Of Protests and Riots: the Media Coverage of June 2009 Events in Iran and Those of August 2011 in Britain

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of America's post - 9/11 "anti-terrorist" policies the old scenario of regime-change in Iran entered a new phase. The media coverage of the 2009 presidential election and especially the election aftermath in Iran, believed by many to be unprecedented in the history of Western media coverage of any presidential election, was clearly in line with color revolution strategies. Predictably, the BBC and VOA played a key role. Soon afterward, the August and September 2011anti-capitalism protests in London and New York provided a good chance once again to test the Western governments' claim of respecting their people's "right-to-protest." Focusing mostly on the BBC's coverage of the two events, as a case study, and drawing upon insights from colonial and postcolonial studies and critical discourse analysis, this study attempts to investigate how the BBC recontextualized and reported the post-election "protests" in Iran and August 2011 anti-capitalism "riots" in Britain through prepackaged information.

Keywords: 2009 presidential elections in Iran; 2011 anti-capitalism "riots" in Britain; Western media; the BBC; Orientalism; critical discourse analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

> In this 'war between good and evil'… every nation had a decision to make: 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'. … Americans are asking: why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. (Bush. qtd. in Mondal 189)

Media studies at the outset addressed the entertaining function of the mass media. Later, modifying its method along with developments in cultural studies, media studies began to approach media as a cultural and ideological institute in defining social and political relations and producing and transforming popular ideologies (Hall, "Introduction to Media"104-6). Today mass media play a momentous role in preservation, production, and transmission of "knowledge," culture, news, and "information." Playing a crucial socio-political and educational role in society, the news generates a specific kind of mass media discourse by fabricating a 'truthful' illusion of reality. In Bingell's view, "The conventions of representation on television most often rely on the iconic nature of images to convey an impression of realism" (87). People believe that by listening to the news, they will obtain a factual knowledge of their society, while, as Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard observes, "news is the report or recontextualization of an event…. News is not the event, but the partial, ideologically framed *report* of the event" (273).

A compelling case in point is the way Western media represent Islam and, especially, Iran. Focusing on the ideological function of media this study probes Western media, specifically the BBC's, representation of the June 2009 post-election events in Iran and the August 2011 anti-capitalism ones in Britain.

A look at the history of post-Islamic revolution Iran shows that Washington and London have consistently adopted antagonistic policies toward the Iranian government, at least as far as the post-Islamic revolution Iran and British foreign policy is concerned. what Anthony Parsons calls the "legend of British power to manipulate any situation to suit its interests" (ctd. in Tarock, "Iran-Western Europe" 58) has proved to be anything but legend. As for America, after September 2001 cataclysmic events and the rise of Al-Qaeda terrorism, it has pursued its neo-imperialist policies as aggressively and destructively as possible in the Middle East. Primary among these has been the 'regime-change' policy toward Iran. There are many reasons for the unfeasibility of hard means of subversion in Iran. As James E. Jennings notes, that "Iran is capable of resisting Western encroachment because of several often overlooked factors, including its challenging geography, its position as the veritable nexus of Southwest Asia, its history of regional domination, and its strong cultural identity" ("The Geo-Strategic Position"). In addition to this geopolitical variable, Kayhan Barzegar points out the cultural and ideological elements of Iran's national power and argues that due to its geopolitical and ideological position, Iran affects the international security and determines the interdependence between the West and the Muslim world (36).

The uncanny resilience of Iran vis-à-vis these subversive policies has led American and its Western allies to put on the agenda soft-war techniques more primarily than before. Washington's anti-Iran rhetoric, sometimes couched in militaristic terms, for years has focused on Iran's nuclear energy program, human rights issues, democracy and terrorism. For instance, Condoleezza Rice called Iran "the Middle East's 'central banker' for terrorism" (Tarock, "Iran's Nuclear Programme" 646), and Dick Cheney warned acrimoniously that the "Iranian regime needs to know that if it stays on its present course (on the nuclear issue), the international community (read the West) will 'impose meaningful consequences' on it"(ibid.). More notably, US President George Bush regarded 'regime change' in Iran, and saving Iranian people, a "messianic mission" for himself (ibid.). This mission was pursued through fomenting internal chaos rather than military war.

To implement the 'regime change' policy soft and psychological war techniques have been used on a massive scale. Launching satellite channels (PMC Family, Farsi One, etc.) targeting Iran, producing and broadcasting series like *24* and Homeland, Hollywood movies like *300* and *Immortals* with anti-Islamic and anti-Iranian content, and in general a consistently

negative representation of Iran are in line with this general policy. The media coverage of post-election events in Iran was a unique manifestation of this policy. Adam Tarock explains Washington's 'regime-change' agenda:

> To put its official stamp on anti-Iran propaganda, in February 2006 Washington made an urgent request to the Congress for $85 million to help Iranian opposition groups broadcast radio and television shows beamed at Iran to 'promote democracy' there, using Poland's Solidarity movement as a model. In charge of changing the regime from within is the daughter of Vice-President Cheney, Elizabeth Cheney. She is attached to the State Department and is referred to as 'freedom agenda coordinator'. ("Iran's Nuclear Programme"654)

2. DISCUSSION

The crisis in Iran started when the two defeated candidates, Mir Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, disputed the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and led the opposition Green Movement. Before the result of the election was announced, Zahra Rahnavard, Mir Hussein Mousavi's wife, stated that if Mir Hussein Mousavi is not elected, the election is rigged. Immediately after it was announced that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won by a landslide, the BBC broadcast: "The Iranian opposition, including Mr. Khatami and the defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, said the election was rigged," ("Ex-president Khatami") while no election observer or Iranian official claimed that the election results were manipulated. The BBC added that after the election "Thousands of opposition supporters took to the streets… More than 80 people are believed to have died in the clashes with the security forces" (ibid.). Apart from the BBC's dubious statistics here, the point is that the events provided the Western media with a golden opportunity to further the regime-change scenario through their semi-skewed coverage.

In 2011, the London's public protests and New York's Occupy Wall Street protests made the Western media broadcast some haphazard and hasty pictures of the malcontent at the capitalist system. Various Western media networks have covered these upheavals in Iran and the West; however, this article focuses on the BBC's representation of the disturbances following the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009 and the August 2001 unrest in Britain to investigate through comparison the two modes of representation one finds in the coverage of the two events. This article argues that rather than a transparent and objective *report* of facts, the BBC most often decides to 'interpret' and 're-present' the factual events in one way or another. Its pose of an 'outsider look' recontextualizes participants in Green Movement as 'we' (allies with the West), and the other Iranians, supporters of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or not, as 'the others'. The BBC narrates Iran and England's stories from two opposite perspectives. In the case of Iran, it sides with the demonstrators imaging them as innocent protesters whose rights have been trampled on. Whereas, in the case of England, people shouting their malcontent on the streets are rioters, 'the criminal Other.' The writers suggest that this kind of representation has its roots in Neo-Orientalist discourse tied up with Islamophobia.

Stuart Hall distinguishes three distinct approaches to representation: **1-Reflective approach** which asserts that language mirrors the true meaning that lies in the real world. **2-Intentional approach** which is grounded on the agency of the authors who impose their unique

meaning on the world through language. **3-Constructionist approach** which states that it is the representational system that constructs meaning and the material world has no meaning by itself (Hall, *Representation* 24-5). In other words, the knowledge of the reality is constructed by and through discourses which in turn are the product of the play of naturalized signs. At the connotative level, signs are open to new accentuations and ideological representations (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"166-8). The ideological representation concerns the idea that one value is privileged, while the others are marginalized and muted. Ideological representation functions through three discourses: **ethnocentric discourse** which is about the centrality of the 'self' and the segregation between 'we' and 'you'; **domination discourse** which is founded on the power relations and superiority of 'we' over 'Others'; and finally, **demonization discourse** which hinges upon the Manichean dichotomy: the presentation of 'we' as good and 'Others' as demonic and evil (Ameli e tal. 12). All these forms of representations and discourses fashion a kind of identity for the group being represented. This identity-formation through representation has close affinity with the critical discourse analysis approach whose focus is "On how social actors and events are represented and how this representation contributes to the formation of in- and out-group identities in relation to a particular event" (Hodge, Kress, and Lemke, ctd. in Achugar 292). In fact, CDA probes into the political purposes and power relations that have given rise to the forms of texts, and the processes of production and reading of texts (Kress, qtd. in Talbot12). Hodge and Kress (1993) recognize two broad discursive strategies used in ideological struggles: "the manipulation of reality and the manipulation of the orientation to reality" (ctd. in Achugar292). These discursive strategies could be explored in the case of Iran and England's disorders; we can discuss how reality is constructed through the BBC's representation of events and participants, and how the BBC evaluates these events and participants and orients itself to reality in order to advance its own political and ideological interests.

The Orient, in Edward Said's view is one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other"(1) and "[has] been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences" (ibid.). Borrowing Foucault's notion of the power/knowledge nexus (knowledge produced through power and power exercised through the production of knowledge (Foucault 93)), Said maintains that orientalism is a form of knowledge produced about the Orient by Occident through their "relationship of power, of domination, [and] of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). In other words, orientalism is "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern the Orient" (ibid. 95). Hence, not only do the orientalist texts create knowledge and the very reality about the Orient (ibid. 94), but they help define the Occident as the Orient's "contrasting image, idea, personality, [and] experience" as well (ibid.1-2). For the West the East is the locus classicus of sensuality, despotism, aberrant mentality, and backwardness, whereas the West is civil, superior, producer and possessor of knowledge.

Slavoj Žižek's concept of 'symbolic efficiency' is also in line with this Western claim that "for a fact to become true it is not enough for us just to know it, we need to know that the fact is also known by the big Other too" (ctd. in Myers50). The crucial point for Žižek is that "it is the big Other which confers an identity upon the many decentered personalities of the contemporary subject" (ibid. 51). Assuming the West as the authoritative big Other signals that only those strands of the East's 'self' registered by the big Other display symbolic efficiency, and determine the East's universal position and identity. These binary oppositions of we/other and privileged/unprivileged are also manifest in Stuart Hall's concept of "discourse of difference" serving to "establish social, political and economic practices that preclude certain

groups from material and symbolic resources" (Hall, qtd. in Wodak 111), meaning that some social agents deserve to access these sources, whereas others do not.

Exploring the America (West)/East dialectic, Ziauddin Sardar and Ehsan Masood contend that America's relationship with the world is an ontological one, "because 'terrorists' are evil, America is good and virtuous. The 'Axis of Evil' out there implicitly positions the US as the 'Axis of Good'…Ontologically good folks need constant reaffirmation of their goodness. This is why America always needs a demon Other; indeed, it is incomplete without its constructed Other. The current demon is, of course, Islam" (265-6). Moreover, America owns 'defining power' and defines 'human rights', 'freedom of the press', a 'fundamentalist', a 'terrorist', or simply 'evil', and such "definitions depend on context and change when expediency demands" (ibid. 267).

Western and Western-backed media often represent a negative image of Iran through their often distorted reports on Iran. Consider the following texts describing two similar situations. The first is BBC's report on the disorders on Quds (Jerusalem) Day in September, and on National Students Day at the start of December in Iran:

> ***Protesters*** are becoming fearless in the face of ***state repression***. Despite increased security, official warnings and often ***brutal crackdowns*** on opposition figures, journalists and ***ordinary demonstrators***, the Green Movement has continued to protest against the result and demand the president resign. ***Tens of thousands of opposition supporters clashed*** with the security forces and members of pro-government militia on Quds (Jerusalem) Day in September … ("Q&A: Iran protests", bold italics added)

Two years later, Assistant Chief Constable Paul Scarrott describes disorders in England as "***gratuitous, senseless*** and wholly ***unjustified*** acts of ***wanton criminality***" ("Nottingham riots", bold italics added)[3]. Further, he adds "I cannot understand this explosion of ***mindless hooliganism*** and ***violence*** which is scarring our city and causing untold damage, not just to property but to the peace of mind of the ***law-abiding majority***" (ibid., bold italics added).

These occurrences in Iran and England are raw historical events which, as Stuart Hall intimates, "cannot, *in that form*, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse" ("Encoding/Decoding" 164). Hence, these events must be encoded in the signs of televisual discourse, and the complex formal rules of language. The remarkable point here, as Hodge and Kress also maintain, is that all language signs are always 'motivated' by social forces (205). The BBC 'reporters' need an appropriate signifier to express their intended signified, and this association of signified with a signifier is by no means arbitrary; it is entirely motivated. A close scrutiny of these two excerpts reveals that first, there is a shift of perspective, and second, different words describe two relatively similar events.[1] What happens here is not the concealment or the inversion of the reality, but the manipulation of the reality in favor of the West's interests (the regime-change agenda). In the process of encoding disorders in Iran, the BBC calls the events 'protest' and the participants 'protesters'. It narrates Iran's unrest from the 'protesters'' vantage point and sides with them. The words in bold italics add some kind of negative evaluation to the topic being treated. Through the use of phrases like 'state repression', 'brutal crackdowns', 'Tens of thousands of opposition supporters clashed with', the BBC (the outsider look) attempts to

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[1] One should of course remember that in the case of the London unrest, unlike those in Tehran, there were no terrorist groups (say, such as MKO) involved and the London police were not attacked, severely injured or killed.

exaggerate the events and recontextualize them in negative terms to intimate the brutality of Iranian security forces and how unjustly they quell 'ordinary demonstrators'.

The orientalist motif of the easterner's inherent brutality is certainly there. In the second text, the BBC (the insider look) relates England's disorders from the viewpoint of a senior police officer (power) who evaluates the events negatively as 'gratuitous', 'senseless', 'wholly unjustified acts of wanton criminality', 'mindless hooliganism' and 'violence'.

The expression 'law-abiding majority' generalizes that the majority of British people are satisfied with their lives and obey law, while participants in these disorders are a minor group of criminals and not 'ordinary' people. With particular narratives of real events, the BBC recontextualizes participants in distinct terms; the in-group identity of participants in the "Green Movement" is positive, while the out-groups are demonized as 'Others'. Participants in England's events are out-groups, hence they are demonized as 'Others' and uncivil in contrast to the majority in-groups who are identified as 'law-abiding we'.

The idea of 'human rights' in Islamic Iran (tied up with the question of feminism and women) has long been cause célèbre of the West. During the disorders in Iran, Shirin Ebadi states: "The violation of human rights is increasing in Iran day by day, the government violence increases day by day. That innocent people are shot on the streets. That people are thrown in prison for even a minor criticism of the government" (Amanpour, "Amanpour interviewing"). Along the same lines, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton acclaimed the protesters' courage, and condemned the Iranian government's 'hypocrisy'. She maintained:

> We are against violence and we would call to account the Iranian government that is once again using its security forces and resorting to violence to prevent the free expression of ideas from their own people… Secondly, we support the universal human rights of the Iranian people. They deserve to have the same rights that they saw played being out in Egypt and that are part of their own birthright. And thirdly, we think that there needs to be a commitment to open up the political system in Iran, to hear the voices of the opposition and civil society. ("Iran police fire")

Reading Clinton's statements one is reminded of the fact that power is brazen-faced and that in this world to be 'right' is in many cases a matter of having the power to narrate. Mrs. Clinton uses the binary opposition in which 'we' (West) is contrasted with the Iranian government as Other (East). In her speech 'we' are characterized positively civil in 'we are against violence' and powerful in 'we would call to account' and 'we support'. Whereas, for her, the Iranian government (as an out-group) is demonic and uses violence to suppress 'free expression of ideas'. In an interview with Christian Amanpour, Mohammad Javad Larijani replied to Hillary Clinton's comments on the orientation of Iran's government toward dictatorship, "Iran is the greatest, and not only the greatest, but the only democracy in the Middle East. Mrs. Clinton's position is dubious, inconsistent and naïve; on the one hand, she is worried about democracy in Iran, on the other hand she is offering the most generous military aids to states which even don't run a single election. Which one we should believe Mrs. Amanpour?" (Amanpour, "Amanpour interviewing"). Significantly, after the 2013 presidential election in Iran, through which President Rouhani came to power, the new president stated in parliament that there was no fraud in the previous election and that in Iran electoral fraud is impossible (http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/308479/Politics/government).

It is noteworthy that while Mrs. Clinton hails freedom of speech, human rights, and open political systems, during the unrest in Britain, the Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke rebukes the

"broken penal system" for riots and states "the 'hardcore' of those involved were known criminals whose behaviour had not been changed by previous punishments… prisons should be used for the most serious offenders, suggesting that tough community punishments would be more effective at reducing reoffending for other criminals" (BBC News, "Ken Clarke says"). Clarke then praises "the justice system for imposing swift, tough penalties on convicted rioters" (ibid.). It should be noted that while Clarke claims "It's about having a job, a strong family, a decent education and beneath it all, an attitude that shares in the values of mainstream society,"(ibid.) he still demonizes and dismisses all anti-capitalist demonstrators as the "feral underclass" or the "criminal classes" (BBC News, "England riots: The feast of fools?") who disturb the majority civil classes. Predictably, the Prime Minister David Cameron calls these protests "straightforward criminality", and claims they have no correlation with poverty or protest (BBC News, "Ken Clarke says"). However, many believe the civil unrest across much of England was to a large extent the result of a broken economic system rather than a faulty penalty system. Many of the English protesters rallied against unemployment, rising inflation and high cost of living, but they were even suppressed by Royal Guard, Scottish police as "A total of 250 riot-trained officers …sent (to England) as part of the mutual aid scheme between the countries"(BBC News, "England riots: Scottish police").

It is interesting that Mrs. Clinton calls the Iranian government hypocritical while in the Occupy Wall Street protests people who protested against America's rampant capitalism were often dealt with brutally. Mrs. Clinton also praises the Arabs' awakening to their rights, while, as Noam Chomsky notes, "the U.S and its western allies did not support the Tunisian or the Egyptian revolutions; rather they opposed them, and backed the dictator till the last minute and then shifted policy when they were overthrown" ("Chomsky on "Occupy Wall Street""). Slavoj Žižek, also, vividly shares his reflections on the Occupy Wall Street protests and finds the root of these protests not in people's corruption or avarice, but in the 'ruling democratic system' which forces them towards corruption and which has even oppressed their capacity to dream, and also attempts to turn this protest into a 'decaffeinated' one ("Slavoj Žižek speaks at"). In regard to human rights and freedom of speech in America, Žižek comments: "We have all the freedoms we want. But what we are missing is red ink: the language to articulate our non-freedom. The way we are taught to speak about freedom— war on terror and so on falsifies freedom. And this is what you are doing here. You are giving all of us red ink" (ibid.).

One significant point about media texts is that they have to explicate and legitimize the why of their representation (Caldas-Coulthard 276). The BBC legitimizes its reports on Iran's post-election unrest with recourse to direct quotations from different persons. Consider the following quotations: "There are terrible class differences in Iran, this plays a part in the protests (Siavash, student, Tehran)" (BBC News, "How Iran's opposition"); "Parvaneh, a student and opposition supporter in Tehran, told the BBC the chants had become more personal and focused" (ibid.). What is interesting about these persons is that they are all students and introduced with names like Parvaneh and Siavash. It is not clear whether such persons exist at all, who these persons are, or why their last names are not disclosed. In addition, the BBC quotes just opposition leaders and excludes the supporters of the government (inclusion/exclusion technique) or other voters who reject the claims of fraud as well as rioting.

Mehdi Karroubi told Newsnight, "An extremist force has taken shape in the government which considers its political survival in crisis. This force through irrational behaviour, such as recent arrests… is trying to drive the movement into violence. They don't want to compromise'" (BBC News, "Iranians gear up"). Another quote, "On his website, Mr. Mousavi denounces the Islamic authorities directly and says, 'Dictatorships in the name of religion are the worst type of dictatorships'" (ibid.). In addition to these quotations the BBC often speaks

of Revolutionary Guards' alleged brutality and constantly repeats unsubstantiated casualty figures: "The opposition says more than 80 of its supporters were killed in the six months after December 2009, a figure the government disputes. Several have been sentenced to death, and dozens jailed" (BBC News, "Iran unrest: MPs call"). These quotations and figures not only display the BBC's support for the opposition group, but also manipulate the audiences' view of what occurred in Iran through presenting an aggressive and harsh picture of the conditions in Iran. It implies that simply being a supporter or protestor can lead to a death sentence.

Thus, if the West craves promoting its foreign policies and ideologies it is imperative to wreck Iran's national unity by instilling violence in people. By broadcasting opposition ideas and exaggerated figures of casualties and prisoners, as well as by repeating unsubstantiated casualty numbers and claims of death sentences, the BBC is engineering the opinion that the audience must overcome these 'sickly inhibitions' and react violently against "aggressors" and "evildoers" (Iran government) to liberate themselves. It is another example of the West's application of demonization discourse to alienate people from their own government. In response to Amanpour's question regarding the arresting and imprisonment of the protesters, Dr. Larijani replies

> Nobody is jailed because of the protest. The only reason for jailing is the violence which was attached to the protest. A violence which got the life of more than 20 policemen and 30 civilians, and also damaged the properties and also people's lives, so the reason for jailing is not the protest. It's the damage and the violence. Any government has a duty to bring an end to the violence. I think the beating of our police is much more less than the New York and Los Angeles police. ("Amanpour interviewing")

Would Western governments and American officials who condemn the Iranian police force for dealing withthe rioters, accept that such riots go on with impunity in their own countries? In England's unrest, people for the most part heard the voices of the government, the prime minister and chief police officers who describe their plans for suppressing the 'criminals' and 'looters'. In this representation the perspective alters and the dominant narrative is that the participants in the protests are evildoers and the "majority" good people must help the government to silence this "minority" criminal group.

Apart from television channels, during the unrest in Iran, social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook were active in inciting violence online. Google Earth, the Chrome browser and photo service Picasa became available in Iran for the first time, "The US treasury department eased sanctions against Iran… as a way to increase the use of web services and support opposition groups" (BBC News, "Google Chrome"), and Farsi language tools were rolled out on Google to "enable freer communication in the country" (ibid.). The BBC claimed that YouTube "offered eye-witness reports" but that it was blocked by the Iranian government and thatGmail was also blocked (ibid.). Google's chief executive Eric Schmidt "was vocal in his condemnation of the Iranian government and its decision to impose media blackouts in reaction to the protests" (ibid.).

In the wake of England's unrest, Twitter, Facebook and Blackberry were monitored, because now British officials were saying that they were being used for plotting online violence. The BBC wrote "The prime minister has said police may need extra powers to curb their use. Networks such as Blackberry Messenger − a service which allows free-of-charge real-time messages − were said to have enabled looters to organise their movements during the riots, as well as inciting violence in some cases" (BBC News, "Social media talks"). At the

onset of the unrest, British authorities like Nick Clegg remarked that "We are not going to become like Iran or China. We are not going to suddenly start cutting people off…The government did not seek any additional powers to close down social media networks" (ibid.). However, the British Prime Minister David Cameron later said: "We are working with the police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality" (ibid.). Exactly in line with Cameron's version of the events, the BBC reported that "A number of people have appeared in court in recent weeks for organising or attempting to organise disorder on social networks" (ibid.). Oddly, the actions of states dealing with western owned and western run social media networks for security reasons are interpreted very differently according to the BBC. In the case of Iran it is 'restriction of the freedom of assembly and expression'. But in the case of England it is preventing the online stirring of violence through the internet.

3. CONCLUSIONS

        Secularism in tandem with Islamophobia discourse largely frames the Western media's representation of Iran. Runnymede Trust defines Islamophobia as "the dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims" (qtd. in Esposito, Introduction xxii-xxiii). There are reasons for the West's animosity toward Islam. Firstly, it partly originates from the belief that, after the fall of communism, Islam functions as a meta-narrative and master-signifier running counter to Western hegemony which fancies a universalization of the Western culture and values (Bennett 5). Secondly, the 9/11 attacks also indelibly affected the position and definition of Muslims. As Chris Allen contends, "Post-9/11 reificatory processes have therefore both re-established and newly established Muslims as chimerical, monstrous others, drawing upon the legacy of anti-Muslimism endemic to the European mindset" (50). Al-Azmeh, putting forward the notion of *homo islamicus*, comments, "All in all, things Islamic are seen as uniform, indistinct, [and] amorphous" (qtd. in Bennett 4). In other words the West fails to distinguish between the Wahhabi fundamentalists, Taliban Extremists, and Takfiris on the one hand, which have all been funded by their Saudi, Qatari, and UAE allies, and other forms of Islam on the other. Such all-inclusive anti-Muslim world views, as Ziauddin Sardar maintains, drives towards the fact that "contemporary Muslims are identified as either terrorists warring against the West or apologists defending Islam as a peaceful religion (ctd. in Allen 50).

> The BBC claims that Iranian protestors' first demand for election recount has inclined toward a call for the end of "Islamic Republic regime" in Iran. It recites Maziar Bahari, a reporter for the US magazine Newsweek whostated, "For some it has become a movement against the Islamic Republic, a movement for a more secular, democratic government" (BBC News, "Iranians gear up"). Shirin Ebadi also encouraged protesters and told Newsnight, "Not only the people are questioning the basis of the theocracy, but even the clergy themselves are split as a result of the government's violent behaviour. It's not just the state that's in conflict with the people, the state itself has been divided in two" (ibid.). The BBC refers to a central slogan of Iran's revolution "Esteghlal, Azadi, Jomhuriye Eslami (Eng: Independence,

Freedom, Islamic Republic)" which many of the post-electionprotesters changed to "Esteghlal, Azadi, Jomhuriye Irani (Eng: Independence, Freedom, Iranian Republic)" (BBC News, "How Iran's opposition"). This inverted chant along with another quotation from a Tehran student who notes another chant ("Nejade ma aryast-deen, az siasat jodas (Eng: We are an Aryan race, religion and politics don't mix)" (ibid.), emphasizes that Iranians are of the Aryan race and religion and politics must be separate. It could of course have quoted millions of others who of others who may believethe opposite. However, it opts to quote and stress a Westernized minority perspective for obvious reasons.

Of course, the drive to caricature and demonize Iran and Islam could backfire in the long run. It would be in the Western powers' best interests to take a more rational approach towards regional issues and a more reasonable approach towards the Islamic Republic. This requires an attempt to make a distinction between extremism in the name of Islam and Islam and between genuine 'protest' and 'rioting.'

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