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Representing Persia: A Discourse Analysis of The American Print Media's Coverage of Iran

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MSc in Media and Communications

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of mutual hostility and mistrust, there have been numerous signs in recent months that the United States and Iran are experiencing a thawing of diplomatic relations. One of the factors influencing this dynamic is the conciliatory posture of Iran's recently-elected President Hassan Rouhani. Drawing on Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, this dissertation uses critical discourse analysis to examine American media coverage of Iran both before and after Rouhani's election, with the aim of determining whether the election of this president precipitated any changes in American media discourse on Iran. This study found that despite the persistent use of Orientalist stereotypes, intimations of a discursive shift following Rouhani's election can be observed in the sample. Specifically, the findings reveal that after the election, a discursive association between Islam and moderation begins to emerge for the first time.

INTRODUCTION

> For much of the public...the press frames on a day-to-day, situation-to-situation basis a highly generalized sense of things; of what is required and of what is not; of who is enemy and who is friend. The press sets the broad limits of our thinking about the "other."
>
> Dorman and Farhang (1987)

On September 27, 2013, American President Barack Obama and newly-elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke by telephone in what was the first direct correspondence between the two countries' heads of government since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution (Mason and Charbonneau, 2013). In the three decades preceding this historic conversation, mutual suspicion and hostility defined the diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran. The origins of Iranian antipathy to the U.S. are complex and multifaceted, but likely stem in part from staunch American support for Reza Pahlavi, the autocratic Shah of Iran against whom the Islamic Revolution was waged. In 1953, after popular pressure had forced the Shah into exile, the CIA supported a coup that deposed the democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran in order to reinstate Pahlavi's rule (Leverett and Leverett, 2013: 28). Shortly after the 1979 Revolution permanently ousted the Shah, then-President Jimmy Carter made the fateful decision to allow the deposed leader, who was seriously ill, to enter the United States to receive medical treatment. The Shah's admittance into the U.S. provoked an angry backlash in Iran culminating in the seizure of the U.S. embassy by Iranian students who held the American staff hostage (ibid.: 48). This event, which came to be known as the 'Iranian hostage crisis,' prompted the United States to cut diplomatic ties with Tehran, which have yet to be fully normalised (State Department, 2013).

Against this historical backdrop of international acrimony, the telephone conversation between presidents Obama and Rouhani can be seen as a significant diplomatic breakthrough. Several factors laid the groundwork for this gesture towards rapprochement. First, one of the foreign policy objectives of Hassan Rouhani's campaign platform was improved relations with the United States. On the topic of U.S. – Iran relations, Rouhani remarked in an interview: 'It seems that extremists on both sides are determined to maintain the state of hostility and hatred between the two states, but logic says that there should be a change of direction in order to turn a new page in this unstable relationship and minimise the state of

hostility and mistrust between the two countries' (BBC News, 2013a). Second, on November 24, 2013, Iran reached an interim agreement with the 'P5+1' countries (Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany and the United States) on its nuclear program which UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon hailed as 'what could turn out to be the beginnings of a historic agreement' (Wilner, 2013). Finally, the recent rise of the radical Sunni group ISIS has given Iran and the United States a common enemy and raised the possibility of strategic cooperation between the two countries (Black, 2014).

Given these recent events, it is clear that there have been significant changes in the social and political realities underpinning U.S. – Iran relations. This dissertation aims to examine whether or not these social and political changes – specifically the election of Hassan Rouhani – have been reflected in American print media coverage of Iran. Previous studies have noted that the American media has tended to rely on crude oppositions and stereotypes in its coverage of Iran. Using Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, this study examines the representations of Iran in American print media in order to determine whether Rouhani's election brought about a shift in American media discourse. The theoretical contribution of the present study lies in its attempt to uncover a potential source of challenge to dominant discourses about the "Other," as well as an exploration of the relationship between discursive and socio-political change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into two parts. The first explores the theoretical background that underpins the present study. The second surveys previous empirical studies on the topic of American media coverage of Iran, and then situates this dissertation within that corpus.

Othering and representation

Given the vast cultural, religious and political differences between the United States and Iran, any study of American media coverage of Iran must engage with the following series of rhetorical questions posed by Stuart Hall: 'How do we represent people and places which are significantly different from us? Why is "difference" so compelling a theme, so contested an area of representation? What is the secret fascination of "otherness," and why is popular representation so frequently drawn to

it?' (Hall, 1997: 25).[1] One potential answer offered by Hall is that difference is essential to the construction of meaning and identity. Drawing on Saussure's structuralist linguistics, Hall outlines the relationship between difference and identity with the following example: 'We know what it is to be "British," not only because of certain national characteristics, but also because we can mark its "difference" from its "others" –Britishness is not-French, not-American, not-German, not-Pakistani, not-Jamaican and so on' (ibid:, 234-235).

One of the primary ways in which difference is 'marked' is through media representations. In this context, Silverstone argues that the media's primary cultural role is to perform 'boundary work,' which 'involves the continuous inscriptions of difference in any and every media text and discourse: from the crude stereotypes of otherness to the subtle and not-so-subtle discriminations of dramatic characterization, narrative construction, political punditry, internet chat rooms and talk radio' (Silverstone, 2007: 19). Silverstone's reference to 'crude stereotypes of otherness' intimates the potential for hostility endemic to the articulation of difference. Indeed, while difference is necessary for the construction of identity, Hall reminds us that it is also 'threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, or splitting, hostility and aggression towards the "Other."' (Hall, 1997: 238). Given the recent history of tense diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran, this propensity of difference to metamorphose into antagonism is of seminal import.

Drawing on Hall's notion of the relationship between difference and identity, as well as Silverstone's view of the 'boundary work' of the media, Orgad outlines two concepts that are particularly useful in analysing representations of others: binary oppositions and stereotyping. In the case of the former, 'the meaning of a concept or a word is often defined in relation to its opposite (e.g. black/white, good/bad). Meaning generated by media representations relies heavily on this signifying practice, by which sets of binary oppositions construct opposing categories (Orgad, 2012: 30). Importantly, binary oppositions are rarely neutral; they often assume the guise of a moral hierarchy, as the following example from Orgad illustrates: 'some media representations of migration construct binary oppositions that cast migrants as criminal, cunning, immoral "invaders" versus a lawful, hardworking, and/or innocent host society' (ibid.). The related signifying practice of stereotyping 'reduces people to a few, simple essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by

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[1] Stuart Hall, *Representation*, 1st ed. (London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997), 225.

Nature (ibid., 257). Stereotyping has an affinity with both the binary oppositions described by Orgad, and the 'boundary work' outlined by Silverstone. As Hall explains, stereotyping 'sets up a symbolic frontier between the "normal" and the "deviant," the "normal" and the "pathological," the "acceptable" and the "unacceptable," what "belongs" and what does not or is "Other," between "insiders" and "outsiders," Us and Them' (ibid., 258).

In his seminal work *Orientalism,* Edward Said demonstrated how these discursive practices were deployed in order to symbolically divide the world between Orient and Occident – East and West. Given this study's emphasis on the representation of a Middle Eastern country in the American media, Said's conceptual framework is highly useful.

Orientalism

Said (1979: 2) defines Orientalism as a 'style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and... "the Occident."' Imbricated in the opposition between Orient and Occident is an acute power imbalance in which the latter subordinates the former. As Said explains, 'Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (ibid.: 3). The discourse of Orientalism derives its authority in part from the concept of inter-textuality; that is, the recurrence of certain tropes about the 'Orient' across a wide variety of different texts, from travel writing to scholarly manuscripts (Hall, 1997: 232). In this context, Said argues that we 'must respect and try to grasp...the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability' (Said, 1979: 6).

Said's text unpacks several pejorative, stereotypical attributes commonly ascribed to the 'Orient' (or 'Orientals') in Western discourse. These stereotypes are used as benchmarks against which the superiority of Westerners can be measured. For example, in his analysis of the speeches of British statesmen, Said observed the following juxtaposition: 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different;" *thus* the European is rational, virtuous, mature, normal' (ibid.: 40;

emphasis added). Representations like these are intimately imbricated in the Western imperial project. Presenting the Orient as primitive and irrational furnishes a justification for Western intervention and the 'civilizing' mission of colonisation. This illustrates the important link between representation and foreign policy. This association is of paramount importance to the present study and it will be explored in greater detail in the next section.

The above remarks by no means constitute a comprehensive summary of Said's groundbreaking work. Rather, I have tried to highlight the features of *Orientalism* that are most relevant to this dissertation. To that end, there are three aspects of Said's analysis that are particularly useful. First, the use of binary oppositions (Orient vs. Occident) and the stereotypes commonly used to depict 'Orientals' (irrationality, primitiveness, fanaticism etc.); second, the strength and durability of Orientalist discourse that results from inter-textuality, i.e. the accumulation of meanings across different texts (Hall, 1997: 232); third, the relationship between Orientalist discourse and the European imperial project. In the next section, I explore the third point in greater detail, with a particular focus on the relationship between American foreign policy and the representation of Iran in American media.

Foreign Policy and the American State

In his landmark work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson discusses the role print media (first books, then newspapers) play in facilitating the construction of national identities. Anderson argues that the simultaneous reading of a newspaper each morning, by a delimited group of people, allows those individuals to imagine themselves as part of a larger collectivity (Anderson, 2006: 33-35). Harvey builds on this idea, arguing that if nation states are 'imagined communities,' then 'they must be geographically imagined. This means everything from mapping boundaries to the cultivation of some sense of national identity within those boundaries in order to ground legitimacy and power' (Harvey, 2004: 96). He goes on to explain that the process of cultivating a sense of national identity often entails 'the depiction of outsiders as not belonging to this distinctive space; they may be depicted as inferior for cultural-historical or environmental reasons. If external enemies do not actually exist then it is often the nefarious task of geographical representation to imagine and create them' (ibid.).

In the case of the post-9/11 United States, Islam has become one of the most widely discussed sources of external threat. This topic has received a plethora of scholarly attention. Ramakrishnan (2008: 98) argues that 'for the American media, Islam in itself is news. Islam came to represent all that is primitive, pre-modern, traditional, fanatic, violent and extremist in a world of modernization and Western civilization.' Along similar lines, Leverett and Leverett point out that 'notions of an unreformed Islam "at war" with the West, if not with modernity itself, have been widely embraced in the United States' (2013: 289).

The association of the 'Islamic threat' with Iran has been a long-standing feature of American public discourse. As Esposito explains, 'for more than a decade Iran represented the embodiment of the Islamic threat, and the Ayatollah Khomeini served as the living symbol of revolutionary Islam. If Khomeini denounced the West – and the United States in particular –as the great Satan, for many in the West he represented a medieval cleric, a menace to the Middle East and the West' (Esposito, 1995: 101). The noteworthy point here is that Iran embodied the *Islamic* threat; it was a threat because it was an Islamic republic. This implies that before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran would not have been perceived in the United States as a threat. Indeed, during the tenure of the Shah (Muhammad Reza Pahlavi), the U.S viewed Iran as a staunch ally. As Esposito explains, 'Muhammad Reza Pahlavi had ruled for more than thirty years (1941-1979). Like Anwar Sadat, he had come to be viewed in the West as an enlightened ally, the head of a modern state' (ibid.). In other words, American perceptions of Iran markedly changed as a result of a dramatic change in the Iranian government, and the concomitant shift in American foreign policy towards Iran. This brings us back to the question of the relationship between foreign policy and the representation of other countries.

In *Orientalism,* Said makes the case that Western discourses about the Orient dovetailed with European imperial ambitions in the Orient. In the case of the United States, several studies have found a correlation between American foreign policy objectives and media coverage. This is not to suggest that European imperialism and American foreign policy are analogous; rather, it is to illustrate the mutual imbrication of discourses and the social and political contexts in which they circulate.

In the case of pre-Revolutionary Iran, Dorman and Farhang's study of coverage in the American mainstream press over a 25 year period found the following: 'the American news media more often than not followed the cues of foreign-policy makers [sic]

rather than exercising independent judgement in reporting the social, economic, and political life of Iran under the shah' (Dorman and Farhang, 1987: 2). If the American news media tended to 'follow the cues of foreign-policy makers' on Iran, then a shift in the objectives of foreign policy-makers would presumably bring about a corollary shift in media coverage. Indeed, as Esposito pointed out, the shah's Iran was generally perceived in the West as an ally and a 'modern state' (1995: 101). It was only after the Revolution that Iran became a threat – an image bolstered by the application of Orientalist stereotypes such as primitiveness and fanaticism.

This dramatic discursive shift that followed regime change in Iran exposes a potential source of tension in Said's formulation. On the one hand, Orientalist discourse becomes powerfully entrenched due to inter-textuality and its imbrication with dominant institutions. However, as the case of Iran illustrates, changes in the governance of foreign countries can bring about dramatic changes in the representations of those countries. This points towards the more general point that representations of the Other are often sites of contestation. Pickering captures this point well:

> Appearances notwithstanding, the "us"/"them" relation which is implicated in the Other is inherently unstable. The ideological function of othering is to attempt to make the relation stable, to give it a static and durable shape and temporally to fast-freeze the configurations of difference and similarity it constructs. This attempt cannot be made once and then forgotten, as if its mapping of the distribution of symbolic configurations is accomplished for all time. It tries to create the illusion that what has been laid down – this is "us" here, this is "them" there – is indeed true for all time, but it will only be effective if it is reiterated and worked on, over and over…

> (Pickering, 2001: 72)

The repetition of certain tropes and stereotypes across a wide range of media, which in part contributes to the enduring durability of Orientalist discourse, thus also betrays a certain weakness. To borrow from Pickering once more, 'stereotyping is in this way subject to contrary pulls between what is felt to be indubitable and what is felt to be in constant need of reassertion' (ibid.). This is the central tension that underpins the theoretical framework of this study. On the one hand, certain discourses and representations become dominant and pervasive across a variety of different media. On the other, they are constantly subject to re-appropriation and

alternate readings. Orgad offers a succinct summary of this point: 'As a process, representation is both conservative, working to inscribe and reconstitute existing power relations, and transformative –subversive and challenging the familiar, established frames for understanding the world' (Orgad, 2012: 35). Against this theoretical backdrop, I will now briefly survey the literature on empirical studies of the coverage of Iran in American media. I will then situate this study within that corpus.

The American Media and Iran: Empirical Studies

In an extensive study of media coverage of pre-Revolutionary Iran, Dorman and Farhang concluded that the American press tended to emphasize and sometimes celebrate the shah's modernizing and 'Westernizing' programs, while minimizing the domestic resistance they engendered (1987: 23, 88). They note that some critical coverage did emerge after the 1973 OPEC oil embargo – however, 'this tendency toward criticism was cut short by the emerging revolutionary challenge to the shah's regime' (ibid.: 153). The press was generally hostile toward the Revolution, portraying the rebelling Iranians as 'backward and shackled by religious superstition' (ibid., 180). This is a trope that has been observed in many studies on this topic, particularly those that focus on media coverage after the Islamic Revolution.

The overwhelming majority of studies on coverage of post-Revolutionary Iran rely on a theoretical framework primarily informed by Orientalism. In his 1981 book *Covering Islam,* Edward Said analysed coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis in American media. He noted the persistent use of Orientalist stereotypes (e.g. irrationality, fanaticism) as well as firm oppositions between 'us' and 'them.' For example, he observes that in *Time, Newsweek* and the *New York Times,* 'one would keep coming up against the information that Iranians are Shi'ites who *long for martyrdom*, led by a *non-rational* Khomeini, *hating America,* determined to destroy the Satanic spies, *unwilling to compromise,* and so forth' (Said, 1981: 98; emphasis mine). Said also observed that, 'almost without exception,' the American media regarded the movement to overthrow the Shah with 'disdain and suspicion' (ibid.: 106).

McAlister both drew upon and critiqued Said in her study of television coverage of the hostage crisis. Similar to Said, McAlister emphasized the role inter-textuality plays in reinforcing certain discourses, which is important due to the extensive media

coverage the hostage crisis received. As she explains, 'for the 14 months that it dominated the U.S. nightly news, and for nearly a decade after in various cultural texts, the Iran story became the paradigmatic signifier of America as a nation imperilled by terrorism…Iran…structured a national narrative of victimization and longed-for revenge' (McAlister, 2001: 199). This also illustrates her emphasis on the discourse of the terrorist threat that Iran instantiated. Finally, McAlister noted that in its coverage of the hostage crisis, the American media habitually deployed a 'captivity narrative' (ibid.: 209), which presented the hostages as 'a family under siege by outside threats and in need of a militarised rescue' (ibid.: 201). This illustrates the link between media coverage and foreign policy considerations.

Marandi's more recent study of Western media coverage of Iran, mostly pertaining to Iran's nuclear program, also observed many Orientalist stereotypes and binary oppositions, as well as the persistent tendency to portray Iran as a threat to the West. For example, Marandi (2009: 17) notes that 'Iranian society is regularly depicted as abnormal and irrational, which itself helps reinforce the claim that Iran is a threat that cannot be dealt with through dialogue and reason.' In their recent book on U.S. – Iran relations, Leverett and Leverett (2013: 8-10) similarly note the tendency of Western media to portray Iran and its government as irrational, unstable and anti-modern.

 Khan's study of the Western media coverage of Iran's 2009 Presidential election, which focused on images and visual framing, noted a similar trend in Western media coverage. This work began by drawing on Saleem to note that 'the U.S. media have framed the images of other nations and their leaders based on the U.S. relationship with that particular country, and that such images went through constant changes whenever the U.S. policy was changed toward that nation' (Khan, 2013: 13-14). Khan found that in general, *Time, The Economist,* and *The New York Times* 'were highly critical of [incumbent President] Ahmadinejad and supportive of [reformist challenger] Mousavi' (ibid.: 23).

This study also analysed the representation of Iranian feminism, and reached the following conclusion: 'The visual framing of the Iranian feminism leaves one with the impression as if there are only two types of women in Iran: The progressive ones, who want more liberal rights and reforms and want to get rid of the old social values and the conservative ones, who are well under the control of the Iranian men and are exploited and who need to be freed as well' (ibid.: 24). This is interesting in relation

to Orientalist discourse, because Iranians are no longer portrayed as an undifferentiated mass of 'Orientals.' Mishra's study on the coverage of the relationship between Islam and democracy in the American press found that, in the case of Iran, the U.S. prestige press frequently deployed Orientalist stereotypes, portraying Iran as an irrational, anti-democratic threat to the United States (Mishra, 2008). Following Said, Mishra connects this threat narrative to rationalisations for specific foreign policy options: 'fear of the threat of extremist Islam and the need to contain it can be used as a justification for wars and imperialistic adventures' (ibid.: 173). Finally, Mishra concludes that dominant media discourses consistently portrayed Islam as inherently anti-democratic and anti-modern, singling out Iran as a paradigmatic example (ibid.: 167).

Izadi and Saghaye-Biria carried out a critical discourse analysis of editorials in *The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post* on the issue of Iran's nuclear program. The authors were interested in the use of Orientalist discourse in these papers, and they coded for the following eight Orientalist themes: (1) Oriental untrustworthiness; (2) Islam as a threat; (3) Oriental inferiority; (4) Oriental 'backwardness'; (5) Oriental irrationality; (6) Oriental submissiveness; (7) Jews vs. Arabs/Muslims; (8) Oriental strangeness (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007: 149-150). The main conclusion of the study was that editorials in the above-mentioned papers consistently relied on Orientalist tropes, with a particular emphasis on the idea that Iran is both threatening and untrustworthy (ibid.: 150).

In the studies discussed above, the dominant trend is to analyse representations of Iran against the theoretical background of Orientalism. These studies tended to find pervasive use of Orientalist tropes, with a particular emphasis on the idea that post-revolutionary Iran is irrational, threatening and anti-modern. In this context, Fayyaz and Shirazi's study is particularly interesting because, while similarly discerning these Orientalist depictions, the authors go on to observe some shift away from them in representations of Iran since the Revolution. The authors note that while certain Orientalist assumptions underpinning representations of Iran have remained 'remarkably durable' since the Revolution, there are several examples of representations that expose the 'ambiguities and inconsistencies of contemporary Orientalist discourse' (Fayyaz and Shirazi, 2013). This is redolent of the primary theoretical tension mentioned above, between the durability of certain representations and the possibility of subverting them. The authors observe that the Presidency of the reformist Mohammad Khatami precipitated a discursive shift away

from some of Orientalist stereotypes that had characterized previous media coverage. As they explain:

> The much-celebrated social thaw under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) unfroze journalistic accounts of Iran as a nation that was fast forgetting Khomeini and moving to reclaim its interrupted pre-revolutionary encounter with modernity… Such accounts offer a seeming shift away from Orientalist discourse and its unrelenting divide between the barbaric Orient and the modern Occident; in these more recent representations, Iranians are depicted as embodying and harboring modern attitudes and American cultural proclivities (ibid.).

This conclusion lends support to Khan's claim that changes in foreign leadership can precipitate changes in American media coverage of those countries. In this case, the election of a reformist president brought about a shift away from Orientalist stereotypes and towards more conciliatory rhetoric. The man who succeeded Khatami as president of Iran was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is generally viewed as a conservative figure in Iranian politics (Leverett and Leverett, 2013: 128-129). The authors note that the election of a religious conservative brought about a resurgence of Orientalist representations of Iran in the American media. They point out that 'Ahmadinejad, traditionalism, extremism and anti-Americanism become conflated within the discursive field of the two largest newsmagazines in the United States' (Fayyaz and Shirazi, 2013). Again, changes in leadership seem to be associated with changes in media representations. This tendency serves as the entry point of the present study.

While much has been written about Orientalism and the coverage of Iran in American media outlets, I was unable to find any research examining what impact the 2013 election of moderate candidate Hassan Rouhani as Iran's president may have had on depictions of the Islamic Republic in the American media. As we have seen, Orientalist representations are durable, but they are also subject to challenge and transformation. Fayyaz and Shirazi's study illustrates that changes in Iran's leadership is one potential source of challenge to entrenched stereotypes. This study aims to examine the discursive changes in American media coverage of Iran that Rouhani's election may have brought about.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(i)   How is Iran represented in elite American newspapers?

(ii)   In what ways has the representation of Iran in elite American newspapers changed following the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iranian President?

This study will use critical discourse analysis to compare how elite American newspapers covered Iran before the election to how they covered Iran after the election. This research aims to expose potential sources of challenge to dominant discourses, as well as to shed light on the relationship between discursive and social change.

METHODOLOGY

Why discourse analysis?

The research question concerns whether the 2013 election of Hassan Rouhani as President of Iran has brought about any changes in the representations of Iran in the American press. It would have been possible to address the question of changes in coverage with quantitative methods, such as content analysis. However, as this study is concerned with stereotypes and othering, it is necessary to go beyond a quantitative assessment of the presence or absence of certain words or phrases and instead provide a close reading and detailed analysis of how various textual strategies are deployed to construct social identities and relationships. A simple content analysis (such as counting the recurrence of certain words and phrases) will be used as an entry point for the present study, but the emphasis will be on a qualitative assessment of the various discursive formations used to depict Iranians in the American print media.

As mentioned in the literature review, Stuart Hall argues that one of the reasons difference is so compelling a theme in representation concerns the centrality of difference to the construction of meaning and identity. Hall argues that one of the ways a given national identity is understood is through its opposition to other nations (Hall, 1997: 234-235). In the case of the American press coverage of Iran, several previous studies have noted that articles often deploy Orientalist tropes, which serve to emphasize the difference between the country being represented (Iran) and the putative American reading audience. The crucial point here is that these distinctions

are not objective or natural – they are constructed. As Said explains, 'as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West' (Said, 1979: 5). The claim that a 'tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary' can 'give reality' to the Orient is based on the idea that discourse is constitutive (as opposed to reflective) of social reality. Put another way, representations construct the social world we perceive. Fairclough (1992) delineates three aspects of the constructive effects of discourse, which discourse analysis enables us to unpack:

(1) Discourse contributes to the construction of social identities and subject positions;
(2) Discourse helps construct social relationships between people;
(3) Discourse contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and belief.

All three of these effects are of great interest to the present study. In terms of social identities, I am interested in how the American media coverage of Iran constructs the identities of Iranians, and what these representations may implicitly suggest about the identities of American readers. As far as social relationships between people are concerned, we saw in the literature review that, while some media representations of the Islamic Republic subsumed all its citizens into a monolithic 'other' category, others made internal distinctions within the Persian polity, between 'progressive' and 'traditional' Iranians for example. As this study is concerned with potential shifts in media discourse about Iran, such distinctions are vitally important, as they would suggest a departure from traditional Orientalist binaries.

Given the geopolitical context of U.S.-Iran relations, the role of discourse in constructing systems of knowledge and belief is also of seminal import for the present study. The absence of normalised diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran render travel to the Islamic Republic difficult for Americans. As relatively few Americans have actually visited Iran, much of what they know or believe about the country will be informed by various media representations. The ways in which these representations depict the Iranian nation and its people are thus very consequential. Given that the three aspects of discourse mentioned above are highly relevant to this study, discourse analysis is an appropriate and useful method to interrogate the ways in which certain discourses construct: social identities, relationships and systems of knowledge and belief relating to Iran.

Another important issue that discourse analysis enables us to address concerns the question of power. The ability of discourse to construct social identities and contribute to systems of knowledge and belief is not a neutral process; rather, it is a process thoroughly suffused with power relations. Drawing on Foucault, Chouliaraki explains that 'discourse sets up a constitutive relationship between meaning and power in social practice' (2008: 674-675). In other words, defining knowledge and social identities is itself an act of power. Van Dijk (1993: 254) neatly summarises this relationship between discourse and power:

> Besides the elementary recourse to force to directly control action... "modern" and often more effective power is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the mind of others in one's own interests. It is at this crucial point where discourse and critical discourse analysis come in: managing the minds of others is essentially a function of text and talk. Note, though, that such mind management is not always bluntly manipulative. On the contrary, dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear "natural" and quite "acceptable."

One of the most important factors enabling certain discourses to appear 'natural' is intertextuality, i.e. the accumulation of meanings across different texts (Hall, 1997: 232). In the introduction to her book *Epic Encounters,* McAlister explains how intertextuality influences American representations of the Middle East: 'Cultural productions help make meaning by their historical association with other types of meaning-making activity, from the actions of state policymakers to the marketing of Bible prophecy…By focusing on the intertextuality… and the common logic of diverse representations, I indicate the ways in which the production of a discourse about the Middle East comes to be understood as authoritative, as "common sense"' (2001: 8). As discussed in the literature review, one of the recurrent themes of previous studies on representations of Iran in the American press is the persistent use of Orientalist stereotypes.

The repetition of these tropes, over time and across a myriad of different media texts, serves to naturalise them and enable them to assume the guise of common sense. Critical discourse analysis is an excellent method to interrogate the ways in which certain uses of language facilitate this process of naturalisation. As Fairclough explains, critical discourse analysis is a useful tool to unpack the "'common sense"

assumptions which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically' (quoted in Philo, 2007: 184).

Despite the benefits of discourse analysis discussed above, this methodology does carry certain risks and drawbacks. One potential problem with discourse analysis concerns the issue of operationalization. Certain types of questions may naturally lend themselves to discourse analytic methods, yet as Fairclough notes, 'there is no set procedure for doing discourse analysis' (1992: 225). This means that while discourse analysis may be a useful method to engage with my research question, the specific process for operationalising this project is not immediately obvious. Moreover, as Gill points out, 'the same text can be interrogated in a whole range of different ways by discourse analysts' (1996: 144). Therefore, the interpretations of the media texts I produce and discuss in this study will by no means be the only possible readings of the texts under consideration. I will attempt to mitigate this limitation by providing ample textual evidence in support of the readings I produce. This approach coheres with Fairclough's argument that the 'main way of justifying an interpretation is through text analysis, by showing that your interpretation is compatible with the features of the text' (Fairclough, 1992: 232).

The final potential problem with discourse analysis is that its focus on media texts neglects the question of audience reception. Suggestions can be made about what certain representations invite the audience to conclude, but discourse analysis cannot definitively tell us whether or not the audience reaches those conclusions. It would therefore be useful to supplement this approach with a methodology that addresses audience response, such as interviewing or focus groups. Time and space constraints do not enable me to pursue these supplemental methods here.

Process: Operationalizing the Research Question

Sampling
In order to examine potential changes in discourse brought about by the 2013 election, I have selected one sample of articles published before the election, and one sample of articles published after. The first sample was obtained by searching the LexisNexis database for articles published between January 1, 2012 and March 31, 2012, using 'Iran' as the search term. Articles containing fewer than ten mentions of the term 'Iran' were excluded, in order to narrow the focus to articles that discussed the Islamic Republic in detail. These articles were then arranged chronologically, and

every ninth article was selected for analysis in order to render the sample manageable and allow for several close and detailed readings of the texts under consideration. The second sample was obtained using the same method, searching for articles published between June 16th, 2013 and September 16th, 2013. The aim was to select samples as temporally proximate to each other as possible, in order to strengthen the integrity of the comparison. While the campaign period officially began in mid May, informal electioneering began well before that. A report by The Project on Middle East Democracy notes that outgoing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad 'continued to position [his close confidant Esfandiar Rahim] Mashaei as a likely successor during his last two years in office' (Tavarna, 2013).

I selected the period of April 1st, 2012 through July 1st, 2012 for the first sample in order to strike a balance: beginning just over a year before the date of the official registration of the candidates (May 7) this period spans the second quarter of the year before an election year (BBC News, 2013b). It is temporally proximate enough to the election to ensure a fair comparison, yet it is temporally distant enough to give a relatively clear picture of how Iran is 'normally' covered, i.e. how it is covered when no elections or campaigning is taking place. This first sample will provide a baseline picture of Iran coverage with which the post-election coverage will be compared. The election itself took place on June 14th, and Hassan Rouhani's victory was announced on June 15th. I have thus selected to begin the second sampling period on the following day, June 16th, and end it three months later, on September 16th.

Selecting to begin a sample the day after a presidential election does carry risks. As presidential elections are liminal and rare events (they take place in Iran once every four years), it would not be surprising to observe temporary shifts in media coverage in the days immediately preceding and following the election. However, the duration of the sample (three months) is long enough to offset any potential ephemeral shifts in coverage that may be found in the election's immediate aftermath. Moreover, the liminality of elections furnishes a further justification for the selection of the second sampling period. Fairclough argues that one useful selection strategy is to focus on 'moments of crisis,' as they may destabilise assumptions that may have been normalised by dominant discourses. As he explains, 'such moments of crisis make visible aspects of practices which might normally be naturalized, and therefore difficult to notice' (1992: 230). Rouhani's election was not a "crisis" per se, however the inauguration of a new president can portend changes in the way a nation or government is perceived. This is of particular interest for the present study because

Rouhani's campaign made explicit his desire to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the United States (Bozorgmehr and Martinez, 2013). The shift in diplomatic posture could therefore serve to expose discursive elements in American representations of Iran that have become naturalized.

Justification for newsapers selected

I have selected *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* for a few reasons. First, as Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007: 148) point out, these publications 'are leading newspapers with regard to the coverage of international news and views, drawing readers from every state and around the world.' *The Washington Post* has won 47 Pulitzer Prizes, and in 2008, the paper was awarded 6 Pulitzers, the second most of any publication in a single year (behind *The New York Times)* (Perez-Pena, 2008). While it is technically not a national newspaper, *The Washington Post* is the most prominent paper in the nation's capital. *The New York Times,* according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2014), has 'long [been] the newspaper of record in the United States and [is] one of the world's great newspapers.' Moreover, as Golan observes, 'elite newspapers such as *The New York Times* serve an intermedia agenda-setting function for other news sources, in particular with regard to the coverage of international events and issues' (quoted in Izadi and Saghaye-Biria, 2007: 148). I intended to include *The Wall Street Journal* as well, however issues of access precluded this possibility.

Coding

As mentioned in the literature review, Izadi and Saghaye-Biria's study coded for eight Orientalist themes: (1) Oriental untrustworthiness; (2) Islam as a threat; (3) Oriental inferiority; (4) Oriental "backwardness"; (5) Oriental irrationality; (6) Oriental submissiveness; (7) Jews vs. Arabs/Muslims; (8) Oriental strangeness (ibid.: 149-150). This approach is useful, as it provides a framework for operationalising a research question concerned with Orientalist representations. Since Orientalism constituted one of the core theoretical tenets underpinning this research, I have drawn from this approach in constructing my coding framework, adapting it to suit the exigencies of this study. In addition, I have also coded for binary oppositions. However, as this study aims to investigate potential shifts in discourse about Iran (including shifts away from Orientalist tropes), the above framework is not sufficient. I have supplemented it by additionally coding for references to Islam, as well as the absence of such references, in articles about Iran. The coding framework is attached in the appendix.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Comparative analysis of the two samples revealed that while there was significant discursive continuity between the two, an important shift in the discourse could also be detected. This section is divided into three parts. The first will discuss the discursive continuities between the samples. The second part discusses the shift in the discourse that was observed. The third section discusses the absences in the discourse of both samples.

According to Fairclough (1992: 62), discourse should be analysed in a '3-dimensional framework as text, discursive practice, and social practice.' This analysis will address the textual dimension by outlining passages from the texts under consideration and grouping them according to four themes: intransigence, untrustworthiness, isolation and the necessity of force. These features of the text will then be linked to the discursive practices of which they are a part. This may involve discussion of intertextuality, as well as the conditions of the consumption and production of the texts in question. The dimension of social practice will be addressed by relating these discursive practices to the broader social practices in which they are imbricated. This discussion will cover the power relations and ideological assumptions that these discursive practices propagate. It should be noted that the discussion and analysis does not necessarily proceed in the order in which the dimensions were described above.

Discursive Continuities

Intransigence
The notion that Iran's leadership is rigid, unreasonable, and strongly opposed to any compromise was a persistent theme in the articles under consideration. One of the most common lexical choices used to denote this is the term 'hard-line,' which Merriam Webster (2014) dictionary defines as 'advocating or involving a rigidly uncompromising course of action.' This adjective was frequently applied to Iranian leaders. Examples from the first sample include references to Iran's 'hard-line leadership' (Erdbrink, 2012) as well as 'hard-line conservative elements in Iran' (Gladstone, 2012). The second sample features references to 'the ruling hard-liners' (Erdbrink, 2013) and 'hard-line conservatives aligned with the Supreme Leader' (ibid.). This phrase was almost exclusively reserved for Iranians. In fact, variations of the term appear 17 times throughout both samples; in 16 of these instances, the term

is applied solely to Iranians. In one case, it is applied to both Iranians and Americans: 'Current and former U.S. officials acknowledged that pressure from hard-liners on both sides could undercut efforts to reach a compromise' (Warrick, 2012).

Untrustworthiness

Another recurrent theme throughout both samples concerns the notion that Iranians are untrustworthy. This generally occurred in the coverage of nuclear negotiations, and proceeded by first constructing a binary between Iran and the West, and then casting aspersions on Iranian motives. There are several examples of this from both samples. In the first, one article notes that 'Western governments are …urging Iran to admit it had a secret nuclear weapons program in the past and to stop producing a more purified form of enriched uranium that can be quickly converted to weapons-grade fuel. Iran insists that its nuclear program is entirely peaceful' (ibid.). Another explains that 'Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, but Western leaders say they suspect it is intended to achieve the capability to build nuclear weapons' (Cowell, 2012). A third observes that 'Western countries suspect the enrichment is a cover by Iran to develop the capability to make nuclear weapons. Iran contends its activities are peaceful' (Gladstone, 2012). The second sample features many similar constructions. One article mentions Iran's nuclear program, 'which Western nations suspect is aimed at enabling Iran to build a nuclear weapon despite the country's repeated assertions that its intentions are peaceful and lawful' (Gladstone, 2013b). Another article notes that 'Iran insists that its program is peaceful, while the United States and other Western nations suspect that Iran is seeking the ability to build nuclear weapons' (Erdbrink and Gladstone, 2013).

Not only does each of these phrases reinforce the boundary between Iran and the West, they also present the former as both perfidious and threatening. By continually reasserting the claim that Western leaders 'suspect' Iran is developing nuclear weapons *despite* Iran's claim that its program is entirely peaceful, these articles leave the unmistakable impression that the statements of Iranian leaders are not to be trusted; no matter what Iranians say, Western suspicions remain. Compounding this impression is the frequent use of the term 'suspect,' which connotes furtive wrongdoing. This interpretation gains further strength when the conditions of text consumption and production – pursuant to Fairclough's discussion of discourse practice (1992: 232) – are considered. These articles were written for – and published in – elite American newspapers for a putative American reading audience. It is very likely that American readers will identify with 'Western leaders' rather than the

Iranian government. The depiction of Iranians as untrustworthy is quite explicitly linked to a threat narrative, since the subject about which Iran's leaders are 'suspected' of misleading the West concerns the production of nuclear weapons. All of this serves to underscore the Orientalist binary between Iran and the West.

Isolation

A theme closely related to the notion of Iran as untrustworthy is the idea that Iran is 'abnormal,' isolated, and different from other nations. One of the articles in the second sample features a passage which illustrates the connection: 'Iran contends the enrichment is for peaceful purposes, but *much of the world suspects* it is meant to achieve the ability to make atomic weapons' (Gladstone, 2013a; emphasis added). Iran is here accused of misleading not just 'Western leaders,' but also 'much of the world.' The binary opposition constructed in this sentence underlines Iran's isolation by juxtaposing it with the majority of the globe.

One of the main conclusions of Izadi and Saghaye-Biria's study was that editorials in elite American newspapers labelled Iran 'a rogue nation whose word can never be trusted' (2007: 150). The authors then connect this framing to Islam: 'Iran is considered a rogue nation because of the nature of its government, which is Islamic' (ibid.). In other words, there is a connection between isolation, threat, mistrust and Islam. The findings of the present study support this notion.

Necessity of Force

An article in the first sample suggests that the prospect of a war between the United States (along with Israel) and Iran 'might well help the ayatollahs... by igniting a nationalist backlash that would bolster their rule' (Kristof, 2012). Iran's leadership is here presented as stalwart and reactionary, craving a war with the West to entrench its power. The implication is that war would be beneficial for the 'ayatollahs' because the 'rogue state' they rule cannot sustain itself through 'normal' diplomatic and peaceful means. This framing is thus related to the themes of isolation and intransigence. In a passage from an article from the second sample, the link can be seen more clearly: 'Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khemenei...has made confrontation with the United States the centrepiece of his rule. Only internal pressure and the threat of U.S. military action will cause Khamenei to accept a nuclear deal' (Hadley, 2013). The claim that confrontation with the U.S. was the 'centrepiece' of Khamenei's reinforces the orientalist binary between the U.S. and Iran, and lends further credence to the theme of intransigence. Further evidence in support of this reading

can be found in the assertion that the only way Khamenei would accept a compromise is if he is compelled to by the threat of military intervention. The clear implication is that Iran's Supreme Leader is reactionary and intransigent and he cannot be dealt with through rational means such as diplomacy; force is the only language he will understand. This is an illustration of the dimension of social practice in discourse analysis. By presenting Iranians as untrustworthy, intransigence and isolated, these representations can be used to justify military intervention.

Discursive Shifts

As discussed above, the primary source of discursive continuity between the two samples was the persistent use of Orientalist tropes, especially stereotypes and binary oppositions. Iranian leaders were variously portrayed as stubborn, untrustworthy, dangerous and reactionary. These depictions lead to the presentation of Iran as abnormal and isolated internationally. One of the sources of isolation is the Islamic nature of Iran's government. Throughout both samples, then, representations of Iran featured several Orientalist tropes that overlapped and reinforced each other: intransigence, untrustworthiness, strangeness and Islam as a threat. However in the second sample, intimations of a trend towards the disentangling of Islam from this regime of representation can be detected. That discursive shift is discussed in detail below.

Clerical Moderation
Throughout both samples, Islam is presented as a potential explanatory variable for the intransigence and isolation of Iranian leaders. Yet in the second sample, the recurrent appearance of a specific collocation suggests for the first time that Islam may also be a source of accommodation. In articles published after Rouhani's election, the phrase 'moderate cleric' appeared several times, usually in reference to the newly elected president himself. One article notes that 'a moderate cleric won the presidential election' (Gladstone, 2013b). Another refers to Rouhani as 'a moderate cleric who has made improved relations with the United States an important goal' (Gladstone, 2013a). A third article describes Rouhani as 'a cleric and a relative moderate within Iran's leadership' (Warrick, 2013). A fourth discusses 'hard-liners who have felt marginalized since Rouhani, a moderate cleric and former nuclear negotiator, won Iran's June 14 Presidential election resoundingly' (Rezaian, 2013). A fifth article furnishes a variation on this construction: 'voters here overwhelmingly elected a mild-mannered cleric' (Erdbrink, 2013).

In each of these cases, a reference to Islam ('cleric') is preceded by a neutralising qualifier. The phrase 'moderate cleric' (or any variation thereof) does not appear in the first sample, and, in the second sample, Rouhani's clerical status is never mentioned without being accompanied by a qualifying adjective ('moderate,' in most cases). The persistent tendency to accompany a reference to Islam with the term 'moderate' implies a deviation from the normal state of affairs. In other words, it implies that there is something aberrational and noteworthy about a moderate Muslim. The line of reasoning that underpins this reading has some precedent.

In her study of the representation of class on reality television programs, Grindstaff notes a tendency for discourses of race and class to reinforce one another. The over-representation of people of colour among the poor and working classes seemingly naturalises the intersection between them (Grindstaff, 2011: 200). Through an analysis of a reality television program she refers to as "*Randy*" (a pseudonym), she explains how the use of a specific qualifier in the description of Caucasian participants indicates that their behaviour deviates from what would normally be expected. 'The favoured term for describing *Randy* guests – "white trash" – underscores the race/class nexus through its use of the racial qualifier: when white folks act like trash, their whiteness needs to be named, because it is understood as exceptional to the "normal" way of being white' (ibid.). The use of the phrase 'moderate cleric' illustrates a variation of this dynamic: when Muslims act 'moderate' or 'mild-mannered,' their clerical status must be named because such behaviour is viewed as an aberration from the 'normal' state of affairs. Consideration of these specific textual examples against the broader field of discourse practices – especially their intertextual relations to other discourses – provides further support for this reading.

As discussed in the literature review, the depiction of Islam as a threat to the West – and the United States in particular – has a well-established legacy. The discourse of the "threat of Islam" was often explicitly connected to Iran. Indeed, Esposito notes that 'for more than a decade Iran represented the embodiment of the Islamic threat' (1995: 101). Moreover, several empirical studies of American media coverage of Iran noted the persistent tendency to portray Islam as a threat. For example, Said observes that in elite American publications, 'one would keep coming up against the information that Iranians are Shi'ites who long for martyrdom' (1981: 98). The notion

that Islam is a source of danger and fanaticism is thus firmly entrenched. Against this backdrop, then, the association of Islam with moderation is indeed noteworthy.

The appearance of the phrase 'moderate cleric' in the second sample illustrates the dialectical relationship between discursive continuity and discursive change in American media coverage of Iran. On the one hand, the persistent use of a neutralising qualifier preceding the term 'cleric' indicates that the association of Islam and moderation represents an aberrant state of affairs, thereby reinforcing the idea of Islam as fanatical and threatening. However, the use of this phrase also introduces a distinction *within* Islam, thereby obviating the Orientalist tendency to treat Islam as a monolithic and unchanging entity. It therefore can be seen as an intimation of a discursive shift away from previous discourses about Iran.

Close readings of some of the passages in the articles which use the phrase 'moderate cleric' further support this interpretation. Consider, for example, the description of Rouhani as 'a moderate cleric who has made improved relations with the United States an important goal' (Gladstone, 2013a). By foregrounding Islam in the description of an Iranian leader's objective to improve relations with the United States, this representation introduces several potential challenges to the dominant discourse. First, it undermines the trope of Iranian intransigence by discussing Rouhani's desire for rapprochement with the United States. Second, it challenges the idea that Islam is pathologically hostile to the West. Third, it extricates the hostility from the juxtaposition between the United States and Iran.

Narratives of Islam as threat, intransigence and isolation tended to overlap and reinforce each other throughout both samples. Yet in the second sample, we begin to see signs of a disentangling of these narratives. The association of Islam with moderation, which only appeared in the second sample, illustrates a slight shift in the discourse away from Orientalism in the aftermath of Rouhani's election. A close reading of another instance in which the phrase "moderate cleric" appears furnishes additional evidence for this interpretation.

One of the articles from the second sample discusses 'hard-liners who have felt marginalized since Rouhani, a moderate cleric and former nuclear negotiator, won Iran's June 14 Presidential election resoundingly' (Rezaian, 2013). The contrast between a 'moderate cleric' and 'hard-liners' challenges the association between Islam and intransigence by placing a lexical marker of Islam ('cleric') in opposition to

a term connoting an aversion to compromise ('hard-liners'). This further illustrates the disentangling of Islam from the narrative of intransigence frequently used to describe Iranian leaders.

While a discursive association between Islam, threat, and intransigence appears in both samples, it is only in the second sample that intimations of the extrication of Islam from this grouping can be detected. There is thus some tension among the various representations of Islam in the samples under consideration. On the one hand, Islam is imbricated in the narratives portraying Iran as intransigent, threatening and isolated. On the other, articles from the second sample begin for the first time to associate Islam with moderation, and, in some cases, explicitly contrast Islam with intransigence. In order to make sense of this seeming contradiction, it must be considered against the backdrop of the dominant modes of representation used to depict Iran in American discourse.

As we have seen, Orientalist tropes have proved to be remarkably durable in representations of Iran in the American media. These representations buttress the opposition between 'us' and 'them' by reinforcing the symbolic boundary separating the two. This lends credence to Silverstone's claim that the media's primary role is 'boundary work,' which involves 'the continuous inscriptions of difference in any and every media text and discourse' (Silverstone, 2007: 19).

Moreover, the antagonism that often characterises this opposition provides support for Hall's assertion that difference can be 'threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, or splitting, hostility and aggression towards the "Other"' (1997:238). The textual representations of Iranians as untrustworthy, intransigent and threatening discussed above thus draw upon firmly entrenched stereotypes and discourses. However, the association of a Muslim cleric with moderation indicates a shift away from an essentialised stereotype of Islam. The findings of this study therefore cohere with the conclusion of Fayyaz and Shirazi's work, which – despite noting the durability of Orientalist representations – demonstrated 'the ambiguities and inconsistencies of contemporary Orientalist discourse, and the ways in which at least some representations are breaking out' of this pattern of representation (Fayyaz and Shirazi, 2013).
 However, these finding also differ from those of Fayyaz and Shirazi in an interesting way. In their explanation of the shift away from Orientalist discourse illustrated by the coverage of former Iranian president and reformist Mohammad Khatami, the

authors note that 'despite his religious title and training, Khatami is largely disassociated from his position as a mullah' (ibid.). In other words, Khatami's conciliatory posture towards the United States brought about more favourable media coverage. However, in order to present Khatami in a more positive light, his clerical status had to be disavowed. This finding illustrates a tendency to present Islam as inherently associated with intransigence and extremism. Indeed, Fayyaz and Shirazi go on to observe the tendency to refer 'to the mullahs as the more institutionally powerful, unelected, hard-line elements of the political elite' (ibid.). Here again we have an association of Islam with uncompromising extremism. So while Fayyaz and Shirazi's study found ruptures within Orientalist discourse, the depiction of Islam as a source of obdurate rigidity remained constant.

The present study, on the other hand, finds that after Rouhani's election representations of Iran no longer observe a firm opposition between Islam and moderation. Unlike the representation of Khatami described by Fayyaz and Shirazi, Rouhani was presented as a 'moderate' without a concomitant disavowal of his clerical status. This depiction hints at a deviation from the stereotypical representation of Islam as a static and undifferentiated source of irrational obstinacy.

Absences

The above discussion focused on prevalent themes in the coverage of Iran in the American print media. However, it is also useful to consider what these representations occlude. On this point, Gill draws on Billig to explain that discourse analysis requires a 'sensitivity to what is not said' as well as to what is said (Gill 1996: 146). Despite extensive discussion of Islam throughout both samples, there is very little mention of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's rejection of nuclear weapons on religious grounds. The Islamic prohibition on nuclear weapons in Iranian foreign policy has been thoroughly documented. Indeed, Leverett and Leverett point out that as far as the Iranian government is concerned, 'nuclear weapons, like chemical weapons, violate Islamic precepts – … they are, to use the religious term, *haraam* [sic] ("forbidden by God").

This argument, first laid down by Khomeini, has been reiterated by Khamenei throughout his tenure as supreme leader and is regularly echoed by other officials' (2013: 86). One example of this comes from Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid

Reza Assefi, who on September 12, 2004 explained: 'we believe that the use of nuclear weapons is religiously forbidden. This is the leader's fatwa [religious decree]' (Radio Free Europe, 2004). In August 2005, Iranian nuclear negotiator Sirus Naseri reiterated this point: 'The Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has issued the fatwa that the production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons' (Mehr News Agency, 2005). As recently as December 30, 2013, a column was published in which Rouhani himself wrote: 'As enunciated in the fatwa issued by supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, we strongly believe that the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are contrary to Islamic norms" (Rouhani, 2013).

While it may be tempting to dismiss these repeated pronouncements as little more than expedient prevarications, Leverett and Leverett argue that they warrant serious consideration: 'This moral constraint on weaponization is more substantial than most Western analysts appreciate. There is the precedent that the Islamic Republic decided – even as Iraq was attacking it with chemical weapons – not to weaponize its stockpiles of chemical agents in order to retaliate in kind' (2013: 86-87). Yet despite the repeated denunciations of nuclear weapons by the supreme leader and Iranian officials – as well as the precedent cited above which illustrates that such pronouncements tangibly impact Iran's strategic and moral calculations – this topic received negligible attention in the articles under consideration. Khamenei's objection to nuclear weapons on Islamic grounds is not mentioned in the second sample, and is only mentioned twice in the first sample. A close reading of the two instances in which it is mentioned will reveal that it is not given prominence.

One of the references occurs in the following context: 'Much of the conversation dealt with the issue of highly enriched uranium, considered the most important issue, because it brings Iran closer to being able to construct a nuclear weapon if it wishes. This Iran denies intending to do, citing Ayatollah Khomeini's statement that nuclear weapons are "haram," or forbidden by Islam' (Erlanger and Gladstone, 2012). The modality in this sentence – described by Fairclough (1992: 236) as the degree of affinity expressed by the writer to propositions in the text – is quite revealing. The authors present Khamenei's prohibition on nuclear weapons not as a fact that might have some bearing on Iranian strategy, but rather as a claim made by Iranian leaders to allay Western suspicions about their nuclear intentions. Moreover, the construction of this sentence bears a striking similarity to phrasing used to imply

Iranian untrustworthiness: a (Western) fear about nuclear weapons is contrasted against Iranian claims that their nuclear program is entirely peaceful. Khamenei's *fatwa* against nuclear weapons is thus presented as another potentially spurious assertion by an Iranian leader that fails to alleviate Western suspicions. If this representation is compared to the coverage given to other statements Khamenei has made, further evidence for this interpretation emerges.

For example, one article from the second sample notes that 'Mr. Rouhani is not likely to be able to determine nuclear policies; that power rests with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, who in his public statements strongly opposes any compromise' (Gladstone, 2013b). Khamenei's control over the nuclear program is stated categorically, and the author suggests that the supreme leader's statements may have some bearing on Iranian policy. Yet the *fatwa* against nuclear weapons is overlooked, and Khamenei's statements are selectively interpreted to imply intransigence. Moreover, note the shift in modality: the content and meaning of Khamenei's statements opposing compromise on the nuclear program are stated as facts, rather than presented as the (potentially false) claims marshalled by Iranian leaders in order to assuage Western anxieties.

The other instance in which the Islamic prohibition on nuclear weapons in mentioned is similarly dismissive: 'the senior U.S. official said that during the meetings, [Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed] Jalili "repeated what they said in the past, that it is un-Islamic to have a nuclear weapon"' (Warrick, 2012). Note how Iranian negotiators are not quoted directly; their statements are mediated by a 'senior U.S. official.' Moreover, pointing out that Iran's rejection of nuclear weapons on Islamic grounds constitutes a repetition of 'what they said in the past' undercuts the importance of this position by relegating it to the dustbin of previous Iranian statements about their nuclear program, which, as we have seen, Western leaders have been loath to believe. In both cases, then, the Islamic prohibition on nuclear weapons codified by Khamenei's *fatwa* receives only passing reference and is treated as little more than a potentially spurious claim that is either implicitly or explicitly contrasted against Western fears. However, Khamenei's statements indicating an opposition to compromise on the nuclear program are stated without qualification and their potential bearing on Iranian policy is underlined. The trivialisation of Khamenei's *fatwa* against nuclear weapons – especially in light of the relative prominence afforded his statements in opposition to compromise – serves to reinforce the trope of Iranian intransigence. Moreover, it tacitly endorses the

association between Islam and obstinacy by highlighting the supreme leader's statements opposing compromise while simultaneously deemphasizing his religious objection to nuclear weapons. Put another way, Orientalist stereotypes can be observed in the discursive absences as well as in the discursive practices that are persistently visible.

CONCLUSION

Through a comparative examination of media texts produced both before and after the election of Hassan Rouhani, this study has found that orientalist representations have remained a consistent feature of the discourse on Iran in American print media. In particular, depictions of Iranians as irrational, threatening and untrustworthy persistently appeared in both samples. Islam was variously associated with each of these stereotypes. These essentialised representations have a long history in American discourse on Iran, and their persistent recurrence throughout both samples is a testament to their resounding durability. Such depictions reinforce the binary opposition between Americans and Iranians by reducing the latter to a series of static essences.

However, despite the continuity of these orientalist discourses throughout both samples, an important discursive shift between the first and the second could also be detected. In both samples, the representations of Iranians as untrustworthy, intransigent and threatening overlapped with one another, with Islam being associated with each of these. Yet after Rouhani's election, we begin to see intimations of the extrication of Islam from the discourse of Iranians as intransigent and threatening. These finding support Pickering's claim that the relationship of the Other is inherently unstable and subject to rearticulation. The use of stereotypes are a discursive strategy aimed at preserving this relationship; however, these findings reveal that such representations are indeed subject to contestation. Further affirming the notion that discourse is a site of contestation is the fact that the association of Islam with moderation in the second sample did not preclude the association of Islam with intransigence. The findings of this dissertation suggest that socio-political changes can furnish a source of challenge to dominant discourses. The precise nature of the relationship between discursive shift and social change is a question that future research should address.

This dissertation has usefully documented several of the discursive formations used to depict Iran in the American print media. As this study has looked in detail at a small number of texts, it would be interesting to see whether or not an analysis of a larger corpus of articles could corroborate the findings presented above. In order to address that question, future research could draw from the findings to construct a coding frame. For example, a large-scale content analysis could code for associations between Islam and moderation. Another fruitful avenue for further research concerns the notion of inter-textuality. It would be interesting to examine a broader range of American cultural products, such as films and television programs, to see if the discursive continuities and ruptures identified above are evident in these representations as well. Pursuing that topic could lead to important insights on the relationship between discourse and the socio-political context in which it circulates.

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APPENDIX

- 35 -

Coding Framework

1) Orientalism

    a) Untrustworthiness

    b) Irrationality

    c) Intransigence

    d) Islam as threat

2) Binary Oppositions

    a) U.S. vs. Iran

    b) West vs. Iran

    c) Rest of the world vs. Iran

    d) Distinctions within Iranian society

3) Islam

    a) Islam emphasized

    b) Islam de-emphasized

    c) Absences in Discussion of Islam

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