain will be touched upon as well.

<sup>8</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 8.

## II - Contextualizing the Middle East and North Africa Prior to the Arab Spring

### Part I: North Africa and the Middle East: A Haven for Authoritarian Regimes

“The democratic uprising in the Arab world has been a spectacular display of courage, dedication, and commitment by popular forces.”<sup>9</sup>

Prior to the advent of the Arab Spring, the MENA was full of authoritarian regimes. The region remained in the iron grip of authoritarianism for decades and this situation was largely supported by the government of the United States, which had many national interests at stake in the region. The American influence on the MENA can best be illustrated by the fact that there was and still is a major American military and naval base in Bahrain. Furthermore, to illustrate the United States’ presence in the region, the U.S. government supplied the Egyptian government with billions of dollars of foreign aid each year, thus enabling the brutal dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak to go uncontested in the most populous Arab country in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from the United States and its impact in the Middle East, it is important to note that strongmen dominated North Africa as well. The following examples demonstrate the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in the MENA: Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, Muhammad Hosni Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Bashar Hafez

<sup>9</sup> Noam Chomsky. *Who Rules the World?* (New York: Picador, 2016): 44.

<sup>10</sup> Hicham Bou Nassif. “Wedded to Mubarak: The Second Careers and Financial Rewards of Egypt's Military Elite, 1981-2011” in *Middle East Journal* 67, no. 4 (Middle East Institute, 2013): 528; Tarek Osman. “The Mubarak Years” in *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (Yale University Press, 2010): 194.

al-Assad in Syria and Colonel Muammar Mohammed Abu Minyar Gadaffi in Libya. These are but a few leading examples of the men in power who ruled their respective countries largely through fear and violence.<sup>11</sup> However, it raises the question as to how and why these countries saw such a sudden series of uprisings and revolutions beginning in late 2010 until August 2011. Or more concisely, what were the preconditions that set the stage for the revolutions in the MENA region? To facilitate this inquiry, DeFronzo's five critical factors of revolution will be utilized as they provide a useful guide to uncover and understand the underlying causes of revolution in the MENA in late 2010.

According to DeFronzo, one of the primary reasons (and, usually, the most evident reason) for revolution is mass frustration leading to popular uprisings. This frustration is oftentimes called relative deprivation by social scientists. Relative deprivation can best be summarized in the following statement:

There are several historical processes that can lead to relative deprivation. Among them is rapid deterioration in material living conditions, which may occur for the whole population of a country during an economic depression or for only some population groups during periods of transition in the economic system.<sup>12</sup>

Further, DeFronzo points out that another process "that can result in the growth of a gap between people's expectations and capabilities involve an increase in expectations rather than a change in capabilities."<sup>13</sup> This necessary condition for revolution was present in the countries that underwent the uprisings and revolutions of the Arab Spring. In Tunisia, for

<sup>11</sup> Joe Stork. "Egypt: Human Rights in Transition" in *Social Research* 79, no. 2 (2012): 463; Larbi, Sadiqi. "Tunisia: Revolution of the citizenry ... a revolution without a head" in *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies* (2011):25-6.

<sup>12</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 11.

<sup>13</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions* : 11.

example, a segment of the population, mainly the youth, had high levels of unemployment despite their relatively high education (most were undergraduates from universities around the country).<sup>14</sup> *Le Monde* rated the youth unemployment at 30% during the initial phases of the Tunisian revolution.<sup>15</sup> These newly graduated students thus had an increase in expectation because of their education and, when higher education brought them no benefits, these unfulfilled expectations caused resentment towards the regime. Moreover, Ben Ali and his family's luxurious lifestyle drew the ire of the population according to a classified report from the US embassy in 2008.<sup>16</sup>

The example of high youth-unemployment rates in Tunisia is but the tip of the iceberg regarding the growing dissatisfaction in the Arab world in late 2010. In Egypt, there was an outcry following the brutal treatment and eventual death of a young man, Khaled Said, at the hands of the state security forces. Eventually, Said's death led to the formation of a Facebook group titled *We Are All Khaled Said* (which shall be discussed later in this paper). The creation and mass following of this Facebook group was indicative

<sup>14</sup> Sonia L. Alianak "The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia: The Arab Spring Realised?" in *The Transition Towards Revolution and Reform: The Arab Spring Realised?* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.): 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> Marion Soletty, "C'est bien un mouvement sans précédent que nous vivons là pour la Tunisie," *Le Monde*, January 5, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/05/tunisie-nous-vivons-un-mouvement-sans-precedent\\_1461433\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/05/tunisie-nous-vivons-un-mouvement-sans-precedent_1461433_3212.html).

<sup>16</sup> Rex Brynen et al. *The Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2012): 19; Many scholars attribute the corruption of Ben Ali's family as a motivating factor for Tunisians. See Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution*: 27-28; and Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren. "Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution" in *The Battle of the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era* (Yale University Press, 2012): 64; and Osman Salih and Kamal Eldin. "The Roots and Causes of the 2011 Arab Uprisings" in *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35 no. 4 (2013): 184.

of the growing dissatisfaction with Hosni Mubarak and his regime thus speaking to the critical factor of mass discontent.<sup>17</sup>

The second element of revolution that DeFronzo identifies is dissident elite political movements.<sup>18</sup> A fairly self-explanatory facet of revolution (given its title), this means that when elite members of a regime, whether it be a large or small number, join the cause of those rebelling, the regime is then faced with a much more difficult task of controlling its populace. When considering this aspect in conjunction with the Arab Spring, the elites in question were best represented by members of the military caste, academia, and middle-class associations like the labour union (UGTT) and lawyers' association in Tunisia.<sup>19</sup> Most strongmen in the MENA countries retained their position of supremacy due to the military therefore it was imperative that their respective military forces sided with their whims and desires to maintain the integrity of the regime. However, during the Arab Spring, some armed forces decided not to support their respective leaders which drastically changed the dynamic of the countries involved and facilitated the spread and success of a given revolution or uprising.<sup>20</sup>

The third necessary condition that DeFronzo identifies in his analysis of successful revolutions is unifying motivations.<sup>21</sup> This feature focuses on the main grievances that a

<sup>17</sup> Brynen. *The Arab Spring*: 24; Stork. *Egypt: Human Rights*: 465; Elizabeth Buckner and Lina Khatib. "The Martyrs' Revolutions: The Role of Martyrs in the Arab Spring." in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41 no. 4 (2014): 380.

<sup>18</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 12.

<sup>19</sup> Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia*: 32

<sup>20</sup> Nikki R. Keddie. "Arab and Iranian Revolts 1979-2011: Influences or Similar Causes?" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 1 (Cambridge University press, 2012): 150; Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia*: 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 14.

given population may have towards their regime, and in particular, grievances that transcend ethnic, racial, class or other kind of societal/cultural boundaries. When considering the Arab Spring, the unifying motivations that cut across class boundaries were the blooming ideas of freedom, dignity and social justice.<sup>22</sup> The freedom to choose who should be elected for positions of power. The dignity of not being persecuted by a state's security apparatus through ideas of social justice based on rule of law and an uncorrupt governmental system.

These ideals were largely missing from the Arabic-speaking world due to the overwhelming presence of authoritarian regimes, and, as such, these principles became a unifying feature of the Arab Spring which would eventually lead to the region revolting against their rulers. Most importantly, they became a rallying cry that allowed the Arab population to garner the attention of the rest of the world. No matter the age, religion or class affiliation, many Arabs saw these principles as being worth fighting for and worth toppling their respective regime.

The fourth condition for mass revolution, according to DeFronzo, depends upon a severe state crisis.<sup>23</sup> In terms of the Arab Spring, perhaps the best example of a severe state crisis could be attributed to the military in Tunisia deciding not to defend the Ben Ali regime. This choice by the armed forces effectively paralyzed the Tunisian state apparatus,

<sup>22</sup> Bayat, Asef. "The Arab Spring and Its Surprises." in *Development and Change* 44, no. 3 (May 1, 2013): 591; Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia*: 32; Masri, Safwan M. Masri. "If the People Will to Live" in *Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017): 51; Buckner. *The Martyrs' Revolutions*: 368, 384.

<sup>23</sup> DeFronzo. *Revolutions*: 16.



thus opening the door to its dissolution which could be conceived as the catalyst for President Ben Ali's departure from power.

The fifth and final factor DeFronzo highlights is a permissive or tolerant world context. The international community, and especially the West, by and large was able to rally itself behind the Arab Spring because of the unifying factors that drew the various Arabic speaking populaces together, that is, the ideas of democracy, freedom, dignity and social justice. The West chose to support the protesters and revolutionaries of the Arab Spring due to the values that they held near and dear at home (which will be illustrated when analyzing the primary sources). Although the US would take a little more time than the rest of the West to join the cause (due to its overwhelming strategic and economic interests in the region), it too would support the protesters, martyrs and revolutionaries of the Arab Spring.

DeFronzo's five critical factors of revolution provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how the Arab Spring revolutions either came to fruition or withered on the vine. They help historians to understand why the Arab countries were primed and ready for mass demonstrations and revolutions. Although other revolutionary theories have been considered (such as Theda Skocpol's structural functionalist position or Vladimir Lenin's Marxist approach),<sup>24</sup> DeFronzo was chosen as it does not place a strict and static point for why a revolution comes about. His factors provide a flexible basis from which to work, and since this paper is a historical work, which posits that all revolutions

<sup>24</sup> Theda Skocpol. *States & Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia & China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Lenin. *The State and Revolution*.

are *sui generis*, it is important to utilize a theoretical model that is flexible enough to accommodate the uniqueness of each and every individual outbreak of revolution that occurred in the Arab Spring. With an understanding of DeFronzo's factors, it is now necessary to analyze the Arab Spring and its unfolding further, to garner a better appreciation of the primary source evidence that will be examined in the final section of the paper.

## Part II: Flowers Bloom in Winter: The Dawn of the Arab Spring

Near the end of 2010, the Middle East was dominated by autocrats and dictators, as was remarked upon earlier.<sup>25</sup> From the coasts of North Africa through to the upper reaches of the Middle East, countries were ruled by strongmen who asserted their influence mainly through power, fear and tradition. Furthermore, Arabs began to take note of the freedom that was present in other regions of the world and thus began to demand these same freedoms and liberties for themselves (though these demands had been evident in the MENA long before the Arab Spring: examples that illustrate this point can be found in both the Cedar revolution in Lebanon in 2005,<sup>26</sup> and the failed Green Revolution in Iran of 2009).<sup>27</sup> Arab citizens were more predisposed and willing to express their agency through the internet at the dawn of the twenty-first century, most likely to due to the anonymity that

<sup>25</sup> Brynen. The Arab Spring: 1.

<sup>26</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore. "The Alchemy of Power That Is Revolution." in *The Times*, February 5, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-alchemy-of-power-that-is-revolution-q59dfkjsx3v>.

<sup>27</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick. "Libyans Face a New Challenge: Expelling the Fear That Qaddafi Instilled in Them." in *The New York Times*, August 24, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/25/world/africa/25voices.html>.

the medium of the internet provides. However, it must be related that some scholars have decried the position that overattributed the influence of the internet and social media in relation to the Arab Spring.<sup>28</sup> I would argue, however, that the internet and, by extension, social media nonetheless contributed to the Arab Spring due to its ability to transcend territorial boundaries at the click of a button—a conclusion which is supported by both Halim Rane and Sumra Salem. In their work, they assert that “social media was not responsible for the success of the revolutions but they did play an important facilitation role in terms of inter and intra-group communication as well as information dissemination.”<sup>29</sup> Rane and Salem demonstrate through their work that social media was a valuable asset to protesters and dissenters alike and though perhaps not the ultimate reason as to why some of the Arab Spring uprisings were successful, they undoubtedly contributed to their success and spread in the region.

Alongside developments in social media and their spread in MENA countries, rulers such as Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia were slowly becoming detached from the harsh realities that gripped their citizenry.<sup>30</sup> As the elite sections of society hoarded large segments of the overall wealth and exacerbated the “geographic unevenness of the macro-economic prosperity”,<sup>31</sup> high unemployment rates ran rampant in many Arab countries thus creating hardship and duress especially among the younger population. This

<sup>28</sup> Mohammed Al-Adzee and Emily Metzgar. “The Arab Spring: Beyond Media Effects” in *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 11 no.1 (April 1, 2018): 18; Jeffrey R. Halverson et. al. “Mediated Martyrs of the Arab Spring: New Media, Civil Religion, and Narrative in Tunisia and Egypt” in *Journal of Communication* 63 no. 2 (2013): 312-3.

<sup>29</sup> Halim Rane and Sumra Salem. “Social media, social movements and the diffusion of ideas in the Arab Uprisings” in *Journal of International Communication* 18 no.1 (2012): 97.

<sup>30</sup> Noueihed. *Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution*: 95; Osman. *The Mubarak Years*: 208.

<sup>31</sup> Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia*: 25.

brings us to the importance of age demographics.<sup>32</sup> The Arab world possessed a large youth population—in sharp contrast with Western countries.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the *Centre for Strategic & International Studies* published a report in 2012 that highlighted the massive growth in population as one of the underlying causes of the Arab Spring which especially affected the youth population.<sup>34</sup> The sharp divide between the younger and older generations explained why discontent suddenly bloomed in the midst of authoritarian states. For example, the youth may not have been as tolerant of traditions as the older generation. Further, in countries such as Egypt, the younger population suffered the most in terms of unemployment.<sup>35</sup>

The youth bulge was a defining aspect of Arab society in 2010 and 2011 and it helped shape the ways that the Arab Spring movements transpired which coincidentally ran alongside the rise of certain technologies and/or avenues of communication.<sup>36</sup> In countries

<sup>32</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick and Michael Slackman, “Egypt Youths Play New Role: Driving a Revolt,” in *The New York Times*, January 26, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/27/world/middleeast/27opposition.html>.; Brynen. *The Arab Spring*: 23

<sup>33</sup> Anthony Shadid, “Veering From Peaceful Models, Libya’s Youth Revolt Turns Toward Chaos,” in *The New York Times*, March 12, 2011, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/13/world/africa/13opposition.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Cordesman, Anthony H. Cordesman et al. *The Underlying Causes of the Crises and Upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analytic Survey*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 21, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Andrey V. Korotayev and Julia V. Zinkina, “Egyptian Revolution: A Demographic Structural Analysis,” in *Middle East Studies Online Journal* 2, no. 5 (2011): 57–95. Authors further highlight that, “Moreover, the investigation carried out at the end of 2010 by the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics discovered that at the eve of the Revolution more than 43% of the Egyptian unemployed had university degrees!” For graphs on the Egyptian youth bulge consult: Korotayev. *Egyptian Revolution*: 85-7. Korotayev and Zinkina highlight that, “As we see, the absolute population growth rates reached their maximum in 1985–1989. Extracting 1985–1989 out of 2010 we obtain 21–25, which is the age of the numerous generation of young Egyptians who came out to the Tahrir Square in Cairo in January 2011.”

<sup>36</sup> For further graphs on youth population graphs consult: Anthony H. Cordesman et al. *The Underlying Causes of the Crises and Upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analytic Survey*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 21, 2013).

such as Egypt, for instance, the internet was becoming more readily accessible. As Ekaterina Stepanova relates, Egypt had 17 million internet users in 2010 compared to 450,000 users in 2000, an increase of over 3,691 percent.<sup>37</sup> This is quite a remarkable spike and it is safe to assume that this enabled many members of the younger generation to partake in the social media revolution of the early to late 2000s, connecting them to one another in ways that were previously not possible.<sup>38</sup> Facebook groups such as *We Are All Khaled Said* enabled citizens of the MENA to doubt the legitimacy of their respective states and spread ideas of dissent amongst the population they inhabited and beyond.<sup>39</sup>

With these various aspects of the MENA taken into context, it is evident that in late 2010 the gasoline had been spilled over the Arab world and only a match was needed to start the fire. That match came in the person of Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi.

Bouazizi was a fruit and vegetable vendor in the town of Sidi Bouzid. After struggling to stay afloat financially, Bouazizi complained to a government official regarding the laws that restricted him from selling his product. Because of his outburst, the municipal official—a 45-year-old woman named Faida Hamdi—struck Bouazizi across the face. That marked the last straw for the young man and he soon thereafter marched in front

<sup>37</sup> Ekaterina Stepanova, “The Role of Information Communication Technologies in the ‘Arab Spring’: Implications Beyond the Region,” in *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 159 (2011): 1–6.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, “Opinion | Postcard From a Free Egypt,” in *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/opinion/11-web-friedman.html>.; Ekaterina Stepanova. *The Role of Information Communication Technologies*: 1.

<sup>39</sup> To list but a few examples: Jennifer Preston, “Movement Began With Outrage and a Facebook Page That Gave It an Outlet,” in *The New York Times*, February 5, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/world/middleeast/06face.html>.; Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 24; D. J. Wolover. “An issue of attribution: The Tunisian revolution, media interaction, and agency” in *New Media & Society* 18 no. 2 (Sage Publications, 2016), 185; Halverson. *Mediated Martyrs of the Arab Spring*: 312.

of a government building and set himself on fire, becoming the now legendary martyr of the Arab Spring: his legacy has been commented on repeatedly by both the media and academia.<sup>40</sup>

Since Bouazizi's act of defiance, the event has been contested and Ms. Hamdi herself denied the allegation.<sup>41</sup> But it was too late: the match had already been lit. With the commitment to brutal martyrdom by Mr. Bouazizi, Tunisia commenced its revolt, one that would shake the foundations of authoritarianism in the MENA.<sup>42</sup> This small instance of self-sacrifice from a lowly vegetable vendor demonstrates the impact that one single moment may have on the course of history. It is something that the reader must appreciate as the memory of Bouazizi would fuel many media outlets as well as the fervor of future protesters around the Arab world.

After a few weeks of intensifying protests and revolts, the Tunisian people were able to oust Ben Ali from power on January 14, 2011.<sup>43</sup> They accomplished this with little bloodshed, which was largely the consequence of the military choosing not to use violence on its own people.<sup>44</sup> This process is indicative of DeFronzo's factor of dissident elite political movements and as well as a paralyzing state crisis factor of revolution. It represented both factors because a) military officers can be conceptualized as an elite

<sup>40</sup> Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 111.

<sup>41</sup> "Hope Is Strongest in Tunisia, Where It All Began," in *The Times*, July 29, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hope-is-strongest-in-tunisia-where-it-all-began-xkhht7s53k>.

<sup>42</sup> Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 1.

<sup>43</sup> Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia*: 23-4; Noueihed. *Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution*: 63.

<sup>44</sup> Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 20; Alianak. *The Transition towards the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia*: 23-4.

segment of society and b) their refusal to defend Ben Ali's regime effectively incapacitated its ability to defend itself.

Many across the world were shocked to find that the Tunisian dictator, Ben Ali, was ousted out of power so quickly and this inspired others to follow suit.<sup>45</sup> The fall of Ben Ali came as quite the surprise when considering the long tenure which he had enjoyed.<sup>46</sup> In response to the Jasmine Revolution, many more uprisings erupted across the region. Countries like Bahrain, Yemen, Morocco and Algeria, to name a few, saw some form of protest or uprising yet the most important country to feel the heat of the Arab Spring thawing the cold of winter was Egypt, the most populous Arab country in the world.<sup>47</sup>

For decades, Egypt was under the rule of Hosni Mubarak, hailed as a war hero turned tyrant. Mubarak enjoyed the overwhelming support of Western powers which provided him with the luxury of having the freedom to deal with his citizenry as he pleased. Thanks to a military apparatus that received large amounts of funding from the reigning superpower of the world – the United States – Mubarak was able to ensure that his regime stayed in power with foreign funding mainly through force, intimidation and the implementation of a state of emergency that had been imposed in 1981, which prohibited

<sup>45</sup> Saleem, Saleena. "Building Trust in the Democratic Process The Role of Islamists in Tunisia's Post-Arab Spring Transitional Politics" in *Pathways to Contemporary Islam: New Trends in Critical Engagement*. Edited by Mohamed Nawab Mohamad Osman (Amsterdam University Press, 2020): 145-6.; Burwell, Frances G. Burwell et al. "European and US Support for Post-Revolution Tunisia" in *A Transatlantic Strategy for a Democratic Tunisia* (Atlantic Council, 2016)

<sup>46</sup> Noueihed. *Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution*: 64; Safwan M. Masri. "If the People Will to Live" in *Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017): 40.

<sup>47</sup> Brynennen. *The Arab Spring*: 17.

many freedoms and liberties.<sup>48</sup> However, no amount of wealth could have saved Mubarak from the aspirations of his people.

The fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia inspired and fueled Egypt's citizenry and, in turn, they organized massive rallies through the aid of social media outlets, especially Twitter and Facebook. Words can do no justice to the massive rallies that took place throughout Egypt, especially when considering the now emblematic Tahrir Square protests (Tahrir meaning Liberation in Arabic).<sup>49</sup> The sheer number of Egyptians who filled the square was a breathtaking sight to behold and it drew the world's attention. The protests of Tahrir Square became the Arab Spring's equivalent of the fall of the Berlin Wall during the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe in terms of its impact on remembrance (a fact which will be elaborated upon in the other sections of this paper).

Initially, Mubarak thought he could simply wait out the protests but, as time progressed and the revolts grew ever larger, it became clear that the use of force would be necessary. Mubarak quickly made use of his security forces to be rid of the protesters and their virulent derision. Mubarak's decision to use force quickly changed the initial character of the Arab Spring from one that was relatively free of bloodshed and resolved

<sup>48</sup> Stork. Egypt: *Human Rights in Transition*: 465-6.

<sup>49</sup> For an appreciation of the magnitude of the protests through imagery, see: Anthony Shadid. "Obama Urges Faster Shift of Power in Egypt." in *The New York Times*, February 1, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/02/world/middleeast/02egypt.html>.; and David D. Kirkpatrick. "Egyptians Defiant as Military Does Little to Quash Protests." in *The New York Times*, January 29, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/world/middleeast/30-egypt.html>.



through peaceful protest—as was the case in Tunisia—to one that would be marked by large-scale violence, oppression and loss of life.<sup>50</sup>

Many Egyptians were killed by Mubarak’s security force apparatus. However, Mubarak was unable to force his military to fire upon the Egyptian citizenry. In much the same way as Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak did not receive the support of his military and, because of this development, Egyptians were more ambitious in their revolution.<sup>51</sup>

Although the police were in the firm grasp of Mubarak, it appeared that the military did not follow suit. This fact ensured that Mubarak would eventually fall from power in a manner very similar to the not too distant Ben Ali.<sup>52</sup>

The role that the United States played during this turbulent time in Egypt must be considered as it was, at the time, one of Egypt’s most important allies. During the initial revolts, the U.S. government, through both the former president of the United States Barack Obama and then secretary of state Hillary Clinton, made it clear that the U.S. still supported the beleaguered Egyptian president.<sup>53</sup>

The support of the clearly tyrannical Mubarak by the leaders of the free world, oft quoted by the United States, raises the question: why would the United States, for all their values and principles, support such a villainous figure who clearly opposed the will of his

<sup>50</sup> Though not as brutal as in Syria or Libya, the uprising in Egypt had 365 deaths by mid-February 2011. See Kirkpatrick, David D. “After Long Exile, Sunni Cleric Takes Role in Egypt.” *The New York Times*, February 18, 2011, sec. Middle East.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/19/world/middleeast/19egypt.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Keddie. *Arab and Iranian Revolts 1979-2011*: 150.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Kazamias, “The ‘Anger Revolutions’ in the Middle East: An Answer to Decades of Failed Reform,” in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 143–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2011.578857>.

<sup>53</sup> Kazamias. *The Anger Revolutions*.

people? A quote from James Schlesinger, the former secretary of state for the US in the 1990s, provides some insight into this question:

An even deeper question is whether we seriously desire or prescribe democracy as the proper form of government for other societies. Perhaps the issue is more clearly posed in the Islamic world. Do we seriously want to change the institutions of Saudi Arabia? The brief answer is no.<sup>54</sup>

As the quote demonstrates, the US often traded their principles for strategic interests in both North Africa and the Middle East by supporting oppressive authoritarian regimes for the sake of stability. The realpolitik that the US played in the region was eventually discarded, however. As the protests continued and more serious assaults were committed against the Egyptian citizenry, the government of Egypt was turned into the other and became the villain of the story, which forced the US government to condemn their former ally.<sup>55</sup>

The decision of President Obama to support the goals and aspirations of the protesters in Egypt drastically altered the political landscape in the MENA for obvious reasons. It also demonstrated the critical factor of a permissive or tolerant world in the face of the revolts in Egypt. The Western world supported the protesters in Egypt and, with the US joining their cause, Mubarak's fate had essentially been sealed.<sup>56</sup> With the US pivoting on its support of Mubarak, and the military unwilling to use force on its people, in combination with the growing determination of the Egyptian protesters, the long-standing

<sup>54</sup> Brynner. *The Arab Spring*: 72.

<sup>55</sup> Andrea L. Guzman. "Evolution of News Frames During the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Critical Discourse Analysis of Fox News's and CNN's Framing of Protesters, Mubarak, and the Muslim Brotherhood" in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93 no.1 (Sage, 2016): 93.

<sup>56</sup> Kazamias. *The Anger Revolution*: 148-150. Kazamias provides four chain of events that forced the Americans to side with the protesters.

Egyptian president finally had to succumb and face the cold hard truth that his time in power had come to an end.

On 11 February 2011, Egyptians would see their sacrifices (and many sacrifices were made, including hundreds who had died throughout the mass protests) pay dividends with the announcement of Mubarak stepping down as Egypt's president.<sup>57</sup> Egyptians rejoiced in their long-time leader's withdrawal and it was perhaps one of the most noteworthy moments and accomplishments of the Arab Spring.<sup>58</sup> However, the unfolding Arab Spring would see a dramatic shift in the ways in which it was carried out and especially by the authoritarian leaders who sought to extinguish the revolutions, by any force necessary.

### Part III: The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back: The Changing Colors of the Arab Spring

The successes in both Tunisia and Egypt put the authoritarians in the region on notice.<sup>59</sup>

These processes in nearby countries necessarily inspired fears and apprehensions among

<sup>57</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick. "Egypt Erupts in Jubilation as Mubarak Steps Down." in *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011, sec. Middle East.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/world/middleeast/12egypt.html>.; Pierre Prier. "Hosni Moubarak, le départ de Pharaon" in *Le Figaro* no. 20692, February 11, 2011, p. 11. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/13>

<sup>58</sup> "If the Eagle Takes Flight, Where Could He Land?," in *The Times*, February 15, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/if-the-eagle-takes-flight-where-could-he-land-lkrt3tk5jx0>.; Mikhail Gorbachev, "Egypt's Agonizing Choice," in *The New York Times*, February 15, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/opinion/16iht-edgorbachev16.html>.; "Printemps arabe : les Etats-Unis tirent les leçons de la crise égyptienne," in *Le Monde*, February 14, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/02/14/printemps-arabe-les-etats-unis-tirent-les-lecons-de-la-crise-egyptienne\\_1479624\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/02/14/printemps-arabe-les-etats-unis-tirent-les-lecons-de-la-crise-egyptienne_1479624_3212.html).

<sup>59</sup> Chrystia Freeland "In Egypt and Tunisia, Lessons for Autocrats Everywhere." in *The New York Times*, February 3, 2011, sec. Middle East.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/world/middleeast/04iht-letter04.html>.

surrounding leaders who worried of possible demonstrations in their own countries.

Witnessing fellow strong-men Ben Ali and Mubarak being unceremoniously forced out of their respective positions of power forced MENA heads of government to consider responding to their own protests and uprisings in a much different fashion. The difference in response was made most evident in the countries of Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, all of which used violence to quell initial uprisings.<sup>60</sup>

Bahrain - a small-island nation located in the Persian Gulf - was an important country in the Middle East in 2011 despite its relatively small size. It held great strategic importance because it played host to an important American naval base, thus enabling the US to present itself in a position of power in the region.<sup>61</sup> Bahrain was ruled by a Sunni-Muslim royal family who governed a largely Shiite population which, after the initial successes in both Tunisia and Egypt, were encouraged to revolt against their government. This presented a serious challenge for the rulers of neighboring Sunni regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, who saw that the geo-political importance of Bahrain was far too crucial an asset to allow potentially hostile Shiites to seize power. Further, the Sunni rulers may have believed that a Shiite ruling class in Bahrain would hold allegiance towards Iran, thus solidifying the Persian nation's presence in the region. Therefore, when protests and

<sup>60</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Syria Shells Major City as Crackdown Spreads," in *The New York Times*, May 11, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/12/world/middleeast/12syria.html>.; Martin Fletcher. "Rebellions Spread as 'Arab Spring' Takes Hold." in *The Times*, February 19, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rebellions-spread-as-arab-spring-takes-hold-psm9dsbj07j>.

<sup>61</sup> Lara El Gibaly and David Jolly. "8 Bahrain Activists Get Life Sentences." in *The New York Times*, June 22, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/middleeast/23bahrain.html>.; For a detailed graph demonstrating other American military positions in the region see: Georges Malbrunot. "Du Yémen à la Libye, la répression se durcit" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20699, February 19, 2011, sec. International, p. 7. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/30>

revolts began to sprout in the small country of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Emirates immediately intervened.<sup>62</sup> The violent repression was quick and effective and left the Bahraini royal family in power. Although the Americans supported most of the democratic aspirations of Arabs in both North Africa and the Middle East, they were largely silent on the oppression that both the Bahraini government and Saudi Arabian military imposed on protesters in Bahrain. This was most likely due to both their special relationship with Saudi Arabia and especially to their important naval base in Bahrain.<sup>63</sup>

It is important to note that this analysis was confirmed by the newspapers of record which barely provided any coverage of the events in Bahrain. The absence of coverage of Bahrain may be due to several reasons. First, because of the Kingdom's special relationship with the USA. Second, because the oppression was quick and therefore, Bahrain did not suffer such long-lasting revolts. Finally, because Bahrain was a relatively small power in comparison to other countries that underwent revolts and protests during the Arab Spring and, therefore, it did not inspire heavy media coverage. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the coverage of Bahrain was largely absent from the four newspapers of record that will be analyzed later in this paper.

Elsewhere in the Arab World, uprisings were taking a drastic turn from massive popular protests to open war. In Libya, insurgents seized the Eastern portion of the country, vowing to overthrow the longest tenured dictatorship in the Arab world of the notorious

<sup>62</sup> Brynne. The Arab Spring: 79.; "Si Bahreïn tombait...", in *Le Monde*, March 22, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/22/si-bahrein-tombait\\_1496853\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/22/si-bahrein-tombait_1496853_3232.html).

<sup>63</sup> Brynne. The Arab Spring: 81.

Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (spelled Qaddafi in the US and Kadhafi in French).<sup>64</sup> This was a far different struggle as both sides wielded sophisticated weaponry and vowed to destroy the opposing side thus creating a state of civil war in the North African nation.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, unlike the case in both Tunisia and Egypt, the international community became directly involved and quickly came to the aid and support of the rebels in Eastern Libya based in Benghazi. The choice to support the rebels can most likely be attributed to Gaddafi's often antagonistic relationship with the West and the world at large thus making him dispensable.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that the international community (with the notable exceptions of China and Russia) decided to intervene in Libya speaks to the fifth critical factor of revolution, that of a permissive or tolerant world context. This was further made evident by the passing of Resolution 1973 by the United Nations Security Council which legalized intervention in Libya by the international community.<sup>67</sup> After some deliberation, the UN vowed to aid the Libyan rebels and NATO initiated a no-fly zone over the country in March 2011: this was enforced primarily by France and the United States, with the former taking the lead.<sup>68</sup>

Libya was an interesting case during this period of the Arab Spring because it quickly became a conflict that was marked as a civil war instead of a people-power

<sup>64</sup> "Paris profite du 'printemps arabe' pour reserrer sa coopération dans le Golfe," in *Le Monde*, March 29, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/03/29/paris-profite-du-printemps-arabe-pour-resserrer-sa-cooperation-dans-le-golfe\\_1500071\\_1496980.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/03/29/paris-profite-du-printemps-arabe-pour-resserrer-sa-cooperation-dans-le-golfe_1500071_1496980.html).; For a summary of Gaddafi's history in Libya see: Alison Pargeter. *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012)

<sup>65</sup> Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 29.

<sup>66</sup> Mansour O El-Rikhia. *Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997): 1. Also, see chronology on pages ix-xii for historical events in Libya from 1832-1995.

<sup>67</sup> Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 29.

<sup>68</sup> Brynmen. *The Arab Spring*: 29.

uprising, largely because both sides possessed heavy firepower. Instead of peaceful protesters against an oppressive police state, the revolution in Libya was marked by a loyalist military in support of Gaddafi verses an armed rebel force that was supported by the Western world. With help from the international community, rebels quickly made their advance to the Western portion of Libya and overthrew Gaddafi in August 2011. The case of Libya provides nuance to the previous cases analyzed during the Arab Spring because it demonstrates that uprisings and revolutions were not the only patterns of the Arab Spring; instead, it sometimes devolved into an all-out war between two combative sides. The eventual consequence of the battle for Libya was the departure of the longest standing dictator in the region, Gaddafi, who was displaced from his position of power, and eventually captured and summarily executed in October 2011, after which a government supported by the Western world was propped up in his place.<sup>69</sup>

Another poignant example which demonstrated the changing colors of the Arab Spring was marked by the protests that erupted in Syria. The country which was led (and still is led) by Bashir Al-Assad and his clan, is a shining example of what happens when a ruler is more than willing to utilize force to crush protests and revolts and still maintains the support of the military caste.<sup>70</sup> While not as unpopular with the West as Gaddafi was, Al Assad and his regime were not particularly well liked by Western states, due to its confrontations with Israel (a long-standing US ally), as well as Syria's amicable

<sup>69</sup> Diane Derr. "Capturing Gaddafi: Narrative as system currency" in *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research* 12 no. 2/3 (2014): 367-8.

<sup>70</sup> Brynne. *The Arab Spring*: 41.

relationship with the former USSR.<sup>71</sup> However, on the eve of the uprisings in Syria, tensions had been lessening and a normalization of relations between Syria and the West had taken place.<sup>72</sup> But, despite this fact, the government of Syria could not suppress the discontent within the Syrian population in 2011.

As protests began in Deraa and made their way elsewhere through the country, security forces and the military directly intervened.<sup>73</sup> Many Syrian protesters lost their lives through the process and their hopes for change were dashed. Assad had more than willingly spilt the blood of his citizenry, but it enabled him to maintain his position of power and the world, at least initially, did not intervene on behalf of the Syrian people.<sup>74</sup> Although by August 2011 it was vividly clear that the Syrian regime had deployed egregious counterrevolutionary tactics, the UN Security Council chose not to intervene, largely due to China and Russia's veto powers: neither of these two permanent members wanted to see a repeat of the Libyan intervention.<sup>75</sup> Syria is a sobering case to reflect upon, since after nine years the conflict still rages on (although recently al Assad seems to have regained control).

<sup>71</sup> Shamir Hassan. "Israel and Syria A Half-Forgotten Chapter in the West Asian Crisis" in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 73* (Indian History Congress, 2012): 1132, 1134.

<sup>72</sup> Hassan. *Israel and Syria*: 1136.

<sup>73</sup> Cécile Hennion, "Damas réprime la contestation à Deraa dans le sang," in *Le Monde*, March 24, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/03/24/damas-reprime-la-contestation-a-deraa-dans-le-sang\\_1497846\\_3218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/03/24/damas-reprime-la-contestation-a-deraa-dans-le-sang_1497846_3218.html).; Paulo Gabriel Hilu Pinto. "Syria" in *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East*. Edited by Paul Amar and Vijay Prashad, pp. 204-242 (University of Minnesota Press, 2013): 208.

<sup>74</sup> James H. Anderson. "AFTER THE FALL: What's Next for Assad and Syria?" in *World Affairs* 174, no. 4 (Sage Publications, 2011): 17.

<sup>75</sup> Anderson. *After the Fall*: 18.



Yet another country which utilized brutal means to suppress protests and revolts during the Arab Spring was Yemen. President Ali Abdullah Saleh quickly ordered security forces and the military to utilize force to maintain control over the country.<sup>76</sup> It should be noted that there were instances in which the military chose not to obey the orders of the President, such as Major General Ali Mohsin Al-Ahmar, who decided to defect from the regime and support the protesters.<sup>77</sup> However, a large number of Yemeni soldiers were willing to follow orders and during some of the more heated protests in Change Square (the Yemen equivalent to Tahrir Square in Egypt) security and military forces rained bullets down on hapless protesters, even sniping them from rooftops according to some journalists.<sup>78</sup>

The situations in Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen illustrate the great variability among revolutionary situations and outcomes. These examples demonstrate that revolution is in no way a single-faceted process. In both Tunisia and Egypt, the Arab Spring revolutions were successful largely due to the massive support from their respective populations, especially in urban areas, which ultimately resulted in the ouster of both Ben Ali and Mubarak (which was best highlighted by Mubarak's court process through the Egyptian court system and demonstrated how the mighty had truly fallen - at least during

<sup>76</sup> "Arabia Infelix," in *The Times*, April 26, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/arabia-infelix-m8cjb5mb2mw>.

<sup>77</sup> Laura Kasinof and Scott Shane, "Yemen's Leader in Talks on Exit but Still Defiant," in *The New York Times*, March 24, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/world/middleeast/25yemen.html>.

<sup>78</sup> "Death in the Darkness: How Yemeni Leader Deals with Arab Spring," in *The Times*, May 13, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/death-in-the-darkness-how-yemeni-leader-deals-with-arab-spring-tmj50s2lmc>.

the high tide of the Arab Spring).<sup>79</sup> However, the countries that were willing and able to use force, such as in Syria and Yemen, showed that many protesters could be killed in a small matter of days and it indicates that the success of the Arab Spring did not always supplant its failures.<sup>80</sup>

The history that has been presented does not cover the entirety of the Arab Spring as several other countries underwent protests and revolts, including Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Morocco. The events covered in this paper, however, took place in the countries that received most of the news coverage. For that reason, this paper has decided to focus on the four countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria as case studies. For the sake of specificity, the case studies in question will include the following temporal parameters: the initial coverage of the Tunisian Revolution; the ousting of Mubarak in Egypt and his subsequent trial; the repression of the Syrian people by their government; and the civil war in Libya. These four cases best capture the coverage of the four newspapers of record being analyzed during the period of December 2010 to August 2011.

<sup>79</sup> Rick Gladstone, "Mubarak Spectacle Captivates the Middle East," in *The New York Times*, August 3, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/04/world/middleeast/04react.html>.; "Courtroom Cage Sends a Chilling Warning to Despots," in *The Times*, August 4, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/courtroom-cage-sends-a-chilling-warning-to-despots-rc2qjsd50p5>.

<sup>80</sup> Hennion, "Damas réprime la contestation à Deraa dans le sang."; Shadid, "Syria Shells Major City as Crackdown Spreads."

### III - Considerations: Memory, Media and Newspapers of Record

We have to come from somewhere. We may try to forget, regret or try to erase the fact or we may, on the contrary, make an effort to reclaim our origins, homeland or traditions, but our personal or family past will always be an important part of our being and our identity. Whether we like it or not, we belong to our memories.<sup>81</sup>

Memory is what enables an individual to make sense of the world, to attribute meaning to time and place, and decide how to act within it. To understand memory, it is first necessary to understand its evolution through academia and the best source to begin this inquiry is with Maurice Halbwachs, the preeminent authority on memory during the twentieth century. Halbwachs asserted the following concerning memory: “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories.”<sup>82</sup> This understanding of memory as a social development rather than a merely individual psychological process is a crucial point to consider in relation to the subject of this paper, that is, newspaper coverage of the Arab Spring because it posits that memories are not simply drawn from an individual but rather, are conglomerated by broader groups of individuals, whether it be family, community, nationality, or culture.

<sup>81</sup> Tariq Ramadan. *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 161.: This quote not only provides great insight into the complexity of memory in relation to the individual but is also relevant because Ramadan is the grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Hassan al Banna.

<sup>82</sup> Maurice Halbwachs. *On Collective Memory*. Edited and Translated by Lewis A. Coser (London: Chicago Press, 1992): 38.

A more recent example regarding memory and its use can be found in the work of Stephen Heathorn who has focused on memory and remembrance as a tool of historical inquiry. Heathorn makes the following salient claim concerning remembrance: “although remembrance of the past is located within the minds of individuals, it is also the product of interaction between individual thought and social and political processes.”<sup>83</sup> This description of remembrance shares similarities with Halbwachs’ idea concerning memory because it emphasizes how individual memory (or remembrance) is motivated and shaped by larger collective processes such as social and/or political developments. Heathorn further highlights a difference between general memory versus historical memory that needs to be considered as this paper seeks to uncover cultural memories relayed by journalists and, in turn, relate those memories in historical terms:

Yet, both collective memories and written histories are really forms of remembrance and are treated as such here. It is frequently assumed by its practitioners that the academic study of the past is epistemologically superior to popular recollections and their expression in cultural remembrance. But this hard division between history and memory fails to account for the fluid transition and interaction between them. Memory and history are similar phenomena that only differ from each other in practices of recall and evidentiary standards. Yet, all remembrance, whether cultural or historical, is purposeful. Historians do not write about everything or anything in the past without purpose: indeed, a favourite charge by the professionals against much amateur history is that the latter is antiquarian – merely uncritical curiosity about the past. Historians aim at making sense of the chaotic past and generating some meaning from it. Similarly, one person’s recollection of the past does not become significant and therefore replicated by others as cultural remembrance unless those others also find meaning in it. This political (in a broad sense) purpose of remembrance, whether historiographical or otherwise, cannot be ignored. Professional historians and their methods (and being one, I obviously endorse them) ought to be part of the conversation about how to understand the past, but historians are deluded if they believe that their status or methods will alone

<sup>83</sup> Stephen J. Heathorn. *Haig and Kitchener in Twentieth-Century Britain: Remembrance, Representation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 11.

carry the day. The past carries meaning for individuals and groups beyond that which historians can and do provide.<sup>84</sup>

What Heathorn astutely points out is that while historical inquiries into the past are important, they are not necessarily superior to memories that are formed and carried forward in society. Memories are locations of meaning and, therefore, those that become popular are promoted in societies and culture through a shared emphasis on their importance. This emphasis on the cultural theory of memory can best be encapsulated by Richard Terdiman who states that, “theories are memory structures, and are structured by memory. They regulate what consciousness will attend to and what will be retained as significant; they codify the past experience of such significance in the form of protocols for its reproduction in the culture.”<sup>85</sup> This understanding of what is reproduced by society provides historical insight into the patterns of specific cultures by understanding what is determined important. Of course, there are also sites of public memory which are memories that are ordinarily enforced by the state or other larger groups and usually have a material object as its source like national monuments such as the Statue of Liberty.<sup>86</sup> Alternatively, social memory is “a concept used by historians and others to explore the connection between social identity and historical memory. It asks how and why diverse peoples come to think of themselves as members of a group with a shared (though not

<sup>84</sup> Heathorn. *Haig and Kitchener in Twentieth-Century Britain*: 13.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Terdiman. “Deconstructing Memory: On Representing the Past and Theorizing Culture in France Since the Revolution.” in *Diacritics* 15, no. 4 (IthacaL: 1985): 14.

<sup>86</sup> Eley, Geoff. “The Past Under Erasure? History, Memory, and the Contemporary” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 3. Sage Publications, 2011. p.555-573.

<http://www.jstor.com/stable/41305346>; Mitchell, Katharyne. “Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory.” in *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5, pp. 442-459. 2003. <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.24.5.442>.

necessarily agreed upon) past.”<sup>87</sup> Further, social memories “can be generally understood as the shared narratives of a community’s past, which are essential to its identity and cohesion.”<sup>88</sup> The emphasis on social identity will be the locus of this paper in that it will be used to understand why certain memories were used by Western commentators while others were avoided.

One final aspect of memory that needs to be asserted is the concept of reputation and its relation to memory. Here again we turn to Heathorn to provide insight into this matter. “The concept of reputation is central to understanding the heroic/anti-heroic,” he writes, “Reputations are clearly cultural constructions that reflect the values and ideologies of the societies in which they are produced.”<sup>89</sup> This understanding of reputation being a by-product of cultural construction is relevant to this paper because reputations regarding leaders in the MENA were largely predicated upon ideologies or value-systems that were held near and dear to the Western world. Because these Middle Eastern and North African leaders were antagonistic toward those ideologies, Western culture influenced the ways in which their reputations would be depicted by the newspapers of record. Further, groups that followed similar ideological patterns to those found in the West would be remembered as heroic, such as the martyrs of the Arab Spring who fought for justice and democracy, while those who were remembered as being contrary to those same ideologies would be largely vilified, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

<sup>87</sup> Scot A. French. “What Is Social Memory?” in *Southern Cultures* 2, no. 1 (University of North Carolina Press, 1995): 9.

<sup>88</sup> Jenéa Tallentire. “Strategies of Memory: History, Social Memory, and the Community,” in *Social History* 34, no. 67 (May 2001): 198.

<sup>89</sup> Heathorn. *Haig and Kitchener in Twentieth-Century Britain*: 10.

To conclude, memory can be viewed as a dialectical process between individuals and larger collectives. As such, both are intertwined with one another and subsequently influence one another. However, not all memories are deemed equally important in society and, therefore, those that are emphasized in the mainstream tend to relate to popular or social memory, while those that are not are forgotten. Therefore, the memories that are heralded by a given society may speak to the importance that certain cultural patterns place on a specific memory. By determining which memories were referenced most frequently during news coverage of the Arab Spring, we can make a more accurate assessment as to whether they were either more uniform or diffuse from one another. If there is a large variance between the memories consulted, it may indicate that memories are largely predicated upon an individual's experience. However, if the counter proves to be true, it may imply that memory functions on larger group mentalities, and in this case, it could suggest that the memories are grounded upon Westernized points of view. Finally, as this paper will demonstrate, though memories were often referenced by Western commentators through an understanding of historical memory, the memories that were regularly referenced, such as the 1989 Eastern European revolutions and the 1979 Iranian revolution, were very generalized and diluted which, in a sense, shaped those historical memories along the lines of social remembrance rather than a strong sense of historical reality. Therefore, the process of distillation of historical memory through a generalized and sometimes distorted interpretation of the events are disseminated through social memory, in which case, the memories themselves become a product more of social remembrance than historical accuracy.

## IV - Media and Newspapers of Record

As this paper is a historical study, it does not seek to make any grand statements concerning the nature of contemporary news and journalism. However, because the news, and more specifically, newspapers of record and journalists are a focus of the historical inquiries of the thesis, it is necessary to address some of the fundamental features of news media. News media typically follow a set of norms and patterns when they produce news stories. I argue that the main driving motivating factors for media outlets are (a) to produce profit and (b) to draw an audience.<sup>90</sup> With these two main features of media classified, one can determine that media platforms generally seek to produce news stories that will win the attention of their target audience. But what is the main audience of a newspaper of record? Seeing that newspapers of record are an authoritative source as well as a text-based source, it may not necessarily be considered as far reaching to the general public as say, television news broadcasts such as those found on CNN and Fox News. But the audience for newspapers of record tend to be members of the social, political, and cultural elite and are ordinarily educated individuals. This gives them an influence that is disproportionate to their circulation.

With the audience of newspapers of record addressed, it's important to note certain restrictions that are placed on newspapers of record when deciding to publish certain

<sup>90</sup> Michael Schudson. *The Power of News* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995): p. 14: Schudson argues that "As with business sections virtually every-where, articles are more likely to report news from the perspective of investors"; Simon Anderson and John McLaren. "Media Mergers and Media Bias with Rational Consumers" in *Journal of the European Economic Association* 10, no. 4 (Oxford University Press, 2012): 831.



content. To aid in determining these restrictions, it is useful to utilize Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*. In their seminal work, they highlight that mass media outlets release their information according to a strict filtering process. The filters highlighted by Chomsky and Herman can be summarized as follows:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism."<sup>91</sup>

The filters are useful to consider when analyzing the sources within this thesis. Filter number five, however, can be reinterpreted as Islamophobia instead of anticommunism as it acts in very much the same way and was used constantly during the Western news coverage of the Arab Spring. Through this filtration process, news is disseminated to the public. Though it can be stipulated that Herman and Chomsky's conception of filters for the news may be too rigid and structured, it nonetheless provides insight into the varying degrees of scrutiny that news stories undergo before being released to the public.

Since journalists and publishers working for newspapers of record act within the paradigm of a business model, they therefore connect to and react with memory in distinctive ways. Firstly, they present a media bias which can be understood as "the process of selecting details by media outlets that are favorable or unfavorable to the subject

<sup>91</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002): 2

being described.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover media biases in “newspapers and magazines... do not merely reflect the social and political forces around them, they actively work to shape political discourse to their own purposes.”<sup>93</sup> By recognizing that newspapers may actually shape public opinion and, therefore, have an overwhelming impact over which memories are stored in a particular culture, historians can best uncover what ideologies are given preferential treatment.

The primary sources analyzed for this paper were written by journalists—a fact which must also be given some consideration. Firstly, a journalist may think one thing but write another because he or she faces the constraints of a publication mechanism. Moreover, some journalists have more clout than others and therefore may be able to state more bluntly their own opinions within the pages of a paper, especially if they are featured within an editorial or opinion section of the newspaper. Contrarily, a new or up-and-coming writer may not have the same liberties as a veteran journalist due to their respective prestige within the industry. Certain sections of a newspaper may also play a role in how subjective a journalist may be in an article he or she is writing. For example, as mentioned, an opinion section of a newspaper provides ample opportunity to voice one’s opinion in comparison to a correspondence section. But what is important to recognize is that journalists generally act within the paradigm of the mass media model that has been

<sup>92</sup> Guo Wen-Chung and Fu-Chuan Lai. “Media bias, slant regulation, and the public-interest media” in *Journal of Economics* 114, no. 3 (Springer, 2015): 291.

<sup>93</sup> Gregory L. Bovitz et. al. “When Can a News Organization Lead Public Opinion? Ideology versus Market Forces in Decisions to Make News.” in *Public Choice* 113, no. 1-2. (Springer, 2002), 127.

highlighted by Chomsky and Herman; therefore, their work goes through a filtration process before it is ever published.

Journalists can sometimes be considered, according to Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, as deputies of a dominant group.<sup>94</sup> In other words, it can be argued that journalists of *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* serve the interests of the respective paper for whom they work and, in turn, are compliant in the filtering system of news stories that has been highlighted by Herman and Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent*. One must also be cognizant that the journalists writing at these four newspapers were generally trained in universities, which can be understood as an institution of the dominant class or elite segment of society in certain cases. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that there is an element of hegemonic influence when reading an article published by *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *The Times* or *The New York Times* because the journalists who write the articles, as well as the newspapers themselves, act as ‘deputies’ of a dominant group in a certain sense. Finally, although the papers themselves may cater to their readers, who, as mentioned earlier, generally belong to elite sections of society, it is nonetheless important to emphasize Gramsci’s notion of cultural hegemony in which the elite shape and therefore, enforce a value-system among a larger section of society. Therefore, I argue that though newspapers of record may not necessarily reach as many people as say a popular magazine or television news broadcasts, they nonetheless play an important part in shaping dominant cultural value inputs as members of the elite. For this reason, it is important to analyze newspapers of record for historical purposes as they

<sup>94</sup> Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, UK: ElecBook, the Electric Book Co., 1999): 145.

provide insight into the larger cultural milieux of a societies like those in the United States, France and Britain.

## V - Analysis of the Articles: Newspapers, Narratives and Memories

“To give the news impartially, without fear or favor. Regardless of any party sect or interest involved.”<sup>95</sup>

To determine whether Western newspapers of record had a synergy or divergence of coverage during the Arab Spring, it is first important to determine what sort of narratives were primarily disseminated by each respective newspaper of record. Further, a secondary line of inquiry will be established, that is, to uncover which memories journalists consulted as they covered the Arab Spring. This form of ‘meaning-making’ provides an insight into which memories were determined to be publishable by the respective newspapers but also, and perhaps more importantly, it provides a historical insight into what memories were dominant in public discourse, at least, from a news engineering standpoint. By analyzing the combination of narrative, themes and memory from illustrious Western newspapers during the Arab Spring, the hopes of this section is to contribute a piece of evidence towards the larger research problem as to whether treating the Western world as an amalgamative whole can be considered a valid source of analysis.

The newspapers that have been selected for this paper are *The New York Times*, *The Times*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*.<sup>96</sup> The four papers are all at the highest level of

<sup>95</sup> Myer Berger. *The Story of the New York Times 1851-1951* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952): credo of The New York Times.

<sup>96</sup> “Le Figaro” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved February 13, 2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Le-Figaro>;

“Le Monde” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved May 15, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Le-Monde>;

international prestige and can be argued to have guided Western public opinion. Second, the four newspapers are published in two different languages which I believe provides a great opportunity to determine whether language had any influence on perceptions within the Western world during the Arab Spring. Thirdly, I specifically chose newspapers that represented two different political affiliations in order to see if this too would provide variability for the coverage of the Arab Spring. *The New York Times* is centre left, whereas *The Times* is centre right. The same pattern was selected for *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, the former being centre left and the latter being centre right.

The selection of the primary sources may be challenged. First, the newspapers in question are only based in three Western countries and only feature two languages, therefore they may not be reflective of the larger whole of the Western world. Second, because the sources in question are drawn from newspapers of record that depend on profit to generate news, they may have a skewed position that does not align with the general Western public. To the first criticism, it must be asserted that though only two languages are focused on, I argue that the three countries analyzed are hegemonic powers of the Western world and therefore often guide Western mindsets and opinions (especially when considering the United States) through their overwhelming presence in the media. Further, France, Britain and the United States are the three permanent Western powers on the UN Security Council which grants them global political clout. Moreover, because the sources in question are divided not only by language but also by nation state, and political leaning,

“The New York Times” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved June 20, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-New-York-Times>.; “The Times” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved July 18, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Times>

as well as continent, they occupy a wide diversity of the Western world thus increasing their wide-encompassing effect as sources for historical analysis. To the final criticism it can be argued that precisely because newspapers of record rely on profit, they necessarily need to cater to some or most of their Western audience and consequently reflect Western attitudes and opinions.

## First Case Study: The Jasmine Revolution

### Narratives of the Tunisian Revolution

The Tunisian Revolution was the first phase of the larger phenomenon that would become known as the Arab Spring. The sudden uprisings and protests in Tunisia caught that country's President Ben Ali off guard (as well as most of the world). Due to its suddenness, the revolution drew a lot of attention from around the globe including the four newspapers of record selected for this paper. This section will mainly focus on articles published in late December 2010 to January 2011 (though some later articles will also be referenced).

The first noteworthy event that set off the Jasmine revolution was Mohammad Bouazizi setting himself aflame on 17 December 2010. Despite the severity of the event, there was little coverage of the initial phases of the Jasmine revolution, especially in regards to the English newspapers of record. In this regard, we can identify the first divergence in the coverage of the events in Tunisia. Interestingly, the French sources - *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* – were much more abreast of events in Tunisia compared to their

English counterparts. In fact, they were several weeks ahead of both *The New York Times* and *The Times*. This deviation reveals that the Western papers did not simply report in a linear fashion and that cultural and national considerations did impact the news coverage of unfolding events.

*Le Figaro* was the first newspaper of record to cover the uprisings in Tunisia in 2010 and the first article retrieved was published on 24 December of that year. A brief quote from the article reveals its main topic of focus. “Théâtre de troubles sociaux ces derniers jours, la ville de Sidi Bouzid, dans le centre tunisien, a vécu mercredi soir de nouveaux développements avec le suicide d'un jeune chômeur qui s'est électrocuté du haut d'un pylône de haute tension.”<sup>97</sup> In this statement, we see the two most repetitive narratives of violence and martyrdom converge with one another, which was common not only for *Le Figaro* but also for the other three newspapers, largely because martyrdom itself generally resulted from violence in the case of the Arab Spring.<sup>98</sup>

*Le Monde* was also more up to date in its coverage of Tunisia than the English newspapers. This fact may be related to France's closer relationship with Tunisia (as a former French colony) and perhaps because the North African country has a large French-speaking population as well as a closer geographical proximity to France. Whatever the

<sup>97</sup> “En Bref” in *Le Figaro*, December 24, 2010, sec. International, p.6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/2>

<sup>98</sup> L'onde de choc tunisienne atteint les pays arabes” in *Le Monde*, January 16, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/16/au-yemen-les-etudiants-appelle-a-suivre-l-exemple-de-la-tunisie\\_1466270\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/16/au-yemen-les-etudiants-appelle-a-suivre-l-exemple-de-la-tunisie_1466270_3212.html): this article specifically analyzes the mass self-immolations occurring across Tunisia and references Bouazizi; Mackey “Qaddafi Sees WikiLeaks Plot in Tunisia.”; Taoufik Ben Brik. “Le soulèvement de la jeunesse en Tunisie est une vraie révolte politique.” in *Le Monde*, January 13, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/13/le-soulevement-de-la-jeunesse-en-tunisie-est-une-vraie-revolte-politique\\_1465121\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/13/le-soulevement-de-la-jeunesse-en-tunisie-est-une-vraie-revolte-politique_1465121_3232.html): constant theme that ran along the narrative of violence was keeping track of the number of deaths that occurred in Tunisia.



reason, the first article published by *Le Monde* that was found through the research was published on Christmas Day 2010.<sup>99</sup> The article concerns protests that occurred in Sidi Bouzid and it explores how the protests became violent resulting in several injuries and one death. This emphasis upon violence, and its coverage by *Le Monde*, is symptomatic of the newspaper's predilection towards covering violent events.

The English-language papers reacted more slowly to the tumult in Tunisia. *The New York Times* did not begin covering the events in Tunisia until 9 January 2011.<sup>100</sup> This date is far later than the immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi who committed himself to martyrdom on 17 December 2010. Despite *The New York Times*' late coverage of Bouazizi, he would nonetheless become a staple of this paper's coverage - and the other newspapers as well - which spoke to the prevalent theme of martyrdom that was almost omnipresent during several phases of the Arab Spring.<sup>101</sup> On 24 January 2011 Roger Cohen—a prolific writer at *The New York Times*—wrote that “Bouazizi set himself on fire in front of the modest governor's building where protesters now gather around portraits of the *martyr*.”<sup>102</sup> Not only does Cohen recount the event on 17 December 2010 he also adds

<sup>99</sup> “De violents affrontements en Tunisie font un mort et plusieurs blessés,” in *Le Monde*, December 25, 2010, [https://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2010/12/25/de-violents-affrontements-en-tunisie-font-un-mort-et-plusieurs-blesses\\_1457732\\_3208.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2010/12/25/de-violents-affrontements-en-tunisie-font-un-mort-et-plusieurs-blesses_1457732_3208.html).

<sup>100</sup> “Deadly Clashes With Police in Tunisia” in *The New York Times*, January 9, 2011, sec. World by Reuters <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2011/01/09/world/international-uk-tunisia-protests.html?searchResultPosition=9>; though made available by the New York Times, the article was nonetheless covered by Reuters in this instance.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Mackey. “Qaddafi Sees WikiLeaks Plot in Tunisia” in *The New York Times*, January 17, 2011. sec. The Lede (blog), <https://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/17/qaddafi-sees-wikileaks-plot-in-tunisia/>; Roger Cohen. “Facebook and Arab Dignity” in *The New York Times*, January 24, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/25/opinion/25iht-edcohen25.html>; David D. Kirkpatrick. “Tunisia Opposition Parties Weigh Power Shuffle.” in *The New York Times*, January 19, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/20/world/africa/20tunis.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Cohen. “Facebook and Arab Dignity”

emphasis to the fact that Bouazizi had become a martyr during the Jasmine Revolution. Moreover, many others from *The New York Times* repeated this point made by Cohen, only raising the legendary status of Bouazizi and his self-immolation.

Much like its American counterpart, *The Times* began covering the revolution in Tunisia at a later stage than the initial incident involving Bouazizi. The first article published by *The Times* was dated on 10 January 2011 titled “Up to 20 shot dead by police in Tunisian and Algerian food riots”, one day removed from the first New York Times publication date.<sup>103</sup>

As this suggests, violence and the charismatic role of an individual dominated the news coverage of the events of Tunisia—especially the first reports by the newspapers in question. To accentuate the violence that appeared to be endemic during the Tunisian revolution, the newspapers often utilized imagery which was perhaps one of the most provocative tools at their disposal during the tumultuous year of 2011. Because the primary means of communication among human beings is driven by visual cues, photographs can achieve a level of depth that words cannot convey. Therefore, newspapers regularly utilized graphic photographs to provoke a sense of sympathy from their readership or to simply garner an emotional response. By capturing the violence that was found in certain sections of the MENA, newspapers of record were best able to strengthen their main narratives concerning the Jasmine revolution.

<sup>103</sup> “Up to 20 Shot Dead by Police in Tunisian and Algerian Food Riots” in *The Times*, January 10, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/up-to-20-shot-dead-by-police-in-tunisian-and-algerian-food-riots-69n3nsq26wc>.

Most photographs that were published by Western newspapers during the Jasmine Revolution showcased two actors: protesters and security forces. This is important to note as it designates the two main actors featured in the narratives, that is, the protesters and the security forces loyal to Ben Ali. Some images of protesters and/or security forces were accompanied by plumes of smoke or fire. This may be due to the newspapers' desire to direct attention to the violence occurring in Tunisia. It could also be that the fire was used to convey that its incendiary destructive nature marked the end of the old regime and the furious outrage of the Tunisian protesters.<sup>104</sup> Generally the photos published in the case of Tunisia depicted protesters and/or security forces often facing off against one another, thus demonstrating their polarizing roles in the narratives espoused.<sup>105</sup> But while the protesters were regularly featured and referenced in terms of violence (mainly by describing and enumerating the number of injuries and deaths suffered), the newspapers also sought to uncover the reasons why Tunisians were so dissatisfied with the regime led by Ben Ali.

<sup>104</sup> Soletty. "C'est bien un mouvement sans précédent que nous vivons là pour la Tunisie.": in this image, protesters are walking around with bandanas covering their face as plumes of smoke rises in the background; Geisser. "Vincent Geisser : « Une transition douce est possible »": this image showcases protesters looking on beyond the photographer as a small fire rages in the background; David D. Kirkpatrick. "Protests Spread to Tunisia's Capital, and a Curfew Is Decreed." in *The New York Times*, January 12, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/world/africa/13tunisia.html>.

<sup>105</sup> "Ben Ali regrette les troubles en Tunisie et accuse les médias étrangers," in *Le Monde*, December 28, 2010. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/28/ben-ali-regrette-les-troubles-en-tunisie-et-accuse-les-medias-etrangers\\_1458640\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/28/ben-ali-regrette-les-troubles-en-tunisie-et-accuse-les-medias-etrangers_1458640_3212.html); Kirkpatrick, David D. Kirkpatrick "Amid Rioting, Tunisia Closes Universities," in *The New York Times*, January 10, 2011, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/11/world/africa/11tunisia.html>; "Little Has Changed in Tunisian Market Where Protest Sparked Revolutions" in *The Times*, April 29, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/little-has-changed-in-tunisian-market-where-protest-sparked-revolutions-s6cx2ttclrs>.: although this image is dated a little beyond the chosen timeframe for the Tunisian case, it nonetheless emphasizes the protesters and also their high-esteem of Bouazizi as they hold up his picture in memory.

*Le Monde*, like the other papers, sought to uncover why the protests were happening, and they early on determined that it was due to a lack of liberties and economic opportunities, along with anger at government corruption.<sup>106</sup> *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* were the first among the selected newspapers of record to highlight that the uprisings and soon-to-be revolutions would be orchestrated by the Tunisians themselves demanding to redeem their dignity and obtain more liberties and freedoms in their respective countries.<sup>107</sup> The French newspapers were the first to publicize the aspirations of the Tunisian protesters in the primary sources researched however, the two English newspapers would follow suit and reached similar conclusions.<sup>108</sup>

The goals and aspirations of the protesters were a central theme for the newspapers, but so was martyrdom. Martyrdom is necessarily tied with concepts of violence because martyrs sometimes committed suicide in order to shed some light on the abuses of the Tunisian regime. The newspapers of record converged on this point and they uniformly

<sup>106</sup> “Tunisie : la crise sociale qui s’étend est le revers de la bonne santé économique,” in *Le Monde*, December 30, 2010, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/30/tunisie-la-crise-sociale-revers-de-la-sante-economique\\_1459076\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/30/tunisie-la-crise-sociale-revers-de-la-sante-economique_1459076_3212.html).; “Ben Ali regrette les troubles en Tunisie et accuse les médias étrangers,” in *Le Monde*, December 28, 2010, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/28/ben-ali-regrette-les-troubles-en-tunisie-et-accuse-les-medias-etrangers\\_1458640\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/28/ben-ali-regrette-les-troubles-en-tunisie-et-accuse-les-medias-etrangers_1458640_3212.html).; “L’explosion de colère qui secoue la Tunisie.” In *Le Monde*, January 6, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/06/l-explosion-de-colere-qui-secoue-la-tunisie\\_1461765\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/06/l-explosion-de-colere-qui-secoue-la-tunisie_1461765_3232.html).; Marion. “C’est bien un mouvement sans précédent que nous vivons là pour la Tunisie.”

<sup>107</sup> Thedrel. “La Tunisie s’installe dans la crise sociale”; Hauter “Jours de rage à Tunis”; François Hauter. “La première révolution arabe au parfum de jasmin” in *Le Figaro* January 17, 2011. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/31>

<sup>108</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick “Behind Tunisia Unrest, Rage Over Wealth of Ruling Family.” in *The New York Times*, January 13, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/14/world/africa/14tunisia.html>.; Cogen “Facebook and Arab Dignity”; Amir Taheri. “Why Did the Iron Man of Tunis Turn to Rust?” *The Times*, January 18, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/why-did-the-iron-man-of-tunis-turn-to-rust-z7s29xrcmr6>.; “Tunisian Media Seize Opportunity for Life without Censorship.” in *The Times*, January 20, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tunisian-media-seize-opportunity-for-life-without-censorship-qqf26w3cvtk>.

pointed to Bouazizi's courageous act of self-immolation. *Le Monde* even featured a photograph which showed President Ben Ali visiting Bouazizi in his hospital bed in an attempt by the President to propagate the image that he sympathized with his Tunisian citizenry (Bouazizi died from his numerous injuries shortly thereafter).<sup>109</sup>

*Le Monde* was not alone in highlighting the martyrs of the Tunisian revolution. *Le Figaro* covered Bouazizi's suicide almost feverishly as can be seen in several articles published in early January 2010.<sup>110</sup> Violence and those who suffered under it during the few weeks of the Jasmine revolution were covered all too frequently. Some of the newspapers often featured the number of deaths in the titles of their articles.<sup>111</sup>

*The Times'* coverage constantly mentioned martyrs as well. An article by the publication mentioned the following, "The revolt began when Mohamed Bouazizi, an unemployed graduate, set himself on fire on December 17 outside the Governor's office in the southern town of Sidi Bouzid."<sup>112</sup> Once again, we are told about Bouazizi setting himself aflame, this time by the British newspaper. The quote also connects the commencement of the revolution to Bouazizi's suicidal protest. All Western newspapers seem to connect this aspect of Bouazizi's sacrifice and all of them perpetuate this

<sup>109</sup> "Remaniement ministériel à la suite des émeutes en Tunisie," in *Le Monde*, December 29, 2010, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/29/remaniement-ministeriel-a-la-suite-des-emeutes-en-tunisie\\_1458971\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2010/12/29/remaniement-ministeriel-a-la-suite-des-emeutes-en-tunisie_1458971_3212.html).

<sup>110</sup> "Trois morts en Tunisie lors de troubles sociaux" in *Le Figaro*, no.20658, January 3, 2011, p.6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/5>; "Mort du marchand à l'origine des troubles en Tunisie" in *Le Figaro*, January 6, 2011, p.6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/6>

<sup>111</sup> "Trois morts en Tunisie lors de troubles sociaux"; "Up to 20 Shot Dead by Police in Tunisian and Algerian Food Riots"

<sup>112</sup> "Tunisians Take Revenge on 'Ancien Regime' after President Flees," in *The Times*, January 15, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tunisians-take-revenge-on-ancien-regime-after-president-flees-lbv3bnkq5jc>.

illustration of the event, thus, mythologizing the event and giving it weight to historical memory. Today, historians and society at large remember the Arab Spring's beginning with Bouazizi's courageous act of self-immolation. This emphasis on martyrdom in Western newspaper reports during Tunisia's uprising helps to show not only something that was prevalent about the Western coverage of the Jasmine revolution, but also how memory is formed through profuse dissemination of the news stories involved.

Another narrative of the Tunisian revolution regularly featured by the newspapers was the influence of social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, more specifically, the impetus they gave to the uprisings. Some articles explicitly referenced social media's effect in their titles.<sup>113</sup> The four newspapers of record unanimously argued throughout many articles that the revolutionary fervor displayed by Tunisians was conducted and organized primarily through social media.<sup>114</sup> An indication of this trend can be seen in the following quote from *The Times*. "But it was the internet – and Facebook in particular that enabled the protests to surge. Just as in Iran, friends used the social network to share videos of police brutality and organise new protests."<sup>115</sup> This example briefly demonstrates the affinity that journalists had towards attributing the successes of the Tunisian revolution to the internet and social media. The French source *Le Figaro* builds on this point and

<sup>113</sup> Cohen. "Facebook and Arab Dignity"; Adam LeBor, "Despots Beware: 140 Characters Can Spark a Revolution" in *The Times*, January 17, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/despots-beware-140-characters-can-spark-a-revolution-k0v8rd7h7n0>.

<sup>114</sup> Thedrel. "La Tunisie s'installe dans la crise sociale"; Hauter. "La première révolution arabe au parfum de jasmin"; LeBor. "Despots Beware: 140 Characters Can Spark a Revolution."; "LES OBSERVATEURS DE FRANCE 24 AU CŒUR DE L'HISTOIRE," in *Le Monde* February 26, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/vous/article/2011/02/26/les-observateurs-de-france-24-au-c-ur-de-l-histoire\\_1485594\\_3238.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/vous/article/2011/02/26/les-observateurs-de-france-24-au-c-ur-de-l-histoire_1485594_3238.html); "L'espoir d'un changement, insufflé par l'exemple tunisien, gagne le Maroc," in *Le Monde*, March 1, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/03/01/l-espoir-d-un-changement-insuffle-par-l-exemple-tunisien-gagne-le-maroc\\_1486681\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/03/01/l-espoir-d-un-changement-insuffle-par-l-exemple-tunisien-gagne-le-maroc_1486681_3212.html).

<sup>115</sup> "Tunisians Take Revenge on 'Ancien Regime' after President Flees."

delivers a good quote to provide insight into the narrative that was so emphatically utilized throughout the Jasmine revolution. “Chez les jeunes, Facebook et Internet en général ont joué un grand rôle dans la mobilisation : les autorités ne s'y sont pas trompées, et tentent en vain de museler la Toile.” *Le Figaro* further states that, “des centaines de millions d'Arabes ont pu suivre et encourager en temps réel le déroulement des événements en Tunisie, grâce aux chaînes satellitaires et aux réseaux sociaux d'Internet, comme Facebook ou Twitter.”<sup>116</sup> In the instance of the narrative of social media, we can see that despite differences of region, politics and language, all four newspapers of record stressed the role that social media played over the outcome of Tunisia's revolution.

Although the four newspapers published many similar narratives, differences did occasionally arise during the coverage of Tunisia. Even the English sources diverged slightly while reporting on the developments of the Jasmine Revolution. *The Times*, for example, took a much more global approach to their coverage of the events that transpired in Tunisia in comparison to their American counterpart, in the sense that they would often examine the reaction of other countries across the globe and not just the countries in the MENA or their own. *The New York Times*, on the other hand, was more parochial and seemed more focused on American interests and American responses in comparison to the European newspapers covered. This inward view is perhaps linked to the hegemonic position that the United States enjoys over global affairs as the sole remaining superpower of the world. Moreover, it could also be reduced to the fact that the European papers shared the same continent and were also part of the EU and, therefore, were more interested in the

<sup>116</sup> Minoui. “Les régimes arabes craignent la contagion” in *Le Figaro*, January 17, 2011 p.5. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/28>

reaction of other countries or inter-governmental groups in the case of Tunisia. Whether this is true cannot be determined simply through an analysis of the Tunisian revolution, but the argument can be strengthened if the view persists throughout the analysis of each case study that will follow.

The geopolitics of the MENA area was a great concern for all four newspapers of record. Each newspaper in question wondered what would happen following Ben Ali's fall from power. Every newspaper questioned whether other autocrats of the MENA area would follow suit.<sup>117</sup> The autocrats in the region were largely supported by the Western world and, if they were to fall, it could severely impact Western interests, particularly those of the United States. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the newspapers of record contemplated this fact.

The Western newspapers of record, in a near unified fashion, worried that radical Islamic groups would seize power in the Mediterranean nation. Prominent *New York Times* writer David D. Kirkpatrick wrote on 20 January 2011 that, "The West has feared that the power vacuum in Tunisia will invite in more radical Islamists, including Al Qaeda affiliates."<sup>118</sup> This statement highlights that even though some writers would not openly state that they were worried about radical Islamists seizing power, they nonetheless, would

<sup>117</sup> "After Tunisia, How Safe Are the Other Regimes in the Middle East?," in *The Times*, January 16, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/after-tunisia-how-safe-are-the-other-regimes-in-the-middle-east-jh86m5k2lnd>.; Anthony Shadid, "In Peril: The Arab Status Quo," in *The New York Times*, January 15, 2011, sec. Week in Review, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/16/weekinreview/16shadid.html>.; "Un printemps en hiver," in *Le Monde*, January 22, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/22/un-printemps-en-hiver\\_1469161\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/22/un-printemps-en-hiver_1469161_3232.html).; Minoui, "Les régimes arabes craignent la contagion"

<sup>118</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, "Tunisia Takes Step Toward Allowing Exiles to Return," in *The New York Times*, January 20, 2011, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/21/world/africa/21tunis.html>.



relay the worry that was being forwarded in the Western world and perhaps as an even wider global political concern.

Some authors covering the events in Tunisia were aware of the influence of Islamophobia not only in their own writing, but also on the Western mindset, as can be seen by the following quote from *Le Monde*: “Il existe une arabophobie et une islamophobie européennes qui sont dangereuses, non seulement en elles-mêmes mais parce qu’elles nourrissent les politiques xénophobes dont le Front national français donne depuis longtemps un sinistre exemple.”<sup>119</sup> As the passage suggests, *Le Monde* was not only aware of the inclination of Islamophobia in the wider coverage of Tunisia’s revolution, but deeply critical of this tendency.<sup>120</sup> Further, this passage is also indicative of *Le Monde*’s left-leaning orientation through its criticism of the far-right organization, the Front National.

The narratives of the Tunisian revolution ebbed and flowed during and after the fall of Ben Ali on January 14, although the English newspapers were late to the party. All the newspapers covered the events in Tunisia in a largely similar fashion, though *The New York Times* was less global in its coverage. Once the Jasmine Revolution had seemingly accomplished its goal (that is, the ouster of Ben Ali), coverage of events in Tunisia

<sup>119</sup> “Sortons de la guerre froide !,” in *Le Monde*, February 18, 2011,

[https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/18/sortons-de-la-guerre-froide\\_1481780\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/18/sortons-de-la-guerre-froide_1481780_3232.html).

<sup>120</sup> For academic sources on Islamophobia in the West consult: Lorraine Sheridan. “Islamophobia Pre– and Post–September 11th, 2001” in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21, no.3, 2006. p.317-336.; Imran Awan and Islam Issa. “‘Certainly the Muslim is the very devil incarnation’: Islamophobia and The Merchant of Venice” in *The Muslim World*, 108 no 3 Jul 2018, p 367-386.; Asif Mohiuddin.

“Islamophobia and the Discursive Reconstitution of Religious Imagination in Europe” in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 39 no 2 2019, p 135-156.: What these sources relate is that Islamophobia, though present prior to 9/11, greatly increased after the attacks on the U.S. The paranoia that was stricken into the Western mindset was made all too clear during coverage of the Arab Spring. More works featuring the analysis of Islamophobia in the Western world can be consulted in the bibliography.

slackened drastically. The lessening of media coverage in Tunisia following Ben Ali's ouster could be the result of a combination of several factors. Firstly, it could be attributed to the spread of uprisings in Egypt, which would garner much wider attention during its own revolution dubbed the January 25th Revolution. Secondly, because the Tunisian revolution was so successful, violence decreased significantly and, therefore, the newspapers felt less compelled to report on the events in the North African Nation. The main narratives around the Jasmine Revolution in these newspapers focused on violence and martyrdom. Further, the effect that social media had over the revolution and its outcome was additionally emphasized by Western commentators. Also, the protesters themselves would be a constant theme that was circulated. The uprising in Tunisia provided newspapers of record with an agent or 'hero' to cover and it came in the form of the protesters and revolutionaries who fought for principles that were perceived as being based in Western values and ideologies. Reaction from various state actors was often discussed as well and especially the reaction of the respective newspaper's national government.

One final and important aspect to consider during the Tunisian revolution was the lack of coverage from the perspective of Ben Ali and his supporters. What is interesting about this insight is that from the perspective of the newspapers of record, it appeared that no Tunisian supported Ben Ali at all. There were many pieces that focused on protesters and their points of view and often newspapers utilized these interviews for their readers to share sympathies with the protesters. Yet, there was never an interview with pro-Ben Ali Tunisians or security forces that needed to deal with sometimes violent protesters.

Therefore, relying on the perspective of the newspapers of record, from a historical standpoint, would more than likely drastically alter the full picture of the Jasmine Revolution.

### Memory and the Tunisian Revolution

When considering Western media coverage of the events that took place in Tunisia, primarily between late December and late January, it is important to remember that the Arab Spring was in its initial stage. This had a direct influence over the ways in which Western commentators accessed and referenced their respective memories. The Arab Spring had not yet spread to other areas making journalists more reluctant to make references to past events and, as such, memories concerning Tunisia were less readily utilized in comparison to Egypt. But though the memories utilized were on a much smaller scale than its Egyptian neighbor, they were nevertheless present during the uprisings that would eventually become the Tunisian revolution.

*The Times* was quick to reference the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe when analyzing the events in Tunisia. An article from the British newspaper titled “The Ceaucescu Moment” even directly references one of the former authoritarian leaders from the 1989 revolutions, Nicolae Ceaușescu, who was removed from power and executed for his crimes against the Romanian people.<sup>121</sup> The article in question relates that Ben Ali’s fall from grace was “was as sudden and tumultuous as that of any Eastern European

<sup>121</sup> For more on the Romanian Revolution of 1989 consult: Peter Siani-Davies. *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (London & Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

dictator.”<sup>122</sup> From this quote, we see that (for this particular author, at least) the memory of 1989 was anchored in the idea of a sudden fall of authoritarian leaders--which led them to draw a parallel with the past events of 1989 to make sense of the fall of Ben Ali in 2011. Another article from *The Times* harkened to this point and is made vividly clear in the following quote: “Tunisia’s events resemble those that led to the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, in which parts of the regime decided to join the uprising.”<sup>123</sup> But the same memory of 1989 did not always lead to the same conclusions. One article asserted that some experts thought that the revolution in Tunisia would not necessarily produce the same results as the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe.<sup>124</sup> From this dichotomy, we see that memories are very pliable and may not produce the same kind of meaning for certain individuals, thus demonstrating their complexity.

Some writers for *The Times* did not necessarily view the outcome of the Jasmine Revolution in a positive light and this also informed their evocation of historical parallels for the uprising. When writers presented a negative view of these events, these views were informed by memories of the 1979 Iranian Revolution—and this was generally the case for all the newspapers analyzed. One article from *The Times* warned readers that the revolution in Iran began with a group of secularists but was hijacked by the Ayatollahs and thus, a negative purview of the revolution of Iran was rendered.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>122</sup> “The Ceausescu Moment,” in *The Times*, January 15, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-ceausescu-moment-nktbk86f0k5>.

<sup>123</sup> Taheri. “Why Did the Iron Man of Tunis Turn to Rust?”

<sup>124</sup> “After Tunisia, How Safe Are the Other Regimes in the Middle East?”

<sup>125</sup> “Is Tunisia Another Iranian Revolution?” in *The Times*, January 19, 2011.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/is-tunisia-another-iranian-revolution-8f85mlgw03v>.

*Le Monde* interestingly did not make much use of historical revolutions when considering memory in the case of Tunisia. Like the other newspapers, Tunisia was not covered extensively because of its rather small role in the Arab world. *Le Monde* did, however, use its own past to make sense of Tunisia's possible future. One article noted that, "L'éviction d'un satrape n'est pas nécessairement la promesse d'un grand soir arabe, et il reste à prouver que la révolution tunisienne évitera l'écueil d'un Thermidor."<sup>126</sup> In this instance, we see that *Le Monde* published an article that made use of its own memory of the French Revolution to illustrate to its readers that simply because Ben Ali had been removed from power, it did not necessarily mean it would translate to a wholly positive outcome for the Tunisian people. The same article also references the memory of Syria's 1982 massacre, in which the al Assad regime utilized brute force to quell an attempted uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>127</sup> *Le Monde* also harkened to the 1989 revolution in Europe, but one of its articles argued that the main difference between the Tunisian revolution and the 1989 revolutions in Europe is that the West supported the authoritarian regimes that were scattered across the MENA landscape whereas they did not in Eastern Europe.<sup>128</sup> The memory of Iran in 1979 was also briefly mentioned by *Le Monde* to remind readers of a possible negative outcome for the Tunisian revolution.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> "Révolution tunisienne : des leçons pour tous," in *Le Monde*, January 28, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/28/revolution-tunisienne-des-lecons-pour-tous\\_1471828\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/28/revolution-tunisienne-des-lecons-pour-tous_1471828_3232.html).

<sup>127</sup> "Révolution tunisienne : des leçons pour tous"

<sup>128</sup> "Le monde arabe, homme malade de la modernité," in *Le Monde*, March 9, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/09/le-monde-arabe-homme-malade-de-la-modernite\\_1490678\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/09/le-monde-arabe-homme-malade-de-la-modernite_1490678_3232.html).

<sup>129</sup> Natalie Nougayrede. "L'Occident pris de court par les révoltes arabes," in *Le Monde*, January 27, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/27/l-occident-pris-de-court-par-les-revoltes-arabes\\_1471337\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/27/l-occident-pris-de-court-par-les-revoltes-arabes_1471337_3212.html).

*Le Figaro*, with a slight divergence from its French counterpart *Le Monde*, used memories from its own colonial past to make sense of the events in Tunisia.<sup>130</sup> It also made use of Tunisia's own past and especially regarding Ben Ali's time in office beginning in 1987.<sup>131</sup> One article asserts this point most clearly in the following quote. "Le régime autoritaire du président Ben Ali fait face à la plus grave crise qu'il ait connue en vingt-trois ans de pouvoir."<sup>132</sup> Such warnings on the vulnerabilities of authoritarian governments were commonplace in all four papers and extend far beyond the scope of this study.

*The New York Times* joined the band wagon in comparing the Tunisian affair to the revolutions in 1989. However, some articles were careful not to overstep their boundaries and to remind readers that Tunisia had unique factors in its own revolution that did not necessarily correspond to the 1989 revolutions.<sup>133</sup>

As the events in Tunisia changed following the Jasmine Revolution, papers would use the very recent past to explain the changing situation in the North African country. This is where the narrative of martyrdom that was so frequently used by the West comes into play when considering memory. The social memory of Mohamed Bouazizi was frequently adopted and used when concerning the Arab Spring and especially in Tunisia. Even though Tunisia had successfully toppled its long-time dictator Ben Ali in January, the

<sup>130</sup> Jean-Pierre Chevènement, "Tunisie, mode d'emploi" in *Le Figaro*, no.20666, January 12, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.15. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/12>

<sup>131</sup> Thedrel. "La Tunisie s'installe dans la crise sociale"; Mezri Haddad. "La Tunisie doit-elle s'excuser d'avoir misé sur l'éducation?" in *Le Figaro*, January 13, sec. Débats, p.16. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/15>

<sup>132</sup> "L'heure de vérité pour la Tunisie" in *Le Figaro*, no.20667, January 13, 2011, sec. Opinions p.17. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/16>

<sup>133</sup> Robert D. Kaplan. "One Small Revolution." in *The New York Times*, January 22, 2011, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/opinion/23kaplan.html>.

revolution did not necessarily yield the results that people desired or, at least, not according to certain Western articles. One *Times* article uses the memory of Bouazizi and his confrontation with Fedya Hamdi to remind readers of the catalyst of the Tunisian revolution, showing how the recent past could come to dominate historical memory.<sup>134</sup>

The memories that were used for Tunisia primarily consisted of the 1989 revolutions in Europe and the 1979 Iranian revolution. It seems that when authors had a positive view of the Jasmine Revolution (and its outcome) they would utilize memories of the European 1989 revolutions. Therefore, if Tunisia would follow this path, many writers likely believed that Tunisia would uphold Western ideals and its revolution would have a similar outcome as the former Soviet satellite countries. However, if a negative perception or consequence was attributed to the events in Tunisia, authors were quick to remind readers of the events that occurred in Iran in 1979 in which an Islamic faction seized power. Moreover, they viewed Iran as an antagonist that opposed Western ideals and principles which is made crystal clear throughout most coverage of Iran in Western newspapers of record and Western media in general. Finally, authors would oftentimes reference Ben Ali's time in power and this process would be a prevalent theme that was shared by all the authoritarian leaders that will subsequently be covered such as Hosni Mubarak.

<sup>134</sup> "Little Has Changed in Tunisian Market Where Protest Sparked Revolutions"

## Second Case Study: Egypt and the Arab Spring

### Narratives of the Egyptian Revolution

The Egyptian revolution, or the January 25 Revolution, was in most ways the watershed moment of the Arab Spring. Not only was Egypt the most populous Arab nation, but its revolution was also the one that would have some of the most severe geopolitical consequences on the surrounding countries due to its position in the region. Hosni Mubarak was a close ally to the United States prior to and even during some of the revolution and he provided a bulwark against anti-Israeli sentiments in the region, something that was invaluable for the American polity.<sup>135</sup>

Media reports of the events that transpired in Egypt during the early months of 2011 are crucial in understanding and determining how journalists came to grips with the unfolding of revolution in a Western-friendly nation such as Egypt, especially one that was so critical to the geopolitical realities in the area. The revolution drew substantial attention around the world and was one of the most covered international news stories in the United States between 2007 and 2011, thus demonstrating its immense impact in the international realm and to the Western world.<sup>136</sup>

The narratives presented by the newspapers of record during the Egyptian revolution were primarily divided by two trains of thought: realpolitik versus ideological principles. These two mentalities in the Western world were most prominent in *The New*

<sup>135</sup> Osman. *The Mubarak Years*: 190, 193-4.

<sup>136</sup> Guzman, Andrea L. "Evolution of News Frames During the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Critical Discourse Analysis of Fox News's and CNN's Framing of Protesters, Mubarak, and the Muslim Brotherhood" in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93 no.1. (Sage, 2016): 81.



*York Times*, unsurprisingly because although the British and French had interests at stake in Egypt, the United States unquestioningly had much more to lose, perhaps most importantly because the Americans had invested billions of dollars into Egypt and the Mubarak regime.<sup>137</sup>

The U.S. and its relationship to Egypt became a staple of reporting for the newspapers.<sup>138</sup> The papers questioned whether Mubarak would follow the footsteps of his neighbor Ben Ali in Tunisia.<sup>139</sup> It is not very surprising that Western commentators would use Ben Ali as a reference point because of Tunisia's proximity to Egypt. However, as the revolution in Egypt progressed, journalists believed that if Mubarak were to fall in the same fashion as Ben Ali, the area would be impacted drastically and perhaps in negative fashion. The main worry was that Islamic fundamentalists could potentially win the day in Egypt following the fall of Mubarak.<sup>140</sup> This trend marked another important feature of the narratives of the Egyptian revolution, that is, coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>137</sup> Nassif. *Wedded to Mubarak*: 528.

<sup>138</sup> "Clinton Calls for 'Real Democracy' but Stops Short of Demanding Regime Change" in *The Times*, January 31, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/clinton-calls-for-real-democracy-but-stops-short-of-demanding-regime-change-wp3bc7ds6dm>.; Bill Emmott. "Obama's Riddle: Withdraw or Keep Military Aid?" in *The Times*, January 31, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/obamas-riddle-withdraw-or-keep-military-aid-73bf718vfw9>.; "Égypte : le coup de pression diplomatique des Etats-Unis," in *Le Monde* February 9, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/02/09/egypte-le-coup-de-pression-diplomatique-des-etats-unis\\_1477702\\_3218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/02/09/egypte-le-coup-de-pression-diplomatique-des-etats-unis_1477702_3218.html).; James Hider and Ashraf Khalil. "Revolt on the Nile: Egypt Defies Curfew." in *The Times*, January 28, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revolt-on-the-nile-egypt-defies-curfew-q99mvxdzn66>.

<sup>139</sup> Liz Alderman. "Arab Leaders in Davos Predict Regime Change in Egypt." in *The New York Times*, January 29, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/business/global/30davos.html?pagewanted=all>.; "Mr. Mubarak Is Put on Notice," in *The New York Times*, January 26, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/27/opinion/27thu2.html>.; "Transition arabe" in *Le Figaro* no.20673, January 20, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.17. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/13>

<sup>140</sup> "Transition arabe"; "L'Égypte en danger" in *Le Figaro* no. 20679, January 27, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.15. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/20>; "Fear and a Touch of Optimism in Israel" in *The Times*, February 11, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fear-and-a>

The Muslim Brotherhood was a competing political party in Egypt during the Arab Spring.<sup>141</sup> It provided an alternative to the largely secular regime that held power in Egypt. Because of the Brotherhood's affiliation with Islamism, the Western newspapers regularly viewed the party in a negative manner.<sup>142</sup> Sometimes, papers simply remarked upon the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood were not leading the charge of the Egyptian revolution.<sup>143</sup> One distinction that did arise in terms of the narrative surrounding the Muslim Brotherhood was the difference in volume. *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro* featured a larger amount of articles that focused on the Muslim Brotherhood than the other two papers. Regardless, the Muslim Brotherhood was generally portrayed in an ominous light by the newspapers of record due to their affiliation with Islamism and perceived opposition to Western values.

touch-of-optimism-in-israel-6950gwgfpkn.; "Generals Hold Key to Future as Chaos Engulfs Divided Nation." in *The Times*, January 31, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/generals-hold-key-to-future-as-chaos-engulfs-divided-nation-rjpmxhlhph>. "L'Egypte, le monde arabe et la démocratie," in *Le Monde*, February 3, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/03/l-egypte-le-monde-arabe-et-la-democratie\\_1474645\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/03/l-egypte-le-monde-arabe-et-la-democratie_1474645_3232.html).

<sup>141</sup> For more on the history of the Muslim Brotherhood consult: Katerina Dalacoura. "Islamism, Secularization, Secularity: The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a Phenomenon of a Secular Age." in *Economy and Society* 47, no. 2, pp.313–34. 2018. [https://journals-scholarsportal-info.librweb.laurentian.ca/pdf/03085147/v47i0002/313\\_isstmbapoasa.xml](https://journals-scholarsportal-info.librweb.laurentian.ca/pdf/03085147/v47i0002/313_isstmbapoasa.xml).; Mohammed Zahid, and Michael Medley. "Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Sudan." in *Review of African Political Economy* 33, no. 110, 693–708. 2006. [https://journals-scholarsportal-info.librweb.laurentian.ca/pdf/03085147/v47i0002/313\\_isstmbapoasa.xml](https://journals-scholarsportal-info.librweb.laurentian.ca/pdf/03085147/v47i0002/313_isstmbapoasa.xml).

<sup>142</sup> "L'Egypte, le monde arabe et la démocratie"; Michael Slackman, "In Mideast Activism, New Tilt Away From Ideology," in *The New York Times*, January 22, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/23/world/middleeast/23egypt.html>.; Jean-Jacques Mével. "L'Europe plaide pour des élections libres" in *Le Figaro* no. 20683, February 1, 2011, sec. International, p.7. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/13>.; "The Unrest in Egypt Means Middle East Faces a Searing Wind of Change." in *The Times*, January 29, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-unrest-in-egypt-means-middle-east-faces-a-searing-wind-of-change-vxtxc6dgl35>.; "Fear and a Touch of Optimism in Israel."

<sup>143</sup> "In Mideast Activism, New Tilt Away From Ideology."

However, journalists and newspapers needed to reconcile their apprehensions concerning the potential downfall of Mubarak with the admirable aspirations of the Egyptian protesters and/or revolutionaries who sought the same freedoms and privileges that most Western nations had obtained long ago. Bill Emmott writing for *The Times* captures this sentiment: “It is a sobering thought, for any European or American prone to proselytizing for democracy and human rights, that this month’s events in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab dictatorships have had so little apparent connection to anything the West does or says.”<sup>144</sup>

The demands of Egyptian protesters were in line with many Western values such as freedom and democratic principles. Some journalists explained that the protesters were also seeking concrete material and political goals such as the end of government corruption, instituting the rule of law and easing economic suffering.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, authors had to weigh in on their position regarding Egypt through the lens of Westerners and the ideological tenets which that entailed. Additionally, writers for the American newspaper also had to take into consideration the interests of their respective country which further muddied the water when considering Egypt. A quote from Albert R. Hunt featured in *The New York Times* highlights this juxtaposition: “Promoting democratic values and human rights around the globe versus protecting security or national interests. Usually, ‘realpolitik’ comes out on top.”<sup>146</sup> Although Hunt concludes that Obama would more than

<sup>144</sup> Emmott. “Obama’s Riddle: Withdraw or Keep Military Aid?”

<sup>145</sup> Slackman. “In Mideast Activism, New Tilt Away From Ideology,”

<sup>146</sup> Albert R. Hunt, “Freedom vs. Security in Egypt,” in *The New York Times*, January 30, 2011, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/us/31iht-letter31.html>.

likely choose realpolitik, journalists tended to side more with their ideological principles. This example is, nonetheless, reflective of the tensions that journalists had to resolve.

Michael Slackman writing for *The New York Times* conveyed that Mubarak had eroded so much trust with his people that he had to be removed from office and that there was no coming back from his position, thus demonstrating that writers sometimes held different opinions regarding the same dramatic event.<sup>147</sup> Another regular at *The New York Times*, Anthony Shadid, also berated the American government for some of its past decisions about choosing realpolitik over ideological principles:

The United States is also blamed here for helping distort the more modern version of these polities, by failing to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, rejecting engagement with Islamist movements and helping prop up governments like Egypt's and Saudi Arabia's that seem incapable of reforming themselves.<sup>148</sup>

With prominent *New York Times* writers such as Shadid chastising the American government for the manner it had conducted itself, there was an obvious predisposition towards principles rather than realpolitik. This preference was ever more present as the revolution in Egypt progressed. What this speaks to is that Western narratives did not necessarily align with one another, not even when focusing on an individual country, as was made evident with *The New York Times*' strong opposition to the choices made by the United States government.

<sup>147</sup> Michael Slackman, "Compact Between Hosni Mubarak and Egyptians Erodes," in *The New York Times*, January 28, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/29/world/middleeast/29mubarak.html>.

<sup>148</sup> Shadid. "In Peril."

Writers were rightly concerned about the American position in the region. *The New York Times* demonstrates the tightrope that the Americans had to perilously cross as the outbreak of largescale protests plagued the Mubarak regime. “This is a delicate moment for the United States and Egypt,” one article stated, “a crucial partner in Arab-Israeli peace efforts.”<sup>149</sup> This statement displays the complexity that American journalists often faced when writing about the events in Egypt and that it was not simply a linear narrative of the events.

Many journalists considered ideological principles of greatest importance, but other writers realized the real-world consequences of the uprising in Egypt and that it was not something to take lightly. It is interesting to note that *The New York Times* was almost exclusively concerned about the role of the U.S. with the unfolding events in Egypt at the initial outset of the revolution. It may be unsurprising because *The New York Times* is, after all, a newspaper based in the United States, however it raises the following question: were the three European newspapers concerned primarily with the relationship of their own countries with that of Egypt? Or was their coverage more extensive than their American counterpart in terms of the reaction of other Western nations?

Writers for *The Times*, much like their American counterparts, found the aspirations of the Egyptian protesters as something worth applauding and this was made evident in many articles that were published by the British newspaper.<sup>150</sup> The British paper also

<sup>149</sup> “Mr. Mubarak Is Put on Notice”

<sup>150</sup> “The People Have Spoken: A Nation Finds Its Voice after 30 Years of Fear.” in *The Times*, February 2, 2011. [https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-people-have-spoken-a-nation-finds-its-voice-after-30-years-of-fear-qrm3rtgvg2c.](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-people-have-spoken-a-nation-finds-its-voice-after-30-years-of-fear-qrm3rtgvg2c;); “Fury and Astonishment as President Mubarak Hangs On.” in *The Times*, February 11, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fury-and-astonishment-as-president-mubarak->

devoted ink to the American response to the developing Egyptian revolution.<sup>151</sup> A frequent author of *The Times*, James Hider, even made direct references to Hillary Clinton's efforts to secure a peaceful transition of power between the Egyptian people and the Mubarak regime.<sup>152</sup> *The Times* did not, however, focus much attention on actors responding to the Egypt crisis outside of Britain and the US.

An article written by *The Times* journalist James Hider which provided some first-hand experience of the Egyptian revolution. What made this article especially significant was that much of the story ran counter to the main narratives that were being espoused by all the newspapers of record. During Hider's Egypt adventure, it was made evident that although the revolution seemed positive, developments on the ground were a much more somber and chaotic story than had been presented in mainstream newspaper coverage. Hider related to the reader that the revolution was not all sunshine and rainbows and that elements of extreme violence, kidnappings, and large-scale looting were also an element of the revolution.<sup>153</sup> This was a rare and fascinating insight into the revolution in Egypt because most of the authors from the newspapers generally presented an idyllic view of the revolution with few exceptions. Many were speaking from a far distant place and therefore had a more abstract idea of the realities of the Egyptian revolution. Aside from the violence

hangs-on-z22283cxmtb.; Sadie Gray. "Egypt: The International Reaction." in *The Times*, February 12, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/egypt-the-international-reaction-rbfxp3vzb8j>.

<sup>151</sup> Martin Fletcher, James Hider, and Giles Whittell. "US Sends Signal to Mubarak: Get out Now." in *The Times*, February 5, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/us-sends-signal-to-mubarak-get-out-now-7xqbsnvdd03>.

<sup>152</sup> James Hider, "Mubarak Hangs on amid Show of Military Force," in *The Times*, January 30, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mubarak-hangs-on-amid-show-of-military-force-h9whflhklq2>.

<sup>153</sup> James Hider, "The Soldier Pointed His Bayonet at Me and Smiled. Welcome to Egypt, He Said," in *The Times*, January 31, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-soldier-pointed-his-bayonet-at-me-and-smiled-welcome-to-egypt-he-said-g6kmws9v3sw>.

that was meted out by the Mubarak regime, the Egyptian revolution was depicted as a relatively unflawed revolution and most journalists did not mention the chaos that was running rampant throughout the country or the criminality that was arising from the situation.

*Le Monde* shared a comparable approach to the other newspapers in terms of narratives regarding the Egyptian revolution. The French paper often represented the Egyptian uprising rather optimistically. Some articles discussed France's alliance with Egypt through the intergovernmental organization, the Union for the Mediterranean, which shows that some authors were aware that the revolution in Egypt would have political consequences for their own country in some shape or form.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, as the situation in Egypt developed following Ben Ali's ouster, some articles did provide some negative criticisms of the Egyptian revolution.<sup>155</sup>

*Le Monde* also focused on the Americans and their changing responses to the Egyptian crisis.<sup>156</sup> This narrative seems to have been prevalent in all the newspapers and it is reflective of the hegemonic position that the United States occupied in the Arab world during the 2011 protests, uprisings and revolutions. It also hints at the importance of the

<sup>154</sup> "L'irrésistible affaiblissement du raïs," in *Le Monde*, January 29, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/29/1-irresistible-affaiblissement-du-raïs\\_1472353\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/01/29/1-irresistible-affaiblissement-du-raïs_1472353_3212.html).

<sup>155</sup> "L'économie égyptienne est dans un état critique," in *Le Monde*, May 25, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/05/25/1-economie-egyptienne-est-dans-un-etat-critique\\_1527085\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/05/25/1-economie-egyptienne-est-dans-un-etat-critique_1527085_3212.html).; The eventual negative reception of the aftermath of the initial revolution in Egypt speaks largely to ideologues coming to grips with reality. Although it seemed like fighting for certain rights and freedoms may have brought about positive change for Egyptians, most writers did not consider the future consequences of displacing a leader such as Mubarak in a large country like Egypt, not to mention the consequence on the economic state of said country.

<sup>156</sup> "Egypte : le coup de pression diplomatique des Etats-Unis"; "Printemps arabe : les Etats-Unis tirent les leçons de la crise égyptienne,"

US regarding the Egyptian regime due to its long-time funding and support of Mubarak and his security apparatus. It also must be stated that *Le Monde*, though it looked at the role of France and the US in Egypt, was not really concerned with many other members of the international community during its coverage.

*Le Figaro*, out of all the newspapers examined during the coverage of Egypt, was much more global than its counterparts in its outlook as the following quote from *Le Figaro* writer, Pierre Rousselin, suggests: “Prudents mais alarmés, les États-Unis et l’Union européenne appellent tous deux l’Égypte à « répondre aux aspirations » de la population.”<sup>157</sup> The quote not only indicates that *Le Figaro* took into consideration multiple Western interests, aside from simply its country of origin, it also is indicative of a larger trend of focusing on the wishes and aspirations of Egyptian protesters.

Western newspapers were also guided by the havoc that was wrought in Egypt, especially in terms of violence. Although violence was, indeed, present in Tunisia during its revolution, the violence in Egypt was much more acute. To shed some light on the comparison, the Egyptian revolution, by the time of Mubarak’s ouster, had seen the deaths of 365 Egyptians according to the Egyptian health ministry.<sup>158</sup> Comparatively, sixty-seven

<sup>157</sup> Pierre Rousselin. “L’Égypte en danger” in *Le Figaro* no. 20679, January 27, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.15. [https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/20](https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/20;).; For further examples of *Le Figaro*’s more worldly approach, also see : Isabelle Lasserre. “La France sort son silence mais reste prudente” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20685, February 2, 2011, p. 6, sec. International. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/37>.; Mével. “L’Europe plaide pour des élections libres”; Jean-Jacques Mével. “L’Union européenne veut tirer les leçons de sa myopie” in *Le Figaro* no. 20682, January 31, 2011, sec. International, p.4. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/11>

<sup>158</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, “After Long Exile, Sunni Cleric Takes Role in Egypt,” in *The New York Times*, February 18, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/19/world/middleeast/19egypt.html>.



lives were lost during the entirety of the Jasmine revolution.<sup>159</sup> This figure illustrates that the use of violence in the Egyptian case and the prominence of violence would be something that all four Western newspapers would focus on as a locus of their narrative structures. The figure also points to the larger population of Egypt to that of Tunisia.

With every passing day of the revolution – especially in its initial phases during the occupation of Tahrir Square and the eventual downfall of Mubarak – violence and death figures were prominently featured in all the newspapers analyzed. Many titles featured the number of deaths that occurred daily.<sup>160</sup> Further, photographs were used in much the same way as the case in Tunisia to exemplify the ongoing violence in Egypt and especially in Cairo.<sup>161</sup> Following the resignation of Mubarak, the violence lessened in Egypt, and so too did the coverage by all four newspapers. The research of the articles published by the newspapers demonstrates that when violence was present, the newspaper coverage would follow suit. Therefore, the first few weeks of the Egyptian revolution was the most highly covered segment of the developments in Egypt. Although there were minor cases of

<sup>159</sup> “Tunisie : Les Chemins de la Démocratie,” in *Le Monde*, April 16, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/vous/article/2011/04/16/tunisie-les-chemins-de-la-democratie\\_1508811\\_3238.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/vous/article/2011/04/16/tunisie-les-chemins-de-la-democratie_1508811_3238.html).

<sup>160</sup> A.T. “Les islamistes mandatent ElBaradei pour négocier avec le pouvoir” in *Le Figaro* no. 20682, January 31, 2011, sec. International, p.3. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/33>; Tangi Salaün. “Nouvelle éruption de violence sur la place Tahrir au Caire” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20811, June 30, 2011, p. 8, sec. International. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/93>; Neil MacFarquhar and Alan Cowell. “Iran Uses Force Against Protests as Region Erupts.” in *The New York Times*, February 14, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/15/world/middleeast/15iran.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Alain Barluet. “Washington presse le président égyptien d’engager « immédiatement » des réformes” in *Le Figaro* no. 20681, January 29, 2011, sec. International, p.7. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/13>: this photo illustrates the trope of capturing fire to highlight or amplify the ongoing violence; “Revolution Is Not Safe, Warns ‘Voice of Tahrir.’” in *The Times*, July 8, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revolution-is-not-safe-warns-voice-of-tahrir-ppmn62zdbvz>.

violence in Egypt from late February until August 2011, the violence was not as severe as it was in neighboring countries such as Libya, Yemen and Syria. These three countries displaced Egypt in terms of coverage and it demonstrates that the news narrative of all four outlets were highly motivated by the prominence of violence. However, there were other themes that were frequently employed by the newspapers of record.

As referenced earlier in the paper, martyrdom was a theme that inevitably ran alongside narratives of violence. Therefore, because Egypt was a site of severe violence, especially during its initial phases of the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution, narratives that focused on martyrdom were very frequent. The title of one blog published by *The New York Times* titled “Victory, Martyrs and Mourning” speaks directly to the presence of martyrdom narratives in the newspapers of record.<sup>162</sup>

Although the protesters in Egypt who died throughout the revolution were often prescribed as martyrs by the newspapers, there were occasions in which individuals were exclusively focused on as martyrs of the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution. One such person was Wael Ghonim, the man who created the Facebook site titled “We are all Khaled Said”.<sup>163</sup> For his actions, Ghonim was placed in prison by the Mubarak regime and, upon his subsequent release, he was portrayed as martyr due to the injustices he had suffered.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Dahshan, Mohamed El Dahshan. “Victory, Martyrs and Mourning.” in *The New York Times*, February 20, 2011, sec. Opinionator (blog). <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/victory-martyrs-and-mourning/>.

<sup>163</sup> Thierry Portes. “Wael Ghonim, le cyberhéros égyptien” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20693, February 12, 2011, p. 18, <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/13>.; For sources on Khaled Said consult: Stork. “Egypt: Human Rights in Transition”: 465; Buckner. “The Martyrs’ Revolutions”: 380. Khaled Said was a man that was killed by Mubarak’s security forces and his memory would function in a similar fashion as Bouazizi’s had during the Tunisian revolution.

<sup>164</sup> Kareem Fahim and Mona El-Naggar. “Emotions of a Reluctant Hero Galvanize Protesters.” in *The New York Times*, February 8, 2011, sec. Middle East.

Even more than that, some newspapers went as far as calling him a voice of the revolution, or demonstrating through imagery his importance to the revolution.<sup>165</sup> Another individual that was made to be a martyr by *The Times* was singer and songwriter Ramy Essam, dubbed the Voice of Tahrir. The article in question also illustrated the wounds that Essam had suffered while under detention with Egyptian security forces.<sup>166</sup> These are only a few examples that demonstrate how frequent martyrdom was referenced by the newspapers of record.

Alongside martyrdom, the power of social media was a frequent theme found in articles by the newspapers of record, much like its counterpart in Tunisia. An article published on 2 February 2011 by *The Times* with the title “The Protest Network” emblemizes the influence of social media over newspaper narratives during the Egyptian revolution.<sup>167</sup> Some writers were almost entirely influenced by the perceived influence of social media. For example, Shane Scott suggests that, when Mubarak decided to cut the internet in Egypt, he effectively, “betrayed his own fear – that Facebook, Twitter, laptops and smartphones could empower his opponents, expose his weakness to the world and topple his regime.”<sup>168</sup> *Le Monde* also followed this narrative pattern as is illustrated in the

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/middleeast/09ghonim.html>; Roger Cohen. “Egypt’s Victory of Values” in *The New York Times*, February 10, 2011, sec. Opinion.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/opinion/11iht-edcohen11.html>.

<sup>165</sup> “Crowds Salute Facebook Dreamer Who Inspired Nation.” in *The Times*, February 9, 2011.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/crowds-salute-facebook-dreamer-who-inspired-nation-9vv7tlrt32v>;

“Les blogueurs, cibles de la ‘diplomatie numérique,’” in *Le Monde*, June 14, 2011.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/06/14/les-blogueurs-cibles-de-la-diplomatie-numerique\\_1535847\\_3218.html?xtmc=printemps\\_arabe&xtcr=256](https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/06/14/les-blogueurs-cibles-de-la-diplomatie-numerique_1535847_3218.html?xtmc=printemps_arabe&xtcr=256).

<sup>166</sup> “Revolution Is Not Safe, Warns ‘Voice of Tahrir.’”

<sup>167</sup> “The Protest Network.” in *The Times*, February 2, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-protest-network-lgkph9dqrn2>.

<sup>168</sup> Scott Shane, “Spotlight Again Falls on Web Tools and Change,” in *The New York Times*, January 29, 2011, sec. Week in Review, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/30/weekinreview/30shane.html>.

following statement published by the French newspaper: “A Tunis comme au Caire, la volonté de se débarrasser du tyran venait des profondeurs du pays mais sans Facebook et Twitter, cet élan n'aurait pas pris de l'ampleur aussi vite.”<sup>169</sup> *Le Figaro* also regularly made reference to the power of social media during the early phases of the Egyptian revolution: “Lancé sur Facebook, un mot d'ordre de soulèvement à l'occasion de la Fête de la police va passer aujourd'hui l'épreuve de la rue. 80 000 internautes ont promis de venir manifester.” Yet another example to illustrate this trend can be found below:

Comme lors de la « grève générale » du 6 avril 2008, qui avait dégénéré en émeutes meurtrières à Mahalla, dans le delta du Nil, le mot d'ordre a été lancé sur Facebook. Plus précisément sur la page « Nous sommes tous Khaled Saïd » , un jeune Alexandrin battu à mort par la police alors qu'il sortait d'un cybercafé l'an dernier.<sup>170</sup>

These quotes signify that most writers were quick to attribute the successes of the revolutions to access to social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook: without these networks, revolutionary aspirations would be fruitless.

However, there were a few outliers to the narrative concerning social media. Frank Rich, writing for *The New York Times*, thought that Western journalists exaggerated the influence of social media and he points to the fact that, in the case of Egypt, the largest protests occurred on days when the internet was shut down. Further, he claimed that, “The talking-head invocations of Twitter and Facebook instead take the form of implicit,

<sup>169</sup> “LE TRIOMPHE DE L’E-DIPLOMATIE,”

<sup>170</sup> Tangi Salaün. “Les jeunes Égyptiens veulent leur revolution” in *Le Figaro* no.20677, January 25, 2011, sec, International, p. 6. [https://nouveau-eureka-](https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/16)

[cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/16](https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/16): notice in this quote that the memory of Khaled Said is once again referenced thus demonstrating the influence his memory had over developments in Egypt.

simplistic Western chauvinism. How fabulous that two great American digital innovations can rescue the downtrodden, unwashed masses.”<sup>171</sup> The article by Rich strengthens the notion that Western narratives were in no way monolithic, even when analyzing one specific newspaper outlet. What is remarkable is the fact that social media was very much a prevalent narrative that involved the Egyptian revolution much in the same way as was presented throughout the Jasmine Revolution.

A final distinctive narrative of the Egyptian case can be seen through the person of Mubarak himself. As the revolution progressed, many Western journalists questioned whether Mubarak would remain in power or go the way of Ben Ali in Tunisia which made Mubarak a perfect outlet for narratives surrounding Egypt. As the protests swelled, and the military chose not to side with the wishes of Mubarak, it became evident to Western sources that the ailing President would not last in his home country. Although the U.S. supported Mubarak almost until the end of his tenure, he did eventually fall from power on 11 February 2011. David Kirkpatrick of *The New York Times* related the following concerning Mubarak’s ouster: “He was toppled by a radically new force in regional politics – a largely secular, nonviolent, youth-led democracy movement that brought Egypt’s liberal and Islamist opposition groups together for the first time under its banner.”<sup>172</sup> Kirkpatrick further stated that, “Mr. Mubarak’s fall removed a bulwark of American foreign policy in the region.” These two statements demonstrate that authors often referred

<sup>171</sup> Frank Rich, “Wallflowers at the Revolution,” in *The New York Times*, February 5, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/opinion/06rich.html>.

<sup>172</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick, “Egypt Erupts in Jubilation as Mubarak Steps Down,” in *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/world/middleeast/12egypt.html>.

to their own country when considering the revolution in Egypt and how they perceived that event. These perceptions would have a direct consequence over which memories would be consulted when writing about the Egyptian revolution and its triumph. However, the newspapers would continue to follow Mubarak's fall from grace even after his ouster and most importantly during his trial on national television in August 2011.<sup>173</sup>

Mubarak fled to one of his estates in northern Egypt after he relinquished his presidency. He and his family would eventually be put under house arrest and his health would subsequently deteriorate.<sup>174</sup> Eventually, Mubarak would be forced to face the consequences of his perceived crimes in August 2011 during a live broadcast of his trial. *Le Monde* related the following concerning his trial: "Moins de six mois après la chute de son régime, emporté par une révolte populaire qui a fait 840 morts, selon un bilan officiel, Hosni Moubarak comparait dans un procès historique pour l'Égypte et le monde arabe, qui a été diffusé en direct à la télévision publique."<sup>175</sup> Notice how this particular passage also reinforces the narrative featuring violence by referring to the number of deaths that

<sup>173</sup> "Courtroom Cage Sends a Chilling Warning to Despots"; "Mubarak Trial Will Put Revolution to the Test." in *The Times*, August 3, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mubarak-trial-will-put-revolution-to-the-test-jjk2v7z9qf2>; "Le procès de Hosni Moubarak au Caire reprendra le 15 août," in *Le Monde*, August 3, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/08/03/le-proces-de-hosni-moubarak-s-ouvre-au-caire\\_1555576\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/08/03/le-proces-de-hosni-moubarak-s-ouvre-au-caire_1555576_3212.html): this article also showcases several images of Mubarak during his trial as well as his sons; "Mubarak Spectacle Captivates the Middle East"; Anthony Shadid. "At Mubarak Trial, Stark Image of Humbled Power." in *The New York Times*, August 3, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/04/world/middleeast/04egypt.html>.

<sup>174</sup> Ethan Bronner. "Mubarak Denies Corruption and Defends His Legacy." in *The New York Times*, April 10, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/11/world/middleeast/11egypt.html>; David D. Kirkpatrick and Liam Stack. "Prosecutors Order Mubarak and Sons Held." in *The New York Times*, April 13, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/14/world/middleeast/14egypt.html>; Gladstone, Rick. "With Trial Looming, Hospitalized Mubarak Refuses to Eat." in *The New York Times*, July 26, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/27/world/middleeast/27egypt.html>.

<sup>175</sup> "Le procès de Hosni Moubarak au Caire reprendra le 15 août,"

was attributed to Mubarak's rule. *Le Figaro* would advance this trend in an article written by Anne Devers who stated the following concerning Mubarak on trial: "Tous les prévenus sont accusés d'avoir donné l'ordre à la police de tirer sur les manifestants lors du soulèvement de janvier, un chef d'inculpation pour lequel ils risquent la peine de mort."<sup>176</sup> As this quote reflects, the consequences of Mubarak's trial were dire.

All four newspapers saw the trial of Mubarak as a triumph of the Egyptian revolution and the goals of its respective revolutionaries. *The Times* published an article with the title "Courtroom Cage Sends a Chilling Warning to Despots" that forwarded an unsettling message to other authoritarians in the region.<sup>177</sup> Further, all the newspapers followed the plight of the protesters during the Egyptian revolution and, therefore, violence was also emphasized as protesters were oftentimes victims of oppressive measures against their persons by Mubarak's regime. Additionally, martyrdom was again emphasized by the newspapers as protesters who died during the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution were usually memorialized as martyrs by the newspapers of record. Further, individuals like Wael Ghonim were used to put a face to martyrdom, thus drawing further sympathy from readers. Social media was also once again accentuated during the coverage of Egyptians revolution much in the same way as was in Tunisia.

One thing that was lacking from all four newspapers were testimonials or interviews with supporters of the Mubarak regime. This trend followed the case in Tunisia in that the newspapers of record only provided one perspective of the Egyptian revolution.

<sup>176</sup> Anne Devers, "'L'Égypte dans l'attente du procès Moubarak'" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20840, August 3, 2011, sec. International, p. 4. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/120>

<sup>177</sup> "Courtroom Cage Sends a Chilling Warning to Despots."

It can be troubling from a nonpartisan point of view that the newspapers of record solely relied on those who opposed the Egyptian regime led by Mubarak. It nonetheless demonstrates a recurring theme throughout the Arab Spring, that is, that the protesters were provided an outlet but, for one reason or another, the MENA regimes and its supporters were rarely provided a platform in the newspapers of record.

### Memory and the Egyptian Revolution

Egypt presented Western commentators with a wide variety of narratives to cover during its blossoming revolution. As was related, violence was endemic to the revolution and many people had died and suffered through it. It also marked the end of the long tenure of Hosni Mubarak, a long-time ally for many Western states. Moreover, Mubarak's fall from grace also presented a challenge to the status quo in the MENA region as Egypt was one of the very few Arab states that shared a non-antagonistic relationship with Israel. With all these working parts, many authors needed to rely on memories of the past to make sense of the emergence of revolution in the most populous Arab state.

Several journalists utilized memories of Egypt's own past. One article published by *The New York Times* noted Egypt had not witnessed such a profound display of dissatisfaction towards the regime since 1977.<sup>178</sup> This reference shows that journalists did not rely exclusively on Western memories to understand unfolding events in the MENA. *Le Figaro* regularly employed memories of Egypt's turbulent past during the twentieth

<sup>178</sup> Kareem Fahim and Mona El-Naggar, "Broad Protests Across Egypt Focus Fury on Mubarak," in *The New York Times*, January 25, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/world/middleeast/26egypt.html>.



century in many of its articles.<sup>179</sup> Aside from *Le Figaro*, the absence of memories that relied on Egypt's own past can possibly be related to the fact that writers often searched for social memories that were more vivid in the minds of their readers, thus, they sought memories from the Western past.

One of the most frequently employed social memories referenced was that of the 1989 Central and Eastern European revolutions.<sup>180</sup> But why were authors so deeply drawn to this parallel? A *Times* article, published on January 29<sup>th</sup>, explored the reasons why the vision of 1989 Europe became such a frequent trope by Western journalists:

As Cairo burns, it is difficult to escape the echoes of 1989, the year of people power in Eastern Europe. Then, one regime after another was overthrown, from the negotiated surrender of power in Poland, to the street demonstrations of Prague and East Germany, the tumbling of the Berlin Wall and the bloody finale of tyrannicide in Romania.<sup>181</sup>

This vivid description of the 1989 revolutions highlights some of the main features which impressed themselves upon Western journalists during the tumultuous process of the Arab Spring. Mass revolutions and popular uprisings were developing in the region, and this was paralleled with the regimes of Central and Eastern Europe of 1989. Further, journalists were reminded by the 1989 revolutions and their successes through the quick fall of

<sup>179</sup> "Transition arabe"; Salaün. "Les jeunes Égyptiens veulent leur revolution"; Alexandre Adler. "Révolution en Égypte, triomphes et ambiguïtés" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20693, February 12, 2011, sec. Opinions, p. 17. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/16>.

<sup>180</sup> Laure Maudeville. "Washington s'active en coulisses" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20684, February 2, 2011, sec. International, p.5. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/19>; Cohen, Roger. "Tehran 1979 or Berlin 1989?," in *The New York Times*, February 7, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/08/opinion/08iht-edcohen08.html>; "Le monde arabe, homme malade de la modernité"; Boyes, Roger. "In the Arab World There Are Powerful Echoes of Central Europe in 1989" in *The Times*, January 29, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/in-the-arab-world-there-are-powerful-echoes-of-central-europe-in-1989-d9n2gzmk7ms>; "The Unrest in Egypt Means Middle East Faces a Searing Wind of Change."

<sup>181</sup> Boyes, "In the Arab World There Are Powerful Echoes of Central Europe in 1989"

authoritarians such as Ceausescu in Romania, which was easily translated to the fall of Ben Ali in January of 2011 and then Mubarak in February of the same year. The timely way in which both of these apparently unshakeable regimes fell to the will of their people suggested to journalists that mass protests by the Tunisians and Egyptians were reminiscent of the will of Central and Eastern European protesters of 1989. The French source *Le Monde* also made references to 1989, “cet égard, ce "printemps arabe" rappelle plutôt celui qui s'est emparé de l'Europe de l'Est en 1989, avec la chute "en domino" de tous les régimes communistes, de la Pologne à l'Union soviétique elle-même.”<sup>182</sup> It is imperative to highlight this quote by *Le Monde* as an example of historico-cultural Western analyses because it shows that newspapers in the West were generally in agreement on the types of memories that would help readers make sense of the revolution in Egypt.

A stimulating article written by Alessandra Stanley who was writing for *The New York Times* suggested that the unfolding events of the Egyptian revolution were more suspenseful than East Germany's Peaceful Revolution. Stanley stated that, “Even the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 didn't quite have the same hypnotic pull and roller-coaster suspense – this was a long vigil that carried a constant threat of mass violence in high definition.”<sup>183</sup> Stanley's observation provides a good example of the process by which memories may also influence the ways in which present events were interpreted. In this case, Stanley perceived the advancement in technology and media coverage as a

<sup>182</sup> Michel Tatu, “Tempête sur le ‘Grand Moyen-Orient,’” in *Le Monde*, March 10, 2011, sec. Idées, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/10/tempete-sur-le-grand-moyen-orient\\_1491296\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/10/tempete-sur-le-grand-moyen-orient_1491296_3232.html).

<sup>183</sup> Alessandra Stanley, “Mubarak's Fall Prompts Double Takes by Anchors,” in *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011, sec. Middle East, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/world/middleeast/12watch.html>.

distinguishing feature which made the revolution in Egypt seemingly more suspenseful in her mind than the fall of the Berlin Wall. Moreover, the statement made by Stanley may also suggest a sort of media sensationalism in order to draw polarizing views – in her case – the suggestion that the Egyptian revolution was even more dramatic than the fall of the Berlin Wall.

*Le Figaro* also reflected on what had happened in 1989 to make sense of the events unfolding in Egypt albeit on a much smaller scale. One good example can be found in a statement by Jean-Jacques Mével: “Hors du cénacle des ministres, l'eurodéputé libéral Guy Verhofstadt voit la révolte arabe se propager comme celle de l'Europe de l'Est en 1989.”<sup>184</sup> This instance highlights an important point - references to past memories were not necessarily made by the journalists themselves but rather, it could simply be an instance in which the journalist in question is relaying a memory made by somebody else who was interviewed or featured in an article, as was the case from the quote above. Although the newspapers did refer primarily to 1989 in the context of Eastern Europe, there was an instance that used a memory outside the realm of Europe. For instance, *Le Figaro* used the memory of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China.<sup>185</sup>

The fact that all four newspapers regularly made use of the memory of the European revolutions of 1989 as a comparative device for the Arab Spring—and especially for the early success of the Egyptian revolution—indicates the transcontinental dimension

<sup>184</sup> Jean-Jacques Mével. “L'Union européenne veut tirer les leçons de sa myopie” in *Le Figaro* no. 20682, January 31, 2011, sec. International, p.4. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/11>

<sup>185</sup> Laure Mandeville. “Obama fait ouvertement pression sur le raïs” in *Le Figaro* no. 20685, February 3, 2011, sec. International, p.6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/4>

of certain memories in Western culture. Although Britain, France and the United States were separated both in terms of distance as well as language, they nonetheless shared in a memory that I argue was grounded on a Western paradigm which united the countries in a shared socio-historical memory. These memories were grounded upon historical memory in the fact that the events had transpired in history. However, the memories of 1989 were largely remembered through their shared perception of belonging to a group, that is, the Western world. Most Westerners see the fall of the Soviet Union satellites as a positive outcome and they therefore view themselves as belonging to the capitalist/liberal victors over the forces of communism. Many journalists also reflected on their own respective national histories, thus making use of a nationalized form of memory. An article by *The Times* titled “Western Response to Arab Spring Is Swayed by Energy Security” goes over aspects of Britain’s political structure which prevented it from being plagued by revolutions throughout the nineteenth century, unlike its neighbors in continental Europe.<sup>186</sup> *Le Figaro* even harkened back to France’s colonialist past, “Notre pays a été un pays colonisateur, avec les perceptions déformées et passionnées que cela implique.”<sup>187</sup> These two quotes help to show that sometimes memories closer to home could also help to make sense of events abroad.

Thus far, a generally positive view of the Egyptian revolution has been presented through the eyes of Western commentators and the memories they consulted. However,

<sup>186</sup> “Western Response to Arab Spring Is Swayed by Energy Security,” in *The Times*, February 22, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/western-response-to-arab-spring-is-swayed-by-energy-security-nsbmrdrvnp15>.

<sup>187</sup> Gérard Larcher. “Tunisie, Égypte : la démocratie, un « risque contagieux »?” in *Le Figaro* no. 20692, February 11, 2011, sec. Débats, p. 14. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/11>

there were many instances that arose throughout the research that suggest that the uprising in Egypt was not necessarily viewed exclusively as a positive development by the newspapers of record. Clifford J. Levy, for example, wrote for *The New York Times* that widespread protests did not necessarily translate into long-standing and fruitful democratic states.<sup>188</sup> To strengthen his argument, Levy made references to the developments in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia under the reign of Vladimir Putin to highlight his point. In the example provided, Levy adopts the traditional American mindset (or even Western perspective) of viewing Russia antagonistically. This view of Russia is grounded upon American principles that typically do not align with those of Russians but also in the fact that political discourse in American circles are grounded upon a Russian interpretation as an ‘other’. The process of ‘othering’ displays how memory is based on a pattern of opposition as well as belonging and in this way an us versus them perception is created through an individual’s memory. This ‘us versus them’ mentality has a profound effect on memories at large because, as was mentioned earlier in the section on memory, memories are the locations in where individuals develop a link to a larger group affiliation. This sense of belonging can be better articulated by a quote from Jordan Peterson who relates that a “shared cultural system stabilizes human interaction, but is also a system of value – a hierarchy of value, where some things are given priority and importance and others not.”<sup>189</sup> We can witness this system of value when subjects covered by the newspapers of record were presented positively such as the protesters who seemed to represent Western values.

<sup>188</sup> Clifford J. Levy, “The Lands Autocracy Won’t Quit,” in *The New York Times*, February 26, 2011, sec. Week in Review, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/weekinreview/27tyrants.html>.

<sup>189</sup> Jordan Peterson. *12 Rules of Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Canada: Penguin Books, 2018): xxxi.

Further we can also see this hierarchy of values when the newspapers presented a negative view of ‘others’ who ran contrary to their ideals.

The othering effects of memory was most prominent when journalists and newspapers published articles that were grounded upon a negative vision of the Egyptian revolution. When journalists predicted a grim future for the Egyptian revolution, they ordinarily associated it with memories of the Iranian revolution of 1979. In fact, the research found that comparisons to 1979 were nearly as frequent as comparisons to 1989: indeed, in the case of *Le Figaro*, reporters and columnists evoked the Iranian revolution more frequently than the revolutions of Eastern Europe in 1989.<sup>190</sup>

The Iranian revolution of 1979 was another common point of reference for Western journalists. Not only was the revolution conducted in a nearby country, Iran, but also the population of Iran had similar belief systems as those of Egyptians, at least in the eyes of Western commentators, as Islam was the dominant religion practiced both in Egypt and Iran in 1979 (and thereafter). Therefore, Western writers often felt that because Muslims were the largest demographic in both countries, similar revolutionary processes might possibly occur. This provides a good example of the ways in which Muslims are othered

<sup>190</sup> Neil Macfarquhar. “Iranian Dissident Says Planned March Will Test Government and Opposition” in *The New York Times*, February 8, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/middleeast/09iran.html>; Ross Douthat. “The Devil We Know.” in *The New York Times*, January 30, 2011, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/opinion/31douthat.html>; “Vers une dictature intégriste au Caire?” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20681, January 29, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.19. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/10>; Mandeville. “Washington presse Moubarak de faciliter la transition”; Pierre Rousselin. “Obama et l’Égypte” in *Le Figaro* no. 20684, February 2, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.15. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/16>; “Le Caire, c’est Téhéran 1979 ou Téhéran 2009 ?,” in *Le Monde*, February 10, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/10/le-caire-c-est-teheran-1979-ou-teheran-2009\\_1478073\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/10/le-caire-c-est-teheran-1979-ou-teheran-2009_1478073_3232.html); “The Unrest in Egypt Means Middle East Faces a Searing Wind of Change”

by Western commentators. Western writers often reduced Muslims to a single stereotyped group with little cultural, political, and religious variety during the Arab Spring. Again, in this instance, we are witnessing a hierarchy of values that opposes the ‘other’ as an enemy or at least as a menacing presence. Since all Muslims were the same, Western journalists feared that history would repeat itself, and what happened in Iran in 1979 would happen in Egypt in 2011: a horrifying possibility, for these Western observers. Contrarily, writers for the Western papers hoped that the Arab Spring would have a similar consequence as the 1989 revolutions.

Journalists, and many Westerners as well as Western nations in general, feared the formation of an Islamic republic of Egypt. These fears were based, I argue, primarily on the prominence of Islamophobia in the Western world, which had its roots in many historical processes but is most attributable to the 9/11 attacks on the United States.<sup>191</sup> The attacks left a deep mark on the memory of Westerners and, in its wake, it fostered a negative caricature of Islam in the eyes of the West. This trend indicates that memory is guided by the general views held by the social collective rather than any real concrete historical interpretation of the events. Consequently, this negative perception of Islam influenced Western writers and their coverage of the Egyptian revolution. Moreover, it encouraged an ‘us versus them’ mentality that was prominent during the coverage of the Arab Spring. ‘Our’ revolutions lead to democracy and freedom, as they did in 1989: but ‘their’ revolutions would lead to religious dictatorship, as they had in 1979. A quote from

<sup>191</sup> Sheridan. *Islamophobia Pre- and Post-September 11th, 2001*: 317.; Mohiuddin. *Islamophobia and the Discursive Reconstitution of Religious Imagination in Europe*: 136.; Haja Mohideen and Shamimah Mohideen. “The Language of Islamophobia in Internet Articles” in *Intellectual Discourse* 16 no. 1 (2008): 75.

*Le Monde* provides a perfect example of some of the worries that plagued Western writers, “On sait leurs préventions. En un mot, c'est la "jurisprudence Iran", la crainte que se répète au Caire ce qui s'est passé à Téhéran il y a trente-deux ans.”<sup>192</sup>

Clearly, authors were worried that Egypt could be another Iran of 1979. But why were Westerners so apprehensive about another Iran? The main worry was driven by the othering of Iran. Its demonization was also elevated with the rise of Islamophobia following 9/11.<sup>193</sup> To emphasize this point, Lorraine Sheridan relates that Muslim, “Respondents indicate that following September 11th, 2001, levels of implicit or indirect discrimination rose by 82.6% and experiences of overt discrimination by 76.3%.”<sup>194</sup> This poll suggests that the othering of Muslims in Western societies was greatly elevated following the 9/11 attacks. Therefore, its very plausible that animosity towards Iran was elevated in Western societies as well due to the heightened sense of viewing the Muslim as other. Asif Mohiuddin further asserts the following concerning this process of othering the Muslim:

Muslims are thus increasingly identified with prejudiced and negative perceptions of Islam that have been reinforced by the impact of a wide range of events, from the Iranian Revolution (1979), 9/11 attacks in America, to the Charlie Hebdo Attacks in France in 2015. After the harrowing events of 9/11 in America, “the ‘Muslim’ became reified as the enemy of the state as a regressive, violent, bloodthirsty and menacing fanatic: the typical terrorist.”<sup>195</sup>

<sup>192</sup> “L’Egypte, le monde arabe et la démocratie,”

<sup>193</sup> Imran Awan and Islam Issa. “‘Certainly the Muslim is the very devil incarnation’: Islamophobia and The Merchant of Venice” in *The Muslim World*, 108 no 3 (2018): 368-9.; Chris Allen and Jorgen Nielsen. *Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after 9/11 September 2001*. Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2002.

<sup>194</sup> Sheridan. *Islamophobia Pre- and Post-September 11th, 2001*: 317.

<sup>195</sup> Mohiuddin. “Islamophobia and the Discursive Reconstitution of Religious Imagination in Europe”: 137.



Further, many Western nations viewed Iran as a troubled state because it was not a secular state in the same vein as Western nations such as Britain, the United States and France again harkening to a Westernized hierarchy of values. Because of their differences, Iran was viewed as a pariah by the West and this view was all too pervasive during Western news coverage of the Arab Spring in Egypt.

Newspapers would utilize the revolution of 1979 in Iran in order to emphasize the importance of the developing events of the Arab Spring and especially that of the revolution in Egypt. For instance, *The Times* claimed that, “Not since the Iranian revolution of 1979 had the Middle East seen anything like this.”<sup>196</sup> As the Egyptian uprising progressed, Western newspapers needed to give meaning to the events that were transpiring throughout the country. Journalists were also aware of the magnitude of the situation arising out of the MENA region and therefore its severity seemed to encompass many facets of the revolution in Iran. As mentioned earlier, *Le Figaro* was the paper that most prominently used the memory of the Iranian revolution to paint a negative picture of the Egyptian revolution. The title of an article published by *Le Figaro* speaks directly to this point “Égypte : le syndrome iranien”. In the article in question, the author claims that the United States was following a similar path in creating a new Iranian state through the revolution in Egypt.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>196</sup> “The Unrest in Egypt Means Middle East Faces a Searing Wind of Change”

<sup>197</sup> François Géré. “Égypte : le syndrome iranien” in *Le Figaro* no. 20691, February 10, 2011, sec. Débats, p. 14. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/6>

Iran was not only a good reference point to highlight the direness of the Egyptian revolution but also to highlight the fears of the West. *The Times* even stated that the Egyptian revolution might lead to a “nightmare scenario – a takeover by the Muslim Brotherhood that would lead the country down the road travelled by Iran in 1979.”<sup>198</sup> Once again we see the Muslim Brotherhood come into the fold and how they are relegated to the same position of perceived evil as the Ayatollahs who seized power in Iran in 1979. *The New York Times* also deployed the memory of Iran of 1979 as a symbol of negativity. Even the title of articles published by *The New York Times* highlight the negative depiction of Iran. For instance, one article published by the paper was titled “Tehran 1979 or Berlin 1989”.<sup>199</sup> This article accentuates the dichotomy between a negative (Iranian) and positive (German) conclusion to the Egyptian revolution. It also supplements the argument concerning the us versus them rationale that was one of the strongest themes of memory as it highlighted the fabric of a group mentality or group belongingness. However, the dichotomy of positive versus negative was also present in references to Iran itself: that is to say, between the attempted Iranian uprising of 2009 and the Iranian revolution of 1979.

The Iranian Green Movement of 2009 was perceived as a positive development in the Western world because of its opposition to Iran’s Islamist regime. Due to the West’s animosity towards Iran, Western sympathies very much fell in line with the protesters of Iran in 2009. In this instance, Iranians were viewed as ‘us’ instead of ‘them,’ and consequently received the approval of Western commentators. Further, the protesters were fighting the Iranian regime with a popular medium that was familiar to the West, that is,

<sup>198</sup> “Fear and a Touch of Optimism in Israel,”

<sup>199</sup> Roger Cohen, “Tehran 1979 or Berlin 1989?,”

social media. The presence of social media during the 2009 Green revolution cannot be dismissed, as it enabled protesters to organize and carry out mass demonstrations against the regime. Another element which coalesced with Western principles was the demand for democracy and democratic transparency. Many of the protesters who took part in the uprising against the Iranian regime demanded an end to corruption, especially in terms of the electoral process in Iran. Large numbers of Iranian citizens believed the 2009 electoral results to be fraudulent and therefore fought back against this perceived corruption. Although the participants of the 2009 uprising in Iran were ultimately unsuccessful, they nonetheless struck a chord with Western observers and it subsequently became another prominent reference point during the Egyptian revolution.

A title published by *Le Monde* exemplifies the dichotomy between a positive view of Iran in 2009 and a negative view of Iran in 1979. The article in question was called “Le Caire, c’est Téhéran 1979 ou Téhéran 2009 ?” The dichotomy between good and evil which was so heavily disseminated by the West during 2011 was put on full display by the article in question. Indeed, the choice of comparison that a journalist made was usually indicative of whether they had a positive or negative view of the Egyptian revolution. For example, the same article mentioned above relates the following concerning Egypt, “Mais s’il faut s’y livrer, je dirais que les manifestants du Caire font penser à ceux du printemps 2009 à Téhéran - ceux à qui on a volé les élections.”<sup>200</sup> This particular commentator (the idealist in this particular article) believed that the protesters of Cairo in 2011 were more

<sup>200</sup> “Le Caire, c’est Téhéran 1979 ou Téhéran 2009 ?”

reminiscent of the 2009 protesters than the 1979 revolutionaries and subsequently had a positive rendering of the revolution in Egypt.

What we see in the case of Egypt is an example of the ‘us versus them’ mentality in action. Through this process, it was possible to witness how a positive or negative viewpoint of the Egyptian revolution would be rendered. Whether journalists held a positive or negative conception of the revolution was indicated by the parallels they drew between events in Egypt, and their memories of other revolutions. Those with an optimistic view, made comparisons to the 1989 revolutions in Europe or the failed 2009 revolution in Iran; those with a pessimistic view, made comparisons to the Iranian revolution of 1979.

### Third Case Study: Syria and the Arab Spring

#### Narrative

It means if you have stagnant water, you will have pollution and microbes; and because you have had this stagnation for decades, let us say, especially the last decade in spite of the vast changes that are surrounding the world and some areas in the Middle East, including Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, because we had this stagnation we were plagued with microbes. So, what you have been seeing in this region is a kind of disease. That is how we see it. . . . We have more difficult circumstances than most of the Arab countries but in spite of that Syria is stable. Why? Because you have to be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people. This is the core issue. When there is divergence between your policy and the people’s beliefs and interests, you will have this vacuum that creates disturbance.<sup>201</sup>

The unfolding uprisings in Syria during early 2011 marked a drastic change of character for the Arab Spring. Whereas in Egypt and Tunisia, the revolutionaries or protesters were able to accomplish their goals in a relatively small amount of time (less than a month for

<sup>201</sup> Pinto. “Syria”: 204-5: very relative quote given by Bashar al Assad in an interview with the Wallstreet Journal.

both countries), events unfolded differently in Syria. For one thing, President Bashar al-Assad was more than willing to employ the state gears of counterrevolutionary violence and he commanded the loyalty of much of the military, already marking a significant contrast to the cases in Egypt and Tunisia in which the militaries chose not to use violence against protesters. Some of the newspapers of record were also leery of the aspirations of the protesters in Syria and were quick to caution readers that “Syria’s Uprising Will Not Be a Rerun of Tunisia”.<sup>202</sup> Assad more than likely recognized the dangers of the revolution and undoubtedly noticed what had happened to his neighbors, Mubarak and Ben Ali, and rather than hesitate, he was quick to apply state force to quell any sentiments that ran contrary to the regime. With lightning speed, the death toll in Syria escalated rapidly, reaching 3,000 by March according to some estimates.<sup>203</sup> Consequently, Western media began assiduously covering the events unfolding in Syria which speaks once again to the media inclination to focus on violence and violent acts.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Dan Snow, “Syria’s Uprising Will Not Be a Rerun of Tunisia,” in *The Times*, April 20, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/syrias-uprising-will-not-be-a-rerun-of-tunisia-kkk5bztblsr>: the title of this article vividly echoes this point.

<sup>203</sup> Anderson, James H. “AFTER THE FALL: What’s Next for Assad and Syria?” in *World Affairs* 174, no. 4 (Sage Publications, 2011): 16.: Anderson also compared al Assad’s oppressive force to that of his father’s in 1982 which was a comparison that the newspapers of record would also make and will be examined in the section on memory.

<sup>204</sup> Georges Malbrunot. “Le pouvoir syrien lève officiellement l'état d'urgence” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20750, April 20, 2011, sec. International, p. 6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/6>; Anthony Shadid. “Security Forces Kill Dozens in Uprisings Around Syria” in *The New York Times*, April 22, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/23/world/middleeast/23syria.html>; Laura Pitel and Nicholas Blanford. “88 Protesters Massacred in Syria.” in *The Times*, April 23, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/88-protesters-massacred-in-syria-lw357cm0tjx>; “L’énormément trésor syrien,” in *Le Monde*, March 29, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/03/29/l-encombrant-tresor-syrien\\_1500051\\_3218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/03/29/l-encombrant-tresor-syrien_1500051_3218.html).

Violence fueled the Syrian protests. Assad was quick to utilize the tools of the regime to repress protests and this often guided most, if not all, Western media coverage of the events. All four newspapers followed suit in this regard, with many articles focusing directly on the violence carried out by the Syrian regime. The following quote from *The New York Times* is typical: “Security forces in Syria met thousands of demonstrators with fusillades of live ammunition after noon prayers on Friday, killing at least 81 people in the bloodiest day of the five-week-old Syrian uprising, according to protesters, witnesses and accounts on social networking sites.”<sup>205</sup> The use of phrases such as “fusillades of live ammunition” captivates the reader’s attention and draws the reader’s mind towards the violence being utilized by the Syrian security apparatus. This quote from *The New York Times* reflects the many articles that provide a narrative focused on violence in Syria, and it was repeatedly expounded upon by the four newspapers of record in order to obtain readership and to keep the world informed about the atrocities carried out by the Assad regime. *Le Figaro* would also play its part in publicizing the violent nature of the Syrian regime and with a title like “Les affrontements meurtriers se poursuivent en Syrie”, it is clear *Le Figaro* opposed the violent nature of President Assad’s actions against the Syrian people.<sup>206</sup>

Beyond violence, the Western newspapers did not emphasize many other discernible narratives or themes when discussing Syria in the first half of 2011. Although protests were highlighted, they were usually associated with acts of violence. The

<sup>205</sup> Shadid, “Security Forces Kill Dozens in Uprisings Around Syria”

<sup>206</sup> G.M. “Les affrontements meurtriers se poursuivent en Syrie” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20727, March 24, 2011, sec. International, p. 10. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/53>

aspirations and goals of the protesters were not as thoroughly covered as their Egyptian and Tunisian counterparts: instead, newspapers concentrated on the violence that the protesters endured throughout their struggle. Social media was also not mentioned or used as a narrative as frequently as in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia which can possibly be connected to the overwhelming presence of counterrevolutionary state violence and how firm Assad was in his censorship of media within Syria. Before proceeding, however, it should be mentioned that though social media was not emphasized in most reports, all four newspapers nonetheless referenced the Facebook page called *The Syrian Revolution 2011*: but these instances were not as extensive as references to social media found in reports about Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>207</sup> Indeed, the mentions of the Facebook page for the Syrian Revolution were equivalent to simple comments and did not present any sort of guiding narrative as was the case in the two former case studies.

In addition, though it was much more violent and bloody than its Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts, the theme of martyrdom was not emphasized in Western news reports about the growing Syrian conflict. This is an interesting fact because logic would suggest that because the Syrian state openly used more violence than its counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, it would follow that there were more martyrs to be commemorated. Of course, the newspapers of record, as was shown in the sources listed above, regularly

<sup>207</sup> Claire Sweeney. "Tanks 'Storm Syrian Protest City.'" in *The Times*, May 7, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tanks-storm-syrian-protest-city-tlbzrwcd2q6>.; "In Syria, Crackdown After Protests." in *The New York Times*, March 18, 2011, sec. Middle East. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/world/middleeast/19syria.html>.; Sibylle Rizk Beyrouth. "Le « printemps syrien » fait vaciller Assad" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20728, March 25, 2011, sec. International, p.8. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/55>.; Henry Laurens and Nora Benkorich. "Sanglant 'printemps syrien,'" in *Le Monde*, May 23, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/05/23/sanglant-printemps-syrien\\_1526135\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/05/23/sanglant-printemps-syrien_1526135_3232.html).

featured the number of deaths that occurred in Syria, but the newspapers did not present any detailed commentary aside from chastising the Syrian state. In certain regards, the theme of martyrdom was still featured by news reports from Syria, but they did not discuss any specific cases which made these reports much less personal than the cases in Egypt and Tunisia. This can most likely be attributed to Assad's decision to ban foreign journalists from entering the country.<sup>208</sup>

Although the theme of martyrdom generally was not emphasized by the newspapers, there were a few articles that focused on one specific individual in the case of Syria. The martyr in question was Hamza Ali Al-Khateeb, a thirteen-year old boy who was killed by Syrian security forces.<sup>209</sup> Although this storyline was featured in some of the sources, it seems that Hamza's death did not generate as much publicity as Bouazizi's in Tunisia. However, one article by *Le Monde* does state that Hamza, "est déjà considéré par certains comme Mohamed Bouazizi, le jeune Tunisien qui s'est immolé par le feu le 17 décembre 2010. Hamza, Mohamed et des centaines d'anonymes sont morts pour que le "printemps arabe" avec ses vents, ses bourrasques et sa grandeur continue son chemin,"<sup>210</sup> which suggests that some circles were trying to advocate for Hamza being equivalent to Bouazizi; but Western newspapers of record generally did not take this view.

<sup>208</sup> Anderson. "AFTER THE FALL: What's Next for Assad and Syria?": 17.

<sup>209</sup> Tahar Ben Jelloun. "Hamzah, 13 ans, juste un peu tué" in *Le Monde*, June 11, 2011.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/06/11/hamzah-13-ans-juste-un-peu-tue\\_1535020\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/06/11/hamzah-13-ans-juste-un-peu-tue_1535020_3232.html);

Liam Stack. "Video of Tortured Boy's Corpse Deepens Anger in Syria." in *The New York Times*, May 30, 2011, sec. Middle East.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/world/middleeast/31syria.html>;

<sup>210</sup> Jelloun. "Hamzah, 13 ans, juste un peu tué"



Western newspaper narratives concerning the growing conflict in Syria are a crucial marker for the overall coverage of the Arab Spring. In one way, the instance of Syria demonstrates that Western narratives were not necessarily static when focusing on different MENA countries. For example, Syria received much less coverage concerning the protesters because journalists were banned from entering the country. Moreover, Syria was an indicator of the changing nature of the Arab Spring itself. It became apparent that not all uprisings would achieve success and, in fact, sometimes they could end in disaster. As the death toll spiralled out of control in Syria it became the primary focus of Western newspapers and their narratives concerning the chaotic country. As journalists were prevented from entering the country, there was a lot less diversity in the stories that came out of the country and, as has been already noted, news reports from Syria focused almost exclusively on violence. Finally, it would be remiss not to mention the fact that—once again—Assad supporters were not given a voice in the news from Syria. This was a process that carried on over from the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution in Egypt. It seems that the newspapers of record were not interested to learn about the perspectives of those who supported what they perceived as oppressive and authoritarian regimes.

### Syria and Memory

The situation in Syria was in many ways different from the uprisings and revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Due to this development, the newspapers utilized almost completely different memories when considering Syria. There was a departure from memories involving European revolutions or revolutions in general. The decision not to focus on past

revolutions when trying to process events transpiring in Syria was indicative of the apprehension that many journalists may have held regarding the aspirations of the protesters in Syria. It can be argued that the perceived low level of success of the uprising in Syria forced journalists to seek out different memories to relate to their readers.

The main and most prominently featured social memories regarding Syria involved memories of Syria itself. Writers regularly remembered the massacres that took place in Syria in 1982.<sup>211</sup> The reason that authors were pressed to make this comparison was because Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, conducted himself in a very similar vein as his son nearly thirty years earlier. *Le Monde* provides a glimpse into the types of statements that were made regarding the memory of 1982: "Mais c'est la ville de Hama, pilonnée à l'artillerie lourde en 1982 sur ordre de Hafez Al-Assad pour venir à bout des Frères musulmans, faisant plus de dix mille morts civils, qui hante encore les mémoires."<sup>212</sup> The deaths of 10,000 Syrians in 1982 definitely shared some parallels with the rising death toll of Syrians in 2011 and subsequently left some low-hanging fruit for journalists to make a comparison. *Le Figaro* sheds some more light on how the memory of 1982 would be related to its leaders: "Confrontées à une contestation sans précédent depuis

<sup>211</sup>Katherine Zoepf. "Long Repressed in Syria, an Internal Opposition Takes Shape." in *The New York Times*, April 27, 2011, sec. Middle East.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/28/world/middleeast/28syria.html>.; Georges Malbrunot. "En Syrie, Bachar el-Assad est confronté au défi de la rue" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20726, March 23, 2011, sec. International, p.9. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/48>.; James Hider and Nick Blanford. "Syrian City of Aleppo Breaks Its Silence to Join Protests." in *The Times*, June 30, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/syrian-city-of-aleppo-breaks-its-silence-to-join-protests-0qvbm3p263s>.; Hennion, Cécile. "Damas réprime la contestation à Deraa dans le sang"; "Une intervention de l'ONU s'impose en Syrie," in *Le Monde*, May 3, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/05/03/une-intervention-de-l-onu-s-impose-en-syrie\\_1516205\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/05/03/une-intervention-de-l-onu-s-impose-en-syrie_1516205_3232.html).: All newspapers were unified in this remembrance and it clearly left an indelible mark on Western commentators.

<sup>212</sup> Hennion, "Damas réprime la contestation à Deraa dans le sang"

la sanglante répression de la révolte des Frères musulmans à Hama en 1982, les autorités syriennes cherchent à calmer le jeu.”<sup>213</sup> By making this parallel with events in 1982, *Le Figaro* emphasized the severity of the violence that was carried out by the al Assad regime.

1982 not only shared parallels with 2011 in terms of the counterrevolutionary violence employed by the state, but it was also conducted by the same ruling family. The hereditary legacy of the ruling al-Assad family was, therefore, another outlet that journalists utilized in order to understand the events occurring in Syria. Many journalists felt that the Syrian state was virtually in the same repressive hands and, as a result, largescale violence by the state rulers was not all that surprising which further increased the decision to make the comparison to the 1982 massacre.

Although these references to 1982 provide insights into the types of memories that Western commentators reflected upon during the Arab Spring, the more important distinguishing factor of memory in the instance of Syria is perhaps its absence. Syria was heavily featured because of its violence, but Western newspapers did not use memory to help readers make sense in its coverage. This can partially be attributed to concerns regarding the violence that Syrians were facing daily and, therefore, journalists were not as predisposed to compare their plight to the past. It can also be drawn back to the ban on foreign journalists in the country. Whatever the reason, it is nonetheless an interesting aspect that warrants some consideration. The case of Syria is also the only instance in which all memories that were used regarded its own history rather than comparative

<sup>213</sup> Sibylle Rizk. “Le « printemps syrien » fait vaciller Assad” in *Le Figaro* no. 20728, March 25, 2011, sec. International, p. 8. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/55>

memories. Rather than attribute meaning by making references to the West's shared past, writers chose to use Syria's own past and little else.

## Fourth Case Study: Libya

### Narrative

Libya marked another stark contrast to the revolutions that played out in Tunisia and Egypt. However, it was also different from Syria in certain regards. The fundamental and perhaps most unique feature of the crisis in Libya, as mentioned earlier in the paper, was that Libya was the first instance in which the international community decided to intervene directly during the most vibrant months of the Arab Spring. Once again, we are reminded of DeFronzo's critical factor for a successful revolution concerning the international community: in this instance the international community (namely the West) decided to openly support and utilize their own resources to provide military aid to the dissidents fighting the Gaddafi regime.<sup>214</sup>

Libya was yet another country in the MENA that had seemingly grown weary of their authoritarian leader, Colonel Gaddafi, who was also the longest tenured autocrat in the region.<sup>215</sup> Gaddafi provided a rallying point for disparate factions in Libya to unite with one another to overthrow his regime. The four newspapers of record utilized several narratives during the conflict between Gaddafi and the Eastern rebels which will be further explored below.

<sup>214</sup> Derr. *Capturing Gaddafi: Narrative as system currency*: 367.

<sup>215</sup> Derr. *Capturing Gaddafi: Narrative as system currency*: 368: Gaddafi ruled Libya for 42 years prior to the Arab Spring and his eventual downfall.

One common theme of Western newspaper coverage was an emphasis on the notorious Colonel Gaddafi himself.<sup>216</sup> Although Ben Ali, Mubarak and al Assad were all central to the revolutionary narratives in their respective countries, Gaddafi was perhaps the most emphasized by the newspapers. As one might guess, the coverage of Gaddafi by the four newspapers in question was negative and all outlets primarily chastised the enigmatic ruler of Libya. The coverage of Gaddafi is an illuminating aspect of Western biases in their reporting because historically Gaddafi was generally viewed as an enemy of the Western world (though he had begun to rebuild his international reputation in the early 2000s) and, as such, he was generally presented as a villain and thus was regularly vilified by Western journalists.<sup>217</sup>

There are numerous examples to be drawn from Libya that show how journalists were adamant in their opposition to the Gaddafi regime. One quote that is indicative of this trend can be drawn from *The Times* when it stated that, “If we don’t bomb Gaddafi’s tanks, Europe is likely to face a wave of refugees and a new generation of jihadis.”<sup>218</sup> Not only is

<sup>216</sup> “Still No Quick Fix.” in *The Times*, July 27, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/still-no-quick-fix-b8t3k99r0ht>.; “Grisly Visit to Gaddafi’s Villa of Torture and Death.” in *The Times*, May 11, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/grisly-visit-to-gaddafis-villa-of-torture-and-death-g76s915dqhd>.; Roger Cohen. “The Price of Delusion,” in *The New York Times*, April 28, 2011, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/29/opinion/29iht-edcohen29.html>.; Mohamad Bazzi. “What Did Qaddafi’s Green Book Really Say?” in *The New York Times*, May 27, 2011, sec. Sunday Book Review. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/books/review/what-did-qaddafis-green-book-really-say.html>.; Pierre Prier. “La Libye secouée par l’insurrection” in *Le Figaro*, February 21, 2011, sec. International, p. 6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/24>.; “Kadhafi menace Paris après les livraisons d’armes aux rebelles,” in *Le Monde*, July 2, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/07/02/kadhafi-menace-paris-apres-les-livraisons-d-armes-aux-rebelles\\_1543810\\_1496980.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/07/02/kadhafi-menace-paris-apres-les-livraisons-d-armes-aux-rebelles_1543810_1496980.html).

<sup>217</sup> El-Rikhia. *Libya’s Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction*: 1; Pargeter. *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*: 119; Pargeter further relates that Qaddafi didn’t make many friends even among his neighbors as well thus making his tenure even more perilous geopolitically.

<sup>218</sup> David Aaronovitch, “The Price of Inaction in Libya Is Far Too High,” in *The Times*, March 18, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-price-of-inaction-in-libya-is-far-too-high-mqh9vjfsvq2>.

this quote reflective of all four newspapers at large, but it is also indicative of the worry that many Western journalists had concerning a potential jihadist seizure of power throughout the region. The British newspaper would oftentimes make use of jihadism as a trope of their coverage and often presented it as an opposing point to Western ideals.

Across the Atlantic, coverage was not dissimilar from *The Times* as *The New York Times* quickly advocated for action against Gaddafi as well. The following quote taken from an article titled “The Price of Delusion” by Roger Cohen is a snap-shot of the widespread opposition to Gaddafi and his regime, and the need for action against the ‘tyrant’:

This embryonic force is not going to defeat Qaddafi in the foreseeable future. Nor can it, alone, apply enough pressure on him for his entourage to see the writing on the wall and act accordingly. That burden falls to NATO. But NATO hesitated as President Obama and America drew back. It is now trying to correct that lapse by escalating operations to take out supply and communications lines.<sup>219</sup>

As the title suggests, along with the quote, any action that could be construed as inaction against the Gadaffi regime was not only dangerous but foolhardy, according to Cohen.

It was an easy choice for journalists to depict Gaddafi as the monster who ruled Libya with an iron fist as he had a tainted past, especially with the Western world, and was often at odds with foreign powers. The great disparity between Gaddafi and his MENA contemporaries can be found in a variety of reasons. Firstly, in comparison to Ben Ali, Gaddafi was well known by the Western world due to his adversarial relationship with

<sup>219</sup> Cohen. “The Price of Delusion”

Western powers especially during the 1980s.<sup>220</sup> Meanwhile, Assad had only obtained rule in 2000 after succeeding his father (though it was supposed to be his brother who inherited power in Syria), while Gaddafi had ruled Libya since the 1960s. As was related earlier in the paper, Mubarak was a staunch ally of the United States during his tenure whereas Gaddafi was often seen as an enemy. Finally, Gaddafi's Libya did not represent a very important geopolitical reality in the region and, therefore, was easily a target by Western media.

Narratives of the events unfolding in Libya between January and August 2011 were also shaped by the decisions of each newspaper's respective host country. The official government responses of Britain, France and the United States were examined frequently by the papers of record such as *The Times*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*.<sup>221</sup> However, national considerations could also draw criticism such as an article published by *Le Monde* which decried the way in which then French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, had handled the situation in Libya.<sup>222</sup> The article in question suggested that Sarkozy's decision to lead NATO's military intervention in Libya was reminiscent of imperialist policies. This stipulation by *Le Monde* not only illustrates the ways in which

<sup>220</sup> Derr. *Capturing Gaddafi*: 366; El-Rikhia. *Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction*: 1.

<sup>221</sup> "Obama's Remarks on Libya - Text." in *The New York Times*, March 28, 2011, sec. Politics. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/us/politics/29prexy-text.html>.: this specific article simply relays to its readers a speech made by Obama concerning Libya; Adèle Smith. "L'ONU vote des sanctions fermes et saisit la Cour pénale internationale" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20706, February 28, 2011, sec. International, p. 7. [https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/2](https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/2;).; "Still No Quick Fix."; "Libye : les charmes de l'ambiguïté constructive," in *Le Monde*, July 13, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/07/13/libye-les-charmes-de-l-ambiguite-constructive\\_1548216\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/07/13/libye-les-charmes-de-l-ambiguite-constructive_1548216_3232.html).

<sup>222</sup> "Sarkozy semble vouloir abattre Kadhafi tout seul" in *Le Monde*, March 11, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/03/11/sarkozy-semble-vouloir-abattre-kadhafi-tout-seul\\_1491575\\_3212.html?xtmc=printemps\\_arabe&xtcr=65](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/03/11/sarkozy-semble-vouloir-abattre-kadhafi-tout-seul_1491575_3212.html?xtmc=printemps_arabe&xtcr=65).

newspapers would often criticize the decisions of their respective leaders but it also exemplifies *Le Monde*'s predisposition to lean left politically. The element of national considerations was commonly utilized by all the newspapers and this facet demonstrates converging elements among the newspapers in question. Although the actual events in Libya were covered by the newspapers, the responses from the newspapers' respective governments were overwhelmingly present as well.

Some newspapers were interested in the government response from countries outside their own. *The Times*, for instance, was very much interested in the French response to the Libya situation because Sarkozy, then French President, chose to lead the NATO effort in the North African country. Titles like "Sarkozy Basking in the Glow of French Strikes on Libya" and "'Super Sarko's War' Puts President Back on Pedestal" published by *The Times* indicates how much importance the British magazine placed on France's role in the Libyan civil war.<sup>223</sup>

Interestingly, there is little mention of the French position in Libya by *The New York Times* (save for one article).<sup>224</sup> This seems to be reflective of a larger trend that was prevalent when researching the US newspaper. The America-based newspaper seemed to have a much narrower scope of inquiry than its counterparts in Europe and this was especially made evident during the escalating conflict in Libya. *The New York Times* were primarily focused on the American position regarding Libya contrary to *Le Monde*, *Le*

<sup>223</sup> "Sarkozy Basking in the Glow of French Strikes on Libya," in *The Times*, March 23, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sarkozy-basking-in-the-glow-of-french-strikes-on-libya-2hbl360l0xc>; "'Super Sarko's War' Puts President Back on Pedestal" in *The Times*, March 21, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/super-sarkos-war-puts-president-back-on-pedestal-3w69pfsvsj0>.

<sup>224</sup> Steven Erlanger. "French Aid Bolsters Libyan Revolt." in *The New York Times*, February 28, 2011, sec. Europe. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/world/europe/01france.html>.



*Figaro* and *The Times*, all of which placed much more emphasis upon other international players during the Libyan crisis.<sup>225</sup> I would argue that this trend is reflective of the hierarchical role that the US plays in the world. This argument seems to have carried weight throughout the four case studies examined. Although this argument is tentative, what is certain is that *The New York Times* devoted little attention to the ways in which other foreign powers reacted to Libya: the paper occasionally referenced NATO and the UN, but its coverage usually revolved around American actions, policies, and interests).<sup>226</sup>

The rebels that opposed Gaddafi out of Eastern Libya were another common topic for Western newspaper reporters.<sup>227</sup> All newspapers made a concerted effort to relate to

<sup>225</sup> Thierry Portes. "La communauté internationale passe ses options en revue" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20711, March 5, 2011, sec. International, p. 6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/8>.; Thierry Portes. "Paris et Londres veulent clouer au sol l'aviation libyenne" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20710, March 4, 2011, sec. International, p. 6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/17>.; "Libye : Eva Joly fustige la 'lâcheté' de l'Europe," in *Le Monde*, March 4, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/03/04/libye-eva-joly-fustige-la-lachete-des-gouvernements-europeens\\_1488124\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2011/03/04/libye-eva-joly-fustige-la-lachete-des-gouvernements-europeens_1488124_823448.html).; "La nouvelle donne en Egypte et en Libye trouble la diplomatie britannique," in *Le Monde*, March 4, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/03/04/la-nouvelle-donne-en-egypte-et-en-libye-trouble-la-diplomatie-britannique\\_1488366\\_3218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2011/03/04/la-nouvelle-donne-en-egypte-et-en-libye-trouble-la-diplomatie-britannique_1488366_3218.html).; Taheri, Amir. "How Obama Messed up: Let Us Count the Ways." in *The Times*, March 30, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-obama-messed-up-let-us-count-the-ways-0tk2ws88dmr>.; "UK Sends Envoy to Libyan Rebel Regime." in *The Times*, March 29, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uk-sends-envoy-to-libyan-rebel-regime-5jvt9p9pc6v>.; "French Risk Colonial Backlash in Africa." in *The Times*, April 6, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/french-risk-colonial-backlash-in-africa-5d952jbs73m>.: These are but a few examples of articles that dealt with international perspectives. It is unclear if the research simply missed instances in which *The New York Times* discussed various country viewpoints regarding Libya however, very few articles came up throughout the research for this paper.

<sup>226</sup> Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick. "Qaddafi's Grip on the Capital Tightens as Revolt Grows." in *The New York Times*, February 22, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/23/world/africa/23libya.html>.; Cohen. "The Price of Delusion"

<sup>227</sup> "Fighters Picked up Pace to End the Stalemate." in *The Times*, August 22, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/fighters-picked-up-pace-to-end-the-stalemate-fg82ksc58x2>.; Thierry Portes. "Contre-offensive des forces libyennes dans l'est du pays" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20709, March 3, 2011, sec. International, p. 6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/0>.; "La bataille pour Tripoli continue," in *Le Monde*, August 23, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/08/23/la-bataille-pour-tripoli-continue\\_1562440\\_1496980.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/08/23/la-bataille-pour-tripoli-continue_1562440_1496980.html).

their readers the impact that the rebels had over Libyan internal affairs.<sup>228</sup> Unlike in Egypt, Tunisia, or even Syria, the newspapers were quick to legitimize the aims and goals of the rebels with little to no vacillation. This immediate legitimacy brings up a number of questions in terms of historical inquiry. First, why were the rebels in Eastern Libya so quickly praised by Western newspapers in comparison to other dissenting forces in the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Spring? Second, why was there no apprehension about the Libyan rebellion, even though there was little interaction and few interviews with the rebels in question?

The answer to the first question once again turns the focus of the Libyan narrative towards the person of Gaddafi. Due to Gaddafi's depiction as the 'boogeyman' of North Africa, it can be surmised that Libya's rebels were viewed and treated as an obvious upgrade and, therefore, were a genuine force to bring the tyrant down. Moreover, it seems that the newspapers adopted the viewpoint of many of the Western nations who became implicated in the conflict during February and March 2011. The UN legitimized the rebels and even recognized the National Transitional Council, NTC for short, as the official government of Libya once the West decided to intervene in Libya.

Although the newspapers were normally positive in their representation of the Eastern rebels, there were some instances in which journalists differed from this trend.

<sup>228</sup> "Aux 'printemps arabes' succéderont des transitions douloureuses," in *Le Monde*, August 25, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/08/25/aux-printemps-arabes-succederont-des-transitions-douloureuses\\_1563229\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/08/25/aux-printemps-arabes-succederont-des-transitions-douloureuses_1563229_3212.html).; "Kadhafi menace Paris après les livraisons d'armes aux rebelles," Neil MacFarquhar. "Qaddafi Leaves Little Behind to Guide Libya in His Absence." in *The New York Times*, August 22, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/23/world/africa/23assess.html>.; Portes. "La communauté internationale passe ses options en revue"; "Rebels Fight to Keep Islamic Militants under Tight Control." in *The Times*, July 9, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rebels-fight-to-keep-islamic-militants-under-tight-control-n5pxw0wj3kb>

Some worried that the issue in Libya was different due to the situation being a violent military struggle which would breed further radicalization.<sup>229</sup> Others worried that due to Libya's tribalistic makeup, it could cause severe consequences or require great efforts and expenses from international players. This apprehension is made clear by the following quote from *The New York Times* writer Thomas L. Friedman:

Iraq teaches what it takes to democratize a big tribalized Arab country once the iron-fisted leader is removed (in that case by us). It takes billions of dollars, 150,000 U.S. soldiers to referee, myriad casualties, a civil war where both sides have to test each other's power and then a wrenching process, which we midwived, of Iraqi sects and tribes writing their own constitution defining how to live together without an iron fist.<sup>230</sup>

Friedman's quote illustrates both the caution that some journalists chose to espouse regarding Libya and it also showcases how memory was used as a comparative tool by many journalists: in this case, the memory of Iraq was used to gauge the possible future of Libya. But though there were some dissenting views about Western support for the Eastern rebels based in Benghazi, the majority of articles that were analyzed supported the rebels.

As mentioned earlier, the UN and NATO opposed Gaddafi during the conflict and this opposition became a consistent point of coverage.<sup>231</sup> The eventual implementation of a

<sup>229</sup> "Libye : une résolution sortie de la boîte de Pandore," in *Le Monde*, March 29, 2011.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/29/libye-ou-les-fers-de-la-souverainete\\_1499539\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/03/29/libye-ou-les-fers-de-la-souverainete_1499539_3232.html); Shadid. "Veering From Peaceful Models, Libya's Youth Revolt Turns Toward Chaos."

<sup>230</sup> Friedman, Thomas L. Friedman. "Tribes With Flags." in *The New York Times*, March 22, 2011, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/opinion/23friedman.html>.

<sup>231</sup> "Gaddafi: I'll Crush Protesters like in Tiananmen Square." in *The Times*, February 22, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gaddafi-ill-crush-protesters-like-in-tiananmen-square-lkx3np5dq7p>; Fahim. "Qaddafi's Grip on the Capital Tightens as Revolt Grows"; Adèle Smith. "'Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU se réunit en urgence'" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20702, February 23, 2011, sec. International, p.6. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/8>; "La géopolitique, entre impuissance et universalisme," in *Le Monde*, February 25, 2011.

no-fly zone through the UN Resolution 1973 extended the news pattern of covering the UN and its decision-making process.<sup>232</sup> There were however practical concerns for the reasons why Western powers chose to supply the military strength to enforce a no-fly zone in Libya. For example, many of the members of NATO had competent militaries and military capabilities which granted them the ability to carry out air strikes and provide supportive roles for the Eastern insurgents in Libya. But, even in this example, the fact that Western powers decided to lead the charge against the tyrant Gaddafi almost immediately rather than in Syria is perhaps suggestive of Western powers picking and choosing which regimes they were more willing to go to war with.

The four Western newspapers of record generally conformed to four themes regarding Libya between the months of January to August. Gaddafi himself was prominent throughout. First, and with few exceptions, Gaddafi was regularly vilified by the journalists who covered him. Second, the newspapers were mostly concerned with their respective countries' response to Gaddafi and the Eastern rebels. Furthermore, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *The Times* were also concerned with the response from other countries such as the United States, Britain or France which hints at the fact that they ultimately usually focused on Western powers. Conversely, *The New York Times* was more simply concerned with the

[https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/25/la-geopolitique-entre-impuissance-et-universalisme\\_1485113\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/25/la-geopolitique-entre-impuissance-et-universalisme_1485113_3232.html).

<sup>232</sup> “Libye : une résolution sortie de la boîte de Pandore”; “Gaddafi: I’ll Crush Protesters like in Tiananmen Square”; Roger. “The Price of Delusion”; Jean-Pierre Stroobants . “L’Union européenne prépare une mission humanitaire en Libye pour sauver Misrata,” in *Le Monde*, April 9, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/04/09/l-union-europeenne-prepare-une-mission-humanitaire-en-libye-pour-sauver-misrata\\_1505266\\_1496980.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/libye/article/2011/04/09/l-union-europeenne-prepare-une-mission-humanitaire-en-libye-pour-sauver-misrata_1505266_1496980.html).; Resolution 1970 enacted by the UN prior to Resolution 1973 was also extrapolated upon by some articles for an example see: Bélich Nabli,. “Un regard juridique sur les mutations dans le monde arabe,” in *Le Monde*, April 4, 2011, sec. Idées. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/04/04/un-regard-juridique-sur-les-mutations-dans-le-monde-arabe\\_1502550\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/04/04/un-regard-juridique-sur-les-mutations-dans-le-monde-arabe_1502550_3232.html).

US response. Another main outlet for coverage by the newspapers was the response from the UN and the subsequent military intervention of NATO in Libyan internal affairs. This example demonstrates the Western tendency to emphasize the Western point of view (especially from the US, Britain and France) and this tendency can be echoed in the newspaper coverage of the events that transpired in Libya. This is a critical factor to consider in terms of narrative because it suggests that newspapers usually conform to the Western hegemonic rhetoric that seems to be pervasive throughout media coverage at large and they can even be seen through specific events like the Libyan situation during the Arab Spring. Finally, like the other three cases under consideration, little attention was given to the position of Gaddafi and his supporters. The newspapers made next to no effort to report the position of those who were pro-Gaddafi while anti-Gaddafi interviews were quite frequent. This once again speaks to the prevailing trend of supporting protesters and chastising the leaders of the MENA area and their supporters.

### Memory and Libya

The memories that were employed by journalists to make sense of the Libyan crisis were much more diffuse and diverse than those used in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria. The memories used for meaning-making during the Arab Spring were varied and did not necessarily conform to any strict pattern and differed between situations and from country to country: and in the case of Libya, unifying memories were largely absent, except for memories that focused on Gaddafi himself.

Throughout the Libyan crisis, Gaddafi himself was a central topic. For this reason, it should come as no surprise that the memories used to make sense of the Libyan conflict

would be directly related to the history of Gaddafi's rise and subsequent hold on power in Libya throughout his long tenure at its helm. All four newspapers frequently referenced Gaddafi's past as they understood it according to the memories they directly utilized.<sup>233</sup> One aspect of Gaddafi's history that was heavily covered by Western journalists was his tenure as leader of Libya. As *Le Monde* related:

Le dictateur de Tripoli, qui cachait ses talents de manoeuvrier sous ses foudres médiatisées, était ainsi parvenu à surpasser tous ses pairs despotes, avec plus de quarante et un ans de pouvoir sans partage. Cette résilience lui valait force inimitiés et son seul véritable allié arabe était le président tunisien Ben Ali.<sup>234</sup>

This quote demonstrates that memories rested not only on Gaddafi but also his past relations with his neighbors within the region. Moreover, the passage indicates that the writer believed that Gaddafi did not possess any allies aside from Ben Ali who had been deposed in January of that year and, therefore, he was left without any friends in the region. Whether this statement is true or not, it nonetheless was rooted in a historical interpretation of Gaddafi's past relations. *Le Figaro* also spoke to Gaddafi's tenure in Libya and was the sole newspaper of record which seemed to speak to Libya's history prior to Gaddafi's seizure of power. The following extract from *Le Figaro* reflects its larger historical analysis of Libya:

Ancienne colonie italienne, la Libye l'avait adoptée à l'indépendance en 1951. Le roi Idris Ier était issu de la confrérie des Sanusi qui exerçait depuis plusieurs décennies une forte influence sur le Fezzan (désert libyen). Cette monarchie qui se déclara constitutionnelle n'était pas, en

<sup>233</sup> Delphine Minoui. "Kadhafi harangue ses fidèles et défie l'Amérique" in *Le Figaro*, no. 20709, March 3, 2011, sec. International, p.7.<https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/5>.

<sup>234</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, "L'exception libyenne," in *Le Monde*, August 27, 2011, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/08/27/l-exception-libyenne\\_1564311\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/08/27/l-exception-libyenne_1564311_3232.html).

principe, incompatible avec la démocratie. Le coup d'État de Kadhafi en 1969 mit fin au règne du roi Idris. Son petit-fils, Mohammed al-Sanusi, qui vit actuellement à Londres a des partisans dans la rébellion. La coalition pourrait envisager son retour. Encore faut-il qu'il ose lui-même sortir du bois, peut-être même débarquer en Cyrénaïque : attendre la fin des événements pour venir faire un tour de piste n'est sûrement pas pour lui la solution. Craindrait-il d'apparaître comme l'homme des Occidentaux ? A-t-il le choix ? L'histoire ne repasse pas les plats. La dynastie des Sanusi ne trouvera pas de sitôt une telle occasion de revenir en Libye.<sup>235</sup>

*Le Figaro* delved into a deeper historical memory than its contemporaries in this instance and it also utilized these older memories to suggest one possible solution to the crisis: a restoration of the Libyan monarchy. It is also important to note that *Le Figaro* tended to seek deeper historical knowledge of the countries they analyzed than the other three newspapers in question. Further, their support for the former monarchy may possibly speak to *Le Figaro*'s center right political orientation, though this argument is speculative.<sup>236</sup>

French newspapers, however, were not the only papers drawing on memories of Gaddafi's long reign in Libya. Both English newspapers utilized the memory of Gaddafi's time in power and his international escapades, such as his support of the terrorist attack on Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988.<sup>237</sup> The papers also made recurrent reference to memories surrounding Gaddafi's personality cult. *The New York Times* often focused on Gaddafi's seizure of power and subsequent method of rule over his North African country. The following quotes exemplify the recurring trope that was offered by *The New York Times*:

<sup>235</sup> Roland Hureaux. "Libye : et si on misait sur le retour du roi ?" in *Le Figaro* no. 20761, May 3, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.16. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/98>

<sup>236</sup> For another instance of *Le Figaro*'s memories that were remembered prior to Qaddafi see: Alexandre Adler. "Je fais un rêve : celui d'une intervention en Libye..." in *Le Figaro*, no. 20711, March 5, 2011, sec. Opinions, p. 17. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.librweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/15>.

<sup>237</sup> MacFarquhar. "Qaddafi Leaves Little Behind to Guide Libya in His Absence"; Kirkpatrick. "Libyans Face a New Challenge: Expelling the Fear That Qaddafi Instilled in Them.";

“Colonel Qaddafi took power in a bloodless coup in 1969 and has built his rule on a cult of personality and a network of family and tribal alliances supported by largess from Libya’s oil revenues”<sup>238</sup> and “Since seizing power in a coup in 1969, Colonel Qaddafi has imposed his idiosyncratic rule on Libya, one of the world’s biggest exporters of oil.”

*The Times*, meanwhile, published similar articles concerning Gaddafi and his past.

An article published by the British newspaper, written by Amir Taheri, focused on Gaddafi in the context of the Pan Arabist movement:

In an ornate salon in the Kubbah Palace, Cairo, a group of young men in uniform beat their chests and appeared to be shedding bitter tears as television camera recorded the scene. It was October 1, 1970, as Egypt mourned the death of its populist leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser. They were members of Libya’s Revolution Command Council who, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, had turned up to take part in the funeral and claim the mantle of pan-Arabism left by Nasser.<sup>239</sup>

Beyond Gaddafi himself, journalists working for the two English newspapers tended to use the memory of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq as a comparative tool, whether to draw similarities or differences for the situation in Libya.<sup>240</sup> Iraq was used in a similar fashion as Iran in 1979 and 2009 that was observed in the previous case studies. For instance, if a positive view of Libya or Libyan intervention was held, a newspaper would

<sup>238</sup> Alan Cowell, “Libyan Unrest Spreads to More Cities, Reports Say,” in *The New York Times*, February 17, 2011, sec. Africa, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/africa/18libya.html>.

<sup>239</sup> Amir Taheri, “Nato Still Has a Role as Gaddafi Exits the Stage,” in *The Times*, August 23, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nato-still-has-a-role-as-gaddafi-exits-the-stage-vqjvkqqrq6b>.

<sup>240</sup> David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker. “Discord Fills Washington on Possible Libya Intervention.” in *The New York Times*, March 7, 2011, sec. Middle East.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/08/world/middleeast/08policy.html>.; Shadid, Anthony. “In Towns Along the Road to Tripoli, Anxieties Compete With Exuberance.” in *The New York Times*, August 25, 2011, sec. Africa. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/26/world/africa/26highway.html>.



be adamant that Libya was not going to be a repeat of Iraq.<sup>241</sup> Conversely, if the situation appeared to be going in a negative direction, they would use Iraq as the reference point.<sup>242</sup>

However, other memories were used throughout the coverage of the Libyan conflict such as referencing the 1989 revolutions of central and eastern Europe.<sup>243</sup> One interesting article, published by *The New York Times*, featured the secretary general of NATO at the time of writing, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who stated, “The dramatic developments across North Africa and the Middle East remind me of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War.”<sup>244</sup> Once again, the Western coverage of the events unfolding in the Middle East and North Africa was influenced by historical memories of the seemingly similar revolutions in Europe in 1989.

*The Times*, in particular, utilized memories of 1989 to give meaning to the events of 2011 in Libya. Like in earlier comparisons to the 1989 revolutions and that of the Arab Spring, Gaddafi’s reign in Libya was compared to the rule of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania: “It could still work in Libya, but only if Mr Gaddafi eventually sees reason and seeks exile, or leaves in a coffin in the manner of Nicolai Ceaucescu.”<sup>245</sup> It is interesting to note that *The Times* regularly made reference throughout the Arab Spring to the Ceausescu

<sup>241</sup> Ken Macdonald. “Don’t Let the Scars of Iraq Deny Justice in Libya.” in *The Times*, March 16, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/dont-let-the-scars-of-iraq-deny-justice-in-libya-jfnkxrp89xs>.

<sup>242</sup> Deborah Haynes. “Are We Really Prepared for the Fall of Gaddafi?” in *The Times*, March 26, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/are-we-really-prepared-for-the-fall-of-gaddafi-30wmgxzrvs5>.

<sup>243</sup> Bill Emmott. “Libyan Tremors Will Be Felt as Far Away as China.” in *The Times*, February 28, 2011. [https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/libyan-tremors-will-be-felt-as-far-away-as-china-tlm3bjhbzjw](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/libyan-tremors-will-be-felt-as-far-away-as-china-tlm3bjhbzjw;); “Gaddafi Vows Vengeance ‘House by House’ Unless Libyans Bend to His Will.”;

<sup>244</sup> Rasmussen. “NATO and the Arab Spring,”

<sup>245</sup> “Obama and the Unsolved Problem of How to Bring Libya Back from the Brink,” in *The Times*, March 9, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/obama-and-the-unsolved-problem-of-how-to-bring-libya-back-from-the-brink-vqcdclxldc>.

moment of 1989. This may suggest that *The Times* wished to use the memory of Ceausescu as a method to sensationalize the stories reverberating throughout the Middle East and North Africa. It may also indicate that the memory of Romania in 1989 lingered much more profoundly on the minds of the British than the French or Americans as there was a definite discrepancy in volume.

But, at the same time, one important theme to consider regarding the memories used for the situation in Libya was the comparative lack of memories in general. Though journalists covering Egypt and Tunisia employed a plethora of memories as comparative tools, the Libyan uprising, like its counterpart in Syria, did not inspire many journalists to make parallels with other past revolutions, either in the MENA, or in other parts of the world. There may be a variety of reasons for this development, such as lack of comparable sources, the complexity of the situation and especially since the international community involved itself in the conflict through the UN and NATO. From the articles that were examined, memories concerning the West's intervention in the former Yugoslavia were not mentioned during the Libyan crisis.

Libya demonstrated an instance where memory was not as avidly and regularly utilized in comparison to Tunisia and Egypt. The most commonly-referenced memories revolved around Gaddafi's flamboyant dictatorship, and his history of conflict with the West—especially in the 1980s: this had included both state-sponsored terrorist attacks like the West Berlin discotheque bombing, and the Chadian-Libyan conflict, which had provoked both the 1986 US bombing of Libya and French intervention in Chad. Other memories that were frequently referenced during coverage of the Libyan civil war were

memories that focused on Iraq in both 2003 and 1991 and the 1989 revolutions in Europe. Though other memories were referenced by journalists at the four newspapers, they were sporadic, which shows that the Libyan crisis did not bring a reliable or rather a central memory to the minds of Western writers or commentators. Therefore, the memories employed by journalists did not have a single uniting theme which caused many journalists not to consult the past to make sense of the devolving crisis in Libya.

## Conclusions

The Arab Spring's most tumultuous period arguably ran from December 2010 until late August 2011. It began with the self-immolation of Bouazizi in Tunisia and ended with mass uprisings across the MENA region. Autocrats such as Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt fell out of power in an astonishingly short period of time. Other leaders in the region fought to maintain their position of power; some were successful, such as Assad in Syria, while others eventually succumbed to outright civil war, such as Colonel Gaddafi in Libya. The news coverage of the Arab Spring during this timeframe was staggering, and Western newspapers of record contributed to this enormous volume of coverage.

Violence was the predominant theme found across most narratives of the Arab Spring as it was pervasive throughout the MENA in the first half of 2011. Western media outlets were quick to support the aspirations of the protesters that took the region by storm, as the goals and desires of these protesters seemingly paralleled Western values and principles. This spoke to a hierarchy of values that could be seen across the sources that have been analyzed. These values entailed ideas such as democracy, governmental accountability, and most of all, dignity. These were the perceived values and principles which the Arab Springers fought for, and they were in sync with many of the journalists who covered the events from late 2010 until late summer 2011. It also speaks to the Western world's adamant support of liberal democracies as the greatest form of government.

Renowned Western newspapers such as *The New York Times* in the United States, *The Times* in Britain, and *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in France provides historians and scholars alike with a brief glimpse of how newspapers of record carried out their work while covering this crucial period of the Arab Spring. Further, because these newspapers were based in three of the most powerful and most influential of the Western countries, it permits a wider analysis of the Western world in general. Still further, by analyzing each paper individually, it is possible to garner a general sense of said newspaper's targeted audience. Finally, because the newspapers have differences in language, political affiliation and country of origin, it is possible to address broader questions like the existence of a Western identity, and it can also contribute to the larger research question as to whether or not analyzing the West as a singular unit for historical inquiry is truly a viable approach in terms of historical accuracy. Though this paper does not assert that a cross-cultural Western identity has been fully established, it nonetheless posits that it has provided a larger source of evidence to make the case that Western nations are in some shape or form tied together by a general sense of identity along the lines of the Western world. To supplement this argument, an examination of both narrative as well as memory as a source for meaning-making was necessary and was ultimately the impetus of this paper.

Story-telling is a crucial component of newspaper articles and, as such, narratives needed to be used by various writers in order to best present what was occurring during the tumultuous months of the Arab Spring. One of the most prevalent sources of newspaper themes for their narratives involved violence and, therefore, instances where violence broke out attracted media attention and news coverage. Further, violence used against

certain individuals also created another prevalent source to guide narratives, that is, martyrdom. The violence that was inflicted on certain individuals was well covered by all four newspapers of record. However, the trend of martyrdom significantly decreased during the coverage in Syria and Libya. This may be due to a variety of factors. First, the fact that journalists were banned from Syria and were less likely to report from the ground in Libya due to the severity of the violence there, prevented journalists from creating narratives around specific individuals. Second, it may also be attributed to the fact that the uprisings in both countries were markedly more brutal, and ultimately unsuccessful in Syria. Though Libya was eventually freed from Gaddafi's reign of terror, this change of regime required a substantial war effort on the part of Eastern rebels and the aid of NATO (both of which were emblems of coverage by the newspapers of record).

Another strong narrative element that was common among the newspapers focused on the ominous figures of Ben Ali, Mubarak, Assad and Gaddafi. These leaders were primarily depicted as antagonists to the protesters. Further, they were often vilified, demonized and ultimately deemed unworthy of ruling over their respective countries due to their past actions. Ironically, many of the authoritarian leaders only enjoyed their positions of power due to support from Western nations. But, as the Arab Spring progressed, and newspapers of record sided with the protesters, an 'othering' effect took place harkening back to the idea of a hierarchy of values. The authoritarian leaders, who were once viewed as part of the Western system, were othered and in turn, displaced from a position of friend and turned into a foe (though Gaddafi and Assad were not necessarily viewed as allies).

The influence of social media was another recurring theme found in the research. Many journalists attributed the successes of the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia to the ability of social media to unite people across large territorial boundaries. Facebook and Twitter were especially applauded by the newspapers of record. However, it seems that when the revolutions were not successful, or took on a different character altogether (as was the case in Syria and Libya), the influence of social media was rarely, if ever, mentioned. This is an interesting point to consider because it seems as though the writers quickly dismissed social media in negative circumstances but quickly gave it credit for the positive developments in Tunisia and Egypt. Whatever the case, it seems that all four newspapers were united in their opinion of the positive impact that social media had over the revolutions in both Egypt and Tunisia.

The final theme that was pursued by all four newspapers of record was the reaction of Western nations to the booming revolutions in the MENA. Each newspaper highlighted how their respective country reacted to the Arab Spring and which steps were taken to aid the protesters who were fighting seemingly oppressive authoritarians. In this regard, we see a divergence between the lone American source and its European counterparts. *The New York Times* generally focused on the American response to the events that unfolded in the Arab Spring. Meanwhile, the European papers were much more concerned with how other European powers, as well as the United States, responded to the uprisings in the MENA. The difference found here may be attributed to the United States' dominant position as the sole superpower in the world which encouraged *The New York Times* to have a much narrower point of view in terms of its analysis of the Arab Spring. However, another

unifying theme that was found on this point in the newspapers of record was that they ordinarily restricted their inquiries to Western nations and did not consider the reaction of the rest of the world. Though they sometimes did mention Russia and China, for the most part, their field of view was limited largely to Western powers and the MENA countries involved in the Arab Spring. This speaks to a rather narrow worldview by all the newspapers of record analyzed and speaks to the trend of Western hegemonic power narratives which causes news to be filtered primarily through Western perspectives.

The second research question that this paper focused on was meaning-making through the tool of memories. I argue that memory is a critical aspect to consider when using newspapers of record as a historical source because it indicates how journalists attributed meaning to the Arab Spring and it in turn provides a socio-cultural insight through this process of analysis. Journalists were forced to use historical memories in order to make sense of the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Through an analysis of Syria and Libya, the paper has shown that the absence of memories is also a telling feature of how journalists and newspapers relate or make sense of events unfolding in areas in which they may not perhaps have entry.

This paper has not been exhaustive in its discussion of the memories that were employed by the newspapers of record. Rather, it sought to uncover which memories were regularly referenced. Therefore, those memories that were only mentioned in passing in a few articles have not been highlighted in the sections that involved the case studies. That being said, memories of former revolutions such as the 1848 and 1989 revolutions in Europe were great sources of inspiration for Western writers as they were grounded upon



similar historical processes such as a demand for the increase in citizen participation and the absence of corruption in government. Though the 1848 revolutions were not referenced until now (largely because the references uncovered were normally used as widescale comparative tools and not enough were utilized on the single case studies that were established for this paper), they were nonetheless remembered by Western commentators and used as a comparative tool in much the same way as 1989 due to some shared features to the Arab Spring.<sup>246</sup>

The relative lack of references of the 1848 European revolutions in the newspapers studied was a surprise to say the least. During my initial inquiries, I was almost certain that the 1848 revolutions would be a great comparative tool for journalists and writers of the Arab Spring as it seemed to have similar processes. However, as I delved through the articles of the four newspapers of record, the 1848 revolutions were largely missing as comparative tools. I surmise that this was the case because the journalists who wrote during the Arab Spring were not necessarily historians and also, they may have thought that the 1989 revolutions in Europe were a much more relatable case for their readers than that of the 1848 revolutions in Europe.

<sup>246</sup> For examples see: “Spring Watch.” in *The Times*, July 28, 2011. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/spring-watch-2chtwrj2w00>.; Nicholas Kristof. “What Egypt Can Teach America.” in *The New York Times*, February 12, 2011, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/opinion/13kristof.html>.; Philippe Chalmin. “1848,2011 : les révoltes de la faim,” in *Le Monde*, February 14, 2011. [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/14/1848-2011-les-revoltes-de-la-faim\\_1479709\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/02/14/1848-2011-les-revoltes-de-la-faim_1479709_3232.html).; Jean d’Ormesson. “Quand les lampions s’êteindront...” in *Le Figaro*, no. 20706, February 28, 2011, sec. Opinions, p.19. <https://nouveau-eureka-cc.libweb.laurentian.ca/Search/ResultMobile/3>.: A fascinating discovery about 1848 comparisons is that *Le Figaro* only referenced it once in the research that was conducted. My first inclination was that the American paper would reference it the least however that proved not to be the case.

The 1989 revolutions provided a positive comparative interpretation of the events of the Arab Spring. Therefore, journalists were quick to make comparisons to the 1989 Eastern European revolutions thus drawing from their collective wellspring of Western memory. Although the newspapers were divorced from one another in so many ways, I think it is telling that they all nonetheless remembered the same event in a near identical fashion which speaks to a larger Western cultural connective memory. True, the British paper did make more specific references to the 1989 revolution in Romania, but all papers seemed to coalesce on the one point that the 1989 revolutions were similar to the Arab Spring in certain facets. In this way, we see a distillation process of the historical memory of 1989. By presenting the 1989 Eastern European revolutions as a merely positive outcome, the writers for the newspapers of record contributed to forming memories which relied on a social remembering process social rather than one that encompassed historical accuracy. Their repeated references to a generalized, and in my opinion, simplistic view of the 1989 revolutions in Europe make it clear that the memory of 1989 during the Arab Spring had become one guided by a social remembrance of the events therefore, providing further proof of Halbwachs' theory concerning the social aspect of memory. Yet, there were other positive memories that were used during that Arab Spring that fell outside the boundaries of the Western world. The Iranian presidential election protests of 2009 were one such positive non-Western memory that was consulted on numerous occasions by the newspapers of record. Further, the attempted Green Revolution in Iran helped authors solidify their narratives of social media-driven revolutions, as the Iranian Green Movement was also seen as being predominantly led by social media groups.

However, the Arab Spring was not always viewed from a strictly positive standpoint. Journalists were often worried that if the stable authoritarian regimes in the MENA were displaced, Islamist factions would seize power. When a negative historical parallel for the Arab Spring was needed, writers would oftentimes utilize Western memories that were perceived as negative, such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 (though Tiananmen Square was left out of the case studies for much the same reasons as the 1848 revolutions).<sup>247</sup> The Iranian revolution of 1979 in particular inspired negative memories from journalists because it represented the replacement of a Western-allied monarchy with an Islamic republic that was hostile to the West. Again, this indicates that a hierarchy of values was more than likely at work when an ‘us versus them’ mentality was found in Western memories of the past. Due to the Islamophobic tendencies of the Western world in general, it soon became evident that any political tendencies that ran counter to Western ideas would be conceptualized as backwards or evil. This was confirmed by the fact that all writers that mentioned the 1979 revolution used the incident to demonstrate a possible ‘evil’ consequence to the Arab Spring. The example of the revolution in Iran is perhaps one of the most enlightening aspects of the relation between memory and historicity because it shows that almost no writers took into consideration the type of government that was represented by the Shah of Iran, who was also authoritarian, and whose regime also represented a negation of Western ideals. However, because the Shah was backed by the

<sup>247</sup> For a few examples see: “Gaddafi: I’ll Crush Protesters like in Tiananmen Square.”; Tatu. “Tempête sur le ‘Grand Moyen-Orient’”; Mandeville. “Washington s’active en coulisses”: Yet another interesting discovery was that the research did not yield any Tiananmen references from the American paper.

U.S.A., this fact seems to have been forgotten or lost by the Western collective psyche. Again, we see in the case of Iran in 1979 a generalized view of the historical memory of the events that took place, thus rendering it more a fabrication of social remembering.

Although 9/11 was referred to selectively and not all that often during the coverage by the newspapers throughout most of the Arab Spring, it nonetheless loomed in the background of news coverage, and memories of this traumatic event were used to make sense of the events during the uprisings. For instance, because 9/11 caused such a climactic shift of discourse when considering terrorism and the Middle East, writers were much more predisposed to viewing possible Islamic factions as hazardous to the West and Western interests, despite the existence of many moderate Islamic political parties. This directly ties into the rise of Islamophobia which was spawned largely from the memory of 9/11.

Newspapers of record provide a valuable way to understand the Western psyche or socio/cultural processes. Because the newspapers sought readership in order to continue their dissemination of information, it was of paramount importance to draw the attention of their readers. Therefore, when analyzing newspapers of record, it is necessary to address the pitfalls of overreliance on them as a source of Western principles. Moreover, newspapers of record, being a text-based news source, do not necessarily draw the largest audiences in Western society. It is also important to recognize that Western newspapers of record, especially the four that have been covered in this paper, sometimes have guest writers who are not necessarily from the West in the first place. However, I argue that despite the fact that newspapers of record function largely within the constraints of the

mass-media filters that were identified by Chomsky and Herman in their work, the articles were nonetheless written primarily by Westerners who lived and breathed through the ebbs and flows of the Western world in France, Britain and the United States: and for this reason, despite differences of region, religion, language, political affiliation and the like, most of their narratives followed similar trains of thought; this further points to the conclusion that the West may have overriding cultural affiliations that crosses territorial boundaries. Further, though other mediums of news may garner a larger audience, such as television news broadcasts or popular magazines, newspapers of record tend to appeal more to elite segments of society for readership: this furthers hegemonic narratives and cultural values which trickle down to the larger society and thus, newspapers of record contribute to driving Western attitudes and opinions. Its also worth mentioning that larger news outlets, such as CNN, often reference newspapers of record as they are considered an authoritative source of world events and are thus influencing the audience of other news mediums as well. Finally, memories can be a useful source to demonstrate some of the diverging elements of Western nations as they provide an outlet to observe minute differences such as those examined, as they convey a much more personal and regional flavour than that of themes and narratives which are inevitably caught by the mechanism of mass media.

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