The Iran Nuclear Issue in New Zealand Newspapers

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Abstract

This study analyses the construction of the Iran nuclear issue appearing in three New Zealand newspapers—the Otago Daily Times, the Press and the New Zealand Herald. It argues that these newspapers framed Iran and the Islamic nature of its political structure as a threat, presented the current Iranian leadership as untrustworthy and legitimated the actions of Western elite nations and Israel against Iran. It argues that these newspapers espouse an Orientalist view and perpetuate the Western elite agenda by constructing Iran as a threat to the world.

Key Words*: Iran, Nuclear, Newspaper, Discourse, Orientalism, New Zealand*

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Introduction

This study examines the representation of the Iran nuclear issue in three New Zealand newspapers—the *Otago Daily Times* (*ODT*), the *Press* (*Press*) and the *New Zealand Herald* (*NZH*). By employing discourse analysis, it aims to determine how these newspapers' construction of the Iran nuclear issue perpetuates the Western elite agenda. It also aims to determine how the issue has been framed through the Orientalist rhetoric of 'Islamic threat'. The Orientalist discourse argues that throughout history 'the West' has had a confrontational relationship with Islam (Said 1978; 1981). Orientalist discourse maintains that the West is ''ideologically'' and ''culturally'' superior (Said 1978, 2) and conversely, that the non-West is ''inferior'' to 'the West' (Said 1978, 4). This discourse of difference creates 'us' and 'them' social groups that maintains a 'Self' versus 'Them' dichotomy through the moral judgmental prism of 'good versus evil' (Achugar 2004, 293 & 295 [original quotation mark]). Finally, the 'Them' or 'evil' is readily constructed as violent, irrational, barbaric, untrustworthy and as a threat (Said 1978; Achugar 2004; Kabir and Bourk 2012). In short, the Other is perceived as equivalent to an 'evil', a perception that clearly constructs the Other as an enemy.

The Orientalist perception promotes that Islam is a threat to 'the West'. Said (1978) argues that in the core of Occidental writing about Islam and Muslims, a binary opposition is constructed between the Orient (''they''/''them''/''Other'') and the Occident (''we''/''us''/''self''). The Orientalist view constructs the 'Other' as being ''outside'' and ''opposite of [the West]'' through its ''textual and institutional practices'' (Prakash 1990, 384-385) and maintains that the Other will harm 'the West' at any moment (Semmerling 2008, 210). Orientalism becomes the dominant discourse in Western relations with the Islamic world (Said, 1978 & 1982; Maira, 2008). The Orientalist perception ''historically'' depicted the Other as ''barbaric'' [original quotation mark] and imposed a negative image of Arabs and the Middle East, eventually perpetuating Western ''intervention'' and domination (Maira 2008, 320-321) particularly in the Middle East. The Other resembles those characters that 'we' do not want to be.

Muslim nations and their issues are perceived through an Orientalist prism (Karim 2000; McAlister 2001; Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007, 161) that legitimates Western elite policy, and the Western mainstream media rarely challenge the dominant ideology (Poole, 2002). Any changes (or lack of changes) in the 'Islamic world' have been identified through the lens of an Orientalist view. The Orientalist view presents

the Orient through discriminatory categorical and stereotypical labelling. However, such ''[c]ategori[zation] and label[ling] can help us understand why'' and how a cultural group is discriminated against in a particular institutional or cultural setting (New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education 2010, 9). This stereotypical Orientalist view ''obscure[s]'' reality, misguides social perception and can be threatening towards the identity of the 'Other' (New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education 2010, 9). Alatom (1997 [cited in Saghaye-Biria 2007, 149]) observes eight categories of Orientalist elements—'inferiority', 'backwardness', 'irrationality', 'submissiveness', 'Islam as a threat', 'Jews vs. Arabs', 'strangeness' and 'untrustworthiness'; and later, Kumar (2012, 42-60) proposes five ''myths'' of Orientalist elements—'Islam is a monolithic religion', 'uniquely sexist religion', 'incapable of reason and rationality', 'inherently violent religion' and 'incapable of democracy'. This study discursively examines whether these elements or ''myths'' are represented in these newspapers' frames when covering the Iran nuclear issue.

Discourse analysis, which originated in *critical linguistics*, explains *how* and *why* a particular discourse is produced and promoted in a particular society (Teo 2000, 11 [original italic]). It identifies why a social group constructs a particular meaning of a social event through a particular frame. Our 'way of talking'— i.e. our use of language—reflects our ideological and cultural perception towards an issue (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 1; Fairclough 1995). Our various social interests shape our worldview (Williams 1961, 55; Matheson 2005, 1-2), through which we construct our perceived reality. The language we use for and the images we construct of an issue in our social life are not ''neutral'' (Jørgensen, and Phillips, 2002, 1), as the construction of reality that is filtered through our social, cultural and ideological orientation can be questioned— e.g. ''the construction [of reality may not] be reliable and responsible'' (Taylor 2006, 17). In addition, the construction of an issue depends on how the producer, like the media, ''*define*[s] the situation'' (van Dijk 2008, x [original italic]). The construction also depends on the choice of language, metaphors and way of interpretation. Language is the main instrument that transmits, promotes and produces our ideological identity and interests (Teo 2000; Fairclough 1992; Faucault 1972). The meaning that is enfolded and manifested in our everyday use of word and image (Jenlink and Banathy 2005, 9) promotes our ideological perception towards the world. One can also argue that the 'reality' we perceive, receive, construct, produce and represent is a ''reality of discourse'' (Jørgensen, and Phillips 2002, 5). Discourse analysis can thus explain how media texts—whether verbal, visual and aural—as

a production of social institutions construct a social group, and, how a media-text downplays, marginalizes and dehumanizes a group of people, on the one hand, and upholds other groups, on the other hand (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1991).

At this stage, it should be acknowledged that there is considerable research conducted regarding Iran nuclear issue. For example, Siegel and Barforoush (2013) examining six mainstream (Western) newspapers— the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Financial Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Independent*—argue that these media outlets in many cases construct Iran and its nuclear program negatively often without authentic information. An earlier study of Izadi and Saghaye-Biria (2007) also argues that Western mainstream media spouse Orientalist perception of Islamic threat in covering Iran nuclear issue. Shirazi (2013) proposes that 'Western' mainstream media promote 'disinformation' against Iran in covering Iran nuclear issue[2]. Therefore it is important to examine whether the findings of scholars as to the negative representation of Iran's nuclear issue— e.g. as a threat— in Western media is replicated in New Zealand newspapers' coverage. Once again, there is considerable research on the media and communication in New Zealand. For example, in defining social discourses between groups and institutions, Revell's (2012) thesis underlines the prejudicial perception of 'white' New Zealanders towards 'non-white' people— citizens and non-citizens. She argues that 'white superiority' is still active in 'the white' perception that constructs a 'we'/'they' identification of Orientalist perception. Phelan (2009), examining New Zealand newspapers' editorials, argues that in covering critical issues, New Zealand mainstream newspapers promote the mainstream ideology. Loto at al (2006) contribute their scholarship on how people originated in Pacific Island nations (e.g. Samoa) are perceived in New Zealand media. The Iran nuclear issue is one of the most critical world issues in respect to the current international politics that concerns East-West debates, and more importantly, reflects the perception of the US/West towards the post-Shah regime in Iran. However, there has been no attention given to the representation of Iran nuclear issue in New Zealand media. This study is an attempt to address this gap.

All news and editorials appearing in these newspapers within a one-year data set— August 5, 2005 to July 4, 2006—are considered On August 4, 2005, Iran's newly elected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that Iran ''would resume nuclear programs despite the risk of triggering an international crisis'' (AFP 2005, 8). This issue

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2 For more references on this statement— study on Iran nuclear issue— see later discussion.

was covered throughout the time frame in the New Zealand newspapers studied. The *ODT* published 56 news stories, the *Press* published 81 news stories and two editorials, and the *NZH* published 91 news stories and four editorials.

By examining news reports, it is possible to identify how a social group is perceived in a particular society, as news-texts are involved in the "diagnosing [of] social relationships, characterizing marginalized groups, and offering prescriptions for addressing social concerns" (Loto et al. 2006, 100). Similarly, the editorial as "a public and political discourse" assesses and evaluates people or an event (Lihua 2009, 63). The standpoint of an editor or owner of a particular newspaper is "clearly articulated" in the editorial (Kahn and Kenney 2002, 381). The ideological stand of the newspapers towards an issue is addressed in its editorial (Kahn and Kenney 2002, 381; Crawford 2009, 455).

Media create a perceived boundary between 'Islam' and 'the West' (Creutz-Kämppi 2008; Poole 2002, 2) that parallels the elite agenda through the process of judging news value. The elite agenda is evident in the framing of the issue within an Orientalist perception—that is, creating an 'us'/'them' definition of a social boundary; defining a cultural group as a problem; highlighting proximate groups; emphasizing the social structure of 'the West' and 'Islam'; and maintaining the perception of a Orientalist threat.

These newspapers did not publish many editorials—six editorials altogether—but these few editorials nevertheless represent the 'house policy' of the respective newspapers. In two cases—the *Press* and *NZH*—the stand of the newspapers is demonstrated. The 'house' policy or the 'stand' of the *ODT* remains unknown per se, as it did not present any editorials on this issue. However, elite policy could be challenged during the process of media framing—that is, production, promotion, selection and construction of an event—but media in many cases keep silent (Tuesto 2008; Poole 2000; Entman 1993), and this silence eventually leads to the marginalization of the 'Other'. Media-perception towards an issue can also be perceived when the media focuses upon the issue all year round; as such extended coverage indicates emphasis (Poole 2000). For example, news reports relating to the Iran nuclear issue, in most cases, were focused upon using banner headlines; such news reports were also top-headline news with photographs on international news pages in all these newspapers, including the *ODT*.

Media promote, construct, and reconstruct mainstream ideology through their representation of the perceived world (van Dijk 1988, 13), and they control informa-

tion and present ''events-as-news'' within the media's own context and interests (Alt-heide 1974, 24; Nossek 2004, 346). In the selection process, media work as part of other social and political institutions (Shoemaker 1991; Poole 2002, 3) and preserve the agenda of the social elite by constructing, controlling and limiting information. In addition, when an individual, group or a culture is identified as 'distant'—i.e. ideo-logically, politically and culturally distant—to the media, it is possible that there will be negatively ''biased'' (Cuthbert and Sparkes 1978) coverage of that individual, group or culture (Leung and Huang 2008, 676). While media uphold the dominant ideology of the society, media also ''construct their own meaning'' (Poole 2000, 23) and, thus, ''[r]epresentation is not then a transparent process of re-presenting an objective reality'' (Ibid, 23). The reality presented is in fact a reality presented from the viewpoint of media that are closely linked with social elites (Gieber 1964, 173; Entman 1993, Marchionni 2012, 151). These socially powerful groups, which include the media, judge society and its members, and can even cast out certain groups and determine the future of that society (Becker 1967; Marchionni 2012, 151). In short, they redefine reality.

The media's mode of interpretation shapes the reality of an event, and a read-er perceives an event within a frame, which is imposed by media (Entman 2004). Through framing, media can highlight some particular aspects of an issue and down-play others (Entman 2008, 90). The image that a social group is given through a particular frame and a particular interpretation, however, favours ideologically and culturally proximate groups (Giltin 1980; Entman 2008 & 1993; Louw 2004). Media text is produced from the ''cognitive point of view'' and the media ideologies in the selection and production processes are ''inherently social'' (van Dijk 1988, 13). The value judgment of an event—e.g. whether a particular story should be published—and the ideological construction of an event can be identified by examining the me-dia construction of an issue (Ibid, 3).

As with some other studies (e.g. Kabir and Bourk 2012; Rosenberg 2008) of New Zealand newspapers, this study observes that all news reports appearing in these newspapers came through international news agencies—AP, AFP and Reuters. In addition, when selecting stories, New Zealand newspapers do not rely on newspa-pers or news agencies originating outside of 'the West' or any alternative agencies such as IPS (Inter Press Services) that promotes positive view towards the non-West (Rauch, 2003, 87). In contrast, news agencies such as AP maintain Western ideo-logical and cultural superiority (Ibid, 2003). Camaj (2010) argues that internation-

al agencies— e.g. AFP— set the agenda in favour of power-elites and their agenda-setting role becomes stronger if the agenda is supported by other news media such as newspapers. Media play a powerful agenda-setting role (Palmgreen and Clarke 1977, 438; Levine 2006; Marchionni 2012) and social elites frame their agenda through media so that their policies will be accepted by media consumers (Entman 1993, 55). This study argues that 'Western' elites are successful in setting their agenda both in international news and through the newspapers' own presentation of its opinion—that is, through its editorials. Scholarly findings (e.g. Wall 1997; Hawkins 2009; Kothari 2010) argue that the Western mainstream media ideologically and culturally serve the interests of the US, UK and the greater West. The Iran nuclear discourse closely relates Western interest in a Muslim nation like Iran and in the greater Middle East. This study will argue how the construction of the Iran nuclear issue has created a boundary between ''the West'' and the Orientalist ''Other'', namely, Islam.

Iran's Nuclear Background

Iran's nuclear program started during the Shah regime of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in the mid-1960s, with the support of the US. Later in 1968 Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The US encouraged Iran in its development of non-oil energy and provided technologies towards establishing a nuclear reactor (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007, 145). US support was withdrawn after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Nevertheless, Russia came to cooperate with Iran in developing a nuclear program and Iran-Russia talks resumed with regard to the nuclear project in 1990. Previously, many nations including Germany, France, UK, India and Belgium had contributed to this project (Aras and Ozbay 2006, 133). Since 1995, Russia has been the only nation involved in Iran's nuclear program, and this issue has become a subject of Western elite nations' concern (Aras and Ozbay 2006, 132-133). However, Iran has ignored these Western nations' concerns and has continued to develop its nuclear project (Sauer 2008, 290). The 'Western' concern in regards to the nuclear issue has many reasons behind it—for example, Iran's gradually increasing influence in the Middle East, and the strong influence of Islam and Islamic practices on its political structure. The perceived influence of Iran in the Middle East, however, was once also supported and encouraged by the US (Kibaroğlu 2007). Due to some Western nations' mistrust of Iran, the US and Israel threatened Iran with military action, and the US and some European nations threatened to enact decades-long sanctions. Iran, in contrast, vehemently argues that its nuclear project is

'peaceful' and that the nuclear activity is Iran's right.

Iran insists its nuclear program is totally non-military, and that it would also save their oil reserves, which would help them to increase foreign revenues (Moshirzadeh 2007, 524). Some Western nations are not convinced by Iran's explanation for their nuclear program, and argue that Iran has ambitions to manufacture nuclear bombs under the mask of its so-called civil nuclear program (Aras and Ozbay 2008; Moshirzadeh 2007). However, according to the agreement between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran is permitted to start a civilian nuclear program (IAEA Information Circular, 1974), and Iran does follow the latest version of the nuclear law provided in 2003 by IAEA. In addition, even though Iran is surrounded by a number of nuclear nations—Pakistan, India, Ukraine, Russia, Armenia, Israel and Kazakhstan—it is Iran in particular that has been singled out by the US as a threat (Kibaroğlu and Caglar 2008, 59; Kaye and Wherey 2007, 112 & 114). The nuclear success of Iran is identified as a ''mortal blow'' to these Western nations in regards to their Middle Eastern policies, which presents Iran as their political and economic opposition (Aras and Ozbay 2008, 47). Furthermore, the US allocated funds (Nasr and Takeyb 2008, 85-86) to the anti-government groups active in and outside Iran in an effort to change 'Islamic' leaderships through sectarian and political unrest. At this stage, this study presents the discussion of the way these newspapers constructed the Iran nuclear issue.

Discussion
'Us' And 'Them' Identification

The image of an enemy functions in society to create an opponent amongst social groups. The function of an image of the 'enemy' has a powerful role in the field of international politics, legitimating one side while dehumanizing the other (Hase 1997, 140; Bech 1997, 66-67) and influencing the authority of power inside and outside of a particular state (Hase 1997). An ''enemy'' or ''opponent'' becomes the main focus of political and policy agendas. The image of such an ''enemy'' incorporates any negative qualities and always possesses those traits, which *we* do not want to see in *ourselves* (Stein 1989; Volkan 1990). Furthermore, any action of an ''enemy'' is seen as an action directed against 'us'. Their activities are always considered suspicious and are readily questioned.

The New Zealand newspapers' reports represent Iran as a threat to the world. Iran's nuclear program is therefore described according to the rhetoric of 'us' and

'them'. The Islamic nature of Iran is usually emphasised by the use of specific terms such as ''Islamic Republic/republic'', ''cleric regime'', ''fundamentalist regime'', and ''ultra-conservatives''[3]. The following examples are useful in conceptualising this statement:

> The diplomatic changes are part of a government shake-up by ultra-conservative President Ahmadinejad that includes putting Islamic hard-liners in key posts at security agencies.
>
> Mr Ahmadinejad has steered Iran into a more confrontational stance in its dealings with other nations, particularly in suspicion about whether Iran's nuclear programme is illicitly trying to develop nuclear weapons, a charge the regime denies (*Iran hard-line regime fires 40 ambassadors*: November 4, 2005 [*ODT*]).

> Iran announced yesterday that it was removing 40 ambassadors from their posts abroad and indicated a farther hardening of the regime's policies by preparing a new phase in its nuclear program (*Nuclear plans on course after purge of diplomats*: November, 4, 2005 [*Press*]).

> Iran's government is pursuing a nuclear development programme, stoking fears among major powers that it will be used to make nuclear weapons (*President issues threat of nuclear attack*: January 21-22, 2006 [*Press*]).

> Iran's hardline government is removing 40 ambassadors and senior diplomats, including supporters of warmer ties with the West, as part of a widescale purge that has pushed reformists out of key security ministries (*The new Iranian revolution*: November 4, 2005 [*NZH*]).

> [Though] ''not definitive[,] it is strongly suggestive that Iran has made significant advancement towards weaponisation'', said one US official (*Stolen laptop used to damn Iran*: November 14: 2005 [*NZH*]).

The choice of language/words, creating myth etc. are socially constructed—''express[ion] of prevailing ideas, ideologies, values and beliefs''— to uphold dominant ideology (Lule 2002, 277). The cultural superiority of the storyteller must be preserved in myth/language. Thus, we see how an invasion of a nation is accepted in media narrative (Kellner 2004 & 2005). The narrative often helps the audience to perceive the world through the prism of the storytellers' ideological and cultural per-

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3   These examples, along with other terms, will be presented gradually in both this and subsequent sections.

ception (Lule 2002). However, narrators legitimate elite agenda. For example, the first quote of each set of selected quotes from the *ODT*, *Press* and *NZH* suggests that Iran's diplomatic position—the replacement of diplomats—is a ''shake-up'' for the West[4]. The *NZH* report titled *The new Iranian revolution* (November 4, 2005) states that it was the decision of Iran's president to ''[put] Islamic hard-liners'' in key security posts. The diplomatic re-shaping of this country is not accepted in the news frame and the changing of its diplomats and diplomatic strategies are identified as a symptom of a ''confrontational stance'' with 'the West'. In addition, the replacement of the Iranian diplomats is perceived as equivalent/parallel to the 1979's Islamic revolution in the narratives— i.e. it is referred to as the 'new revolution'.

Since the establishment of Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, this nation has been called an anti-Western 'Islamist' country and identified as an enemy of 'the West' (Rashidi and Rasti 2012; Said 1981 & 2003; Debashi 2009) due to the 'Islamic' nature of its political structure (Said 1981; Keddi 1998). The image of Iran as an 'enemy', in fact, legitimates 'the Western' political agenda as it was once worked for 'the West' against Russia during Cold War era (Karim 2000; Poole 2002). This identification parallels with the clash of civilization thesis, which argues that a clash will occupy the world/international relation (O'Hagan 2002, 1) after the Cold War era. The concept of the 'clash' suggests that only 'the West' is rational (Ibid, 1) and therefore, what 'the West' perceives to be good is also right for the rest of the world (Ibid, 1). However, their political agenda towards spoiling 'democratic' norm in the 'non-West' is absent in the discourse. For example, in 1953, a democratic regime in Iran was overthrown with the involvement of CIA (Lee 2013) and a 'Western-friendly regime'— the Shah— was placed instead. 'The West' received control over Iranian oil from its 'friend' (that is what 'the West' was unable to gain before and after the Shah). In 1979 with the overthrow of 'the friend' by 'the Islamist' however, the distrust begins to build again. Since then 'the West' is suspicion of Iran's activities—and promotes the view that what Iran does is against 'the West' and 'the world' (O'Hagan 2002; Karim 2000). Media join this elite discourse in perpetuating elite agenda through Orientalist perception of the Islamic Other (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007, 161; Lee 2013). For example, this portrayal of Iran appears in the context of the US accusation that ''Iran [was] secretly trying to develop atomic arms in violation of the Nuclear Non-prolifer-

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4   The phrase ''shake-up'' can also be found in the *Press* report (*Nuclear plans on course after purge of diplomats*: November, 4, 2005) and the *NZH* report (*The new Iranian revolution*: November 4, 2005) and subheadline.

ation Treaty'' (*Iran hard-line regime fires 40 ambassadors*: November 4, 2005 [*ODT*]). The photo-caption of the *NZH* report also follows the Western policy line, reading: ''EXTREME VISION: Ultraconservative President Mahmood [sic] Ahmadinejad's broom has swept through the security ministries''. It seems that not only Iran's nuclear advancement but also whatever actions they take gives cause for suspicion.

The ''social [and] symbolic power of words'' (Lule 2002, 276) indeed appears when these newspapers represent the 'anti-West' enemy according to the 'Western' political agenda— even without authentic information. For example, two issues appear in the above-mentioned excerpts—the US accusations and suspicion, and the diplomatic reshuffle of Iran. Both suggest that Iran has adopted a position against ''the West''. The symbols that a text carries and the message it wants to convey for social consumption legitimates the narrator's ideology and creates a purposive meaning which favors the narrator's construction of the event (Choudhury 2004, 78) and also perpetuates the elite agenda. For example, the US official quoted in the second example (and indeed in all cases) suggests that he or she is not sure[5] whether Iran is advancing with a nuclear weapon program but he or she is sceptical about the innocence of Iran's supposedly non-military nuclear program. The source is anonymous here—that is, he or she ''asked not to be named''. The framing, however, appears to show that the US suspect that Iran plans to manufacture a nuclear bomb. The nuclear program and the diplomatic changes Iran is carrying out are defined as ''Islamic''; thus, a perception comes through the 'enemy' image of Iran that accords with the perception of an Islamic Other. 'Our' perceived threat is presented as a fact. In contrast, 'their' explanation—namely, that the nuclear program is peaceful and ''intended only to produce electricity''—is rejected, which eventually means that their argument is presented as irrational (*Iran hard-line regime fires 40 ambassadors*: November 4, 2005 [*ODT*])[6].

The reader can see the myth making process and the particular interpretation (Goc 2009, 4) that projects the 'enemy' image through suspicion. For example, in *US claims Iran advancing nuclear arms plans*: November 14, 2005 (*ODT*), it is argued: ''there should be increased international pressure on Tehran to end the program''.

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5 In most cases, these newspapers reports maintain that it is not ''definitive'' but ''strongly suggestive'' that Iran is advancing towards a nuclear bomb. See the *ODT* reference, for example, *US claims Iran advancing nuclear arms plans*: November 14, 2005.

6 For similar narratives, in other newspapers, see for example: *MPs threaten to pull out of nuclear treaty*: May 9, 2006 (*Press*); *Bush 'planning nuclear strike against Iran*: April 10, 2006 (*NZH*).

The *NZH* reports: ''The President [George W. Bush] said 'the world **must not** permit' Iran to develop a nuclear weapon and said Tehran was being ''held hostage'' by ''Islamic clerics'''' (*Bush vows to end addiction to Mideast oil*: February 2, 2006 [emphasis added]). The *Press* report states: ''George W. Bush declared in his State of the Union address that 'the nations of the world **must not** permit the Iranian regime to gain nuclear weapons' [...]'' (*Defiant Iran warns world*: February 3, 2006 [emphasis added]). 'Our' authority over 'them' can be seen in the emphasized words. This, in fact, reinforces political world order equivalent to cultural world order— 'Islam' versus 'the West' (O'Hagan 2002, 4). However, the ''international pressure'' from ''the world'' is in reality, ''pressure'' from the US, Israel and three European nations— France, the UK and Germany. In addition, the generalization of ''the West'' is limited to the US, the UK, France and Germany. The ideological leanings of international news agencies towards some elite nations are prominently focused upon in this context. The power of the texts is evident through the sensationalization of the issue— the isolation of Iran from 'the world' and the assertion that Iran is doing something, which will harm 'the world'. The narratives support elite nations' agenda against Iran by constructing the Islamic Other.

Untrustworthy Islamic State

'Western' mainstream media represent Iran through the Cold War discourse— that is that, Iran is Islamist and a threat to 'the West' (Lee 2013; Karim 2000). In political communication some identity based terms such as Islam, the West are frequently used in defining the clash between civilizations (O'Hagan 2002, 39). This issue needs to be discussed in the context of the New Zealand newspapers. The New Zealand newspapers' news construction maintains the suspicion that Iran cannot be trusted with its nuclear program. This perpetuates the Orientalist view of Islamic threat, despite the fact that ''Iran had not yet purified uranium'' (*Iran threatens to halt nuclear inspections*: February 2, 2006 [*ODT*]) and that the US officials are not able to confirm ''the timetable'' indicating *when* Iran may start its ''nuclear bomb'' project, instead saying that the ''Islamic Republic had the money and sophisticated scientific personnel to complete the work'' (*Told to remove cameras*: February 8, 2006 [*ODT*]). However, these New Zealand newspapers' reports say that ''the world'' cannot trust this ''Islamic'' (*Iran 'has bomb training camps'*: October 13, 2005[*NZH*]), ''ultraconservative'' (*Iran insists: wipe out Israel*: October 29, 2006 [*Press*]) ''Islamist Republic'' (*Reports indicate solid case against Iran*: March 4-5, 2006 [*ODT*]). Consequently, 'we'

are making decisions on the basis of a perception of untrustworthiness.

The following examples show the way in which these newspapers' reports further reference the perception of 'untrustworthiness'. These kinds of statements appear frequently in these newspapers:

Iran has repeatedly said it only wants to enrich uranium to the low grade needed to generate electricity, not to the much higher level needed for a bomb (*Bid to break impasse*: March 2, 2006 [*ODT*]).

The United States and European Union fear Iran's nuclear power program is a cover for making nuclear weapons. Iran says it needs the technology to generate electricity (*Iran seeking nuclear weapons, says report*: January 5, 2006 [*NZH*]).

The West suspects Iran is seeking nuclear arms, Tehran says its atomic programme aims only to generate electricity.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said nuclear weapons were against Islamic teachings, but he vowed to pursue atomic energy (*Iran scorns EU's draft*: January 20, 2006 [*Press*]).

Through the use of language one can see the workings of an inclusion/exclusion process and the media manipulation of the content, context and event. For example, the 1953 coup against democratically elected President M. Mossadegh was constructed as a popular uprising against an ''incompetent'' leader (Lee 2013, 6). In fact, the overthrown of the Mossaddegh regime and establishment of the Shah was due to the UK-US political and economic agenda— controlling Iranian oil— that was continually supported and legitimated in 'the Western' media construction (Ibid, 6- 7). In the 'Western' media frame, however, the overthrown of the Shah regime is perceived as the 'enemy agenda' (Lee 2013; Keddie 1998, 6) of Islamic fundamentalists. Since then Iran has been identified as the 'enemy' and a 'threat' to 'the West' (Rashidi and Rasti 2012). This identification, nonetheless, legitimates 'the Western' elite agenda against Iran, a process which can be traced back to 1953 (Lee 2013; Keddie 1998). This also seems to be the case for New Zealand. The above excerpts indicate that, according to Iran, Iran's only aspiration is to build civilian facilities to provide electricity. However, the excerpts also question this assertion, stating that this plant can also be converted to achieve nuclear weapons. This implies that Iran's officially stated aspirations to build civilian electricity plants are suspected to be false, and that this ''Islamic nation'' is therefore intending to deceive.

A particular social group may create a boundary around them and their institutions such as media who legitimate the construction of that boundary. This eventually constructs a perceived clash between groups (Simons 2010, 393). The clash is focused upon through the various activities of the social elites that perpetuate elite political agenda. For example, the former US President Bush perceived his enemy in the streets of Baghdad and he proposed that until 'the enemy' was defeated, the clash would remain (Ibid, 394). In his speeches59 he uses terms such as 'Islamists', 'Islamism', 'axis of evil' (e.g. Iran), all of which refer to 'the enemy' (Ansari 2007, 108). To defeat 'the enemy' political elites need to set their agenda— which in this case is a fear of Islamist/Islam (Simons 2010, 394). In the 'West' Iran is identified as 'Islamist Iran' or as a 'totalitarian' nation (Ansari 2007, 107). Social institutions perpetuate political agenda against 'the enemy'. President Bush framed the Iraq invasion as a war against a ''civilizational enemy'' (Simons 2010, 406)[7], which included the 'Islamist' including 'Islamist Iran'. The elite-supportive social institutions legitimate the elite agenda. For example, these newspapers parallel the political elite or ''the West'' fears that ''Iran will use its civilian nuclear program'' for military purposes (*Iran's nuclear research raises prospect of sanctions*: January 12, 2006 [*NZH*])[8]. Nonetheless, Iran is represented as a future threat with its nuclear program even with its current peaceful project. This is an extreme position that rejects Iran's right to any version of nuclear energy. The news reports appearing in these newspapers framed the issues through the perceived consequences (Entman 2003 & 2004); any kind of nuclear program in Iran is a threat for ''the world'' and thus, Iran continues to be seen as an untrustworthy and irrational nation. This position seems to show that the framing is not only against the possibility of Iranian nuclear bombs, but also against its civilian project. The moral authority is thus given to some Western elite nations through the frame of 'good' versus 'evil' in which the Western elite nations are morally superior. Thus, these Western nations play the role of 'defender of the world' against the 'threat' from 'Islamist' Iran which follows a 'traditional religion', Islam. This fear actually comes from an Orientalist perception—the ''traditional religion'' of Islam versus

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7 Discussing the political use of the 'clash' Simons (2010, 406), — observes how some Western political leaders use it for their agenda: Bush has used terms like this on a number of occasions: 'it is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century and the calling of our generation' and 'it is a struggle for civilization. We are fighting to maintain a way of life enjoyed by free nations'.

8 Similar messages can be found in other newspapers. For example, the *Press* suggests that the ''traditional religious conservative'' Iran has ambitions to manufacture nuclear bombs (*Call to wipe Israel off map*: October 28, 2005). The *NZH* reports that the nuclear projects of this ''Islamic Republic … ''could eventually result in production of a nuclear weapon'' (*Ahmadinejad: Israel cannot continue to live*: April 26, 2006).

the 'modern' West.

Policy Recommendations

The above discussion proves that Western elites were successful in framing their agenda against Iran through international news agencies. The success of the elite agenda can also be identified through policy recommendation of news reports. For example, according to the report *US attack on Iran seen as last option* (January 17, 2006 [*ODT*]), it might not be possible to destroy Iran's nuclear projects because ''much of it is underground'' and ''dispersed in numerous sites''. The suspicion eventually presents the consequences— the 'Islamist enemy' wants to bomb us. The report suggests that it is better to bomb 'them' before 'they' bomb 'us'. The selective representation of 'our' good action— that is bombing Iran is legitimated and acceptable as harmless. In contrast, Iran's civilian nuclear plant is framed as dangerous or 'bad'. This kind of selective frame of media text promotes the Othering of Iran (Said 1993, 80-82; O'Hagan 2002, 12). 'The Western' media provide cohesive voice in perpetuating political agenda (O'Hagan 2002, 4; Louw 2004). For example, these newspapers also identified some common issues that could destabilize 'Western' interests. For example, ''an attack on Iran could inflame anti-Americanism'' across the world and it will ''launch new attacks'' on ''the West'' (*US attack on Iran seen as last option*: January 17, 2006 [*ODT*]). Such an attack will also ''inflame US problems in [the] Muslim world'' (*Spy plane shot down over Iran*: April 11, 2006 [*Press*]) because what the Iranian President says about ''the West'' is forwarded to the people living in ''Algiers to Islamabad'' (*Man of people is West's biggest fear*: January 18, 2006 [*NZH*]).

The non-West and more specifically 'Islam' is depicted as an exotic 'Other' (Nashef 2012, 80) and the perceived view 'the West' possesses of 'non-Western' countries. Islam can be viewed within 'our' texts (Said 1978, 58-69) that focus on 'our' choice of language (Jourdan and Tuite 2006, 9 & 11). In addition, 'the West' divides the world into two categories: in/out groups— namely, pro-and anti-American nations (Said 1997/1981, 40). For example, the above-mentioned report reinforces that it is not only Iran but also the entire 'Muslim world'— i.e. Algeria to Pakistan, which is constructed as untrustworthy or as a possible threat. Thus, the strike against Iran is justified and accepted, but the consequence—Muslim anger—needs to be considered. Therefore, ''the West'' will have to think of alternatives to a military strike. However, ''the last option'' is still available: ''the United States may ultimately have to undertake a military strike to deter Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons'' (*US attack on Iran seen as last option*: January 17, 2006 [*ODT*]; *Tehran's assurances facing 'litmus*

test': January 17, 2006 [*NZH*]), and ''the military option may be the only means of halt-ing a regime'' (*Hawks ready the warplanes*: February 8, 2006 [*Press*]). This is despite Iran's guarantee that the ''nuclear programme will not be diverted towards weap-ons'' (*Iran says Chirac's nuclear comment unacceptable*: January 23, 2006 [*ODT*]). But 'we' do not accept that guarantee.

Young (1995: 98) argues that the sense of the Western colonial supremacy does not come through the administration of war only, rather this sense may appear as ''a desiring machine'' (Ibid, 95)— 'the West' has the right to advocate for/against others (Nashef 2012, 80). For example, 'our' actions, in striking against a nation on the basis of hearsay or rumour, are accepted, but 'their' guarantees with regard to achieving nuclear energy are rejected. However, ''the West'' does not want to strike against Iran in the first place. Rather, a ''package of incentives'' (*Split over European plan for nuclear deal with Iran*: May 22, 2006 [*ODT*]) is proposed that includes ''for-eign supply of atomic fuel so Iran would not need to enrich uranium itself'' (*Carrot or stick for Tehran*: June 3, 2006 [*NZH*]). 'The West' is constructed in this report as having a benevolent nature (Gavrilos 2002, 341-342); such framing however limits oppositional discourses— control over Iran. In addition, media construct the social world by framing the issue from their ideological view that arguably preserves the elite agenda (van Dijk 1988, 8). For example, this package, however, will only be given on the condition that Iran stops ''enriching uranium'' (*Split over European plan for nuclear deal with Iran*: May 22, 2006 [*ODT*])[9]. Therefore, ''the West'' will ensure Iran's security, which is already identified as a ''threat to international peace'' (*No deal on talks, Iran tells US*: June 2, 2006 [*ODT*])[10]. This ''support'', nonetheless, would only be proposed if ''the West'' perceives that there is no possibility of hostility from this ''Islamic Republic''. It is safe for ''the West'', because it will not encounter hostility from this or any other 'Islamic' nations. But Iran will, once again, be dependent on ''the West''. This package is, however, one of 'our' political mechanisms for further-ing 'our' power over this ''Islamic Republic''. This will secure 'us' from the ''threat'', which has been identified as ''traditional'' and ''Islamic'' since 1979.

In countering this ''clerical regime'', the US has taken another strategy—encour-aging ''regime change'' in Tehran, as ''the ultimate goal'' (*US thinking of bombing Iran*: April 10, 2006 [*ODT*]). As a result, along with diplomacy, sanctions and strik-

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9 A similar message can be found in *West holds its breath as Iran mulls nuke deal*: June 8, 2006 (*NZH*); *Big pow-ers agree on Iran strategy*: June 3, 2006 (*Press*).

10 The assertion that Iran is a threat is presented elsewhere in the *ODT*, the *Press* and the *NZH*.

ing Iran, ''regime change'' in Iran is another strategy ''in resisting the theocracy'' of Iran[11]. Therefore, ''we [the US] want the Iranian people to be free'' (*US eyes Iran regime: report*: March 14, 2006 [*ODT*]). This 'freedom' will come in the form of striking Iran, imposing sanctions on Iran or replacing ''the ayatollahs of Tehran'' (*Tehran regime change US goal*: March 14, 2006 [*NZH*]). Whatever it is that 'we' want to do, 'we' seem to have the right to do it.

The ideological and moral superiority of 'the West' is maintained through the construction of the issue—'the West' appears to safeguard 'the world' against the Islamic threat by promoting freedom, establishing peace, offering generous support to an Islamic nation, and standing against the threat of the world. Thus, if the UN cannot take action against ''this regime'', the US and/or Israel will launch strikes against Iran. The legitimacy of such strikes will not be questioned; nor will the legitimacy of ''the world's'' belief in the threat of Iran upon world peace. It is 'our' definition of terms like ''irrational'', ''threat'', ''violent'' and ''peace'' that matters, and this definition is a means of authority over 'them'—that is, the Islamic Other.

Iran Nuclear Issue In Editorial

There were no editorials appearing in the *ODT* on this issue. The *Press* published two editorials and the *NZH* published four editorials. The Western political elites were successful in setting their agenda via framing the issue, both in New Zealand newspapers' editorials and international news agencies. For example, the *NZH* editorial argues that Iran's nuclear project is a threat to Israel and 'the world'. The editorial maintains that Israel is facing ''Iran's ally'' in the Middle East—Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine (*Iran must accept fuel without fire*: September 4, 2006 [*NZH*]). The headline of the editorial—*Iran **must accept** fuel without fire* [emphasis added]—also provides absolute authority to ''the West''.

The authority also parallels the elite policy line and follows a political argument that parallels the elite agenda. As discussed above President Bush decides what Iran can do and cannot do. The US blames Iran for everything bad in the Middle East and Afghanistan (Debashi 2009, x). The editorial constructs Islamophobia through the false fear of the Iranian influence in the Middle East (Ibid, ix). As suggested above, Iran's 'nuclear success' is perceived in 'the West' as a (international) political defeat to their Middle Eastern policy. The perceived 'success' eventually creates Iranopho-

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11 For the reference to 'regime change' strategy in the *Press*, please see for example: *US to push for regime change*: March 14, 2007; and in *NZH*: *Tehran regime change US goal*: March 14, 2006.

bia inside 'the West'— this success may reduce 'Western' authority in the Middle East. As a result, 'the West' and the 'Western-elite supportive media' oppose any kind of nuclear development in Iran (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria, 2007). Similarly, New Zealand newspapers' editorial argues that a ''nuclear-armed Iran would make the Middle East, and the world, a far more dangerous place'' and therefore, ''[a] concerted international effort must be made before it is too late'' (*Iran needs carrots and sticks*: January 13, 2006). Likewise, another editorial (*World unity needed over Iran*: May 1, 2006) argues: ''Tehran is intent on its building its own nuclear weapons''; but it clarifies the 'world position' towards Iran: ''Nothing less than the cessation of uranium enrichment should satisfy the international community''. Thus, it asks for ''world unity'' in taking action against Iran because ''their [Iran] less-than-frank dealings'' makes ''international community'' ''frustrated'' (*World unity needed over Iran*: May 1, 2006). The Orientalist perception of the Islamic Other as 'irrational'/'inferior'/'awkward'/'a threat', in fact, legitimates 'our' actions against 'them'—that is, the Islamic nation.

In current Western discourse 'Islam and Iran' is similarly identified as a threat (Said 1981; Debashi 2009). In Western media 'Iran' and its citizens are dehumanized (Debashi 2009, ix) due to its political relationship with 'the West'. For example, in the *Columbus Post-Dispatch* newspapers' editorial cartoon[12] individuals of Iranian descent are depicted as cockroaches (Ibid, ix). The caricature promotes the 'enemy' image of Iran and suggests that its people cannot and should not be trusted (Ibid, x-ix). This image of Iranian's untrustworthiness can also be found in New Zealand newspapers' editorials. For example, the *Press*' editorial says that Iran is untrustworthy, arguing that ''No-one believes [Iran]'' and that Iran will supply nuclear bombs to 'Islamic terrorist groups' active across the world (*Iran on the brink*: January 16, 2006 [*Press*]). Another editorial constructs a similar position: ''Iran insists that its nuclear program is peaceful, aiming to simply ensure the nation's energy supply. That is balderdash'' (*Iran's treachery*: April 12, 2006). Both the *NZH* and the *Press* editorials hint that Iran is untrustworthy/irrational/awkward/a threat and ask 'the world' to take action against this ''Islamic regime''. The moral authority is given to the elite nations through these newspapers' editorial frames and these elite nations are framed as the defender of the world. Thus, they question Iran's nuclear rights but encourage the US strikes against Iran, in contrast—indicating 'our' good motives in initiating strikes,

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12 Published in this newspaper on September 4, 2007.

while emphasising 'their' bad motives in initiating a civilian project—and this reflects their Orientalist perceptions which frame the issue according to the elite agenda.

Conclusion

In regards to media framing, New Zealand newspapers, in their international news and editorials, maintain a similar perception—that Iran is a threat and should not be trusted with its nuclear program. The Orientalist perception of untrustworthiness and irrationality were repeated. It emphasises that the Islamic elements found in the state political structure of Iran is a source of distrust. These newspapers, as with some other Western mainstream media outlets and elite nations' politicians and their bureaucrats, in their frame represented the Orientalist view of 'us' and 'them', in which Iran was identified as the Islamic Other and as a threat. This unchallenging media frame legitimates and authorises the power of some Western elite nations; thus, elite ideology is accepted without question.

The discussion can be focused upon from a different angle. Iran is not violating the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) agreement (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007) in planning the civilian nuclear project. Furthermore, this nation is currently far from actually achieving the kind of civilian project that Iran claims will be cost effective in terms of its internal energy consumption. Iran is not the only nation that could be identified as a nuclear power in this region. However, there may be several reasons behind the identification of Iran as a threat or the simplistic depiction of Iran in these newspapers. First, after the Shah regime of Iran, 'the West' lost its 'faithful' leader in Iran with the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. A perceived mistrust between Iran and some Western nations started and has continued since then. In support of elite policy newspapers framed 'Iran' in parallel to the (elite) agenda. The success of the elite's framing is thus reflected in New Zealand newspapers' construction of Iran nuclear issue—their editorial comments parallel the international news agencies that perpetuate Western elite agenda. This is due to their cultural proximity and ideological leaning towards the Western elite interests.

The elite nations, international news agencies and New Zealand newspapers alike maintain that the 'Islamic Republic/republic' of Iran is irrational, and a threat; and descriptions of its 'Islamic' political ideology appear with a specific agenda—the non-reliable leadership in Iran. The newspapers and agencies preferred to echo those voices that parallel the elites inside their society—that is, what they say and what they do not say. The elite political agenda comes through the hostile relation-

ship between Iran and the Western elite nations; and the elites are successful in setting their agenda by framing Iran negatively in these newspapers both in editorials and news reports. The frame found in these newspapers parallels some Western political elites and thus the reason why Iran cannot acquire a nuclear project while it is surrounded by nuclear power nations remains nevertheless unquestioned. It is not even questioned whether the IAEA agreement would be violated should Iran complete its civilian nuclear energy plant.

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