The BBC and Al Jazeera English:
The Similarities and Differences in the Discourse
of the Pre-Election Coverage of the 2009 Iranian Election

MOHD FAIZAL KASMANI
Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

This article aims to understand to what extent the news-gathering factor explained global news coverage of the 2009 Iranian election. It examines the differences and similarities between the BBC and Al Jazeera English (AJE) pre-election coverage of the 2009 Iranian election, when all the international networks were relatively free to report on the Iranian street. It triangulates critical discourse analysis of the BBC and AJE news with the results of interviews with BBC reporters and editors who were involved in coverage of the election. The analysis reveals more similarities than differences in the pre-election coverage of the BBC and AJE. It concludes that shared occupational ideology among international journalists and the lack of access to the conservative group and the Iranian authorities contributed to the convergence of coverage of both networks during the pre-election period.

Keywords: Iranian election, critical discourse analysis, global news, BBC, Al Jazeera

Studies that map the complexity of today's satellite channels support the idea of diversity and complexity of global media flows (Brüggemann & Schulz-Forberg, 2009; Cottle & Rai, 2008). Daya Kishan Thussu (2007, p. 10) divides the global media flow into two categories: dominant flows of media networks from the United States, Britain, and European countries and contra-flows[1]of global media traffic from the non-Western regions such as India, Korea, China, and the Middle East. Thussu (2007, p. 21) argues that, even though the flows of cultural media products are not proportionate between two groups, the evidence shows that global media flows are "not just one way from the West" to the rest of the world. Twenty-four-

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[1] Contra-flow is defined as a situation in which "countries once considered clients of media imperialism have successfully exported their output into the metropolis" (Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996, p. 23). Sakr (2001, p. 117) adds that contra-flow implies not only reversed or alternative media flows "but a flow that is also counter-hegemonic."

Mohd Faizal Kasmani: faizalkasmani@usim.edu.my

hour news channels such as CCTV-9 and Al Jazeera are among the important players in the transnational media networks that emanate from the contra-flow groups.

BBC and Al Jazeera English (AJE) coverage of the 2009 Iranian presidential election is at the center of the analysis in this article. For international news networks, this 10th presidential election was deemed an important occasion because it represented a distinct yet important event of political Islam. The Iranian presidential election on June 12, 2009, served as the latest stage in the unfolding story of an Islamist group that governs a country and creates a constitution that places religious authority at the top with mixed elements of democracy. The pre-election period was chosen for analysis because this was the time when all the international networks were relatively free to report from the streets of Iran. After the election, due to the Iranian government banning international media from covering rallies in Iran, significant parts of the information and visuals in the BBC World News and AJE reports were gathered from the Iranian government news network, people in Iran, or social networking sites. Therefore, the news reporting after the election period may not entirely represent the networks' points of view.

This article proposes that journalism practices are defined heavily by the shared occupational ideology by which journalists identify themselves with one another and give "legitimacy and credibility to what they do" (Deuze, 2005, p. 446). It investigates the extent to which the BBC and AJE journalists depend on a shared reality with other journalists and their surroundings to help them cope with the time constraints in news reporting and validate their own decisions and representations of reality (Donsbach, 2004).

The BBC is selected to represent the dominant group of global media traffic because of its global reach, and AJE is selected to represent the contra-flow category in the global news media. Both media institutions also are known for their "objective" reporting, which challenges elite voices and gives opposition groups the opportunity to participate in their news-making process through the multiple perspectives of dialogue and debate (Bicket & Wall, 2009; Wojcieszak, 2007)

BBC's international 24-hour news channel, BBC World News, was launched in October 1991 and reaches more than 200 million homes around the world. Douglas Bicket and Melissa A. Wall (2009), commenting on the BBC's presence in the United States, note that the credibility and respect that the BBC has set it apart from the mainstream U.S. media and carry huge influence, making it a "super alternative news medium" (p. 374) in the country. On the other hand, Al Jazeera's 24-hour English-language channel, launched on November 15, 2006, has been described as a "counter-hegemonic practice" (Wojcieszak, 2007, p. 121) that defied the norm of the state-owned national-based channels that existed in the Arab world. The former managing director of the AJE channel, Nigel Parsons, said that AJE will continue to adopt its parent's organizational style, Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA), which provides credible, balanced alternative views to those of the Western media (Tatham, 2005).

News-Gathering Practices

Research in media and communication has found similarities in the professional features of journalists across media types in different countries. Surveys carried out across regions and countries

such as China (Wu & Weaver, 1998), Indonesia (Manzella, 2000), India (Rao, 2009), Uganda (Mwesige, 2004), and Spain (Sanders & Canel, 2006) found that most journalists share the dominant ideals of the Anglo-American[2] professional culture of journalism, such as the practice of reporting based on facts, and regard themselves as disseminators of neutral and objective information. This consolidation of journalistic practices among news makers is seen as part of the development in journalistic professionalism[3] and represents the gradual rise of journalism as a global profession.

The rise of professionalism in global journalism is closely related to the conceptualization of shared occupational ideology—the idea that journalists all over the world share the same understanding about values, practices, and strategies characterizing their profession. This shared occupational ideology "holds journalists together as a profession and therefore forms the foundation of journalism's identity" (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 370). Mark Deuze (2005) explains that occupational ideology can be seen as "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular group, including—but not limited to—the general process of the production of meanings and ideas" (p. 445). Deuze refers to the notion of ideology in journalism as an intellectual process in which a particular group's collective ideas and views, mostly on social and political issues, are shaped and shared by its members.

This concept of shared occupational ideology, together with the demands of journalists' work that involves making conclusions and judgments about reality quickly under news-gathering time pressures, means journalists depend on the shared reality of their counterparts (Donsbach, 2004). This shared reality is considered reliable because it is reproduced by others and is generalizable as it is being practiced by groups of individuals. This shared reality is also the best way for a journalist to validate his or her own decision in the representation of realities. Wolfgang Donsbach (2004) points out that this conception of journalists' shared reality may explain the "consonance" in media coverage. A shared reality may cause an agreement in news decisions and news treatments due to similar "frames of reference of coverage built up before the events" and "by the journalists' need to validate their professional decisions about what is newsworthy" (Donsbach, 2004, p. 142).

Ulf Hannerz's (2004) ethnographic studies on foreign journalists found that correspondents form "a community even on a worldwide basis" and share particular types of experiences and values of what he calls a "consciousness of kind". This may result in journalists writing similar stories, which might be explained either in terms of conspiracy among journalists who share the same ideology or as "a matter of professional logic leading to parallel invention." In addition, Hannerz notes that the physical proximity of

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[2] The "Anglo-American" media model mostly refers to the British and U.S. media experience. Although there are substantial differences, both media systems share the idea that the professionalization of journalism is essentially synonymous with objectivity and political neutrality (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 38).

[3] Professionalization in this context does not refer to an ideal type based on a "systematic body of knowledge or doctrine" in a profession such as medicine or law. Although there is formal "professional" training in journalism, it is "not essential to the practice" and not a necessary prerequisite to enter the profession of journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 33). The dimension of journalistic professionalism is based more on shared characteristics among journalists.

foreign correspondents also matters. Media organizations all over the world are usually placed in a concentrated area, and they may "develop at least a nodding acquaintance with the people regularly showing up to cover the same events" (pp. 155–156).

This notion is in line with the argument of the media globalization—the deterritorialization of news content—and this has redefined the role of journalists, and in particular foreign journalists. In news media and journalism studies, a concept known as "global journalism" has emerged. Peter Berglez (2008) explains that global journalism is "endowed with a particular epistemology, defined as the global outlook" (p. 874), which is different from the national outlook. The global outlook instead seeks to understand and explain "how economic, political, social and ecological practices, processes and problems in different parts of the world affect each other, are interlocked, or share commonalities" (Berglez, 2008, p. 847). Stephen D. Reese (2004) defines global journalism as "a system of newsgathering, editing and distribution not based on national or regional boundaries—where it is not expected that shared national or community citizenship is the common reference uniting newsmakers, journalists and audiences" (p. 242). Elfriede Fürsich (2002) points out that global journalists in the global media are not "international journalists who cover foreign news from the perspective of one nation," but are global news workers who work for "transnational media corporations and produce their content for a global market" (p. 59). This new global position for journalists "challenges the established frames of reference of journalism—the national and the local level" (Fürsich, 2002, p. 59). The global reporting of other nation states therefore could no longer simply be referred to as "foreign." The destabilization of location into "coexistence of a diversity of cultures, traditions and lifestyles, which cannot easily be integrated or neutralized" (Fürsich, 2002, p. 66) means a more complex framing of events to be presented to global audiences.

Hillel Nossek (2004), however, argues that the globalization of news media has not erased the function of the nation-state. The media institution is still largely affected by the domestic context either "through legislation or on a social and cultural level" (p. 345). Nossek (2004) points out that media organizations "operate in a network of other organizations and are part of a larger social organization . . . which interacts with, and is affected by, other social institutions" (p. 346). Journalists' and editors' decisions regarding foreign events are thus still largely influenced by a broader cultural-domestic environment. Kai Hafez (1999) further explains that media globalization is occurring at the technological, institutional, and production levels, but not at the content level. This is because "the interdependence between media, the nation state, national elites and other particularists force of society is much stronger than international dependence" (1999, pp. 53–54). Hafez (2009) argues that, even though transnational media are increasingly globalized, they are still far from becoming ideal platforms of global discourse.

Methodology

The tools of analysis of this study are based on critical discourse analysis (CDA), which examines the dialectical relationship between semiotic modalities in languages and social practices (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002). CDA assumes that language and social process are deeply implicated with each other and views language as a representation of social practice that constitutes meaning in social processes (Chouliaraki, 2000). The applicability of CDA to the study of news, however, has been questioned for its heavy reliance on textual analysis and for placing less emphasis on the production background or the

reception process by audiences (Barkho, 2008; Carvalho, 2008; Philo, 2007; Richardson, 2008). Colleen Cotter (2001, p. 417) observes that the analysis of text has always been the main focus of media discourse studies and that there is no significant work on the second component of media discourse: the norms and routines of news practitioners. Drawing from these discussions over methodological aspects of discourse analysis, this study employs two methods to analyze the news discourse of the BBC and AJE. The first method is based on textual analysis of news packages broadcast by the BBC and AJE during the pre-election campaign period of the 2009 Iranian presidential election. The second method of the study is a semistructured interview with editors and reporters from the BBC and AJE who were involved in the news coverage of the election.

The analysis of transcribed textual features or voice-over commentary of the news is based on two levels of analysis: micro-level analysis and macro-level analysis. The micro-level analysis examines the lexical features and sentence construction of texts. The macro-level analysis is based on the concept of intertextuality, or the idea that texts cannot be viewed or studied in isolation and must be understood in relation to other texts (Richardson, 2007, p. 100). This study analyzes the use of direct and indirect quotation in BBC and AJE coverage.

To conduct semistructured interviews with editors and reporters from the BBC and AJE, a fieldwork study was carried out in March and April 2010 in Doha and London. Interviews were conducted with reporters and editors from the BBC and AJE who were involved in the coverage of the 2009 Iranian election. Informants were given a list of questions before the interviews. Follow-up questions were added as the interview progressed. The interview data were used to supplement and contextualize the textual and visual analysis of the BBC and AJE news reports. The interviews reveal whether the concept of shared professional practices among journalists affected news-gathering practices during the 2009 presidential election.

The samples of the news packages broadcast by the BBC and AJE were obtained from the companies' official news websites. The time frame of the sample selection is from the campaigning process of the election until the day before the election (June 1–12, 2009), a period when all international networks were relatively free to report on the Iranian street.

Analysis

Six reports were produced by AJE, and five news packages were broadcast by the BBC on the pre-election campaign before the June 12 presidential election results were announced. Analysis of these news packages showed convergence in the way these two networks portrayed the two main candidates: conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and reformist Mir Hossein Mousavi. Analysis of the word structures, reported speeches, and sentence constructions of the reporting revealed that the pre-election coverage of the BBC and AJE portrayed a negative representation of Ahmadinejad and his supporters and a positive representation of Mousavi and his followers.

Al Jazeera English

The main theme in the BBC and AJE reporting centered on the clash between reformists and conservatives. In coverage of rallies held by the two groups, conservatives were generally portrayed as a devout group of people with unwavering loyalty toward Ahmadinejad, while Mousavi supporters were mostly depicted as young Iranians who wanted changes in the government, which was controlled by the religious ruling elite.

AJE pre-election reports on Ahmadinejad and his supporters carried mostly negative overtones. The vocabulary used by AJE to describe Ahmadinejad and his followers falls invariably under the lexical categories of militarism and despair. This was illustrated in the AJE report on June 10, 2009 (Ronaghi, 2009b), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Al Jazeera English, June 10, 2009

Shot number	Image	Sound
1		The hard-fought campaigns are almost over,
2		but the main contenders for the Iranian presidency continue to fight.
3		Thousands came to see

4

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's final rally

5

and to hear him make a last appeal to his followers.

6

These people need no persuasion, though,

7

to cast their votes for the president.

8

The campaign has set new standards

9

in confrontation, with a televised debate

10

pitting the four candidates against each other.

11

Accusations of corruption and incompetence

12

were traded on prime-time TV.

13

On Wednesday, Ahmadinejad attacked his main rival, Mir Hossein Mousavi, claiming some of his most influential supporters were corrupt. But where Ahmadinejad followers see a winning tactic, his opponents see an act of desperation.

The report opened with a visual of people attending a rally with a corresponding voice-over narrative: "The hard-fought campaigns are almost over, but the main contenders continue to fight." Although the "fight" metaphor did not refer to any candidate, the visuals of thousands of people were from the Ahmadinejad campaign rally, which gave a negative referential meaning to the Ahmadinejad group. In shot 5, the action of Ahmadinejad addressing the crowd was described as his "last appeal," which hinted at desperation on Ahmadinejad's part.

In a direct address to the camera, as shown in shot 13, the reporter employed a metaphor of war in describing the clash between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi, saying that Ahmadinejad "attacked" Mousavi during a live televised debate. The verb indicated a negative attitude on the part of the writer toward Ahmadinejad. The reporter also posed a hypothetical question—"Where Ahmadinejad followers see a winning tactic, his opponents see an act of desperation"—which presupposes that Ahmadinejad's attack on Mousavi was an act of desperation to win the election.

The words used in the report to describe Ahmadinejad's supporters demonstrated a religious, almost fanatical, lexical pattern. Ahmadinejad's followers were described as those who "need no persuasion to . . . cast their votes." Shot 6, which accompanies these words, shows a painted-faced man holding a picture of Ahmadinejad, implicitly denoting a fanatical characteristic of Ahmadinejad's supporters.

AJE's framing of direct quotes from Ahmadinejad supporters accentuates the religious character of the group. This was illustrated in the second report of the network on June 10, 2009 (Ronaghi, 2009c). As shown in Figure 1, the phrases "religious duty" and "unshakable faith" framed the direct quotes of Ahmadinejad supporters in a way that portrayed the conservative group as unquestionably and blindly following their leader and the government.

Many of his young supporters see campaigning and voting for conservatives as their religious duty. Their numbers are steady and they have an unshakable faith in their candidate.
"Our enemies abroad are watching this election closely. So as our leader Ayatollah Khamenei says, it is our obligation to vote. It is as important as our daily prayer."

Figure 1. Al Jazeera English, June 10, 2009

In contrast, AJE coverage portrayed Mousavi's group in a more favorable light. This could be seen in a report of June 9, 2009 (Ronaghi, 2009a), that explained the adoption of new media by the reformists in the election campaign to counter the mainstream media controlled by the government. The tone of the reporting was clearly in favor of Mousavi's campaign. It featured only direct quotes from supporters of the reformists. The report noted that the Internet had become "a key weapon" for the group. It also pointed out that the reformists had the upper hand in the election campaign because of their understanding of new technology such as the Internet and mobile phones, while the Iranian government, which controlled the state television, "doesn't really understand how the technology works."

Direct quotes from the supporters of the reformists were constructed to portray the group as more rational and dynamic. As shown in Figure 2, the word "succeeding" and phrase "attracting significant support" after the direct quotes of a Mousavi supporter demonstrate a positive feeling and an optimistic assessment of the group by the reporter (Ronaghi, 2009c).

Ali Sotoudeh won't be taking part in the election. Despite the pleas of his reformist friends.
"My vote will have no effect. Because it won't change the flaws in the constitution, which allow our leader absolute power with no responsibility."

The only way for reformists to return to power is to persuade the likes of Ali to go to the polls and they just may be succeeding. Their rallies in recent days are attracting significant support.

Figure 2. Al Jazeera English, June 10, 2009.

The BBC

Similar to AJE, the main theme of the BBC pre-election coverage was a collision between reformists and conservatives. The terminology used by the BBC in its pre-election reports echoed Al Jazeera's coverage, where the portrayal of Mousavi's supporters was more positive than that of Ahmadinejad's supporters. The BBC, however, pushed these characterizations further by describing the differences between the two. The network portrayed Ahmadinejad's and Mousavi's supporters in an oppositional, "us versus them" relationship—mainly in the form of modernists versus traditionalists.

The BBC's category of lexical items in depicting Ahmadinejad, his campaign, and his supporters demonstrated a sense of madness and foolishness—evidenced in a report by BBC main correspondent John Leyne (2009a) on June 8, 2009. His report contained an element of hyperbole in describing Ahmadinejad and his rally. In paragraph 1, Ahmadinejad, for example, was ascribed with negative epithets such as "villain" and "mad." In paragraph 2, Ahmadinejad's "rhetoric" was modified with the adjective "fiery," showing the reporter's negative evaluation of the candidate.

1.   To many in the West he's either a villain, or a mad man.
2.   The rest of the world might hear his fiery rhetoric.

The report also overlexicalizes the description of Ahmadinejad's rally. The reporter's use of the words "crazy," "chaos," and "absolutely madness" in his direct access to the camera, as shown in Table 2, further reflected his unfavorable evaluation of Ahmadinejad and his supporters.

Table 2. BBC, June 8, 2009.

Shot number	Image	Sound
1		It's crazy. The president is in there somewhere. It's chaos. It's been like this for about five minutes. And this is like it is wherever he goes in Iran. It's absolutely madness.

The metaphor employed by Leyne to describe Ahmadinejad's supporters extends the theme of the madness and foolishness of the conservative group. As shown in Figure 3, a "godlike" metaphor was used to illustrate the image of Ahmadinejad, who was portrayed as excessively revered by his followers. The report sardonically noted that Ahmadinejad's followers believed that he could help "to cure [a] child" and can "solve everything." This godlike metaphor also framed the direct quotes of Ahmadinejad's supporters and contextualized them in an "obsessive" light. The phrases "worship him almost as a prophet" and "a woman pleads with him to help to cure her child" before the quotes of Ahmadinejad followers inevitably framed viewers' interpretation about the "obsessive" nature of the group.

When we travel with his motorcade, we soon find crowds of Iranians who worship him almost as a prophet. "He likes the people, and he has been good to us. So we will vote for him again." As he comes out to his car, a woman pleads with him to help to cure her child. Despite the crush, there's no attempt to push her away.
"My friend, Ahmadinejad is my friend. I love Ahmadinejad."
At rally after rally we've been to, the women press forward with scrolled notes. The rest of the world might hear his fiery rhetoric, but these women believe one word from Mr. Ahmedinejad will solve everything from their housing to their health care.

Figure 3. BBC, June 8, 2009.

The BBC depiction of Mir Hossein Mousavi and his campaign during its pre-election reports was more positive. The words used to describe Mousavi and his followers expressed a positive attitudinal meaning that falls under the category of modernity. In paragraphs 3–5, for example, Mousavi was portrayed as someone who has "broken with tradition," is "a moderate reformist," has "a more liberal approach," and is "less confrontational."

3. Mr. Ahmadinejad's main rival, Mir Hossein Mousavi, has even broken with tradition to campaign with his wife (Leyne, 2009a).
4. He is seen as a moderate reformist (Sergeant, 2009).
5. . . . he stands for a more liberal approach at home and a less confrontational approach to the West (Simpson, 2009).

Direct quotes from the reformist group were also framed favorably. While the direct quotes of Ahmadinejad's followers in the BBC pre-election report were mainly about professing supporters' reverence toward the candidate, direct quotes from Mousavi's supporters showed their desire for democracy, human rights, and freedom, as shown in paragraphs 6 and 7.

6.   Mousavi's campaign has been gathering momentum and his supporters hope to be in that run-off. "We all vote for Mousavi, Mir Hossein Mousavi, because he supports democracy, human rights" (Sergeant, 2009).

7.   You've only got to look at some of these people to realize they are not going to be voting for a hardliner like President Ahmadinejad. "For this election we want more better . . . better economy, better money and better relations with other countries. And we want more freedom, more and more freedom" (Simpson, 2009).

Differences

Although analysis of the pre-election coverage finds many similarities among the BBC and AJE, some differences were evident in how the networks constructed their arguments about the differences between the conservative and reformist groups.

The AJE portrayal of the clash between the reformists and the conservatives mostly came from the insider's point of view, explained as internal conflict in Iranian politics and society. The network report on June 9, 2009, for example, centered on the topic of crucial young Iranian voters (Ronaghi, 2009a). The report described that the adoption of new technology by the reformist group in their campaigning process may have given the group an upper hand because of its ability to attract young Iranians who are more adept with new technology. AJE's main narrative in its coverage on June 10, 2009, again argued that a high turnout among young Iranians would give an advantage to reformist candidates as evidenced during President Khatami's election win in 1997, because "many young Iranians reject the religious fervor of Iran's ruling elite" (Ronaghi, 2009c).

In contrast, BBC coverage of the pre-election campaign was mainly based on the construction of the reformists as the in-group by associating them with Western values and the conservative as the other group who were embodied in non-Western and mostly religious values. In addition, the BBC's depiction of the differences between the reformists and conservatives was mostly anchored in the viewpoint of the West.

The BBC's portrayal of Ahmadinejad's campaign, for example, was contextualized within the framework of an Iran versus the West conflict. A report by BBC world affairs editor John Simpson (2009) particularly highlighted a campaign video of Ahmadinejad that described the candidate as boasting "about the way he humiliated Britain," which "his hard-line supporters' love." Paragraphs 8–12 further illustrate that, when describing Ahmadinejad, the BBC's arguments were mostly based on Western or U.S. points of view.

8.   To many in the West, he is either a villain or a mad man (Leyne, 2009a).
9.   . . . they detest the "Death to America" chants and everything Mr. Ahmadinejad stands for (Leyne, 2009a).
10.   The president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is the well-known thorn in the side of the West (Sergeant, 2009).
11.   A new president could deliver less strident anti-American rhetoric (Sergeant, 2009).
12.   Viewed through Western eyes, all the candidates in this election are pretty hard line (Sergeant, 2009).

The stark contrast between the conservatives as traditionalists and the reformists as modernists was portrayed in the BBC report of June 8, 2009. The report described Mousavi's supporters as "members of Iran's new Internet surfing, satellite TV-watching generation," who "detest the 'Death to America' chants and everything Mr. Ahmadinejad stands for" (Leyne, 2009a). A report on June 9, 2009, emphasized that the new generation of Iranians were yearning for a modern way of life in the city. They were described as "chasing the latest fashion, and surfing the Internet" and listening to pop songs (Leyne, 2009b).

The BBC reports particularly highlighted the differences between conservative and reformist women in terms of their appearance. This was reflected in the June 8, 2009, coverage of Mousavi's and Ahmadinejad's rallies. As shown in Table 3, the BBC pointed out the appearance of Mousavi's supporters, who were described as having a "more relaxed dress code," compared to the appearance of Ahmadinejad's supporters, who were previously shown wearing full-veiled attire (Leyne, 2009a).

Table 3. BBC, June 8, 2009

Shot number	Image	Sound
1		. . . these women believe one word from Mr. Ahmedinejad

2

will solve everything from their housing to their health care.

3

And the man of the people has time for them all.

4

Just look at the more relaxed dress code to see the difference with the opposition rally.

Discussion

Findings from the interviews show that one major factor that shaped the reporting of international news networks during the 2009 election is that Iran is a tough place to report on. AJE's main correspondent Alireza Ronaghi stated that the reason for less favorable coverage of the conservative camp during the pre-election campaign period was the lack of access to the pro-Ahmadinejad group and government sources. The conservative camp were said to be less accessible and less welcoming toward all international news networks, including AJE.

> In a way I think both the BBC and Al Jazeera were trying to portray whatever was going
> on in the Iran political scene with as much professionalism and impartiality as possible.
> But the problem was the group that we were approaching for our coverage was not the
> same. While the reformists were more welcoming, more understanding, towards the
> function of news networks, Ahmadinejad supporters were not all like that. Some of
> them, or let's say a huge proportion of Ahmadinejad supporters, are the kind of people

who think that talking to foreign media is a blasphemy and whatever they say might be distorted in a way to be used against Islam and their belief. So their portrayal looked a little gloomy or a little suspicious in a way, that's why. And they don't give that much access to their rallies, to their opinion. They are a little more secretive, more cautious, when it comes to dealing with foreign media. That's why their picture is so different. (Ronaghi, personal communication, January 27, 2011)

Ronaghi further explained that, even though he is an Iranian, he did not have easy access to Ahmadinejad's rallies. When asked about why AJE visuals mostly had long and external shots of Ahmadinejad rallies, compared with the more intimate shots of reformist rallies, he stated that the difficulties in getting into Ahmadinejad rallies contributed to that framing.

I remember on one occasion specifically when we went to one of the Ahmadinejad rallies, near the Freedom Square. We wanted to go upstairs to report live on the rooftop, but the security was so tight. They didn't even let us pass through the door. It took us an hour to convince them that we just wanted a live shot. . . . "You can stay with us." Security has always been a problem in all of his [Ahmadinejad's] rallies. (Ronaghi, personal communication, January 27, 2011)

The BBC's main correspondent Jon Leyne managed to get better access to an Ahmadinejad rally. Although Leyne stated that his team faced similar difficulties in obtaining government sources, he still managed to report from inside Ahmadinejad rallies during the pre-election campaign period, and this was portrayed in his news package on June 8, 2009.

Certainly, yes, we have much better access to the reformists, and I always said from day one that the hardest thing in Iran is to get the official point of view and I was delighted when I did, [it was] the strongest report I did, the report that got the most praises—when I finally managed to persuade the Ahmadinejad camp to let me go out with him on their campaign trail, and he did have real supporters. (Leyne, personal communication, April 19, 2011)

Although difficulties of access to pro-government sources and events could have contributed to the BBC's and AJE's favorable representation of the reformist group, another factor may explain the positive coverage of the reformist group. The shared excitement among international journalists toward the surge of the reformist camp before the election and the possibility of leadership change in Iran could explain reporters' bias toward the opposition group. As explained by Nick Walshe (personal communication, February 28, 2011), journalists are biased toward change "because it is more exciting and interesting,, and this in turn brings more positive coverage toward the reformists. This excitement toward the reformist group during the post-election coverage in Iran is admitted by AJE head of output Sarah Worthington:

> I think the Iran story then was probably more black and white than it is now, which I think is potentially why there were more similarities. Ahmadinejad's government is probably fairly well known for being quite tough and controlling, and I think at the time, any sort of beginning of uprising or protest, it was a very interesting story. I think perhaps that's why the similarities. (Worthington, personal communication, March 10, 2011)

One important thing to note is that the BBC and AJE had different approaches in their operations on the ground during the 2009 Iranian election. This could explain the differences between the BBC and AJE in the interpretation and construction of the topic in the reporting of the 2009 Iranian election. The BBC English-language team, which reports for both BBC domestic channels and the BBC World News, had all British reporters: Jon Leyne as the main correspondent, world affairs editor John Simpson, and Middle East editor Jeremy Bowen. This study contends that, although BBC World News is a global and commercially funded organization, the centralized news-gathering operation that it shares with the domestic BBC channels means that the network is still influenced by its nation-state. The primary target audience of the BBC news-gathering operation is the British license fee payers and taxpayers. Even though the BBC is exemplary in its reputation as a public broadcaster that is largely protected from political influence, the fact that it is ultimately answerable to the British audience means the news makers' judgment in creating news stories "[is] still heavily based on national boundaries with shared national or community citizenship" (Reese, 2004, p. 242). The above scenario could explain the outcome of the textual analysis of the BBC news during the pre-election coverage of the 2009 election, which showed that the BBC's portrayal of the differences between the reformists and conservatives was mostly anchored in the viewpoint of the West. BBC correspondent Jon Leyne admits that the influence of "British prejudices" in his reporting is inescapable.

> I think there is a danger that we reflect the British prejudices. I mean look, the British government, it's a democratic government. Broadly speaking it's going to be in tune with the views of the population, not one hundred per cent, not like point by point, but broadly speaking the British government is listening to its people. So therefore, what people in Britain think is not widely far from what the government thinks. We would always say we are neutral. We don't reflect the policy of the British government. Many people can't believe when we say that. That said, it is often the case that in some ways, not always, reporting for many countries will reflect some sense of the leads or prejudices or whatever that were around them. Obviously I have a kind of world view that I reflect in my reporting. I like to call it independent but obviously it is subjective. (Leyne, personal communication, April 19, 2011)

AJE, in contrast, is able to operate without a domestic agenda because it is not answerable to Qatar's domestic audience. In addition, the fact that AJE has secure financial backing from the Emir of Qatar, at least for the coming years, frees the AJE editorial team from financial pressure (Kraidy, 2008, p. 29). It is important to highlight, however, that AJE had an all-Iranian team: a local reporter, Alireza Ronaghi, as its main correspondent; a correspondent-cum-presenter, Teymoor Nabili; and producer Nazanin Sadri. Both Nabili and Sadri are based in AJE headquarters in Doha. AJE correspondents,

therefore, have a closer dependence on their country of origin than their host nation-state. The AJE strategy to present events from the eyes of reporters with Iranian backgrounds during the election means its news makers have better knowledge of the country's language, culture, and political scenario. As Iranians, they clearly have more respect for the culture, opinions, and interests of the different societies within Iran. This could explain AJE's portrayal of the clash between the reformists and the conservatives during the campaign period, which was mostly from an insider's point of view. AJE correspondent Teymoor Nabili points out that his cultural background and understanding of the Iranian context had certainly colored his reporting of the Iranian election.

> My Iranian heritage, my knowledge of the language and my experience in the country are not as great as many of the people in the newsroom. But they are significantly greater than many of the people in this newsroom and many of the other journalists who were both in Iran and outside of Iran during the time. I don't know the extent to which my personal background has helped or hindered my reporting. I really couldn't tell you. I think by and large it's probably fair to say that a little bit of background knowledge and a little bit of experience in the culture that you are talking about tend to help. (Nabili, personal communication, March 8, 2011)

Conclusion

Based on a critical discourse analysis approach, this article demonstrates how language used in the BBC's and AJE's pre-election coverage of the 2009 Iranian election constructed meaning to events, individuals, groups, and their social practices. The BBC and AJE coverage contained topical similarities in their news agendas. During the period analyzed, both networks presented mostly the same topic: the clash between the reformists and conservatives. In terms of the themes and lexical choices of the pre-election coverage, both networks gave a favorable and more optimistic representation of Mousavi and his supporters and an unfavorable portrayal of Ahmadinejad and his supporters.

These similarities, to a certain extent, support the argument that the competitive environment of global news networks can lead to homogeneous coverage. Because both networks target the same English-speaking audiences, there could be duplication in the news offering (Hamilton, 2004) resulting in journalistic products that are "so similar" with "tiny differences" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 24). In addition, previous studies have shown that AJE and the BBC have applied similar styles in reporting international events (Cruikshank, 2009; Gerhard, 2010).

However, a deeper analysis of the interpretation and construction of the topic revealed differences in the pre-election reporting of the 2009 Iranian election between the BBC and AJE. There were disparities in the way both networks constructed the differences between the conservatives and reformists during that period of reporting.

This study finds that shared excitement among international journalists toward the surge of the reformist camp before the election explains reporters' bias toward the opposition group. However, the reason for the less favorable coverage of the conservative camp was mainly due to the lack of access to

the pro-Ahmadinejad group and government sources which affected the quality of reporting during the 2009 Iranian election. This study also finds that linkages of international news coverage with the nation-state differentiate the coverage of the BBC and AJE. This different position in global news reporting is what Mohammed El-Nawawy (2003) calls "contextual objectivity," in which news networks aim to cover the news objectively but are still affected by the domestic context either through legislation or at a social and cultural level.

This study has a few limitations. It concentrated on only one global event. Because both the BBC and AJE are part of much larger organizations, that which applies to the reporting of the 2009 election may not apply to other conflicts and regions covered by the networks. However, the in-depth analysis of the samples of broadcast news and the data, which include interviews and analysis of secondary material, give credence and validity to this study. In addition, while this thesis was essentially a case study of the coverage of one world event, the comparative element between two influential global news channels, together with a theoretically significant and methodologically sound paradigm, lends the findings resonance within a larger context.

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