

Between change and resistance: Analysis of the islamist parties coverage by the egyptian and moroccan media before and after the arab spring

Valentina Saini

*Investigadora del Laboratori de Prospectiva i Recerca en
Comunicació, Cultura i Cooperació de la UAB (LAPREC)*

Introduction

We need to begin this paper by providing some explanations about the wider work context it belongs to. After that we will proceed by briefly discussing the theoretical framework on which this wider work is based starting with Islamism. Indeed, it may be argued that it is not possible to determine the press treatment of Islamism without first getting to know that phenomenon. We will then continue by focusing on the media and especially on their participation in the daily construction of social reality. Then the focus will be placed on some aspects of the media practice that

actually construct the daily social reality such as the agenda setting, the interpretation of events and the treatment of issues. After a brief introduction to the analysed Egyptian and Moroccan newspapers as well as to our methodology, we will finally explain the results of our analysis along with our conclusions.

It shall be highlighted that this communication is part of a work in progress, so it will not be possible for us to analyse our whole sample, which is made of 707 units. For this reason, we decided to analyse only 20% of the sample collected in each newspaper.

This communication is part of my PhD thesis work entitled: *Social construction of the Euromediterranean space. European policies and treatment of Islamism in the region's press before and after the Arab Spring*. The thesis is directed by Dr. Teresa Velázquez, Professor of the Communication Science and Journalism Department of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It is also the continuation of my mid-term thesis disserted in September 2011 entitled: *Social construction of the Euromediterranean space. European policies and treatment of Islamism in the information of the press*⁶.

⁶ The results obtained through this research correspond to the research project: "Social construction of the Euro Mediterranean space in the media. Information in press and television" (CSO2009-01579SOCL). The research is financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2009 – 2011). Researchers of the project (in alphabetic order): Hassan Abbas, María Luz Barbeito, Tayeb Boutbouqalt, Carmina Crusafon, Olga Del Río, Natalia Fernández Díaz, Abdelouhad Elimrani, Elisabet García Altadill, Juan Antonio García Galindo, Francisco Martínez, Lucía Molina, Nieves Ortega, Elisabeth Peña, José María Perceval, José Manuel Pérez Tornero, Fernando Sabés, Susana Tovías, Sahar Taalat, Teresa Velázquez (main researcher). Scholarship holder participating in the project: Ricardo Carniel. PHD students participating in the project: Cristina Marques and Valentina Saini.

The thesis aims at analysing and comparing the treatment of Islamist groups in the European and Arab press spotting differences and similarities, and especially focusing on the participation of the media in the construction of the reality around this specific matter. This subject acquires particular significance considering the Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean policies to build a Mediterranean area of peace, stability and prosperity as well as to foster intercultural understanding between the “Muslim World” and the “West”. While the mid-term thesis only analysed samples collected in newspapers that were published long before the so called Arab Spring (all of it was part of dailies published in 2009) the thesis analyses information and opinions published both before and after the Arab Spring. We thought that it would be especially interesting to analyse such a sample as it offers the opportunity to spot possible differences between the treatment of Islamism before and after the unprecedented events of the Arab awakening. As for this particular communication, we will focus on part of the above mentioned thesis and specifically on how the Egyptian and Moroccan press treat the phenomenon of Islamism and Islamist groups and parties.

Theoretical framework

Islamism

We decided to analyse how the media treat Islamism because it is indeed one of the widest and most

important phenomenon in the Arab countries. We can find its origins in Al Afghani (1839 – 1897) and see its diverse and heterogeneous evolution in groups and parties as diverse as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party and the Palestinian Hamas. According to Al Afghani, if the Muslims wished to recover their strength in order to counter and win the colonial powers, they had to find their unity under the flag of Islam again, reforming it as a social and political system. This is the basis of the Salafi current, also called pan-Islamic, which interprets Islam not only as a religion but also as a civilization.

The French Arabist François Burgat⁷ identifies three phases in the evolution of Islamism. The first one is set in the Nineteenth century, when the phenomenon emerged under and as a reaction to the presence of the colonialist powers in the Arab regions. The second one is in the context of the newly independent Arab states; and finally the third one is set in the Nineties after the fall of the Berlin wall. According to Burgat, while during the second phase the attention of the Islamists was focused on the Arab domestic regimes, which harassed and contained them, the third phase determines the creation of international violent groups (of which Al Qaida would be the main example) whose enemy is the “crusaders and Zionist” alliance while national Islamist movements

⁷ BURGAT, F. (2006) *El islamismo en tiempos de al-Qaida*. Edicions Bellaterra, S.L., Barcelona.

and groups still face important restrictions to their political participation in most Arab countries.

More generally, we can argue that at its origins Islamism tried to find in Islam the solutions to economic, social and political problems affecting the Arab countries as well as a common code and basis for social and political regulation for all Muslim peoples. According to Martín Muñoz⁸ the term Islamism represents a “neologism that points out the existence of a Muslim reformist movement that includes not only a socio-cultural project but also a political one”. Despite the high degree of diversity and heterogeneity of the Islamist phenomenon, one of the factors was that all of its movements and groups suffered, in one moment or the other and in different degrees, from the harassment and repression of the regimes that attained to power after the rise of the independent Arab nations.

As we explained briefly and in more general terms, Islamism has quite a long history. The first structured and organized movement belonging to this ideological current was founded by the Egyptian Hassan Al Banna in 1928 under the name of Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al Muslimin*). Besides Islamism, Bayat identifies a more recent phenomenon which he calls post-Islamism. According to him:

⁸ MARTÍN MUÑOZ, G. (1999) *El Estado árabe: crisis de legitimidad y contestación islamista*. Barcelona, Bellaterra cop., 291

“Islamists become aware of their system’s anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to normalize and institutionalize their rule. [...] Not only a condition, post-Islamism is also a project, [...] it represents an endeavour to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty”⁹.

Despite all the difficulties that Islamist groups and movements had to face both from the outside and from within, their presence as important social groups is unquestionable and it was made patent soon after the Arab Spring. Without being promoters and despite their low-profile participation in the marches, rallies and manifestations that led to the unprecedented consequences we all know, the Arab Islamists have come to power both in Morocco and in Egypt for the first time in their whole history. The leader of the Moroccan Justice and Development party, Benkiran, is the first Islamist Prime Minister in the country’s history; as for Egypt, the country is experiencing its first free presidential elections and one of the two best-performing candidates is Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood’s presidential candidate. Before that, the parliamentary elections resulted in an Egyptian parliament mostly made up of the Brotherhood and the Salafists. A new, important phase has begun for Islamists in different Arab states: they are getting the political role that for decades they have been struggling for and they are therefore receiving important responsibilities in

⁹ BAYAT, A. (2007) *Making Islam democratic. Social movements and the post-Islamism turn*. Stanford, University Press, 11

front of those countries' population. They are currently taking an important challenge; it is their chance to succeed or to fail in actually connecting with the needs and hopes of the people by facing concrete issues that have their voters concern, though under an Islamist reference, without focusing on purely formal religious problems which would certainly cause quite worse results for them in the next elections. The divisions of the society of these two countries pose a complex challenge to the newly elected political elite. Undoubtedly, most young Egyptian revolutionaries feel at least puzzled by the fact that the second round of the country's presidential elections is going to be between the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi and the former regime's member and exponent Ahmad Shafiq, while both Khaled Ali and Hamdeen Sabbahi, considered to be the preferences for most revolutionaries, performed rather poorly.

In such a fragmented and to a certain extent unstable and uncertain political situation in both countries, it is particularly important to see how the media are acting. Whether they are being mostly neutral or more or less overtly campaigning in favour of some and in detriment of others, whether they are contributing to a successful transition and to social justice and peace despite societal divisions. Are the media in these two countries acting as a guarantor and promoter of interaction of the different sectors of society and public sphere? And what differences, if any, can we find in the media treatment of

Islamism and Islamist groups after the Arab Spring compared to their treatment before it?

Media and social reality construction

From the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann (1966) built the bases to understand that media are fundamental institutions in the process they call social construction of reality. The correspondent theory separates the reality defined as the one that is independent from our will, from social reality, which is the one that is constructed, perceived, interpreted and re-constructed by human beings. In this sense, referring to the second type of reality (which they also call reality of daily life) Berger and Luckmann¹⁰ affirm that it is socially constructed. Tuchman, who defines the media as the window through which we see what happens in the world, also explains that,

“[...] the news media play an important role in the news consumers’ setting of a political agenda. Those topics given the most coverage by the news media are likely to be the topics audiences identify as the most pressing issues of the day”.¹¹

In Communication Studies much work and analyses have been focused on how the media contribute to the social construction of reality and also on the effects and influence they can have on people, on the audience.

¹⁰ BERGER, P.L. and LUCKMANN, T. (1966) *The social construction of reality*. London, Latimer Trend & Co.Ltd

¹¹ TUCHMAN, G. (1978) *Making news. A study in the construction of reality*. New York, The Free Press, 2

Some intrinsic processes of the production of the media discourse have been identified as important factors in this process of reality construction. Among them the most important have been found to be the following:

- a) agenda setting
- b) framing
- c) interpretation
- d) treatment

Agenda setting and framing

The daily content of the mass media is the result of an institutionalised process, proper of each media organization, that consists in selecting, excluding and classifying news depending on their relevance. This means that the media are not a mirror of the total reality around us; instead they select some events and offer them to the audience according to a number of criteria. Through this system of daily functioning, the media is an essential actor of social construction of reality. As well explained by Mar De Fontcuberta¹² the agenda setting reflects the evaluation of daily events made by the media and also their intention to transmit this (and not a different) order of importance to the audience so that people consuming that particular media perceive and assume that order of importance. Without forgetting the relevance of everyone's perception of the media messages, it is true that we, as the audience,

¹² DE FONTCUBERTA, M. (1993) *La noticia. Pistas para percibir el mundo*. Barcelona, Paidós Ibérica S.A.

unconsciously perceive the framing that each media operates on daily reality. This determines that some news are assigned more importance than other, while a number of events is simply excluded by mainstream media every day for reasons which can vary. Some media can exclude certain types of events from their agenda because of their editorial policy or their political orientation or there can be events that according to the well-established criteria that determine whether an event can become news, simply do not get to be included in the agenda of the mainstream media.

Marini¹³ also highlights the fact that the more information is given on one subject, the more important the society is going to consider that subject to be. Yet, the consequence of the agenda setting process is not limited to what finally appears on the first page of a daily. According to Marletti¹⁴ the agenda setting most importantly consists in preparing the cognitive framework and the interpretative categories for the audience to assess news. Media have already been proved unable to actually determine how the audience should think *about* the news they present, yet they certainly play a key role in influencing *what* the audience thinks *about* that, which issues dominate the public debate and the daily life of society.

¹³ MARINI, R. (2006) *Mass media e discussione pubblica*. Roma-Bari, Giust. Laterza & Figli

¹⁴ MARLETTI, C. (1985) *Prima e dopo. Tematizzazione e comunicazione politica*. Torino, RAI Radio Televisione Italiana

The framing process is also essential for the social construction of reality, as it consists in an in-depth treatment of a subject or event which normally catches and receives longer attention than other news by the media. This implies that such events are implicitly considered to be much more important than others for the media which will also determine that major public attention is focused on certain news, making other events appear less relevant or even disappear. Of course, such a prolonged and in-depth treatment of certain events also contributes to shape a specific vision of those events in the collective long-term memory of the members of a society¹⁵. News framing becomes even more relevant when we consider that the influence of media is usually stronger in moments of crisis or breach with usual schemes. Events such as September 11th have undoubtedly been framed and it is possible that the framing made of that event by some Western media contributed to the creation of a collective symbolic imagery of “Islamist terrorism” in which Islamist groups and parties that never used violence or stopped using it decades ago were also included. This kind of framing that finally became the interpretative routine of those media is possibly the cause of the fact that most information about Islamist groups in the European media is related to terrorism¹⁶. When an event is framed

¹⁵ VELÁZQUEZ GARCÍA-TALAVERA, T. (1992) *Los políticos y la televisión: aportaciones de la teoría del discurso al diálogo televisivo*. Barcelona, Ariel

¹⁶ SAINI, V. (2011) *La construcción social del espacio Euromediterráneo. Políticas europeas y tratamiento del islamismo en la información del medio prensa*. Mid-

by the media it usually becomes a subject of public debate and this debate inevitably carries within itself different ideological interpretations and considerations that do not only shape the way in which the audience interprets the debate at that particular moment, but that will also enter the collective memory of the related subjects. It is in these particular moments that the treatment of the media becomes particularly important as it can promote diversity and dialogue among various sectors of society or, instead, it can promote prejudices and stereotypes that finally contribute to the polarization of those various sectors of society. So it is also particularly relevant in periods of transition from an authoritarian rule to a democratic system.

Interpretation and treatment

Of course, after the media select the news and establish their agenda we have also to focus on another aspect of their routine that is crucial in their contribution to the social construction of reality, that is the interpretation they do of the news, how they choose to tell the news, with which formal aspects and, more importantly, through which language. The processes through which media interpret reality are not actually different from those that every person experiences in their interpretation of everything that happens around. Still what differs is the range of its consequences, in fact

despite the overcoming of the transmission model and the need to consider the obvious and important role of the receivers of each message in its construction and interpretation this obviously contributes to the symbolic construction of social reality. As Diezhandino¹⁷ states, journalists are not simple intermediaries between what happens and the audience, but they are observers, classifiers and interpreters of the reality. That is why the media are interpretations of reality, not its simple reflection. This is not only because of the above mentioned processes of agenda setting and framing but also because of the language used, which is also interpretation and not the mirror of what we perceive. The same thing can be explained by using different words and, most of the times, choosing one fact or another depends on the interpretation we want to transmit to the others in order to persuade them of what we are saying. According to Fowler¹⁸, differences in expression always imply ideologies and consequently also different interpretations. This is where we find the important issue of “bias”. It has already been accepted by journalism professionals and also by scholars that total “objectivity” is impossible not only because every person working in the news interprets what happens according to their symbolic and perceptive categories, but also because of the very productive routines of the

¹⁷ DIEZHANDINO NIETO, M.P. (1994) *El quehacer informativo*. Bilbao, Servicio Editorial Universidad del País Vasco

¹⁸ FOWLER R. (1991) *Language in the news. Discourse and ideology in the press*. London, Routledge

news media machine. The only operation of selecting what events deserve to be turned into news is a first-degree interpretation.

The phases of agenda setting, framing, interpretation and treatment are the most important ones in the productive routines of the media for the phenomenon of social construction of reality. We can actually relate the process of treatment to the origins of Berger and Luckmann's institutionalization concept. According to them,

“All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, ipso facto, is apprehended by its performer as that pattern. [...] Habitualized actions, of course, retain their meaningful character for the individual although the meanings involved become embedded as routines in his general stock of knowledge, taken for granted by him and at hand for his projects into the future. [...] These processes of habitualization precede any institutionalization [...].”¹⁹

The passage from the selection to the treatment of news is essential in the construction of reality by the media. As Giacomarra²⁰ explains, during this phase, news pass from being an event to a narration; therefore they pass from a reality made of concrete things and actions to another one made of words. When we study the

¹⁹ BERGER, P.L. and LUCKMANN, T. (1966) *The social construction of reality*. London, Latimer Trend & Co.Ltd, 71

²⁰ GIACOMARRA, M. (1997) *Manipolare per comunicare. Lingua, mass media e costruzione di realtà*. Palermo-Firenze, Palumbo Editore

treatment in news media of a certain subject or event we need to take into account more than the words chosen for the narration of news and we also have to focus on the page that the newspaper chooses for them, whether they are accompanied by pictures or not (and the message carried by those pictures), and the other news that appear in the same page, as well as possible opinions and/or analyses related to that subject. Eventually, it is in the treatment of one specific subject or event that we need to look for the discourse produced by the media on it, as well as for the symbolic and interpretative categories it carries and its embedded meanings.

The press in Egypt and Morocco

When referring to the mass media in the Arab countries we observe that, in general, they have always been closely linked to politics. The regimes of Arab recently-founded independent nations soon realised how important media are in shaping public opinion and how fundamental it was to have some degree of influence and control on them, especially at “critical” times. The period that immediately followed the independence of many Arab countries was characterized by the natural instability that affects any national political system in a period of transition (such as the scenario that Egypt and, to a different extent, Morocco are going through). Furthermore, that particular moment was also affected by the confrontation between Arab nations and the

newly-founded state of Israel. So the Arab regimes justified their influence on the mass media as a necessary measure to ensure that people would support governmental policies in such a critical and tricky context.

William Rugh²¹ identifies four categories in which he classifies Arab media: mobilization media, loyalist media, diverse media and transition media. According to his analysis, Morocco belongs to the third one while Egypt to the fourth one. After Morocco reached its independence the state opted for promoting a pluripartidist system in order to avoid the emergence of a hegemonic political force. In this respect, this pluripartidism option is reflected in the high number of newspapers and magazines offered to the audience in Morocco. Most newspapers and magazines are private-owned and they offer quite diverse political tendencies, editorial policies and styles. Yet, according to Mohsen Finan²² the high number of publications of the Moroccan media scene does not necessarily prove the existence of a real pluripartidism or freedom of expression. She actually identifies the increasing number of press publications more with the presence of a developing market rather than with the true institution of a new power (the famous “fourth estate” that is necessary in an under-construction democracy). Actually, although

²¹ RUGH, W. A. (2004) *Arab Mass Media. Newspapers, Radio and Television in Arab Politics*. Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, London

²² MOHSEN FINAN, K. (dir) (2009) *Les Médias en Méditerranée : nouveaux médias, monde arabe et relations internationales*. Actes Sud, MMSH, Barzakh

the Moroccan constitution guarantees freedom of expression and press, there are some red lines that cannot be crossed, the most important of which being Islam, the monarchy, and the governmental policies on the Western Sahara conflict.

For what concerns the two Moroccan newspaper we analyse, they are Al Sabah and Al Masseur, both privately-owned. Al Sabah belongs to the group Eco-Media and was created in 2000. Despite its economic independence from the government this newspaper is identified as quite close to the positions of the monarchy²³. Al Masseur was founded in 2006 by Rashid Niny, who had previously worked as a journalist for Al Sabah causing some problems to the Eco-Media directors who were cited for trials in a number of occasions for his chronicles. When he founded his own newspaper he continued to work with the same orientations he had under Al Sabah. As a matter of fact he was released last April after completing a one-year prison sentence. International organizations for the defence of human rights and freedom of expression condemned the fact that his trial was conducted under the criminal code rather than the media law as well as the reasons for which he was sued. Through his column “Shuf Tshuf” he is known for highlighting corruption and abuses committed by the kingdom’s high ranks and authorities.

²³ FIBLA, C. (2008) *La prensa magrebí a contracorriente*. Afkar/Ideas No. 16 (Winter 2007/2008) Barcelona, IEMed and Madrid, Estudios de Política Exterior

As for Egypt, we can identify three types of newspapers in this country. Firstly there are state-owned newspapers, such as Al Ahram, Al Akhbar and Al Jumhuriyya which are closely controlled by the government. Their editors and directors have always been appointed by the president and, after the January 2011 revolution, it was the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that appointed new directors. Secondly we find party-linked newspapers. It is the case of the daily Al Wafd named under the homologous party and of Al Araby, a weekly magazine published by the Nasserist party. It could be argued that if the opposition parties are also allowed to have their own publications then these would express their opinions, which should be generally opposite to those of the ruling party. Yet, we need to take into account the fact that the Egyptian law ruling the foundation of parties was meant to guarantee a strong and effective control by the government on the political forces that are allowed to constitute a political party. Therefore, once a party is actually allowed to be created, it must abide those red lines that cannot be easily crossed without any consequences. Thirdly we find the most recent type of Egyptian press that is the private-owned newspapers and magazines. Some of the newspapers belonging to this category are Al Shorouk Al Gadid, Al Masry al Youm and Al Dostour. This kind of press is neither state-owned nor linked to any political party and it actually struggles to be a credible, strong alternative to the other two kinds of Egyptian press and, for this reason, it faced penalizations and even penal

trials for crossing some red lines. It was the case of Al Dostour's former Editor-in-Chief Ibrahim Eissa, who faced conviction and a financial fine for bringing the possible consequences of former president Hosni Mubarak's precarious health conditions to the public attention and debate. Finally we can state that the media have an important role in influencing public opinion in Egypt and at the same time that they do not play as neutral institutions but instead embed their political preferences and ideologies in the way they choose to represent reality.²⁴

We decided to analyse Al Ahram and Al Shorouk for our work. As in the case of Morocco their political orientation is quite different. While, as we explained, Al Ahram is a state-owned newspaper Al Shorouk is a private one. Al Ahram is the oldest newspaper in the Arab world. It was founded as a weekly in 1876 and it became a daily in 1881. Its independence is at least restricted because of its economic dependence on the Egyptian government and also because its directors and editors in chief were always appointed by the president. After the Arab Spring the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces appointed new personalities to run the newspaper but it still is state-owned. On the contrary Al Shorouk is a very young Egyptian newspaper, it was founded in 2009 and belongs to the editorial group Dar

²⁴ ABOU-EL-FADL, R. and ÖKTEM, K. (2009) *Mutual misunderstandings? Muslims and Islam in the European media. Europe in the media of Muslim majority countries*. European Studies Centre. Oxford, University of Oxford

Al Shorouk, currently one of the leading editorial groups in the Arab region. This newspaper is known as a liberal-oriented one which during the revolution made a continuous and in-depth treatment of the events since its start, while Al Ahram practically denied that reality until the 12th of February, the day after former president Mubarak resigned. Among its usual columnists we find some of the main Egyptian liberal intellectuals and personalities such as Alaa Al Aswany and Nawal El Saadawi but also exponents from other currents and sectors of the society.

Methodological aspects

As we advanced in the introduction this paper analyses only 20% of the sample collected in four Arab newspapers for our PhD thesis that is constituted by over 700 units. This reduced sample includes news published in 2010 and 2011 and will also be compared with the units we analysed for our PhD mid-term work that belong to 2009. These refer to the second and third week of March 2009 while the 2010 sample is constituted by the last week of November and the first of December. Finally, the 2011 sample gathers news published during the last week of May and the first of June and during the last week of November and the first of December. It is a quite extensive sample that allows us to analyse the treatment of Islamism in the selected newspapers in different moments of these countries'

history and consequently also of Islamist groups and parties. We selected information and opinion units if one or more Islamist groups were cited in its headlines or subheads. For this paper we designed a questionnaire about the treatment of Islamist groups in the Egyptian and Moroccan newspapers that has some variables in common with the questionnaire we applied to the 2009 sample in our mid-term work. Some variables focus on formal aspects of the newspapers' treatment of Islamist groups and parties while others are useful to determine the role that Islamist groups appear as having in each unit. The questionnaire is only applied to the units' headline and subheads. We will now start the analysis of our data by giving some explanations of our findings about the newspapers' treatment of the Islamist phenomenon before the Arab Spring and after it. The collected sample has been analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Quantitative methodology: content analysis

While for our PhD thesis we are going to apply both quantitative and qualitative methodology we opted for just a quantitative analysis for this paper. Content analysis is one of the main methodologies used in Communication Studies. Actually the beginning of the academic research on the mass media is also identified with the need to apply content analysis as a technique that allows to quantify previously determined aspects of a text and to achieve reliable and quantitative results about the messages transmitted by the media. For a

long time one of the main reasons for using content analysis was considered to be that it was a methodology that needed to be objective, reliable and repeatable.

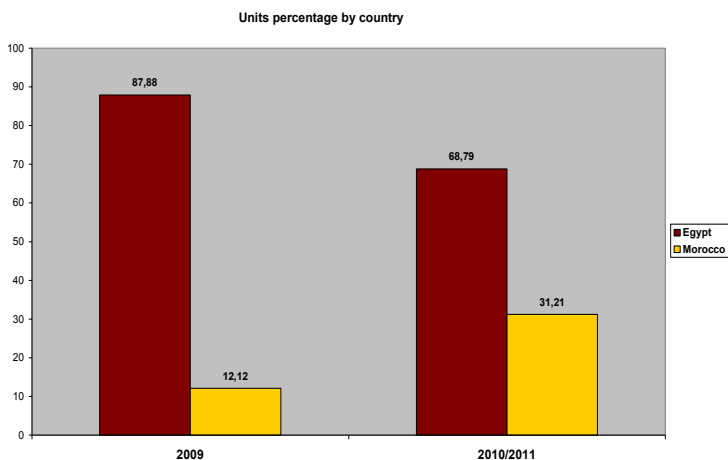
In other words, if different researchers had applied the same questionnaire to the same sample they should have obtained the same results. Nonetheless nowadays it is assumed and accepted by the academic world that total objectivity is not possible to achieve when using this methodology. Despite being employed as a quantitative analysis we can not forget that content analysis is also a fundamentally qualitative methodology as it is based on a theoretical framework through which every researcher specifies the analytical categories he/she is going to apply. According to Hansen²⁵ every researcher using this technique is going to start by identifying the text's aspects that are relevant for the analysis, which implies taking a decision and making a subjective choice based on the investigation's theoretical framework.

Islamism in the Egyptian and Moroccan press before and the arab spring

As a general and initial consideration we can find a common feature of the samples collected in 2009, 2010 and 2011. In both samples we see that the majority of units related with Islamist groups were found in the Egyptian newspapers while it seems that Moroccan

²⁵ HANSEN, A. (1998) *Mass Communication Research Methods*. London, MacMillan Press

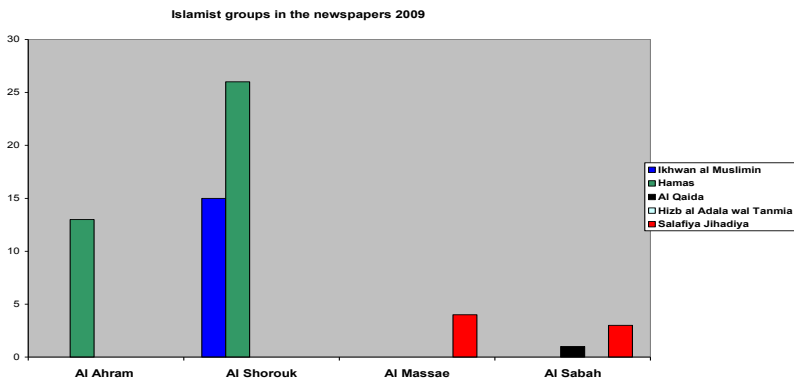
diaries pay less attention or give less space to Islamist groups and parties.



As we can see in Graphic 1 and 2 we find common features at a quantitative level in the treatment of the same newspapers along the two years. First of all we can see how the Muslim Brotherhood is totally inexistent in the sample collected from the Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram while it is the most present in the sample of Al Shorouk. This makes us understand that the reason why the Muslim Brotherhood was invisible in Al Ahram was not that it had not an active role in the social and political scene and, therefore, news; it was instead part of its editorial policy to symbolically annihilate the main political opposition force to the regime. The fact that the Palestinian Hamas was so visible in the sample of both Al Ahram and Al Shrorouk in 2009 is due to the

negotiations that Cairo was hosting at the time between Al Fatah and Hamas.

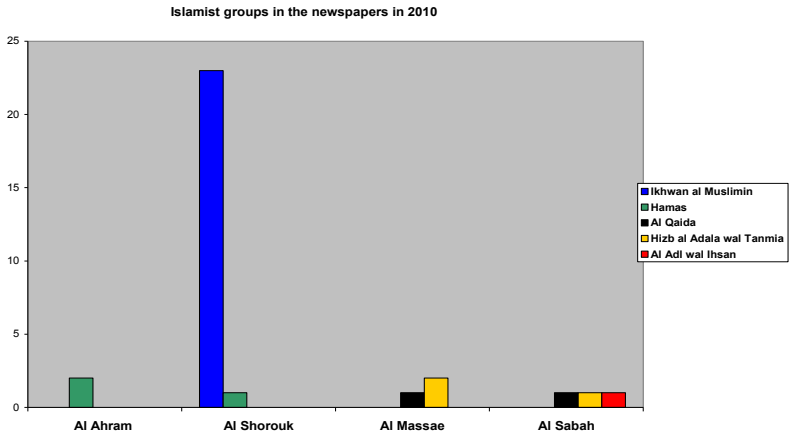
Graphic 1.



As for the Moroccan newspapers we found some differences between the 2009 and 2010 sample. In the first one we noted that all units that treated Islamist groups were related to terrorism (and in fact we found Al Qaida and the Salafiyya Jihadiyya) and that the Party of Justice and Development (Hizb al Adala wal Tanmia) had not been visible in any headline or subheads of the two newspapers.

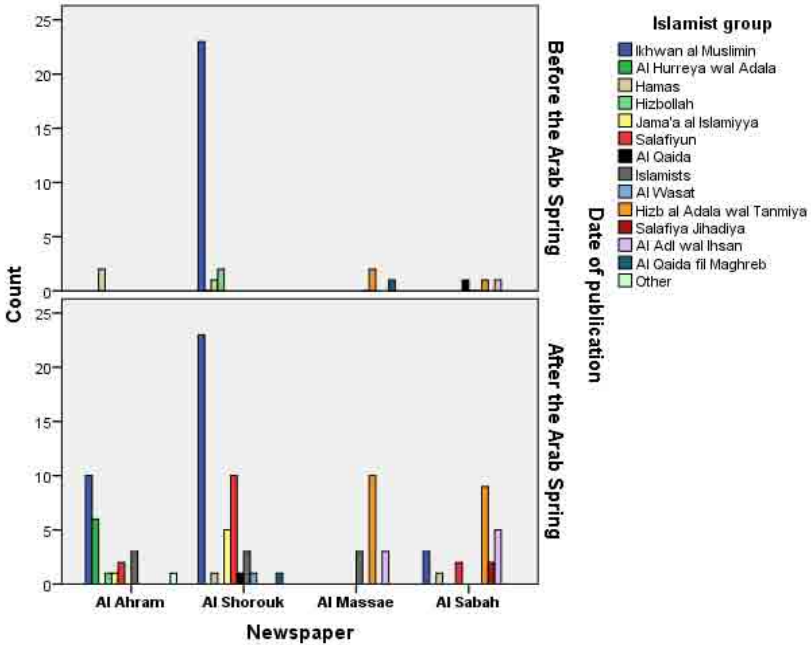
Such a trend seems to have changed in the 2010 sample, as we can see in Graphic 2, which shows cases related to the PJD both in Al Massae and Al Sabah.

Graphic 2:



While the two Moroccan newspapers still have in common the presence of Al Qaida in 2010 we see that the Islamist movement Al Adl wal Ihsan is only visible in the sample collected from Al Sabah. In Graphic 3 we can also see how Al Adl wal Ihsan only starts being visible in Al Massae's sample of 2011.

Graphic 3



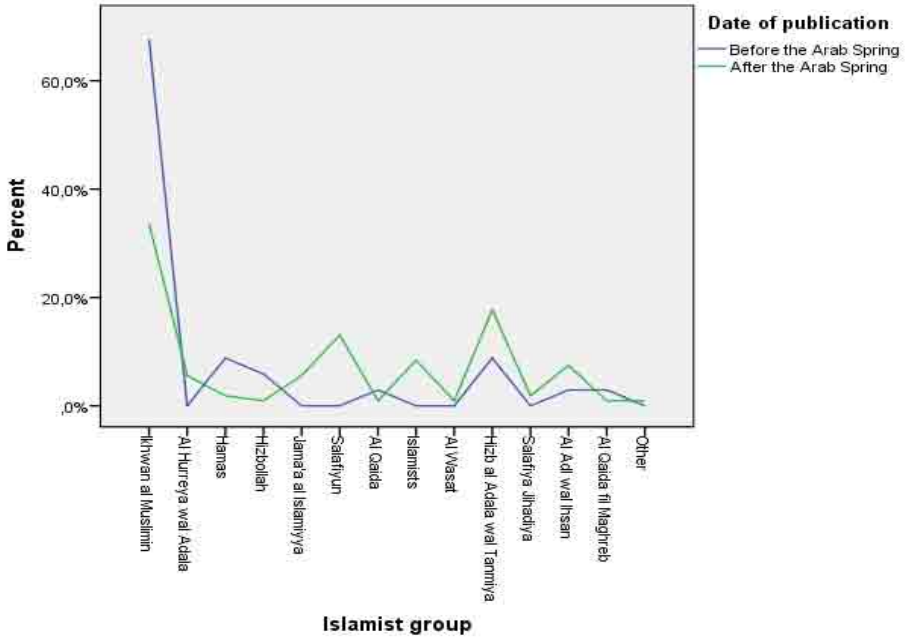
Graphic 3 and 4 show an important aspect: not only there was an increase of the attention paid by the newspapers to Islamist groups after the Arab Spring but the sample that was collected after it also presents an important rise of the variety of Islamist actors participating in society and politics. Even Al Shorouk that was the newspaper which paid most attention to the Muslim Brotherhood starts making visible other Islamist actors after the Arab spring such as the Salafists, the Jama'a al Islamiyya and the Islamist currents in general.

As for Al Ahram Graphic 3 clearly shows how the Muslim Brotherhood only starts being visible in this state-owned newspaper after the Arab Spring together with Al Hurreya wal Adala, the party founded by the Muslim Brotherhood after the fall of former president Mubarak.

The two Moroccan newspapers also go in the same direction, showing an increase of both quantitative units and of the variety of Islamist actors they make visible. Yet they also present a factor of continuity with the samples collected before the Arab Spring as a significant part of their units still have terrorist groups as their protagonists. In fact we can see Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and the Salafiya Jihadiya among the Islamist actors they pay attention to. This is an element we identified in our mid-term PhD work. We found that 100% of the units collected in Al Massae and Al Sabah in March 2009 were related to terrorist groups and specifically to Al Qaida and the Salafiya Jihadiya. There was no information about politically active Islamist groups or parties in the headlines and subheads of those newspapers our sample.

Graphic 4 also shows the increase in the variety of Islamist actors that are visible in the selected newspapers after the Arab Spring in both countries.

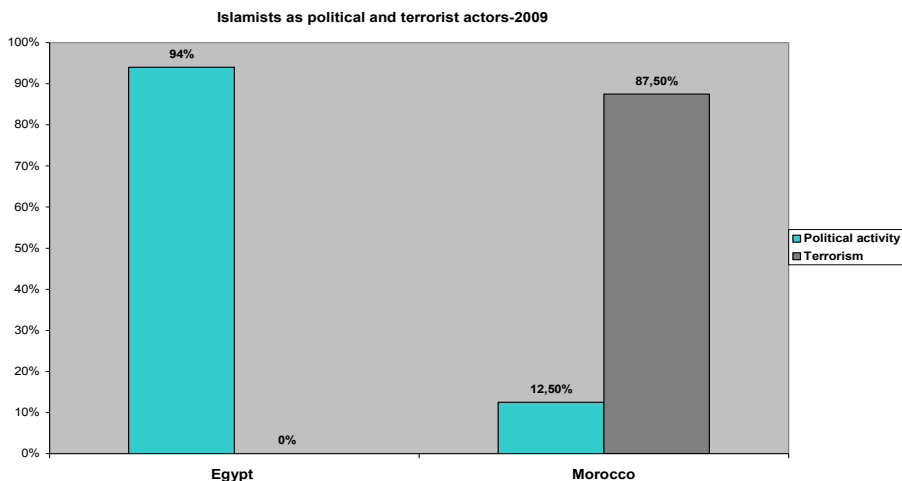
Graphic 4



We are now going to analyse the representation that these newspapers do of Islamist groups and parties as political actors. As we already anticipated we found significant differences between the treatments of Islamist groups made by the Egyptian and the Moroccan newspapers in 2009. As we see in Graphic 5 while most of the units related to Islamist actors in the Egyptian press represented them as being involved in political activities, the contrary happened in the Moroccan press which mostly represented them as actors involved in terrorism. This is due to the fact that most of the

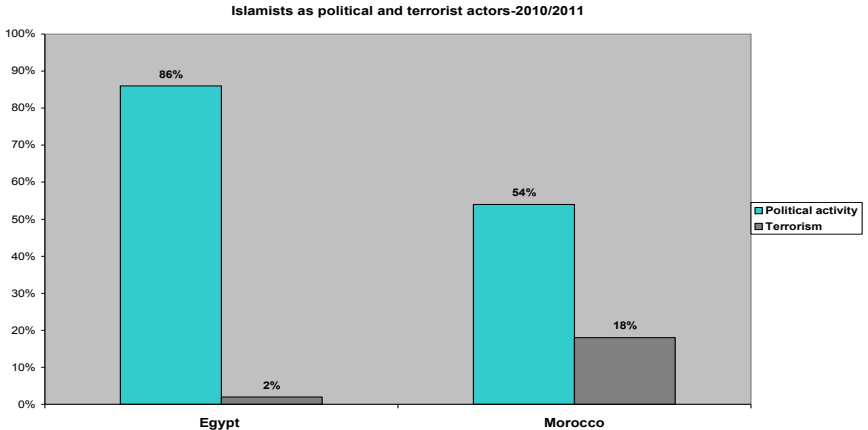
Moroccan sample focused on terrorist organizations such as Al Qaida and the Salafiya Jihadiya.

Graphic 5



Graphic 5 shows us that terrorism was virtually inexistent in the Egyptian newspapers in the sample collected in 2009 and that Islamist actors were almost totally represented as involved in political activities. On the contrary we found that in the sample collected in the Moroccan newspapers published in 2010 and 2011 the attention for the Islamists as political actors has increased significantly compared to the sample of 2009 and that the focus on terrorist groups has decreased, as Graphic 6 shows.

Graphic 6



Graphic 7 allows us to provide a more detailed analysis of the political activity of Islamist groups and actors in the sample collected in 2010 and 2011. The results are interesting because they highlight the differences in the treatment of Islamist groups among the different newspapers but also within the same newspaper depending on the period.

The graphic clearly shows quite important differences between the political activity of Islamist groups and parties made visible before the Arab Spring and after it. First of all we can see that only after the Arab Spring Al Ahrām shows Islamist groups in activities such as opposition, statements and opposition to the militaries. Yet if we compare it with Al Shorouk we see an

interesting trend: in this sample Al Ahram never shows the Muslim Brotherhood as being developing their electoral campaign, while Al Shorouk does both before and after the Arab Spring.

This is particularly interesting as it strengthens the observation of Al Ahram's treatment of Islamist actors before the Arab Spring. Our 2010 sample corresponds to the legislative elections of that year, the last that happened under Mubarak's rule and which registered an important record of electoral frauds. As in 2005 the Muslim Brotherhood, despite not having a party, was the most organized and the strongest political force in the opposition and yet (better said, right because of this) it was absolutely invisible in Al Ahram.

On the contrary, Al Shorouk represented the Brotherhood as a political actor that was conducting its electoral campaign and also under harassment through a number of detentions among its candidates and supporters. After the Arab Spring both Al Ahram and Al Shorouk focus on the internal divisions of the Islamist forces (mostly of the Muslim Brotherhood) and Al Shorouk also represents the Brotherhood as having positions opposed to those of the revolutionaries in quite a high number of cases.

These units refer fundamentally to the will of the revolutionaries to protest against the military rule with *miliouniyya* rallies for which they were not supported by the Muslim Brotherhood as a whole movement.

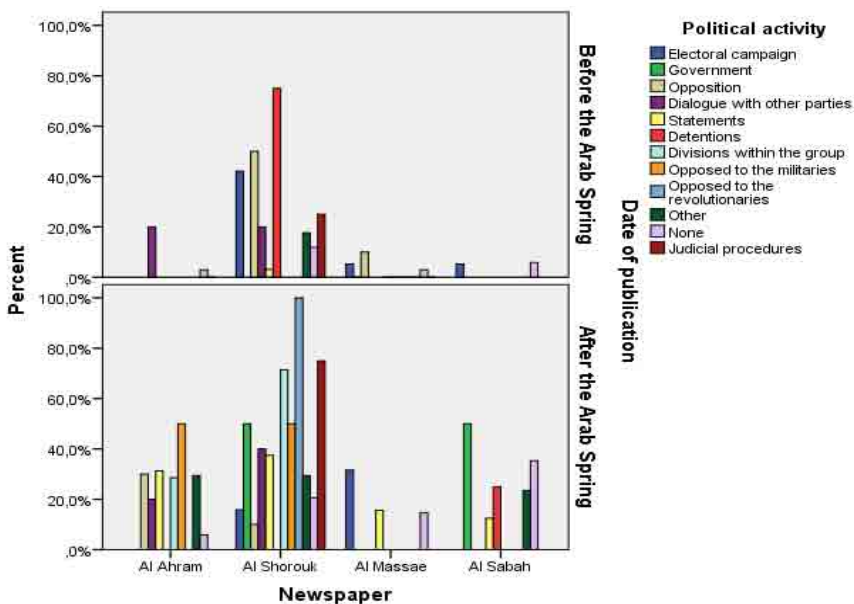
Nonetheless important parts of the youth of the Islamist movement disobeyed the leadership's instructions and took part to the rallies in Tahrir Square, making the divisions within the movement visible. Such an aspect was also highlighted by Al Ahram. As for the Moroccan newspapers we can see that before the Arab Spring Al Massae and Al Sabah gave very little attention to the electoral campaign of the PJD and only Al Massae gave some space to the representation of the Islamists as opposition forces. After the Arab Spring we find a rise in the variety of the political activities of the Islamists in both dailies.

They give some space to the Islamists' statements but for the rest we see mostly differences between the two newspapers. We see that only Al Massae makes the PJD's electoral campaign visible; on the other hand only Al Sabah represents Islamist parties in governmental activities and also highlight the detentions of members of other Islamist groups such as Al Adl wal Ihsan. One last interesting aspect of the Moroccan newspapers' treatment of Islamist groups and parties is that before the Arab Spring Al Sabah does not represent them as having an opposition role.

With the exception of an insignificant percentage that represents them as being in electoral campaign, political groups are practically inexistent from its pages. Al Massae instead, which is closer to the monarchy, represents them as opposing forces before the Arab Spring, though in very poor percentages. In this we see a

difference between Al Ahram and Al Massae, both close to their countries' governments although in very different ways and extents. While Al Ahram symbolically annihilates the main opposition to the regime, the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Massae gives the Islamists little space representing them as political forces and also in electoral campaign, which is a treatment that is quite closer to reality than the one made by Al Ahram.

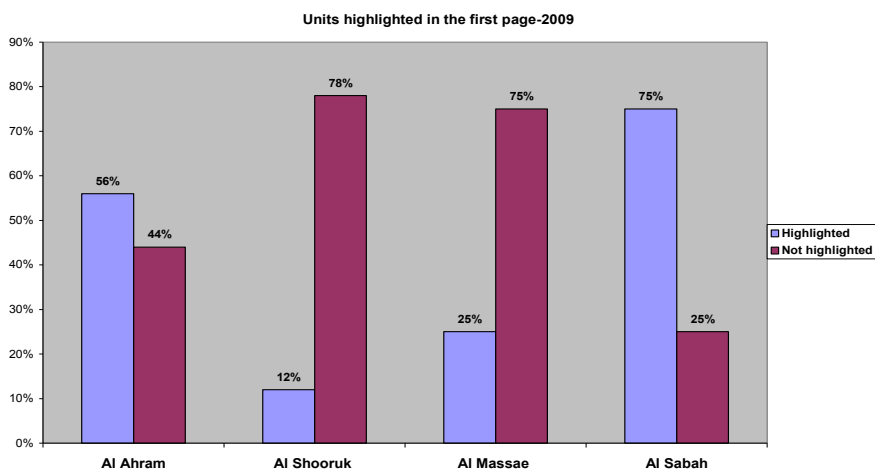
Graphic 7



The first page of a newspaper is also very important for its contribution to the social construction of reality, as it is the space in which a daily highlights the issues it considers to be the most important. So we think it could

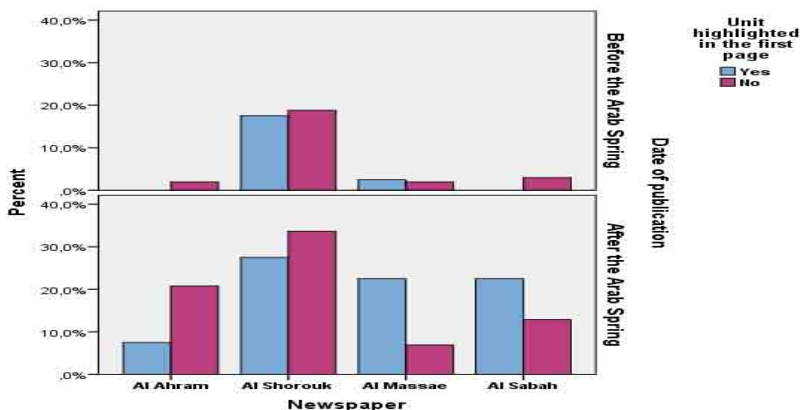
be interesting to verify which newspapers give space to Islamist groups and parties in their first page before and after the Arab Spring. Graphic 8 shows the data related to the 2009 sample. We can see that Al Ahram gave space to Islamist parties in its first page. At first it could seem remarkable but it is actually not so surprising if we take into account that it was the units about the negotiations between Al Fatah and Hamas in Cairo that were highlighted in the first page, as it was a policy promoted by the Egyptian government. We also see not very surprising differences between the two Moroccan newspapers, as Al Massae gives very little space to Islamist forces in its first page while the contrary happens in Al Sabah.

Graphic 8



Graphic 9 instead shows us the percentages of cases that were highlighted in the first page of the analysed newspapers in 2010 and 2011. We see important differences in the treatment given to Islamist forces by Al Ahram, Al Sabah and Al Massae while Al Shorouk basically continues with the same criteria. In 2010 no Islamist group or party was visible in the first page of Al Ahram (we need to remember that it was an electoral period in Egypt) nor on Al Sabah. Nonetheless this changed after the Arab Spring and Islamist forces appear in their first page.

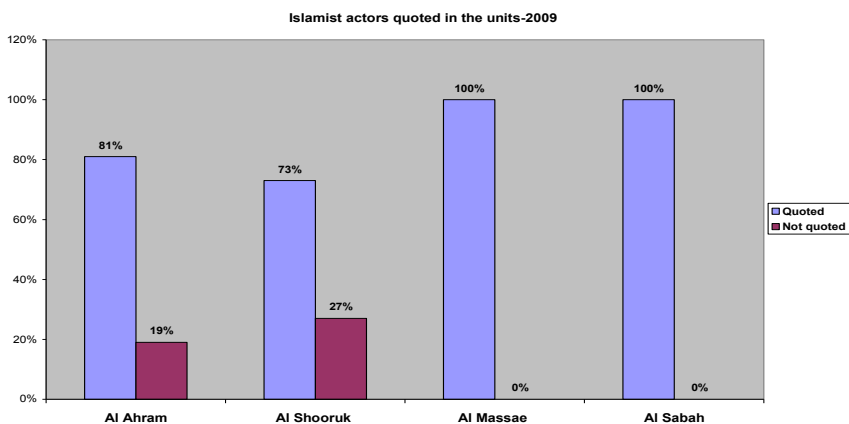
Graphic 9



Another relevant factor when evaluating the treatment that a newspaper offers about social and/or political groups is whether it directly or indirectly quotes their members. The fact that a newspaper quotes them means that they are given the chance to explain by

themselves the reasons for their acting as well as their stance on events and facts for example. Of course this does not protect news from possible bias and manipulations but a qualitative analysis would be necessary to determine this. So, based on our quantitative methodology we work with the premise that the fact that Islamist actors are directly or indirectly quoted in the units related to them is a positive element in their treatment. As Graphic 9 shows we found this positive element in the four Arab newspapers we analysed.

Graphic 9

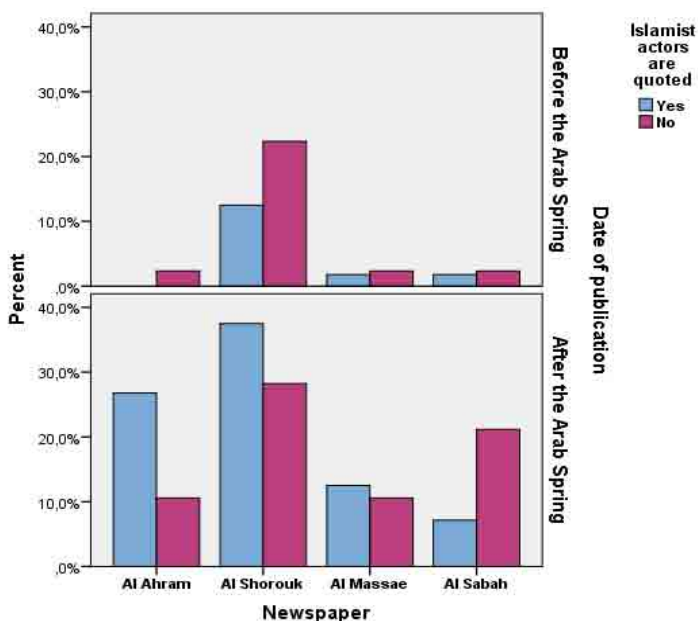


Yet we still have to remember that the Islamist party quoted by Al Ahram was Hamas in the context of the Cairo-sponsored negotiations between Hamas and Al

Fath. Graphic 10 shows it seemed to be a conjuncture element of the newspaper more than a usual routine.

While the routines of the other newspapers are more or less maintained, Al Ahram is once again the one showing a major change.

Graphic 10



While it did not quote the members of any Islamist group or party during the 2010 electoral campaign, the newspaper's new editors apparently changed this routine after the Arab Spring, starting to quote the members of Islamist forces in most cases.

Conclusions

As a result of this preliminary analysis we find few common features and many differences in the treatment of Islamist groups and parties in these four newspapers before and after the Arab Spring. The common element we find in the 2009, 2010 and 2011 sample is the higher number of units related to Islamism in the Egyptian newspapers than in the Moroccan dailies. As for Moroccan newspapers we find a trend that begins in 2010 and is confirmed in 2011 compared to 2009 which is the fact that they pay more attention to Islamist groups and parties as political actors rather than as terrorists.

As we explained the Moroccan press shows a continues increase of attention towards their presence in the social and political spheres of society, although violent groups such as Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and the Salafiya Jihadiya do not disappear from their coverage of Islamism. While it differs from the Egyptian newspapers, where terrorist groups are not visible, they have a relevant feature in common. As we showed in Graphic 3 and 4 after the Arab Spring we find greater attention towards a higher variety of Islamist actors. In the 2011 sample we find Islamist actors such as the Jama'a al Islamiyya, the Salafists, Al Wasat and Al Adl wal Ihsan that were not found in the units collected in 2009 and 2010. There is also the rise of Islamist currents in general in the newspapers published in 2011, which means that they perceive and represent the increase of Islamists'

importance in their social and political scenario after the Arab Spring.

Formal aspects such as the presence of Islamist groups and parties in the first pages of these dailies and of direct or indirect quotes of their members in the units related to Islamists also show us an important change after the Arab Spring. For example we saw that Al Ahram started to highlight Islamist groups in its first page only after the Arab Spring while in both Al Massae and Al Sabah we found a significant increase of this practice after in 2011.

We found Al Shorouk to be the newspaper offering the best treatment of Islamist groups, highlighting their role as opposition forces and the detentions and harassment they suffered before the Arab Spring and then covering their varied political activities after that. While often presenting the Brotherhood's stance as opposed to the one of the young revolutionaries of Tahrir Square after the Arab Spring, this independent newspaper never falls into a particularly biased treatment that might deepen the conflict between these two social forces. It often offers information about different social and political factions in the same page giving the impression to be a public forum for their debate. We finally can conclude that it is the newspaper presenting the more uniform routine over the whole analysed period.

Al Ahram, on the contrary, is the daily showing the most significant turn in its treatment of Islamist forces after

the Arab Spring as we showed in our analysis. While they were inexistent before the Arab Spring or instrumentally present as part of glorified governmental political initiatives such as in 2009, a variety of Islamist groups and parties appear in this state-owned newspaper after the Arab Spring, even in its first page. Regarding this we found an interesting difference between Al Ahram and Al Massae, both close to the governing elite of their countries, though in very different extents. While in 2010, before the Arab Spring, Al Massae represented Islamist groups in their activity of opposition to the government, though in poor percentages, Al Ahram absolutely did not. So while Al Ahram conducted a true symbolic annihilation of Islamism and of the main organized group opposing Mubarak's rule, the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Massae gave Islamists little space but representing them as political forces involved in political activities, which we find to be a treatment that is closer to reality compared to the one made by Al Ahram.

For what concerns Al Sabah in this preliminary analysis this Moroccan newspaper presents itself (something that will have to be confirmed through the continuation of our analysis) as a daily with a liberal tendency that pays much attention on groups, parties and personalities holding positions of power in Morocco, regardless of who they are. Yet, and this confirms the perception of the liberal tendency of this newspaper, we found quite an abrasive stand towards the leader of the PJD, Benkiran and Al Adl wal Ihsan in some units and

especially when the PJD's victory in the legislative elections of 2011 seemed more and more possible.

After this preliminary analysis we can surely argue that there have been important changes in the treatment that the analysed newspapers do of Islamism, being Al Ahram the one showing the most evident and important change and Al Shorouk the one showing a mostly uniform treatment of this phenomenon over the whole analysed period. Although we will be able to state that with a higher degree of depth after the qualitative analysis we did not find an overtly biased treatment of Islamist groups and parties after the Arab Spring in the Egyptian newspapers, which instead seem to be struggling to offer space to a variety of political and social forces, mostly in the case of Al Shorouk. As for the Moroccan newspapers, instead, we found a number of headlines or highlighted quotes in both Al Massae and Al Sabah that are surely going to offer interesting results after a qualitative analysis and that let perceive a biased treatment of Islamist political forces.