

What is happening on the ground?
A theoretical critical review of the nature and dynamics of the
'movements' in the so-called “Arab Spring” in the light of social
movements and revolution theories and beyond

Many terms have been used by scholars to define what has happened in Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Many of them, such as “riots”, “protests”, “uprising”, “rebellion”, “revolution,” reflect ways to understand the phenomenon both as “causes” and “outcomes”. Thus, the contribution of this study is to explore how scholars are studying the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, through the examination of the representations of it produced by Western or West-based scholars. What labels (terms, concepts), theories (lens, approaches, factors) have been used to ‘name’ the phenomenon and with which purpose? To answer this question, this study maps and surveys systematically the terms used by the scholars to define and explain the ‘Arab Spring’ in journal articles between late 2010 and middle 2012. Building upon a comprehensive database of 67 journal articles, we find that articles related to the ‘Arab Spring’ have been softly increasing since 2011. The mapping also reveals that the “Arab Spring” remains the most frequently used label, followed by “Uprising” and “Revolution”; that the relationship Arab Spring-Revolution is the core combination of label and theory; that the explanation of the phenomenon is the core aim and that the macro regional level of analysis remains predominant, followed by case studies on Egypt.

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Introduction

Over the last two years, since the emergence of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ as a phenomenon of interest for scholars, it seems that different labels, terms, concepts and theories have been applied to study it, in a broad range of journals and on the basis of different purposes: to clarify and to explain. So far, no systematic mapping of the Arab Spring studies has been produced. However, as mentioned in a recent article by Baron and Pursley (2011) there is need for thinking about the Arab Spring in order to make a contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon. Performing a very inclusive search through Web of Science 67 published journal articles referencing the ‘Arab Spring’ have been identified. According to their own coding, and as expected/predictably, they established that the majority of these articles referencing the “Arab Spring” as the main label (42 cases of 67, 23.2%), followed by “Revolution” (38 cases, 21.0%), “Uprising” (34 cases, 18.8%) and “Protests” (17 cases, 9.4%). They also found out that the number of articles per year increased lightly, between 2011 (40) and 2012 (45).

The purpose of this contribution is to move beyond this broad inventory and to provide a first comprehensive mapping and analysis of Arab Spring-related publications focusing specifically on published journal articles excluding those of opinion and book reviews. To this end, in a personal effort, a bibliographical database was established by, conducting an extensive search through bibliographical databases to gather the greatest possible number of articles and studies concerning the Arab Spring.

For each publication, apart from the generic elements of the bibliographical references, it was also compiled the abstract, and systematically coded some core features on the basis of the full-text file: the three main labels/terms/concepts applied to the phenomenon¹, the three main theories (lens, approaches and factors) used by scholars to study it, the identification of the main goals: explain and clarify; some comparison with 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution; level of analysis and the number of cases studied.

This specific set of features has been selected on two main grounds. On the one hand, some of these have regularly been used in previous although methodological mapping exercises (e.g. Bennett, Barth & Rutherford 2003, Franchino 2005, Rihoux et.al 2013). On the other hand, this initiative can be a contribution for future mapping of the Arab Spring studies in journal articles. Thus, given the growth of studies on the Arab Spring as a current phenomenon, the field and diversification of Arab Spring scholars, and Arab Spring-related publications, the overall research question is: How is this

¹ The approach used was to select the three main concepts used by researchers in each article. I chose three rather than one to have a broader view of the diversity of terms/concepts applied by the same researchers.

phenomenon being represented by scholars? The specific research questions are: Which are the main labels used by scholars to name the ‘Arab Spring’? Which are the main theories (lens, approaches, factors) used by scholars to clarify or explain this phenomenon? What is the research goal of Middle Eastern scholars to study the ‘Arab Spring’? Is there any intention of comparing this phenomenon with the 1979 Iranian case? Which are the relationships between labels and theory? By concentrating on these features, it will be able to answer these questions.

Arguably, the Arab Spring database that has been created has by now achieved a comprehensive inventory of the field in terms of publications, especially with regards to journal articles. At the time of writing, putting a cap on August 15, 2012, we gathered 67 Arab Spring-related journal articles². Of these, opinion articles, reviews³ and those without free access are left out⁴. Therefore, in this contribution, we chose to focus on

² After the date of the analysis I have gathered other articles which will be analyzed to update the dataset for future research (N=13): Bresheeth, H. (2012). The Arab Spring: A View from Israel. *Middle East Journal of Culture & Communication*, 5(1), 42-57; Eiran, E. (2012). The Arab Spring: Opportunities. *Palestine-Israel journal of politics, economics and culture*, 18(1); García, R. O. (2012). Mohamed VI: Política y cambio social en Marruecos. *Las claves del proceso de transformación que se opera en el país vecino. Mediterranean Politics*, 17(2), 253-255; Hall, E. (2012). Year after Arab Spring, digital, social media shape region's rebirth. *Advertising Age*, 83(24), 10-10; Haugbølle, R. H. (2012). Ben Ali's 'New Tunisia' (1987–2009). A Case Study of Authoritarian Modernization in the Arab World. *Mediterranean Politics*, 17(2), 249-251; Kandil, H. (2012). Why did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?. *Mediterranean Politics*, 17(2), 197-215; Khiabany, G. (2012). Arab Revolutions and the Iranian Uprising: Similarities and Differences. *Middle East Journal of Culture & Communication*, 5(1), 58-65; Khoury, H. (2012). The Arab Re-Awakening and the Hopes for a Palestinian State. *Palestine-Israel journal of politics, economics and culture*, 18(1); Sabry, T. (2012). On Historicism, the Aporia of Time and the Arab Revolutions. *Middle East Journal of Culture & Communication*, 5(1), 80-85; Scott, M. (2012). Al-Qaeda to Arab Spring: Islamist Terrorism and Democracy. *72(2)*, 314-316; Singerman, D. (2011). Liberation Meets the State. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43(03), 388-389; Yonah, Y. (2012). People are urging us not to give up. So we are not giving up! *Palestine-Israel journal of politics, economics and culture*, 18(1); York, J. C. (2011). The Revolutionary Force of Facebook and Twitter. *Nieman Reports*, 65(3), 49-50.

³ See: Davis, J. E. (2011). The roots of the Arab spring: a bibliographic review. *Hedgehog review*, 13(3), 55-63; Murphy, E. (2012). Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb. *Mediterranean Politics*, 17(2), 251-253.

⁴ No free access journals (N=15): Al-Najjar, B. S. (2008). Civil society in the Arab world: a reality that needs reforming. *Contemporary Arab affairs*, 1(1), 43-54; Hanafi, S. (2012). The Arab revolutions; the emergence of a new political subjectivity. *Contemporary Arab affairs*, 5(2), 198-213; Naser-Najjab, N. (2012). Palestinian youth and the Arab Spring. *Learning to think critically: a case study*. Ajami, F. (2012). The Arab Spring at One: A Year of Living Dangerously. *Foreign Affairs*, 91(2), 56-65; Anderson, L. (2011). Demystifying the Arab Spring. *Foreign Affairs*, 3; Doran, M. S. (2011). Arab Spring, Persian Winter: Will Iran Emerge the Winner from the Arab Revolt? *Doran Replies. Foreign Affairs*, 90(4), 187-188; Gause, F. G., III. (2011). Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(4), 81-90. *Contemporary Arab affairs*, 5(2), 279-291; Sunitan, M. I., Al-Sadoun, J. K., & Fakhro, A. M. (2011). Views from the Arab Gulf on the ‘Arab Spring’ and its repercussions. *Contemporary Arab affairs*, 4(4), 501-523; Greene, R. W., & Kuswa, K. D. (2012). “From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow”: Regional Accents and the Rhetorical Cartography of Power. *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 42(3), 271-288; Dixon, M. (2011). An Arab Spring. *Review of African Political Economy*, 38(128), 309-316; Goldman, L. (2011). Silence Across the Sinai. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 50(2), 10-11; Künkler, M. (2012). Religion-State Relations and Democracy in Egypt and Tunisia: Models from the Democratizing Muslim World – and their Limits. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 18(1), 114-119; Naser-Najjab, N. (2012). Palestinian youth and the Arab Spring. *Learning to think critically: a case study. Contemporary Arab affairs*, 5(2), 279-291; Sunitan, M.

these 67 full-size articles published since 2011 onwards that are available in full text format for coding and verification purposes, quite a number to start a first review about what is happening on the ground according to scholars view.

All of those 67 articles are English-language. In the next sections, this corpus of articles is systematically surveyed with regard to some of the core features outlined above.

I. Mapping the Arab Spring

1. Which labels/terms or concepts?

Over the whole period and of all publications, the most frequently used label by scholars is “Arab Spring”. This amounts to 42 of 67 publications, as compared to 38 for “Revolution”, and 34 for “Uprising”. For the counting families of similar labels were created⁵, for instance: “Arab Uprising” and “Uprising” were counted as one and the same term, as well as “Arab Revolution” and “Revolution” which were considered as “Revolution”. Both “uprising” and “Revolution” define what the phenomenon is; “Arab” is being considered as the context, referring to the region in which the phenomenon is happening.

Labels such as “Arab spirit”, “Barricades”, “Wave of political contention”, “Arab demonstration”, “Nonviolent resistance”, “Struggle for Democracy” and “Democratic wave” remain rather marginal at this stage (1 case, 0.6%).

Figure 1: Label type, cases and percentages indicates, on the whole, the overall number and percentages of the terms related to Arab Spring (including this one) in publications of journal articles since 2011.

I., Al-Sadoun, J. K., & Fakhro, A. M. (2011). Views from the Arab Gulf on the ‘Arab Spring’ and its repercussions. *Contemporary Arab affairs*, 4(4), 501-523.

⁵ CODES: AS: Arab Spring; R:Revolution; UP:Uprising; P:Protest; Mv:Movements; Ds: Demonstrations; AR: Revolts A: Awakening; H:Upheavals; CA: Collective action; DE: Democratization.

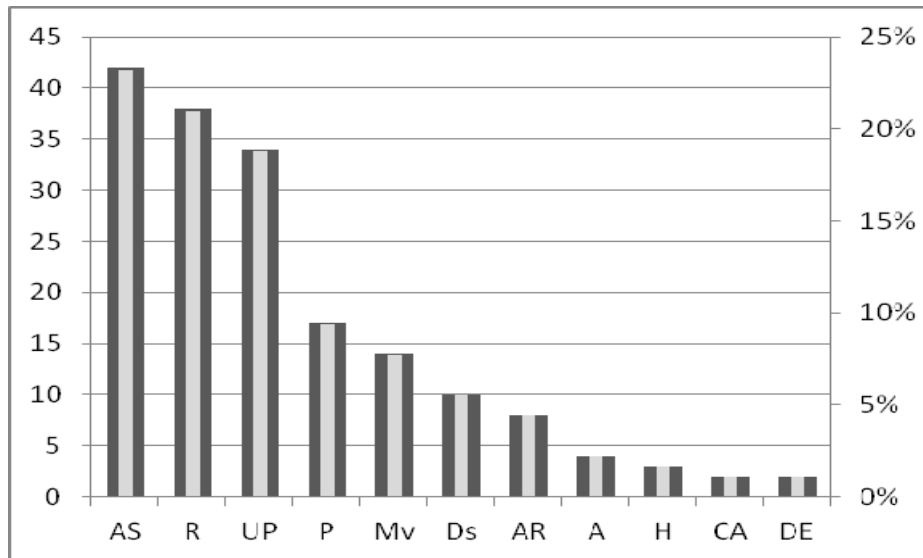


Figure 1: Label type, cases and percentages

CODES: AS: Arab Spring R: Revolution UP: Uprising P: Protest Mv: Movements Ds: Demonstrations AR: Revolts A: Awakening H: Upheavals CA: Collective action DE: Democratization

Source: Own elaboration

2. Which theory?

Over the whole period, the three core theories applied by scholars to the Arab Spring studies are, respectively, Revolution (12 cases, 7.1%), Authoritarianism (11 cases, 6.5%) and Democratization (7 cases, 4.1%). Other theories and approaches applied are Social Media (6 cases, 3.5%) and Social Movements (6 cases, 3.5 %).

Figure 2: Relationship between theories and cases indicates the nine main theories applied to the study of the “Arab Spring”. Beyond the three main theories mentioned above, we found: Transition to Democracy (5 cases, 2.9%); Collective action (4 cases, 2.4%), Social Networks (4 cases, 2.4%) and Democracy (3 cases, 1.8%).

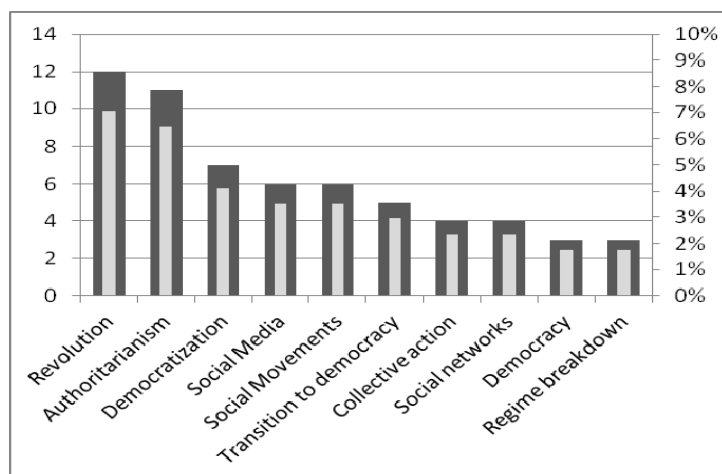


Figure 2: Relationship between theories and cases (Source: Own elaboration)

3. Clarify or explain?

Over the whole period, the main goal of the scholars is to explain the phenomenon of the Arab Spring. This means that scholars have focused on factors/conditions which contribute to the Arab Spring rather than clarifying what the phenomenon is. One reason can be that the phenomenon is currently happening and that any change can occur. Other reason is the lack of predictability of the Arab Spring (Goodwin 2011, p. 452), which has led scholars to wonder why it was not possible to predict the uprisings and the overthrow of political leaders/regimes.

Table 1: The main research objectives indicate that from 67 articles, 56 have the goal of explaining what is happening on the ground. Furthermore, the table shows an increase in the number of articles with this goal, being 25 in 2011 and 31 in 2012.

Objectives	2011	2012	Total
Clarifying	15	14	29
Explaining	25	31	56
Total	40	45	

Table 1: Main research objectives (Source: Own elaboration)

4. Which level of analysis?

Over the whole period, the main level of analysis of the Arab Spring phenomenon is the regional one (41 cases). One reason is that scholars are focusing on the Arab Spring as a wave of changes. Another reason is the simultaneity of such waves and the “cascade effect” or cross-systems diffusion since the Tunisian case. The rest of the articles address in-depth singles case studies.

As Figure 3 (level of analysis) shows, Egypt is one of the most studied single cases in the journal articles (20 cases), followed by Tunisia (9 cases), Syria (4 cases), Libya (3 cases), Jordan (2 cases), Morocco (1 case), Yemen (1 case) and Palestine (1 case).

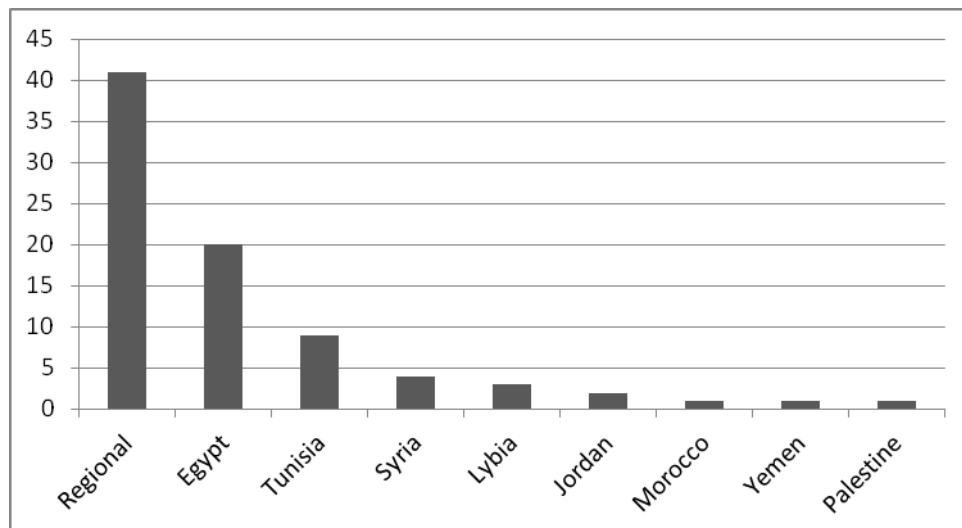


Figure 3: Level of analysis (Source: Own elaboration)

Undoubtedly, Egypt is one of the cases that has most attracted the attention of the scholars. One reason can be the chronological way in which the facts unfolded. After Tunisia, protests in Egypt began on 25 January 2011 and ran for 18 days. After an attempt to eliminate the nation's internet access by the government (Dainotti et al. 2011), tens of thousands individuals protested on the streets of Egypt's major cities. After 18 days, and around 30 years in power, President Hosni Mubarak (r. 1981-2011) dismissed his government, without the support of the military, later appointing a new cabinet. A second reason is the current political situation of the country: the new president Mohamed Mursi has been elected in free elections (June 24, 2012) assuming power since June 30th. A third reason can be the position of Egypt in the Arab world and the "ripple effect it has on other actors in the region, both in terms of governmental policy and civil society movements" (Tadros 2012, p.1). In the same way, Egypt has a geostrategic significance for Western and Arab actors. These actors have tended to "invest large funds in a bid to influence internal political configurations and public policies" (Tadros 2012, p.1).

5. *Labels-theory relationship*

So far I have dealt with the frequencies of the terms/concepts and theories used by scholars. But what about the relationship between terms/concept and theory? Focus on concepts is "to think about the nature of the phenomenon being conceptualized" (Goertz 2005, p. 16), and to focus on theories is to think about the concepts and the relationship among them within different structures and visions: ontological (non-causal constituents parts of a phenomenon) and causal (cause-and-effect relationship) (Goertz 2005).

To think of the relationship between term/concept and theories allows to explore how the scholars study the so-called 'Arab Spring' and whether they are focused to clarify or explain the phenomenon.

Figure 4: Combination Theory-Term/Concept shows, the most frequents combinations of them which are: “R (Revolution) – Authoritarianism [9 cases]”, “AS (Arab Spring) – Revolution [7 cases] and UP (Uprising) – Revolution [7 cases].

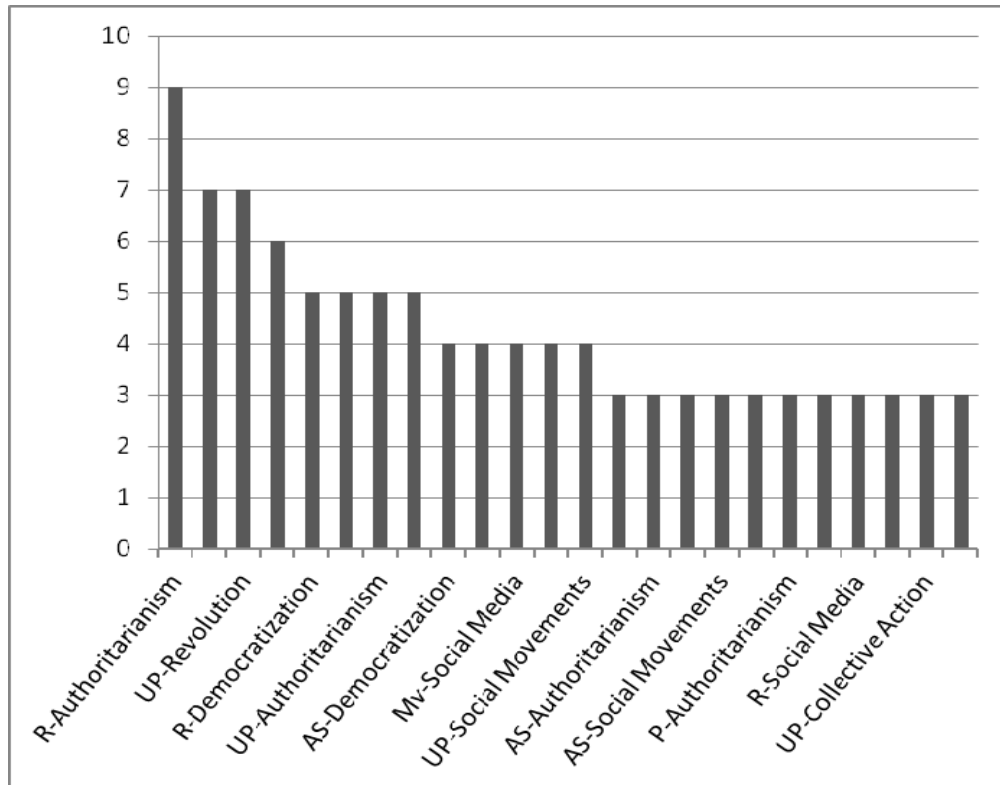


Figure 4: Combination Theory-Term/Concept

CODES: AS: Arab Spring R: Revolution UP: Uprising P: Protest Mv: Movements Ds: Demonstrations AR: Revolts A: Awakening H: Upheavals CA: Collective action DE: Democratization

Source: Own elaboration

6. Why these combinations?

Combination: “R (Revolution) – Authoritarianism”. Under this combination, the Arab Spring is understood as a Revolution, being the revolution a concept defined as a continuum, a process that evolves since the uprising and bottom-up struggle toward the overthrow of political leaders, change of political regimes, free elections, etc. The authoritarianism as an approach and theory may explains the context in which a revolution arose in order to understand the phenomenon and to predict the different outcomes of such revolutions.

Combination: “AS (Arab Spring) – Revolution”. Under this combination, the Arab Spring is understood as a rupture of the status quo, the units of analysis may be both the visible forms of collective action and the outcome(s) thereof. According to the scholars’ points of view, Revolution is the theory best suited to explain the causes of mass

mobilization, the consequences thereof as well as the causes of the regime collapse and its different outcomes.

Finally, the combination: “UP (Uprising) – Revolution” reflects the cases in which the scholars privileged “protest” as the main unit of analysis. Either as dependent or independent variable, scholars may explain the uprising by using Revolution theory to look both at the causes and the consequences.

7. *Comparison with Iran*

Over the whole period, there has been an attempt at comparing the Arab Spring with the 1979 Iranian Revolution. From the 67 articles, just a few publications (6) have compared with the Iranian case.

Although Amanat (2012) intends to explore a parallel between the Iranian Revolution and Arab Spring, referring to the first as the “winter of discontent” after the revolutionary optimism of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, he states the need to avoid generalizations about all Arab countries since they are not one monolithic unit. Kashani-Sabet (2012) analyses the Iranian Revolution after revolutionary episodes by focusing on the consequences of the new regime of Ayatollah Khomeini for the role and rights of women. She sees the future of MENA countries as uncertain, and although is not possible to generalize to all countries of the region, she states that it is important to take in account this matter. Keddie (2012) reflects on the thirty-two years from 1979 to 2011 in Iranian politics. It is mentioned that the mass movements in Iran and several Arab countries that have overthrown or threatened rulers had not been predicted and that there are some influence among these movements. Keshavarzian (2012) reflects on the unfinished revolution in Iran and the case of Revolution in Egypt, as well as of the consequences of revolutions and regional context in the women's rights, freedom of speech, and independent civil associations. Kurzman (2012) tries to make a parallel between the Arab Spring and the two main Iranian uprisings: the Green Movement of 2009, which challenged the pillars of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which brought the Islamic Republic to power. Finally, Nabavi (2012) reflects about the trajectories available to the Arab countries; will they follow the same trajectory as Iran did in 1979 or not?

II. According to scholars: What is happening on the ground and why?

1. *Is it spring, uprising or revolution?*

Many scholars are aware of the issues of applying the term ‘Arab Spring’ to the current phenomenon occurring in MENA countries (Abu-Zayyad 2012; Pace 2012). Some scholars as Tadros (2012) criticize the label of ‘Arab Spring’ stating that the current

developments in the region are not an ‘Arab Spring’ (Tadros 2012, p. 1). She argues that the label refers to the short-lived phase in which Arab leaders were opening political spaces for activism. In a controlled manner though (Tadros 2012, p.1). Therefore, in her vision, ‘Arab Spring’ is not suitable to refer and describe the phenomenon in MENA, mainly since it confuses the act of people, “the power of people’s agency in topping corrupt rulers”, with the outcome (Tadros 2012, p.1).

Arab Spring is not a scientific concept, it is a label to describe the series of uprisings and social protests which have rocked the MENA countries since 2010 onwards (Wardrop 2011). Many scholars consider the Arab Spring as a process of political and social change, which had the contribution of civil society demanding rights, freedom, political change and whose development and outcomes depend on the relationship between state and society. Therefore, the Arab Spring means a process of rupture with the status quo from bottom-up, which can lead to a revolution or not –revolution being understood here as the transformation of the political and social structures. Thus, Arab Spring embraces the “uprisings”, the popular developments and the revolutionary episodes, because it reflects a political and social context of the MENA countries within which it was possible to be engaged in collective action and protest.

With respect to the term “Uprising”, some scholars like Lynch, (2012) state that they “are an exceptionally rapid, intense, and nearly simultaneous explosion of popular protests across an Arab world united by shared transnational media and bound by a common identity” (Lynch 2012, p. 9). It seems that “uprising” refers to a wave of popular protests on a regional level, affected by common media and identities which possibly have an impact on its development and success. Lynch sees the uprising as the cause of a possible democratization process and the end of dictatorships. Therefore, the concept is being observed in its role, as a cause and not as outcome (effect).

Many scholars use the concept “uprising”, “upheavals”, “revolts” and “riots” as the same thing. However, what seems to be clear is that many scholars are focusing their attention to the popular protests and demonstrations in the streets, as unity of analysis. Finally, the concept of “Revolution” is being amply applied by scholars to the Arab Spring context. In fact, revolution is being understood as the overthrow of authoritarian political leaders/regimes as consequences of efforts to transform the political institutions and the justifications of political authority in society, accompanied by mass mobilization and formal or informal non institutionalized actions to undermine existing authorities (Goldstone 2001, p.142). Thus, the success of the emergence of a revolution is the achievement of such efforts by groups of society to transform the social foundations of political power (Kimmel 1990; Podeh 2012).

Tunisia



Zohra Bensemra/ REUTERS

Tunis January 14, 2011, "Protesters demonstrate against Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali".

Available at: http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2011/01/an_uprising_in_tunisia.html

How to evaluate what is happening on the ground in the light of scholar view? To answer this question is essential to take in account two core matters: (1) The phenomenon to be explained/studied (unit of analysis); (2) The research questions. Whether a scholar focuses on the study of the protest at individual level, the research questions can be focused on the protestor's motivations to act. Thus, on the basis of two core issues, the analysis of the scholars view will contribute to provide an answer about what is happening on the ground to motivate "protest" in a given area/country; to motivate the uprisings in different countries and to cause the overthrow of political leaders/regimes, etc.

Egypt



Mohammed Abed/ AFP/Getty images

Cairo, January 25, 2011. “Thousands of young Egyptians gathered in downtown Cairo on Police Day - a holiday normally dedicated to officers who had died fighting the British in a 1952 skirmish- to demand the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled the country virtually uncontested for almost thirty years.”

Available at

<http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2044357,00.html#ixzz2N3rr33Cl>

Libya



AP

Libya, 2011 Available at <http://untimes.org/details/220>

Yemen



REUTERS/Khaled Abdullah

Yemen, Sanaa December 27, 2011. “Anti-government protesters shout slogans during a rally to demand that Yemen's outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh be tried”. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/news/pictures/slideshow?articleId=USRTR2M9JP#a=11>

2. *Where do we go from here? A brief comment about the “unruly politics lens”*

After mapping the results, a question that arises is where do we go from here? What other theories or new approaches are being developed to apply to the study of the phenomenon of interest? A new concept is being developed by the Institute of Development Studies IDS, University of Sussex, which is called “unruly politics” (Shankland et al. 2011). This concept is being proposed as an option or alternative lens to the study of current events in the MENA region. The concept focuses on the understanding of the agency relationship and the spaces in which people are mobilized to achieve their demands. Instead of trying to be a new paradigm or a new theory, “unruly politics” is being applied as a new lens, an approach that “typifies a different political inquiry that shifts the site of analysis from dynamics, mechanisms and trajectories of contestation” (Tadros 2011).

In fact, whatever the causes of the mass mobilizations in the Arab world and the globe at large, “unruly politics” focus on the fact that these demonstrations “are rupturing the status quo”⁶. Thus “unruly politics” allows to explain what is being witnessed around the globe, namely that: “the masses [are] engaging through spaces outside state and civil society and through a different form of agency”⁷. Furthermore, from the point of view of agency, the people who have risen up in the MENA countries and in the world “come from across all classes, including a bulk from the middle class driven by incensed indignation that the absolute minimum conditions for securing economic and political justice are being violated. Yet what brings them together as a crowd is far more diffuse than being bound together by the ideas or causes of a social movement. The leadership is far looser and more scattered than in previously-studied social movements”⁸.

Beyond cross-class coalitions challenging the status quo, the spatial dimensions of the mass mobilizations both in the MENA countries and the world are changing. They are no longer conventional platforms through which politics is exercised; rather they are spaces in which people are engaged politically “because political and civil societies no longer provide the means to express citizens’ voices”⁹. Therefore individuals engaged in unruly politics will be “continuously seeking to find alternative spaces on the margins that provide opportunities for contestation” (Tadros 2012, p. 6; Rabbat 2012).

Thus, “unruly politics” is a developing concept that focuses on the dark matter of citizenship, governance and participation, which is impossible to see but which makes the whole system work (Tadros 2012, p.4).

⁶ Ibidem

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ Ibidem

⁹ Ibidem

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to provide a first comprehensive mapping of the Arab Spring-related publications in journal articles, from the very first application in 2011 until August 15 2012. Some clear results are emerging: (a) the main three terms/concepts applied are “Arab Spring”, “Revolution” and “Uprising”; (b) the most frequently theory applied is “Revolution”; (c) the predominant goal of the Arab Spring studies is to explain the phenomena rather than clarifying; (d) a few numbers of articles (6) compare the Arab Spring to the 1979 Iranian case; (e) macro-regional level of analysis is predominant in the journal articles, followed by single case studies about Egypt, far ahead of Tunisia in quantity (41 cases vs. 9 cases respectively); (f) the combination of term/concept-theory is crucial to understand the aim of researchers in what to explain and clarify is concerned. As it was noted, the “Theory of Authoritarianism” is linked to the “Revolution” concept. It remains that revolutions occur in authoritarian context and not in democracies; therefore the aim is to explain why the phenomena occurs. The term “Arab Spring” is linked to “Revolution theory” and the term of “Uprising” is linked to “Revolution theory” in an attempt at explaining the phenomenon.

It seems that to answer the question about what is happening on the ground in the light of scholars view, depends on the strategy of research: the phenomenon to be explained/unit of analysis and the research questions. Therefore, the Arab Spring embraces a diversity of phenomena to be studied. Depending on what types of events or subtypes are taken in account as dependent variable, it will be possible to answer this big question.

Finally, since it was not possible to predict the Arab Spring events, scholars must think of new lenses, of new approaches and they need to revise existing theories. So far, it seems that “unruly politics” (Shankland et al 2011) is being developed as a whole new lens, not only to explain Arab contexts but also uprisings, mass mobilizations and demands for change elsewhere in the world.

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