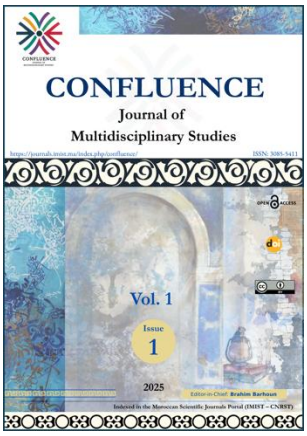


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The Representation of the Arab Spring in the U.S. Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the Arab Spring was represented in U.S. print media, specifically in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It explores how discursive strategies and linguistic devices used by journalists reflect ideological biases, particularly the persistence of Orientalist thought. The analysis identifies recurring themes such as the depiction of violence in the Arab world (negative other-representation), Islamophobia (Islam as a threat), and the assertion of Western superiority (positive self-representation). These patterns suggest that media coverage reinforces long-standing stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, portraying them as irrational, violent, and culturally inferior. By contrast, the West—especially the United States—is constructed as rational, civilized, and morally superior. Drawing on CDA methodologies proposed by Teun A. van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak, the study argues that such representations are not neutral but are ideologically driven and aligned with U.S. foreign policy interests. The findings reveal how news discourse constructs and legitimizes unequal power relations and contributes to the production of in-group (West) versus out-group (Arabs/Muslims) identities. Ultimately, the paper calls for ethical journalism that fosters intercultural dialogue and challenges biased media practices.

KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis

Media

Arab Spring

U.S. Newspapers

Introduction

On December 17, 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire in a show of public protest against the police who removed his produce cart. Protests broke out on the same day in Sidi Bouzid, increasing quickly to other cities. The uprisings were named the Jasmine Revolution, which caused disorder in Tunisia and ultimately led to the resignation of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Subsequently, a series of anti-government protests spread across several Arab countries, which the global press dubbed the "Arab Spring." The first use of the phrase 'Arab Spring' to refer to the Arab uprisings was by an article published in an American political journal. According to Joseph Massad, the choice of the term was not accidental but "rather a US strategy of controlling their aims and goals" (Massad). In fact, the term "Arab Spring" was coined by Western media in early 2011, referring to the 1968 Prague Spring, a period of political liberalization and mass protest in Czechoslovakia, a communist state, following World War II. The so-called Prague Spring restructurings were an effort to grant citizens additional rights through partial decentralization of the economy and democratization, amid the country's domination by the Soviet Union. However, the case in the Arab region is highly different. The belief was that the Arab Spring was a political uprising by

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masses demanding a liberal democratic reform, and that these uprisings would cause a wide political change across the Arab world; however, the results were rather unexpected.

In fact, the outcomes of the Arab Spring do not correspond to the so-called Prague Spring. The latter was a top-down path, starting from members of the regime. In contrast, the uprisings in the Arab World were rather popular revolts that ended in an unanticipated way. "Social change and revolutions across history, always born out of fundamental crises, surprise the world when they happen, and their aftermath usually seems unpredictable. The Arab Spring uprisings validate this tried and true – albeit seldom recalled – history lesson" (Eid and Douai 1). According to political scientists, the societies impacted will face difficulties as they navigate the transition to unpredictable futures, with various political and social forces attempting to shape the new political landscape. Some challenges are likely to be significant, as democratic transitions do not always succeed, and violence often results in ongoing civil unrest (Rex et al. 2000; Maboudi 2022).

Although the Arab Spring received extensive global media coverage, the events in the Arab world were covered by Western media more thoroughly than ever before. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine the representation of the Arab Spring in American media. More specifically, it focuses on texts in news articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The article examines principally from a Critical Discourse Analysis approach how journalists employ discursive strategies[1], which may serve their own ideology[2] and agenda in their news coverage of the Arab Spring. In other words, the objective of this study is to reveal explicit and implicit meanings in news reports in terms of linguistic devices and rhetorical tropes that journalists use to represent Arabs and Muslims during the Arab Spring.

The choice of the Arab Spring as the temporal setting and historical background for this research is significant given that the event marks one of the most important political and social developments in the Arab world. Actually, the Arab Spring has attracted the special interest of many scholars, researchers, and specialists from various domains. Numerous studies have been conducted on the Arab Spring from different perspectives. Some works offer a historical context perspective analysis of the Arab Spring, demonstrating how the Arab revolutions have developed and spread from one country to another. Other works focus on the role of the U.S. administration in the Arab Spring; essentially, a considerable amount of scholarly research pays attention to the United States' reaction to the Arab Spring and the strategies adopted by the Obama Administration to deal with the uprisings. Alternatively, numerous studies focus on the role of social media in mobilizing those collective actions. Yet, there are relatively few or no studies that deal with the media representation of the Arab Spring, particularly the American imprint media, from a Critical Discourse Analysis standpoint. For instance, Michael D. Bruce and Othman Mohamed Othman Alshareif conducted two different studies on the media framing of the Arab Spring, yet focusing only on the visual coverage. Othman Alshareif's work (2016) investigates how the Arab and Western media affected the staff and students of one Libyan university through their presentation of the major Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. His thesis concentrates on the reporting by *Al-Jazeera* and the *British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC). Michael D. Bruce, on the other hand, conducted a systematic comparative analysis on visual coverage of the civil unrest in Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Syria; from five transnational satellite news channels that broadcast to/from the Arab world—*Al Jazeera*, *Al Jazeera English*, *Al Arabiya*, *Alhurra*, and *BBC Arabic*. In contrast, Stefanie Ullmann delves deeply into the linguistic and metaphorical frameworks used across various media narratives, employing Discourse Analysis to uncover the ideologies and power dynamics present in both Western and Arab contexts. However, the study does not explicitly focus on American imprint media or analyze how these narratives uniquely shape public perception in

the United States. Its broad comparative approach examines a variety of media outlets without isolating the distinct narratives that arise within American coverage.

Hence, this makes it significant for the present research to investigate the representation of the Arab Spring in the American imprint media from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective. Furthermore, the analytical study is unique in that the news reports under analysis have not been considered in any previous work in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis. The paper's hypothesis suggests that the media's representation of Arabs and Muslims is packed with discourses related to the ideology of Orientalism. In fact, the way by which Westerners have come to know Arabs in general is through the so-called Orientalism; the traditionally Western construction of non-Western cultures as isolated, irrational, and passive 'Other'. Edward W. Said, in his pioneering book, *Orientalism*, defined it as a mode of thinking based upon:

> an ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and […] the occident. Thus a very large mass of writers […] have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, mind, destiny, and so on. (3)

According to him, Orientalism dates back to the period of the European Enlightenment and the colonization of the Arab World. It gave a rationalization for European colonialism based on a self-serving history in which "the West" constructed "the East" as significantly different and inferior, that is, in need of Western intervention. Islam, as well, is constructed under this dichotomy, which includes a binary opposition that makes the West dominant in modern, rational thought, and the Muslim the mysterious, dangerous Other. Accordingly, the present paper focuses on the following main points:

1- What are the topics and themes that are recurrent and emphasized in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* news articles about the Arab Spring?
2- What are the discursive strategies and linguistic forms employed in the representation of Arabs and Muslims?
3- Do the newspapers, through their representation of Arabs and Muslims, contribute to the formation of in-group and out-group identities?

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis methodology is used in this study to collect and analyze the set of selected media texts on the Arab Spring, and to achieve the objectives set out by this article, which suggests that the media's representation of Arabs and Muslims is saturated with the ideology of Orientalism. Through critical discourse analysis, we can explore how journalists, who are elite members within media organizations, employ discursive strategies that may serve their own agenda in their news coverage of the Arab Spring. According to Teun A. van Dijk, elites are members of dominant groups who have privileged access to discourse, and whose power is measured by the "extent of their discursive and communicative scope and resources" (255). Discursive strategies, on the other hand, are the linguistic means used by those elites to attain their targets goals in discourse. Besides, one of the main aims of Critical Discourse Analysis that matches the realm of this study is to deconstruct the hidden ideologies of discourses that help to produce unequal power[3] relations in societies. It focuses on language and its socio-cultural context and the ideological beliefs established through texts; it "offers

specific theories and methods for the analysis of narrative, argumentation, style, rhetoric, images, metaphor, interaction, ideologies, norms and values, and many other structures of text and talk and their cognitive basis and social functions" (Dijk and Teun 3). Therefore, it aims to raise the reader's awareness of the power of language in shaping their view and interpretation of events. Hence, as an analyst, the focus is on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of dominance[4]. The selected method to analyze texts in this study is a multidisciplinary form of Critical Discourse Analysis, because one single method approach may not generate the appropriate results in doing Critical Discourse Analysis. According to van Dijk (1993), Critical Discourse Analysis necessitates a true multidisciplinarity and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social opinion, power, society and cultures. Hence, bearing this argument in mind and given that discourse analysis is essentially an interpretive and deconstructive reading, the approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in this study is a heterogeneous mode of analysis, encompassing a shared perspective that incorporates a range of approaches as practiced by van Dijk, Fairclough, and Wodak. The approaches utilized help examine elements of the text at a 'micro' level and consider the impact of such choices at a more 'macro' level. However, as emphasized by van Dijk (2023), Tian (2021), and Mullet (2018), the empirical analyses of discourses go beyond the popular but vague notion of "frame" and involve a more comprehensive and explicit analysis of the text and talk of social movements. Hence, CDA, in this study, presents the perception of the news gatekeepers' intention when producing news about the Arab Spring in general and Arabs in particular, as well as the perception of the news distributed to worldwide audiences.

The newspapers selected for this study are *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. All data is obtained from online sources due to the accessibility of online material. Both newspapers have an archive of their content available on their websites. The corpus of media text is based on purposive rather than arbitrary variety; it consists of articles reporting on the Arab Spring. News reports selected for analysis cover the period of the uprising from January 2011 to December 2011.

The New York Times and *The Washington Post* were selected for a number of reasons. Both are considered elite newspapers and are among the largest media outlets in the United States, ranking third and fifth, respectively, in terms of circulation size. They are leading newspapers with regard to the coverage of international news and views, drawing readers from every state and around the world.

Results and Analysis

The first step in the analysis process is to read the texts in question in an uncritical manner, assuming the role of a regular reader. In fact, the first reading shows that the majority of reports express support for the protestors. Yet, through extensive readings with a critical eye, and with the intention of detecting discursive strategies and patterns, a number of Orientalist themes appear in the majority of cases. The preliminary and common themes found in the coverage of the Arab Spring are violence in the Arab world (negative other representation), Islamophobia (Islam as a threat), and the Western superiority in comparison with Arabs (positive self-representation). The three themes are overlapping and interconnected. Accordingly, this section is divided into three parts, each devoted to discussing one of the three recurring themes.

Theme 1: Violence in the Arab world

In this section, the analysis focuses on how the Western media has presented the Arab uprisings to the world. The selection of news texts in this section shows a negative portrayal of events during this period; the central dominant theme in the newspapers' coverage is that of violence in the Arab world. This macro strategy is achieved through different micro strategies; accordingly, the focus is on how those strategies are applied to attain the underlying intentions hidden behind their discursive construction.

Headlines	Newspaper	Date of publication
Surge in Syrian Killings Is Reported Before Visit	*The New York Times*	December 21, 2011
If the Arab Spring Turns Ugly	*The New York Times*	August 27, 2011
Bahrain Protesters Clash With Police Near Capital After Teenager's Funeral	*The New York Times*	October 7, 2011
Violent Protests in Egypt Pit Thousands against Police	*The New York Times*	November 19, 2011
Bahrain Admits to 'Excessive Force' against Protesters	*The Washington Post*	November 21, 2011
Muammar el Quaddafi's End	*The New York Times*	October 20, 2011
In Rare Interview, Assad Denies Ordering Crackdown in Syria	*The New York Times*	December 7, 2011
Tripoli Coverage from Sky News Wins Praise, as other Reporters Remain in Rixos Hotel	*The Washington Post*	August 21, 2011

The distribution of news topics signals the dominance of negativity and the climate of conflict and tension. Violence, insecurity, and struggle are, essentially, the main topics of interest. As is obvious from the titles, the event is headlined primarily to convey that the Arab revolutions are all violent and aggressive. This is the common meaning and critical information upon which most of the articles converge, and to which the addressees perceive. In fact, from the first glance at the headlines of both newspapers, one can observe the number of words synonymous with 'aggression', 'fighting', 'antagonism', 'forcefulness', and 'carnage'. Headlines are generally constructed on the basis of a minimum of words and a maximum of knowledge; however, we notice that mystification is a common feature among the majority of headlines. Indispensable data are missing, which consequently leads to deceiving the receiver. In fact, headlines establish a cognitive macro-structure that helps to manipulate the way readers process

and comprehend the report. Consequently, any theme, participants, and events that are referred to in the headlines are stored in the memory of any reader, and with frequent recurrence of the same topic and connotations, the topic becomes part of the knowledge system of the reader. Here, authors present a readymade system of ideas about Arabs (the Other, the Orient) that maintains the existing stereotypes. Accordingly, newspapers manipulate the structure of the headline to serve ideological purposes when presenting events during the Arab Spring. Such manipulation includes highlighting certain aspects of the story while downplaying others.

Moving to the analysis of the reports, we notice as well the higher percentage of collocation lines in the negative description category in both newspapers. In fact, the narrative dimensions of the texts are extreme and appear to be explicitly structured to create a negative image of the Arab revolutions. At the lexical level, the majority of words used to represent Arabs indicate a non-neutral representation. It may be argued that the choice of word goes with the nature of the event described; however, violence is presented, not only noticeably, but also in an exaggerated way. This representation is constructed with overlexical preferences. According to Peter Teo, overlexicalization creates "over-completeness" in the news discourse, suggesting that no further analysis and interpretation is needed. Moreover, Roger Fowler describes it as an "excess of quasisynonymous terms for entities or ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem in the culture's discourse" (85). For instance, the words "violence" and its alternates are prevalent and repeated markedly in all the texts.

More importantly, reported speech is used in reports in all its forms, mainly direct speech, indirect speech, and the slipping of speech reporting. To strengthen the rhetorical dimension of their news texts, Journalists prefer statements from sources that are consistent with what they genuinely believe. The majority of sources are anti-government ones, which announce violence and emphasize it. This confirms that journalists are not interested in avoiding coverage of other people, such as those who supported their leader during the uprisings. Hence, there is a significant imbalance between sources. Besides, the quoted voices are attributed with some authoritative quality to legitimize the journalist's claims in the news story. Likewise, the reporting verbs used to introduce the reported discourse also reveal the journalist's position and ideology. Accordingly, reporting voices that selectively align with the newspaper's plan to make strong and valid arguments jeopardize the credibility of U.S. journalistic practices. In view of that, the analysis of the quoting structures, in their components of agent identity and reporting verbs, gives us a representation of what the press considers relevant for that part of information, which is constructed on the basis of words, not truths.

At the level of transitivity, we note that journalists employ various types of processes to convey their attitudes, depending on their intentions. Here, we are concerned with the whole clause, rather than just the verb and its object. Hence, every choice of any process type reveals the hidden ideology behind the surface structure of words. For instance, both active and passive forms are used in reports. The active form is used to show violence, the agent, and the victim of the action, while the passive form is used to highlight the consequences of all types of violence.

Unfortunately, all the changes that happen in the Arab world have been identified through the lens of an Orientalist view, which presents Arabs through discriminatory, categorical, and stereotypical labeling. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* portray Arabs as 'violent killers' who kill each other irrationally. This uncovers what van Dijk refers to as dichotomic, culturally specific conditions formed by social identities, which may be consciously or unconsciously guided by political ideology. Hence, ideology manipulates news narrative discourse, whereas news narrative discourse helps to reinforce the existing ideology. In fact, the process of labeling is closely connected to the concept of representation, as things are given specific names to identify them, depending on an ideological basis. Thus, when the journalist identifies social objects, he/she represents them from his/her own angle; for instance, describing

a social actor as violent helps in the representation and perception of that social actor as such. Moreover, the reappearance of such representation leads automatically to the creation of mental conceptions about that actor, which gradually becomes an unchallengeable characteristic that turns out to be part of a shared culture. Therefore, such categorization misguides the social perception of the 'Other' and thus his identity as well. Accordingly, identity is never fixed, more than ever in times of conflict; rather, it is constructed through communicative action.

Therefore, we can confidently conclude that both newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, prioritize violence over objectivity. Both play a prominent role in the reproduction of stereotyped images about the Arab land through the discourse to which they have access. The results provide evidence supporting the research hypothesis that the media's representation of Arabs is packed with the ideology of Orientalism via the implementation of various discursive strategies. Those discursive strategies are forms of discursive manipulation of reality because the journalist consciously intrudes in such a reality to achieve their intended effects.

Theme 2: Islamophobia

In this section, the focus shifts to how Islam and Muslims are portrayed during the Arab Spring. Islam as a threat was prevalent in the American media coverage of the 2011 uprising events. Thus, this section aims to examine the linguistic strategies employed by the authors of the selected newspapers to maintain the persisting conceptualization of Islam and Muslims as 'other' or, instead, as a 'threat.'

Headlines	Newspaper	Date
Egypt's Uprising Stirs Fears of Persecution of Minority Coptic Christians	*The Washington Post*	February 03, 2011
Exiled Islamists Watch Rebellion Unfold at Home	*The New York Times*	July 18, 2011
The Vacuum after Qaddafi	*The New York Times*	February 27, 2011
Why Israel Fears a Free Egypt	*The Washington Post*	February 04, 2011
U.S. Must Take Sides to Keep the Arab Spring from Islamist Takeover	*The Washington Post*	Mars 23, 2011
The Islam Debate Egypt Needs	*The Washington Post*	August 04, 2011

By using negative lexical items, Muslims as social actors are represented in such a stereotypical way that they are associated with fundamentalism, violence, terrorism, extremism, radicalism, salafism… Actually, when the newspapers frequently use such terms and associate Islam with terrorism, both notions become synonymous in the readers' minds; thus, swaying their perception of Muslims and Islam. As remarked, the referential strategy in the presented data plays a pivotal role in terms of in- and out-grouping, which automatically leads to the inclusion of one group and the exclusion of the other. This is a clear illustration of the ideological square concept presented by van Dijk. For instance, the lexical choices the journalists use discursively construct Muslims as the out-group, and the U.S. as the in-group. In the discourse of both

newspapers, the concept of the West versus Islam defines the separation between us and them. Muslims are not only portrayed negatively, but they are also over-lexicalized with a broad negative characterization. The repetition of some words within the exact text is remarkable in different reports. Fowler considers this strategy to be a pragmatic approach to encoding ideology in news discourse.

Sourcing is another tool used by journalists to emphasize good things about us and bad ones about the Muslim 'other'. The majority of sources are American, which shows America's concern about the problems raised by Islamists. The question of who to refer to for a certain narrative plays a vital role in how an event is constructed. In fact, the voices of Western sources of information are all present to give the discourse factuality and authenticity. Hence, those voices absolutely influence the reader's understanding of events. However, the recurrence of those voices leads us to consider a significant point that is the absence of the voices of the so-called 'Islamists'. In the majority of texts analyzed, there is an absence of Islamits' voices. Certainly, the presence of those voices will significantly alter the results of the selected texts. The omission of those voices can be subcategorized under Thomas Huckin's manipulative silences. According to him, they are "those that intentionally conceal relevant information from the reader or listener, to the advantage of the writer or speaker; unlike other types of silence, these silences depend for their success on not being noticed by the reader or listener" (351). Thus, this silence in the majority of texts purposefully misleads the reader in a way that is satisfactory to the journalist. As stated by Huckin, Manipulative silences are deceptive or misleading in that they conceal certain information relevant to the topic at hand, thereby giving added prominence to other information. In this way, "quotation patterns form an ideological mechanism used to maintain social control of the 'powerful' over those who are marginalized out of power" (Teo 41). Thus, Muslims are not even given a chance to defend themselves and respond to the accusations directed at them. Otherwise, "virtually anything unsaid would count as a 'textual silence' in virtually any text" (Huckin 353). More importantly, the way Western sources are referred to is equally ideological. These referring terms draw attention to the position and status of the referent that the journalist wants the reader to focus on. Consequently, the quotation patterns in the data analyzed are powerful ideological devices that could manipulate the reader's perception and interpretation of Islam and Muslims.

If we turn our attention to the syntactic structures, we will find that Islamists are mostly put in subject position in transitive active clauses in comparison with other participants who are constantly portrayed as passive actors. This practice, which is a linguistic ideological process, depicts Muslims as negative actors, while others are depicted as victims. Hence, together with the fact that Muslims are frequently represented as committing terrorist acts, the image of Islam as a threat is reinforced.

Moreover, the newspapers use general conclusions about Muslims or Muslim communities, which present their limited and traditionalist approach towards Islam. Actually, generalization is the extension of some characteristic and actions of one particular group of people to a more general set. In the texts analyzed, we remark a generalization of the crimes of Al Quaida and other groups to a constantly larger group of people i.e. Muslims in general. References to Muslims emerge frequently in relation to terrorist operations of some groups, to the extent that it becomes a prevailing part of Muslim history. This mechanism gives reporters:

> A convenient means to ascribe certain key qualities to the main participants of the news discourse without encumbering the reader with tedious details; on another, the selection and representation of a particular generalizing attribute also hints at an underlying ideology that might have motivated the choice in the first place. (Teo 16)

This strategy can also be considered part of the exclusion theory. The problem of generalization is that when we classify someone into a specific social group, our perception of that person is also affected. For example, if a Muslim person is defending himself or herself in any case, he/she will surely be perceived as aggressive and violent; however, if he/she is a non-Muslim, he/she will be perceived as courageous. Hence, this shows that generalizations go hand in hand with stereotypes, which are the basis of prejudice and discrimination.

In fact, the issue of discrimination in the media is discussed in Fowler. Following his line of reasoning, discriminatory practices do not work in relation to the individual, but in relation to a certain group where individuals are involved and placed; consequently, constructing a stereotype which cultures ascribe to the group. Hence, these sets of common-sense beliefs are attached prejudicially to individuals; that is why "there is an unquestioned assumption that Islam can be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés" (Said 230). The stereotype of Islam as a fundamentalist phenomenon was shaped long ago by different agents. Once a stereotype is constituted, there is no chance for deconstructing it or even reconstructing it in light of any new event, such as the Arab Spring.

So far, we have seen how discursive strategies like generalization, over-lexicalization, intertextuality, labeling, and transitivity can be used to create the image of the terrorist Muslim, which perpetuates the negative stereotyping of Muslims in general. The coverage of Islam is then classified as negative because it links Islam and Muslims to conflict, violence, intolerance, and extremism.

Theme 3: Western Superiority

The news texts discussed in the preceding sections all share a negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims during the Arab revolutions. In contrast, the texts chosen for analysis in this chapter present a positive image of America. The common theme in the texts examined below is American superiority over other Arab nations. In this section, we explore how the same linguistic devices are utilized to create different representations of various actors within the same context. The focus, then, is on both the explicit and implicit discursive strategies used by authors to depict America with positive attributes.

Headlines	Newspaper	date
U.S. Launches Campaign to Track Down Libyan Missiles	*The Washington Post*	October 13, 2011
Western Finance Bodies Face Challenges in Funding Arab Spring Countries	*The New York Times*	September 21, 2011
In Tripoli, Support for Gaddafi is Shallow	*The Washington Post*	May 31, 2011
Clinton Credited with Key Role in Success of NATO Airstrikes, Libyan Rebels	*The Washington Post*	October 28, 2011
Clinton Meets with Syrian Opposition	*The Washington Post*	December 06, 2011
White House Presses Egypt's Leaders to Speed up Reforms	*The Washington Post*	November 23, 2011

In the analyzed texts above, we find that both newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, employ different linguistic features such as lexical choices, transitivity, modality, metaphor, hyperbole, euphemism, intertextuality, and presupposition to project a positive image of Westerners, while projecting a negative image of Arabs. Both headlines and lead paragraphs are used strategically to serve this ideological purpose and to convey the view of the newspaper, highlighting certain aspects of one group while downplaying others. The findings further uncover a considerably strong ideological tendency in the analyzed texts to project, explicitly and implicitly, a negative image of Arab governments in an attempt to legitimize the imposition of sanctions against some countries.

In fact, van Dijk's notion of ideological square provides a more reasonable description for the findings suggested in this study. van Dijk contributes a theoretical concept, namely the 'ideological square', which summarizes the double strategy of positive in-group representation and negative out-group representation, where 'we' are good and 'they' are bad. Accordingly, in his book, *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*, John Richardson noted that the ideological square foresees that "'outsiders' of various types will be represented in a negative way and 'insiders' will be represented in a positive way" (51). Correspondingly, the ideological square functions to polarize the in-group and the out-group in order to present the "We" group favorably and the "They" group unfavorably. It is a way of perceiving and representing the world according to "Their" ideology.

The linguistic devices employed in the texts analyzed in this section have a remarkable discourse potential to misrepresent news stories. For instance, through analyzing the transitivity system, it became clear that some structures could be used to consider the power relations. Through the skillful application of the active structure, the positive role of Western officials and institutions as active, powerful units is foregrounded in the headlines, leads, and throughout all the texts, as they are consistently placed in the first position in active clauses. Quite the opposite,

Arabs are often portrayed as passive, failing to develop and progress, and relying on external support and assistance. This gives Western officials and institutions greater thematic roles in the text as a whole, contrary to Arabs.

The twin strategy of binary opposition is also evident through lexical choices. As stated previously, lexical choices have always been recognized as critical in the production of meaning and the routine of representation. The author divides the world into good and evil through his choice of categorization process. When we consider the words used to represent both sides, we notice that all positive terms are employed to represent Western officials and their actions; conversely, all the negative words are used to depict Arabs and their behaviors. Thus, through the use of specific keywords, different identities are assigned to the governments and those involved in the uprising. While civilians in Arab countries are brutally attacked by their dictatorial regimes, Western governments are working tirelessly to protect those civilians and maintain peace and stability in the world.

Such ideological representation and biased language in news media result in the legitimization of one side and the suppression of the other. Accordingly, the struggle to face terrorists and to liberate people became the primary ideological justification for NATO intervention in Libya. Both newspapers are trying to persuade the reader that such an intervention is advantageous not only to the Libyans but also to other nations, because they are destroying a dangerous terrorist force. Hence, the way in which the response to the Libyan revolution is represented makes NATO intervention appear moral, legitimate, and rational, accentuating the humanitarian nature of the intervention. Hence, following this line, the NATO bombings were undertaken with humanitarian intent, and it is not considered a violent act. As Edward Said has noted in a new preface to his 1978 publication *Orientalism* "every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires" (xvi). This is precisely what the United States does in order to convince the international community.

Actually, the narrative structure of news reports is crucial for a proper understanding of events; hence, it is often manipulated ideologically by the newspaper. In the texts analyzed, we conclude that there is a tendency in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to de-narrativize events related to NATO violence and its effects on people; yet, on the other hand, they present stories of Arab violence in a straightforward narrative, with detailed information and statistics. Consequently, the receiver generalizes the specifications of a particular member of one group to that entire group. In other words, the bad description of some minority group is generalized to the majority group, i.e., the Arabs.

Furthermore, the use of metaphor in various texts reveals both positive self-representation and negative other representation. The use of such figurative language by the author and Western officials is not primarily intended to present facts but rather to convey their theories and goals and to persuade the audience. The U.S. administration in all examples is personalized to activate the reader's emotions. In this context, metaphors can also be manipulative and impact the receiver, either positively or negatively. They are further used to justify war as a "just war," as stated by Lakoff (2003), Kendall (2020), and Dunn (2021).

Norman Fairclough's concept of intertextuality is also of valuable help in analyzing the Western newspapers' ideology and the ways they choose to achieve their political objectives. In the analyzed texts, we clearly notice that "in-group" members have more access to media compared to "out-group" members. Hence, the presence of Westerners' voices in the news articles through intertextuality helps to authorize and justify their arguments and reactions. However, the systematic exclusion of Arab officials' voices helps to silence them absolutely and disempowers their arguments and justifications. Among all the analyzed articles, either

there are no quotations from the Arab side or they are very limited in number, and the majority of those quotations are presented indirectly, in contrast to Western ones. In this case, not all groups have access to discourse; hence, they do not have the same speaking rights. Such intertextual framing augments the possibility of convincing the reader with the preferred stereotyped discourse. So, since only the power elites have access to such genres of discourse, the reader tends to believe their claims for that reason. Moreover, since elites serve as reliable sources, they reproduce the dominant ideologies. Accordingly, intertextual analysis is a crucial tool for extracting ideological traces in news narratives. Thus, newspapers undoubtedly present images that are not purely objective, as evidenced by their choice of narratives and the sources used.

Hence, the critical discourse analysis applied to the present texts explains how the discursive mechanisms used by newspapers reproduce racism by creating positive images of "Us" and negative ones of "Them." Western media manages to reproduce a discourse of condemnation, strengthening the stereotype of developing countries, which is opposed to a positive civilized image of Western countries, through empowering and approving their own superiority, and emphasizing the difference between "Us" and "Them." Hence, the self/other dichotomy influences the author's mode of writing, which contributes indirectly to the representation and reproduction of racism. van Dijk asserts that news racism provides systematic negative images of the other, contributing to negative mental models, stereotypes, prejudices, and ideologies about those "Other." Edward Said, correspondingly, maintains that it is through such discourse and its effects that the West has been able to legitimize itself over the uncivilized "Other." The repeated discourses approve that the Orient is primitive, mysterious, and unable to govern itself. Said, as well, suggests that all discourse, remarkably, discourse about other cultures, is inherently ideological. This discourse creates a considerable divide between East and West, situating the West as a superior culture to the East.

Conclusion

We can conclude that mass media cannot offer a standpoint which is free from a biased interpretation of events; equally, the media institutions "tend to construct reality in a manner congruent with their underlying ideological and political functions" (Sai-hua and Nakamura 411). By employing a persuasive narrative style, we have realized that authors manipulate the reader to interpret events in particular ways. We have shown how some dominant journalists limit the communicative rights of some agents by controlling their access to discourse. By doing so, they are implicitly manipulating the reader's understanding of events, as well as their attitudes and ideas. In fact, such use of language helps the authors not only to describe a specific event in terms of their own way of conceptualizing it, but also to persuade the audience to create reality in their own ways. Additionally, we have recognized that each news article is filled with a certain ideology and agenda. CDA is, then, used in this study as a successful method for analyzing texts in order to uncover those hidden ideologies. It is an adequate methodological approach for understanding how political powers create divisions in society, and revealing which group is constructed as superior and which one as inferior. In this respect, CDA allows for the disclosure of patterns of language use denoting discriminatory and exclusionary practices. More importantly, using CDA helps to reveal what type of knowledge is produced and reproduced through language use. Hence, the methodology used helps to answer the research questions stated earlier.

The analysis of the news discourse of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* shows that the major dominant themes about the Arab Spring highlight the notions of violence in the

Arab world and Islam as a threat. On the other hand, it highlights the positive representation of the West. The positive representation of the West serves to create an opposed set of power relations which constructs the West as the in-group, and Arabs, along with Muslims, as the out-groups. American political morality has been a dominant theme in the American media from the start of the Arab revolutions. This morality has been revealed through a particular discourse of Western values that has finally been imported to Arab societies. This is clear evidence of the operation of the ideological square, which consists of highlighting our good actions and their bad ones. More specifically, the American media representation of Arabs and Islam predominantly maintains that Arabs are different, inferior, evil, violent, backward, and uncivilized, and Islam is considered a threat to the international community; on the other hand, Americans are the civilized, superior, and good ones. This is precisely what the post-colonial discourse in social theory identifies as American Eurocentrism. It is a cultural phenomenon that considers cultures of non-American societies from a Western standpoint. America, for instance, behaves as a universal signifier in that it assumes the superiority of American cultural values over those of non-Western societies. Accordingly, American media coverage of Arab countries reinforces the 'we' notion that already exists; so, its coverage is instead an assertion of power. Therefore, the West in general and America in particular remain hegemonic in their coverage of Arab uprisings.

Additionally, America's coverage of the Arab Spring is shaped by its foreign policy in the Muslim and Arab world. In other words, the American media has covered the Arab Spring from the standpoint of the United States perceived foreign policy interests and main concerns in the region. In fact, it has devoted coverage to particular uprisings at very different rates. For example, the revolts in Syria and Libya were highlighted more than those of other countries, like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, or Morocco, in which the number of articles was very low. The quantity of articles covering Libya and Syria was remarkable, as well as the length of text describing the events. Those dissimilarities have been controlled by whether the governments were the United States' friend or enemy; both Libya and Syria are considered enemies of the United States, while others are considered strong allies. More importantly, the protests in Bahrain were analogous in seriousness to those of Syria and Libya; however, the United States did not prefer to intervene in Bahrain as it did in others. As seen in the analysis, all texts were supporting the NATO intervention in Libya, and calling for the same action in Syria. The policy of war on terrorism was also present in the coverage of the Arab spring, especially while representing Islam. The American media is adopting the White House agenda in reporting on foreign affairs, particularly on war against Islam. In any case, the American media did not forget to include Israel in its coverage; even though it was outside the circle of conflict; yet, it showed much concern with its well-being. For instance, many articles focused on the effects of the Arab uprisings on the security of Israel.

In light of this, the American media coverage of the Arab spring is automatically biased and unjust. Therefore, news is neither a free nor an objective reflection of reality; instead, a newspaper goes through different processes that are guided by certain rules and conventions that shape the final product, mainly the text. Therefore, the reality in this case is made and not reflected; in other words, it is constructed linguistically. Accordingly, the picture emerging from the analysis presented in the preceding sections is only a contemporary manifestation of an old representation that has been ongoing in American newspapers for the past decades that matches with the article hypothesis which suggests that the Arab spring is represented in the Western media through an Orientalist prism.

Hence, it can be concluded that the effect of some events such as the 9/ 11 attacks and others preceding ones seems to limit and structure the news discourse about Arabs and Muslims. There has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Unfortunately, little attention was devoted to covering successful experiences in the Arab region, or quoting the

versions of other international sources. For instance, little attention was paid to the case of Qatar, which announced plans to hold elections in 2013 despite there being no protesters on the streets, no aggression, and no deaths, and to the Moroccan case in which the king decided to change the whole constitution. Thus far, those shining experiences have been partially neglected by the Western media. The Arab Spring as a revolution failed in changing perceptions about Arabs and Muslims; hence, what is really more needed instantly is a media revolution. We should start from scratch and go back to the traditional ethics of journalism, because presently, ethics are diminished in the media. Journalists should work to promote intercultural dialogue, not to raise racism and discrimination. Freedom of expression does not mean freedom of the media; so, journalists should be responsible and aware of the consequences of what they publish. Alternatively, we should explore ways in which journalists and the media can develop new ethical practices in a context of upsetting trends and realities that affect the notions of dialogue and diversity.

Notes:

1. A discursive strategy is a systemic representation in discourse that relates to a particular ideology and achieves a specific effect.
2. From a critical linguistic standpoint, ideology is a system of ideas, beliefs, and values that are shared collectively by social groups.
3. Power is a crucial notion in the field of CDA. Fowler (1985) defines power as the ability of people and institutions to manipulate the behavior and material lives of others.
4. van Dijk (1993) considers 'dominance' in the area of CDA as the exercise of social power by elites, institutions, or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial, and gender inequality.

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