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Beware the winter is coming! Arab Spring in the global media

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines how the global media uses the concept of revolution when reporting about the Arab Spring. The understanding of the concept informed by historical Western revolutionary events perpetuates Eurocentrism which continues the inability to comprehend the regional, cultural, and political peculiarities of the Arab Spring. Media framing analysis reveals the use of the outdated notions of revolution based on six common attributes. The concept of revolution defined by the six attributes fails to address the events because it is delimited by its own Western origin and with its own understanding of modernization and progress. Such use of the concept is maintained by the media but also affects perception of the events while de-emphasizing their revolutionary character.

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The Arab Spring¹ received a large amount of media attention as the events unfolded over the years. While “The Protester” became Time’s Person of the Year in 2011, this “romantic” fascination with the events in Western media outlets eventually turned into cynicism, renaming the Arab Spring as the “Arab Winter”. The wave of revolutionary events that commenced in December 2010 in Tunisia quickly spread across the Arab region. The initial protests in each country developed differently; from minor protests to partial governmental changes or even complete regime overthrows. Every participating state underwent distinct developments, but what they had in common was the wave of events they participated in, the region, and the expressed demand for a change. By the end of 2011, more than 20 countries in the region had taken part in what became known as the Arab Spring.

This study at first extracts six attributes used to define Western revolutionary events—violence, public support, economic inequality, fundamental changes, new governments, and destruction of long-standing principles—and it shows how they alter media coverage of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was enthusiastically received as long as it seemed to be following this preset idea of a revolution. When the events diverged from this definition, and it became clear that the Arab Spring had its own character and identity, the media characterized it as an “unsuccessful” undertaking. This article assesses the common conception of revolution in Western media and argues that this conception is informed by the historical knowledge of European and North American revolutions, but it excludes the wider view of the world’s history.

Key political concepts are not universal, and as this article shows, they can diminish and misrepresent the character of the event to which they relate. Because of the regional, cultural, and political peculiarities of the Arab Spring, the concept of revolution used by the media failed to explain the events: first, because the concept is defined by its own Western identity; second, because it is defined with its own understanding of modernization and progress that is specific to the European context. The concept of revolution as used in the media is problematic, because it reinforces the imbalanced power relations between the observing Western media sources and the observed Arab states, and it leads readers to the faulty conclusion that the Arab Spring was a nonrevolutionary event. This shortcoming reveals how principles of othering persistently work through the language and the use of concepts set in the Western² traditions of knowledge, even after scholarly discourses on revolutions have recognized a need to reach beyond such conceptions.

What follows is an attempt to answer the following question in two steps. How does the concept of revolution as used in the media affect reporting about the Arab Spring? First, by extracting common attributes of the concept of revolution through a conceptual historical approach. Second, by using these attributes as frames in media framing analysis (MFA).

On the concept of revolution

The political concepts—such as the state, freedom, democracy, empire, etc.—that we use to define and describe current political and social events have been part of European languages since the eighteenth century (Koselleck, 2004). In the period of Enlightenment, when modern European languages were still forming, key concepts took on their modern meaning (Koselleck, 2002). Between 1750 and 1850, the premodern usage of language transformed to the usage of today. This study, by focusing on the concept of revolution, shows how revolutionary events of the eighteenth and nineteenth century played an important role in the way revolutions are defined today. The concept of revolution used in global media discourses is, as a result of its origin, loaded with meanings informed by the Western understanding of modernity and progress. Therefore, the term falls short of comprehending the events in different contexts. Mardin (1971, p. 211) and Hermassi (1976, p. 211) both pointed out that our understanding of the concept of revolution has been predominantly shaped by our knowledge of specific revolutionary events. Certain political, social, and historical circumstances have been extracted from these events without any modification and applied over and over again to other “similar” events (Hermassi, 1976, p. 211). This study shows that the observers of revolutions in Western media still use the historical knowledge of famed revolutions as a point of reference.

What follows is a short overview of the conceptual history of “revolution” in primary texts on the Glorious, the American, the French, and the 1848 revolutions. In this overview, six main attributes primarily assigned to the concept of revolution are extracted and later used in the news framing analysis.

Observers of the British, American, and French revolutions agreed that any successful revolution would bring *substantial changes* (Paine, 1995; Tocqueville, 2011) and “shake off a power” (Locke, 1988, sec. 196). It would *change state affairs and regimes and tear down other long-standing principles*. “Revolution was henceforth defined as a progressive and

irreversible change in the institutions and values that provided the basis of political authority” (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003, p. 53). According to Thomas Paine (1995) and his observation of the French Revolution, the main political change of a revolution was to enable sovereignty. Tocqueville believed that a revolution was supposed to be marked by fundamental changes, similar to those he observed in 1848 in France. A revolution could challenge the political, the social, or the religious dimension of the state, or, as it happened in France, all three (Tocqueville, 2011).

Another attribute defining the concept of revolution is *strong public support*. A revolution is defined as a massive social movement. Marx’s concept of a “modern” or proletarian revolution, for example, embraces a massive yet sudden event that becomes fortified by repression, and where the working class plays the most important role (Engels & Marx, 1896). The concept is also a result of struggle based on *economic inequality*. For Marxist and socialist traditions alike, revolutions are an outcome in times of economic crises; or, as Marx (2009) pointed out, since the start of the eighteenth century, there had been no serious revolutions in Europe that were not preceded by commercial and financial crises.

The last attribute commonly ascribed to revolutions is *violence*. While conservatives felt horrified by the extent of violence that occurred in revolutions (Burke, 1890), liberals and socialists believed that a revolution might need to use violence to safeguard liberty and to enable the ultimate change in state affairs (Tocqueville, 2011). Finally, a more conservative understanding of revolutions views them as a sometimes necessary means to maximize stability and order (Burke, 1890).

More current studies of revolutions, especially in the field of comparative politics, have expanded the concept. While still treating the above-mentioned attributes as important, they are now less encompassing. Comparative studies reveal that violence does not define all revolutions and that not every revolution leads to the permanent transformation of institutions and values. Not all revolutions are necessarily successful and prosperous. Brinton’s (1965) study shows that revolutions might “change some institutions, some laws, even some human habits”; these changes could come immediately or in the long run, and they could be extensive or limited (pp. 242–250). Revolutions are not necessarily massive social movements; nor are they always a result of a class struggle. They can be commenced and carried out by the state elite, as happened in Japan in 1868, Turkey in 1923, Egypt in 1952, and Peru in 1968 (Trimberger, 1978). While many revolutions occurred through intense sociopolitical conflict, not all revolutions are necessarily violent. Both Huntington’s study (1976) of revolutions in developing countries and Skocpol’s analysis (1979) of social revolutions in France, Russia, and China focused on popular uprisings and violence against authorities as defining factors of revolutions. Nepstad’s study (2011), on the other hand, offers a comparative approach to nonviolent revolutions of the twentieth century: for example, the Philippines Revolution of 1986, the ousting of the General Pinochet in Chile with a referendum in 1988, and the collapse of the state of East Germany in 1989. Comparative studies also show that not all revolutions result in more efficient and centralized governments. Although Brinton’s (1965) analysis of the English, American, French, and Russian revolutions establishes postrevolutionary efficiency as an outcome of these revolutions, Stinchcombe (1999) points out that such changes do not happen overnight. In recent years, scholars of revolutions have also pointed out the necessity of future theories of revolution to

feature separate models for the conditions of state failure, the conditions of particular kinds and magnitudes of mobilization, and the determinants of various ranges of revolutionary outcomes, each of which may be the result of contingent outcomes of prior stages in the revolution's unfolding. (Goldstone, 2001, p. 174)

Nonetheless, these more recent discoveries are not included in the conceptualization of “revolution” in media discourses. As this study shows, media discourses conceptualize revolutions closer to the notion presented in the primary sources on the great revolutions, where a revolution means substantial irreversible changes in the name of progress, democratization, and modernization. This excerpt from a column in *The Guardian* is just one of the examples:

[The Arab Revolutions are supposed to be] dismantling the structures of political despotism, and embarking on the arduous journey towards genuine change and democratization. (Ghannoushi, 2011, paragraph 1)

Despite the fact that recent studies of revolution have shown the diversity of revolutionary events (Foran, 1997, 2005; Goldstone, 2001; Goodwin & Skocpol, 1989; Lawson, 2005; Selbin, 2010; Skocpol, 1979), mainstream media continue to cling onto a limited conceptualization of revolution based mainly on early European and North American histories—what this article will call a Eurocentric conceptualization of revolution defined by six attributes: violence, public support, economic inequality, fundamental changes (in politics, society and religion), new governments, and destruction of long-standing principles. Eurocentrism in this article is understood as unquestioned and absolute traditions of knowledge reproduced by various social institutions. Borrowing from Shohat and Stam (2014), Eurocentrism can be defined as knowledge of European history, philosophy, and literature that becomes naturalized as “common sense” because it is so embedded in everyday life that it often goes unnoticed (p. 1). This study critically approaches the universal, “commonsensical,” “one-size-fits-all” usage of the concept of revolution in Western media.

Framing the Arab Spring

In order to access the ways in which the concept of revolution is used in Western mainstream media coverage, this study conducts MFA focused on *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* between the years 2011 and 2013. These two sources were chosen for three reasons: first, they are recognized as the most-read broadsheet newspapers published online;³ second, they occupy an “elite”⁴ status in the global media domain; and third they are acknowledged to have a stronger effect on political elites and decision makers (Kepplinger, 2007). By using MFA, this study attempts to understand how conceptual practices are carried out by Western media. The analytical technique of framing refers to tracing “a process whereby communicators, consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner” (Kuypers, 2006, p. 8). Frames used in communication make some information more salient than others, affecting how the audience perceives an issue that is communicated to them (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). It is important to note that frames are socially shared and persistent over time (Reese, 2001, p. 11) because they are a reflection of culture. When it comes to media discourses, culturally embedded frames are “appealing for journalists, because they are ready for use” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 87). Culturally embedded frames

carry connotations the intended audience can easily grasp. “Because such frames make an appeal to ideas the receiver is already familiar with, their use appears to be natural to those who are members of a particular culture or society” (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 87). This study shows how the understanding of particular events in media discourses reflects still present taken-for-granted beliefs about the world by examining how the concept of revolution as used in the media affects reporting about the Arab Spring?

The frames used in this study were formed following a review of literature that indicated the tendency to conceptualize contemporary revolutions based on the knowledge of past revolutions (Hermassi, 1976; Mardin, 1971). This resulted in six aforementioned frames. Before presenting the analysis, the processes of obtaining data and sampling will be discussed.

The initial search of articles using the database Lexis Nexis comprised 282 articles. These were all the articles published in the three-year period of between 2011 and 2013 with their main topic being identified as the events known as the Arab Spring. To avoid the articles where the Arab Spring was only mentioned in passing, the criterion was set where the clear connection with the Arab Spring had to be established in the headline of the article. The main topic of the article was decided through a two-step topic identification process. At first a combination of a noun defining a geographical area in the Middle East and North African region and a noun defining a social movement or collective action had to appear in the headline of an article, such as *Arab Spring*, *Egyptian revolution*, or *Yemeni insurgency*. This resulted in 282 initially reviewed articles, out of which 195 (138 from *The Guardian*, 57 from *The New York Times*) were deemed relevant after duplicates, letters, and blog posts were removed from the set. A portion of the data (20%) was coded by a second coder to test the intercoder reliability. Kohen’s Kappa coefficient shows substantial agreement between the coders.⁵

As to the categories of articles, news items were the most frequent in both publications (146 articles; 75%), followed by opinion or comment columns (22 articles; 11%), editorials (14 articles; 7%), and features (13 articles; 7%). Considering the entire discourse as relevant, no distinctions were made between these categories of articles. For the same reason, no distinctions were made between the authors of the articles or contributors mentioned in the texts themselves. Due to the selective nature of the journalistic and editorial processes (McQuail, 2010), deciding on what events to cover and how, whose statement to include and which article to publish, every circulated text contributes to the construction of news and thus to the framing of the event.

Every article was treated as a unit of analysis acknowledging the possibility of a single article using more than one frame. Fifty-nine percent of all the 195 articles included into the analysis reported about the Arab Spring while using at least one of the six frames⁶ defined above, demonstrating a tendency to report about revolutionary events using an outdated conceptualization of “revolution”.

The framing analysis reveals *violence* as the most common attribute of the Arab Spring (for framing analysis results see Table 1). The two media outlets reported on killings, tortures, kidnappings, injuries, and violent events in almost every country participating in the Arab Spring (Kingsley, 2013; Neild, 2011; Taylor & Siddique, 2011). While violence fits into the preset revolutionary criteria, violence as it was discussed in the articles on the Arab Spring was predominantly associated with the regime. The media have distinguished between the violence caused by the regimes and the violence caused by the protesters and

Table 1. Framing analysis results in percentages including the number of appearances.

Frame	% (N)
Violence	36 (91)
Public support	22 (56)
Economic inequality	18 (45)
Fundamental changes (politics, society, religion)	14 (36)
New government	6 (16)
Destruction of long-standing principles	3 (7)

activists. Thirty-six percent of the frames of violence indicated it was the regime that was violent, and only 14% said it was the protesters and activists (the other 50% did not make a clear distinction between the two). In addition, violence, especially when attributed to the work of repressive regimes, was reported as excessive, horrifying, brutal, and unnecessary: peaceful protesters were beaten, shot, and taken away; the numbers of dead civilians were growing; and the civilians opposing the regimes were tortured, killed, or detained without trial (El-naggar & Slackman, 2011; Kanter & Gladstone, 2013; Milne, 2011). The media often emphasized the distinction between nonviolent civilians and violent regimes. As one article states, “Balaclava-wearing riot police armed with batons, teargas launchers and dogs squared up against a small crowd of demonstrators who had gathered to express a sentiment widely felt in the city” (Abdul-Ahad, Shenker, Ali, Chulov, & Black, 2011, paragraph 11). Violence in the hands of repressive regimes, as reported by the media, was robbing the Arab Spring of its revolutionary character.

The frames of *public support* and *economic inequality* represent the Arab Spring as an event supported by the masses. According to *The Guardian*, millions of Arabs stood united for “a new history,” “for dignity and freedom after decades of shame and oppression” (Al-Bassam, 2011, paragraph 5). While there was no consensus about who was the driving force of the revolution, whether this was the working class (Mishra, 2011) or the youth (Fahim, 2011; Shadid, 2011; Shenker, 2011; Slackman, 2011), many articles emphasized the economic circumstances, harsh neoliberal politics, and capitalism, besides repressive politics, as the main reason for the revolt. At the heart of the 2011 protests is “the graduate with no future” (Mason, 2013, paragraph 5), “fueling anger at the repressive politics and economic stagnation that deprived the region’s youth of opportunity and freedom” (Slackman, 2011, paragraph 8). Poverty and unemployment were at least two common factors uniting the Arab Spring events (Black, 2011; Chrisafis, 2011; Marzouki, 2012).

The frames of *fundamental changes* and *new governments* were, at first, very optimistic. In the beginning of 2011, when the Arab Spring became the event of the year, it was called a revolution because it was believed to be able to topple existing regimes, end autocracy and tyranny, and demolish the old political culture and bring in the new. “The unwinding revolutions of the year,” writes *The Guardian*, “from Tunis to Cairo and Tripoli, and on to Damascus—make the Middle East a cockpit of change. They rattle the cages of all those, including Iran’s ayatollahs, who cling to the old nostrums” (“Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring,” 2011, paragraph 7). The Arab Spring was expected to be the power “dismantling the structures of political despotism, and embarking on the arduous journey toward genuine change and democratization” (Ghannoushi, 2011, paragraph 1), because it unleashed “a change in consciousness, the intuition that something big is possible; that a great change in the world’s priorities is within people’s grasp” (Mason, 2013, paragraph 2).

Later in the progress of the events newly created regimes and governments started being framed as a revolutionary failure. According to the media, the Arab Spring with its inefficient new government was unable to completely destroy the old regime. The awakening of the Arab region turned into a decline, an incomplete revolutionary process that was unable to sustain the changing momentum. Events such as “savage repression, foreign intervention, civil war, counter-revolution and the return of the old guard,” filled the international press and other observers with pessimism and disbelief in “genuine democratic transformation” (Miline, 2011, paragraph 1). In 2013, even the events in Tunisia, the more successful Arab Spring participant, were framed by the media as incapable of revolution, because they were unsuccessful (Shabi, 2013). Several articles made clear that these events should not be called a revolution.

I don't know who dared call the uprising the Jasmine revolution. It's not over yet, and in the time of Martyrs and wounded, you cannot talk about (a beautiful flower-like) jasmine. But anyway jasmine smells nice, but it wilts very quickly. (Mark, 2013, paragraph 28)

In the cases of Libya and Syria, where the revolutionary developments were slower, and there was more violence, the accounts were even more pessimistic. The Libyan revolution “failed to deliver on its promises” (Stephen, 2013, paragraph 4), and the Syrian revolution provided no change at all (Beaumont, 2011). As soon as it became clear that democratic change would not happen right away, that violence could not be avoided, and that it would not be clear whether the events were going to change for better or worse, the accounts of the revolution became extremely pessimistic. Not only did media discourses attack the violence and call for peaceful transition, but they expressed disbelief that the Arab Spring could have any good outcome. The revolution, the newspapers reported, took an ugly turn.

The images streaming from Cairo's streets last month were not as horrifying as those of the capture and brutal death of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, but they were savage all the same. They were a sobering reminder that popular movements in some parts of the world, however euphorically they begin, can take disquieting and ugly turns. (Nasr, 2011, paragraph 1)

The notion of revolution as an act of change that included the *destruction of long-standing regimes and principles* was also questioned in the news reports. The media perceived the Arab Spring as being more successful at creating the new than at destroying the old. The articles talk about the progress and reforms that were brought about with the revolution: for example, reforms granting women more rights, free elections, democratic reforms, and, equally important, a change in consciousness and awareness of possibilities. While these processes were in action, the media outlets reported, almost paradoxically, that the old order was not destroyed. Only 3% of the articles framed the Arab Spring as destroying the old structures of power. The Arab Spring was instead framed as incomplete, especially when dealing with the prerevolutionary regimes. As El-naggar and Slackman (2011, paragraph 8) put it: “The revolution has so far managed to get rid of the dictator, but the dictatorship still exists”. One of the fears expressed was what would happen to the revolution if a moderate Islamist party, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia, won the election polls. Another set of fearful news discussed the possibility of more radical Islamist influences, such as Al Qaeda. The Arab Spring was no longer a revolution; it became a failure, incapable of inflicting change, and as such “a real boon to jihadists” (Worth, 2013, paragraph 4).

The Arab Spring was most of all framed as violent, not because of violent protesters and activists, but because of the autocratic regimes it was fighting against. Because of the lack of democracy and human rights, the whole region was presented as violent, a harsh environment for a revolution to succeed. The revolution was capable of influencing some changes but incapable of completely overthrowing the deeply rooted regimes. The location and its specific culture and religion were intervening with the revolutionary progress. While the new order was being introduced in steps, the old structures of power were neither destroyed nor removed from the political or the social. According to the discourses in Western media outlets, the Arab Spring was at first believed to be a revolution. It was perceived as a necessary act, based on the idea of change and progress emerging from the public, criticizing neoliberal politics, determined to end poverty and tyranny, even if that meant to bear violence or to use violence for the revolutionary cause. It was only later, when the events started to skew away from the preset norm, that the discourses became critical and worrisome, turning the Arab Spring into the Arab Winter. The Arab Spring was enthusiastically welcomed as long as it seemed to be following the preset idea of a revolution. But as soon as the events diverged from this definition, the media characterized it as something other than a revolution, an unsuccessful undertaking that had turned the possible “awakening” of the Arab World into a decline.

For many the “Arab Spring” has long since turned into an Arab Winter, as savage repression and counter-revolution crushed, hijacked or diverted popular pressure for democratic rights and social justice. (Milne, 2012, paragraph 1)

Doubly shadowed Arab Spring

The above accounts demonstrate that Western mainstream media draw heavily upon the knowledge of great modern revolutions to assess and understand contemporary revolutionary events. The Arab Spring was defined as a nonrevolutionary event when it failed to satisfy the preset historically based criteria: because it was too violent and cruel; it did not destroy old political and religious principles; and the new governments, when set in place, were not more efficient than their predecessors. Such conclusions are inevitable when the concept of revolution is derived from a few models of revolutions provided by European and North American history. With this limited knowledge, “unless a dramatic, large-scale change has swept away all existing institutions and resulted in a recasting of the social order from top to bottom, a given historical experience fails to qualify as a revolution” (Hermassi, 1976, p. 211). Mardin’s (1971) contribution to this topic also suggests that when the concept of revolution is set within a Eurocentric framework, it cannot adequately address events outside of this framework. A critical reassessment of media’s understanding of “revolution” indicates that the Eurocentric framework requires particular locality and temporality. The study contends that the Arab Spring in media discourses is therefore doubly shadowed by the Western identity and temporality of the European Enlightenment, modernity, and progress.

The Arab Spring is deemed non-Western because Islam is the predominant religion in the region. Even before the world press started debating the threats of the Islamic State in 2014, fear of Islamists and Jihadists contributed to the debates about the Arab Spring. One of the fears expressed was what would happen to the revolution if a moderate Islamist

party, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia, won the election polls. The observers of the events were afraid of the Arab Spring taking a “wrong,” Islamic turn. When the Islamist parties started winning the polls, the media renamed the Arab Spring the Arab Winter (Dalrymple, 2011; Makiya, 2013; “Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring,” 2011), stripping it of its revolutionary character. The media implied that if the Arab Spring was no longer capable of creating a Western type of democratic society, because it was hanging onto traditional religious values, it could not have been a revolution. There is an expressed fear of sectarianism destroying the Arab state (Makiya, 2013), the revival of the Islamists (Dalrymple, 2011) supported by the Islamist militants’ claims that the uprisings make room for them to seize power (Weiser & Shane, 2011), coming to a conclusion that “against these kinds of forces, unfortunately, the young revolutionaries of the Arab Spring are helpless” (Makiya, 2013).

The attempt to compare the European experience, the disestablishment of the Catholic Church by the French revolutionaries, with the role of Islam in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary Muslim societies is misleading. That is mainly because “Islam has a more direct relation to the content of social structure than many other religions” (Mardin, 1971, p. 203). Islam presents a link between the rulers and the ruled, an alternative to the polity, when religious establishments perform services usually provided by the state, and the core of a process of socialization (Mardin, 1971, pp. 204–206). Mardin argues that Islam plays a very different role in Muslim societies than did Christianity in Europe in the time of Enlightenment. Islam’s role is more bureaucratic and popular. It has a central importance for the functioning society. Thus, the role of the two religions in the revolutionary processes cannot be compared. Nonetheless, this study shows that the location of the events and the specific culture and religion affect the perception of the Arab Spring. Islam as the most important identifying attribute of the region is still the culprit for the reactionary character of the events presented in the media (Said, 1997, pp. 8–9).

Furthermore, the concept of revolution is defined not only by where it happens but also by when it happens. Qualifiers that were normal repercussions of modern European revolutions, even in the twentieth century, are defined as nonrevolutionary or antirevolutionary in the beginning of the twenty-first century. While violence seemed to be a normal companion of many European revolutions, on the side of either the revolutionaries or the regime, it is precisely this violent and repressive feature of the Arab Spring that renders the revolution impotent, and according to the media sources, it strips it of its revolutionary character.

Experts estimate that over 100,000 people died in the civil wars of the English Revolutions, that 1.3 million ... died in 1789–1815 in the civic and Napoleonic wars, that over 2 million ... died in the course of the Mexican Revolution, and that ... in Russia and China, war and dislocations in agriculture led to tens of millions of deaths. (Goldstone, 2002, p. 85)

But when it comes to the Arab Spring, violence was characterized as nonrevolutionary and not as concurrent fallout. Similarly, the Arab Spring’s revolutionary character was questioned by media outlets because the events did not replace the old political elites with a new power of authority. But then again, the American Revolution also did not end with switching elites, and “it was [nonetheless] as radical and as social as any revolution in history” (Wood, 1993, p. 5).

The Arab Spring was also perceived as nonrevolutionary because it was not able to present efficient new governments; even more, it turned back to repressive and conservative regimes. Repression and conservatism are not new postrevolutionary occurrences. Under the rule of Napoleon III, France underwent similar circumstances after the 1848 Revolution. Additionally, efficient new governments demand time to build. As expressed by Stinchcombe (1999), “Revolutions in the past seldom ended in a way naturally described as a transition, as if one knew where one was headed” (p. 51). Most of the immediate postrevolutionary governments are met with difficulties, because “all aspects of [postrevolutionary] government tend to be unsettled and difficult to manage” (Stinchcombe, 1999, p. 52). In the past, it took revolutions years, even decades, to establish efficient new governing bodies and institutions. Why, then, is the Arab Spring not treated with the same courtesy?

According to Göle (1999), this is because of the dual understanding of time and modernity. When it comes to the conceptualization of modernity inside and outside of the West, time is not perceived as coeval (Göle, 1999, pp. 46–49). “There is this implicit non-contemporaneous time attribution to the non-Western, as not sharing the same time with ‘us’; ‘us’ being defined as the moderns, Westerns and seculars in opposition to those perceived as traditionalists, religious, backward” (Göle, 1999, p. 47). The duality of time in the case of the Arab Spring manifests itself in the idea that violence, repression, religion, and tradition belong to the past and that the Arab Spring does not share the same time and experience with Western events of similar magnitude. In other words, what was treated as a normal or even necessary part of a revolution in the nineteenth century or earlier is uncivilized and backward in the twenty-first century, because it is delayed. “Those who are distant to the center of Western modernity, and located at the ‘periphery’ of the system are also those who ‘lag behind,’ are ‘backward,’ delayed in terms of time” (Göle, 1999, p. 46). This shows how the perception of Western modernity disables the concept of revolution as used in the media to successfully refer to events following different temporal trajectories or the same trajectories at a different speed. Thus, this article argues that the concept of revolution as used in the media included into this study cannot explain the Arab Spring events, because it is Eurocentric, defined by its own time (modernity) and place (the West), hence having limited reach and applicability.

Conclusion

In recent years, there seems to be an increasing tendency to think of the dualism separating the West from the East as an ideology which belongs to the past, when in fact, it is persistently hiding deep in the structures of language. As such the politics of othering not only manifest themselves as an isolated set of neo-conservative beliefs behind foreign policies, on the contrary, the politics of othering are still very much present in everyday communications. Approaching the dualism through the study of concepts reaches behind the facade of political correctness, unveiling a Eurocentric presence in basic key concepts.

While this research utilized journals read by almost 87 million readers monthly, this study is still limited to only two news sources with a similar ideological affiliation and one language. These findings nonetheless present important implications for media practices. A number of comparative studies can capture and explain different types of revolutions, but media representations take too narrow a definition, thereby reinforcing the Eurocentric notion of revolution.

The contribution of this analysis also aims to go beyond the erring usage of the concept of revolution. Its intention is to bring academic focus to conceptual practices in media and everyday discourses. Scholars of conceptual history have already recognized the necessity to broaden their focus outside the limits of academic discourses (Richter, 1995); in turn, as this study shows, scholars of media and cultural studies should focus on concepts and their usage in discursive practices to reveal the hidden, persistent, and rooted nature of the politics of othering. For example, it would be interesting to see how the concept of refugees affects media reporting, public and political debates and foreign policies. Such an approach to the study of concepts and the politics of othering may reveal the limits of the language being used, and it might expose the invisible Western character of several political concepts which have yet to be questioned.

Notes

1. Currently, the term “Arab Spring” has become contested. For the purposes of this article, the author uses the term specifically because it is the term used in the media being analyzed.
2. When using the words “West” or “Western,” this text refers to Europe and countries of substantial European ancestral populations.
3. According to ComScore (ComScore, 2012), an IT company that measures global online activity, *The New York Times* has 48.7 million and *The Guardian* 39 million monthly readers accessing their content worldwide.
4. “Elite” sources are frequently cited by other media outlets because they are perceived as “good” and “reliable” news sources. They function as intermedia agenda setters that dictate what different forms of media talk about and how they talk about it (Christensen & Christensen, 2013; Meraz, 2009).
5. Intercoder reliability for all six variables corrected for agreement by chance (Kohen’s Kappa) ranged from 1 to 0.61. The average ranging at 0.755. According to Landis and Koch (1977) this is substantial agreement between coders.
6. In the codebook of the analysis, the six frames were defined as follows: (1) Violence: established connection between the revolutionary events and violence, either by describing violent events and their outcomes or by stating the number of victims and casualties. (2) Public support: expressed local (regional or national) support for the events. The support can be expressed by an individual or a group. (3) Economic inequality: when implied that reasons for the events were economic or class based. (4) Fundamental changes: when stated that the Arab Spring inflicted changes in the social, cultural, religious, and political order of a state or region by introducing a certain fundamental novelty, such as gender equality or multiparty elections. (5) Destruction of long-standing regimes and principles: acknowledging the correlation between the events and their outcomes resulting in the destruction of the old power structures and ideologies. (6) New governments: reports about the changes in the governmental institutions brought about by elections and appointments of representatives.

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