

A Critical Study of Reports of the Assassination of Iranian Nuclear Scientists by *The New York Times* and *Y-net*

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Abstract: The present study aims at exploring the different ways in which the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists has been reported in two American and Israeli newspapers. Drawing on Van Dijk who considers ideological discourse analysis as a specific type of socio-cognitive analysis and Wodak's discourse historical approach to the study of discourse, the present study attempts to show the significant role played by certain discursive strategies in the construction of ideology. The findings revealed that The New York Times and Y-net have reported the events similarly each employing discursive strategies specifically the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation as the most prominent strategy constructed particular ideologies in their accounts of the news events reported.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); ideology; Iran's nuclear program

I. Introduction

The assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists and the arrest of the individuals held responsible for the incidences have been widely covered by world media, often described by Western media as 'bombing' and 'killing' and as 'terrorist' and 'anti-human' acts by Iranian media reflecting each the different points of view and ideologies with which the events have been represented. As a matter of fact, journalists project a picture of news events that is in their best interests and ignore the other side of the events that is inconsistent with their own preferences. The news reports embody the journalists' dominant ideologies which, according to Fairclough (2003:9) sustain social relations of power and domination. As Li (2009) puts it, depending on the media's institutional interests, attitudes and purposes, varieties of language are used in order to convey certain versions of reality about the world and relations. In fact, the news media transmit the voices of power in a covert form so that they contribute to social control and reproduction (Fairclough, 1992, p. 110-161). Van Dijk has indicated that although the first major form of power is controlling discourse, its other form involves controlling people's minds (2008, p. 357). In fact, action is indirectly controlled by influencing people's minds, e.g., their knowledge or opinions. As power is exercised through language, news structures are also linked with the social cognitions of journalists as group members in ideological institutions such as the media. The powerful groups such as leading politicians in governments, parliaments, journalists, publishers, editors of major news media not only make decisions, but they also have fundamental access to and control over public discourse so that their opinions and ideologies are channeled through the

media (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 44-5). Indeed, various opinions of the politicians and the dominant groups are enhanced and 'popularized' through the media (Van Dijk, 1993b, p. 268). The media reproduce racism since they are related to other elite institutions and also they structurally shape and change the social mind (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 243). By asserting the broad ideological influence of media on their audiences, Van Dijk adds that the powerful groups have control over the actions and minds of the public by accessing the media so that they reproduce not only their power, but also their own event interpretations and ideologies (1993a, p. 245-6). He (1988, p. 28) has further pointed to the journalists' active function in representing and reproducing news events in adopting a socially and ideologically controlled set of constructive strategies.

Understanding the crucial role the media play in the reproduction of their underlying ideologies that are defined by Van Dijk (1998, p. 49, 2000, p. 7) as fundamental beliefs of a group and its members that can manage social group relations, such as those of domination and conflict, the present paper aims to reveal the embedded ideologies within the newspaper discourses by investigating the main discursive strategies in the two newspapers namely, *The New York Times* and *Y-net* (based in Israel) in their reports of the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists during 2010 and 2012. Although reports about the terrorist incidences assassinating five Iranian scientists appeared widely in the world media, no discourse research focusing on the media coverage of and responses to the events seems to exist as far as the researchers know. This paper, therefore, will examine how two selected newspapers from the US and Israel covered the news about the assassination events. Thus, we collected all news reports directly related to the assassination events (68 news articles) through searching the two newspapers' websites. After that, we examined them carefully and thoroughly and then analyzed the most frequently used ideological strategy, namely positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in order to demonstrate how this strategy constructs specific ideologies. Therefore, the news reports were analyzed both linguistically and semantically, that is, the analysis of the cognitive, social and political context. In the following, we begin with a description of the historical and political context in which the Iranian nuclear issue and the assassinations take place. This will be followed by a discussion of the main theoretical framework of the study and discursive strategies used to analyze the selected texts in the two papers mentioned above.

II. Context

In order to explore the processes of ideological construction in the two newspapers, we need to consider relevant historical and political contexts about Iran's nuclear program as well as the contexts for Iran-US-Israel relations. This is in line with Wodak's (2001) discourse historical approach to CDA that embeds the background information within discourse analysis in order to make the readers understand the underlying socio-political meanings. Since the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution, the relationship between Iran and the two countries -the United States and Israel- became full of tension. The Iranian-Israeli relations shifted from warm relations to

hostility because Iran's leader Ayatollah Khomeini avoided recognizing Israel's entity by referring to it as 'the Zionist regime' or 'the Jerusalem-occupying regime' in an attempt to protect Palestinian's right in order to return to their homes. He also encouraged anti-Israeli activities like declaring the last Friday of Ramadan as al-Quds Day that has become an annual Iranian protest against Israel to liberate Jerusalem (al-Quds). On the other hand, Israel considers Iran as a threat because it denies its legitimacy and always asks Israel to return the occupied Palestinian lands. So, Israel has repeatedly expressed its concern for Iran's nuclear program to the point that it always threatens to attack Iranian nuclear facilities if Iran continues development of its nuclear program or the so-called nuclear weapons. But, Iran has consistently stated that its nuclear program is purely peaceful aimed to produce electricity and to export part of the electricity produced by its nuclear reactors to neighboring regions because its oil-based economy will be damaged after finishing oil. In the case of Iranian-American relation, one can say that since the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Iran and there have been a great deal of tension and hostility between them (Simbar, 2010). Indeed, after the overthrow of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who had close ties with the United States, the Iranian revolutionary students occupied the American embassy because Iran considered the Shah as an American puppet that was his main supportive. Since then, the United States broke diplomatic relations with Iran and started imposing sanctions on this country.

As for Iran's nuclear program, according to the Website of Iran's Atomic Energy, it was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States and some Western countries. After the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, it was stopped because the international cooperation was cut off. Then, Iran restarted its program in order to access the peaceful nuclear energy for science, medicine, electricity, agriculture, and industry. While Western countries have accelerated their limitations, Iran's major goal is to create a self-sufficient country. Since Iran's revolution, the United States and Israel have started punitive economic and political sanctions against it either directly or through Arab countries in order to put pressure on it (CSMonitor, 2010). As Simbar (2010) has noted, the United States and the West are in fear of Iran's power in the region that may lead to the departure of the United States from the Middle East; therefore, the US has consistently sought to isolate Iran both by imposing sanctions and various kinds of political and economic pressures on Iran especially on its nuclear program. According to Ahadi (2009), since 2003 the concerns about Iran's nuclear program have risen so that the Arab countries and the United States have mostly criticized the program and have made their most efforts to stop it.

Iran considers the stopping of uranium enrichment non-negotiable, but the limitation on the degree of enrichment, the number of centrifuges and the sign of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) are among negotiable issues (Hadian, 2010). Hadian has indicated that Iran dismisses the utility of nuclear weapons for many reasons some of which are as follows: (1) the risk of the nuclear race in the region; (2) the high cost of production and keeping the nuclear weapons; (3) internal oppositions; (4) the prohibition of accessing weapons of mass destruction

in Islam and (5) Iran's obligation to NPT. In fact, some of Iran's major aims to pursue the peaceful nuclear program, as Hadian has mentioned, are as follows: (1) the progression of Iran's power and status in the world and national pride inside the country; (2) the scientific progress; (3) having a political power in the region and in the world. On the other hand, Israel and the United States insist that Iran is developing nuclear weapons and have created doubt over its aim in public opinions, but they have not been successful in providing any acceptable evidence for the world and international community (Ahadi, 2009). The propaganda campaign against Iran's nuclear program has been so effective that the concern for Iran's program is widespread among the public opinion to the effect that the Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2012) has showed that majority of people in the world consider Iran's nuclear program as developing nuclear weapons and also majority of opponents support international economic sanctions against a nuclear-armed Iran.

In short, the US and Israel insistently attempt to deprive Iran of its inalienable right to pursue its peaceful nuclear program in various ways like mounting a propaganda campaign against its program that emphasizes on its being a nuclear threat to the whole world and imposing strict sanctions against it. As Simbar (2010) has indicated, the sanction policy has led to a negative portrayal of the United States in Iranian peoples' minds because Iran's government and its people aim to be entirely independent of other countries. The killing and killing attempt of five Iranian nuclear scientists occurred during 2010 and 2012. On January 12, 2010, Iranian elementary particle physicist Massoud Ali-Mohammadi was assassinated when a motorcycle parked near his car exploded. On November 29, 2010, two prominent physicists were targeted by hitmen on motorcycles, who attached bombs to their cars and detonated them from a distance. Professor Majid Shahriari was killed and Professor Fereidoun Abbasi was injured in the two separate attacks. On July 23, 2011, Darioush Rezaeinejad was shot dead in eastern Tehran. And, on January 11, 2012, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan and his driver were killed by a bomb attached to their car from a motorcycle. The terrorist group that was financed and trained by Mossad was arrested by Iran's Intelligence Ministry and their confessions were broadcasted on Iran's television. The Iranian government reacted to the bombings that assassinated its nuclear scientists, calling them 'inhuman terrorist acts'.

III. Theoretical Framework

'Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce or challenge relations of power and dominance in society' (Van Dijk, 1993a, p. 252). The central principle of CDA is to study 'the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance' (Van Dijk, 1993b, p. 249). In fact, CDA brings to the surface the underlying attitudes and ideologies by unraveling the strategic devices kept concealed behind the surface structure of discourse. Van Dijk (2000, 2001) does CDA by applying a 'triangulation' framework that links society, cognition, and discourse holding that there is no direct relationship between society and discourses since societal and discursive

structures are mediated by social cognition which involves beliefs, opinions or mental models. He considers 'discourse' in the broad sense of any 'communicative event', including written or spoken interactions, gestures, and images that express and (re) produce ideologies. 'Cognition' involves any mental representations or processes, and finally, 'society' includes both the face-to-face interactions and group-relations. In his definition of ideology, Van Dijk (1998, p. 26) suggests that ideologies are 'clusters of beliefs in our minds' so that one way to analyze ideologies is cognitive study. The cognitive analysis of ideology means that ideologies are mental models that are acquired, shared and changed socially. They are social beliefs of specific groups that had previously been the general beliefs and opinions (1998, p. 313). At the same time, he stresses that ideologies are also socially acquired, constructed and changed and that they represent group identity and interests because each member acts in the interest of the group (1998, p. 29). The social function of ideologies is to control the social practices of groups especially discourse that is able to express and convey ideologies (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 88). Therefore, besides their mental dimension, their social dimension should be analyzed because they are essentially shared by members of groups. It is notable to remind that ideologies are formulated and reproduced by the powerful and dominant groups since they have access to and control over public discourse like media (1998, p. 316). Van Dijk further explains that since all types of socially shared beliefs such as knowledge, norms, and values are not ideological, ideologies are those beliefs that are general and abstract that underlie social representations (1998, p. 314). Finally, He holds that ideologies are acquired, formulated, expressed and reproduced through discourse and that they both influence and are influenced by discourse (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 88). And, the discursive analysis of ideology requires a detailed account of various structures and strategies along with detailed analysis of the context (1998, p. 317). Hence, after defining ideology as 'the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members,' and as 'the basis of social practices of group members,' Van Dijk points out that one of the crucial social practices that influences and is influenced by ideologies is language use and discourse, so much of our discourse express our ideologically based opinions (2000, p. 7-9).

The above-mentioned integrated socio-cognitive analysis characterizes Van Dijk's approach to ideology which is employed in this paper that investigates the underlying ideologies within the two selected newspapers. One of the works that relates to the role of media in ideology construction is by Soltani and Shaghasemi (2010) who define the media as 'reflectors' of ideologies of their owners, examine *The Time* magazine to show how American press represented Iran's nuclear controversy in the way that reflected the policies of American government. They conclude that *The Time* has represented Iran very negatively as a country that is nearing atom bomb and every diplomatic effort has been doomed to failure. Similarly, Ghiasian (2007) unveils the ideological construction of dominance in the negative portrayal of the Muslims and in the positive representation of the White in two British and two American newspapers after 11 September 2001. She shows that the newspapers rebuild their dominant ideology being representing the Muslims as threats to other countries. And, Teo (2010), in his

study of the ideological construction of racism in the news has analyzed two Australian newspapers that polarized between 'us' including the (white) law-enforcers and 'them' including the (ethnic) law-breakers reflecting the marginalization of the minority Vietnamese migrants into Australia. The present study will examine ideology in terms of the 'triangle of cognition, society and discourse' of Van Dijk (2000, 2001) that follows a social, cognitive and discursive approach in order to investigate how the two newspapers under study have constructed specific ideologies in their reports of the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists. Applying a triangulated approach, this study has examined the most frequently used strategy namely, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation which is one of the most significant properties of ideologies that constitute the 'ideological square' in order to demonstrate how it has constructed specific ideologies in the newspapers under study. In Van Dijk's terms (2000, p. 42), the overall ideological strategy is that of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation which involves four principles as follow:

- Emphasize positive things about 'us'
- Emphasize negative things about 'them'
- Deemphasize negative things about 'us'
- Deemphasize positive things about 'them'

He asserts that the members of social groups polarize between 'us' and 'them' on the basis of this 'ideological square.' In political discourses including news discourse which is supported by politicians and political groups, the underlying ideologies are expressed by emphasizing 'our' good things and 'their' bad things and by deemphasizing 'our' bad things and 'their' good things (Van Dijk, 2006). This positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation strategy that associates the good properties and what we find better to ourselves or deemphasize 'our' bad things and 'their' good things exists in the ideological situation of dominance and group conflict (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 275). These overall strategies may be manifested in discourse in all levels of action, meaning and form like lexical choice and other linguistic features. This paper investigates this strategy by specifically analyzing the lexical selections made by the newspapers as well as the meaning. In addition to the analytic strategy of Van Dijk, the discourse historical approach of Wodak (2001) is followed in the analysis of news articles under investigation. The distinctive feature of the approach of Wodak is the analysis of the background information within discourse analysis. Indeed, the researchers embed the background and historical knowledge about the relations between the three countries, i.e., Iran, the US and Israel, in order to help the readers understand the underlying socio-political meanings which was discussed in the previous section. Therefore, in the present analysis, we tend to explore how 'us' and 'them' is portrayed in the discourse of *The New York Times* and *Y-net* in their reports of the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists for the purpose of unveiling the ideology construction in these newspapers by focusing on one of the most significant ideological roles of language being positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation strategy.

IV. Analysis

The data comprise the whole news articles directly related to the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists. The newspapers include *The New York Times* and *Y-net* based in the United States and Israel respectively. The data collection was carried out through the newspapers' websites seeking reports related to the assassination of Massoud Ali-Mohammadi, Majid Shahrari, Fereidun Abbasi, Darioush Rezaei, and Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan which were published in the period between the first assassination in 2010 and the last in 2012. Table 1 shows the total number of collected articles in the newspapers.

Table 1. Number of news reports on the assassination events

Newspaper Title	Number of News Reports
Y-net	52
The New York Times	16

Interestingly reports of the assassination of Iranian scientists have received wide coverage in *Y-net* that proves the significance of the incident for the newspaper. The most obvious form of ideological expression in discourse is lexical choice that may build ideological square by describing out-groups in negative terms and in-groups in positive terms (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 270). Therefore, in the following analysis we examine the ideological constructions in the newspapers under study by focusing specifically on lexical choices that construct positive portrayal of in-group and negative picture of out-group.

Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation

This study is an attempt to show the relation between ideology and discourse by depicting the two newspapers' representations 'us' and 'them' in their reports of the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists. So, given that newspapers have an active role in conveying their ideological stances, this section deals with the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation which is very typical in the newspapers' biased account of the assassination events. *The New York Times'* and *Y-net's* word choices used to represent 'us' positively and to represent 'them' negatively construct the themes in the following tables.

Table 2. Positive self-presentation in *Y-net*

Themes related to 'us'	Relevant news extracts
Innocence	'[Ali-Mohammadi] was murdered in a <i>mysterious assassination</i> ,' 'we are all <i>shocked</i> ,' 'Israel does not comment on such matters'

Table 3. Negative other-presentation in *Y-net*

Themes related to 'them'	Relevant news extracts
Undemocratic	'Ayatollah's regime,' 'the regime,'
Untruthfulness	'Iran has a history of making these claims,' 'doubt over Tehran's version of reality,' 'secret equipments allegedly responsible for the assassination,' 'the spy network allegedly responsible for the assassination,' 'the Iranian government claimed,' 'alleged Israeli spy,' 'alleged Iranian Mossad agents,' 'often no further information is released,' 'Iran has not reported any leads but accuses CIA and Mossad,' 'Iranian claims,' 'rushed to accuse Israel,' 'Iran's unsettled account with Israel,' 'many conflicting reports regarding the victim's identity'
Bomb threat	'It is seeking nuclear weapons,' 'to stop it getting the bomb,' 'Islamic Republic's disputed nuclear program,' 'Iran's controversial nuclear program,' 'their word on suspected nuclear weapons development,' 'seeking bomb,' 'its nuclear ambitions,' 'its refusal to halt its atomic work,' 'Iran is aimed at developing bombs,' 'secretly working on nuclear arms,' 'it is working on a nuclear warhead and other aspects of a weapons program,' 'concerns about its growing nuclear prowess,' 'Tehran is rapidly nearing nuclear weapons,' 'the real danger was Tehran,' 'activity directly related to the design and testing of nuclear weapons,' '[Iran's] nuclear program is a cover to build bombs,' 'enrichment work,' 'suspected Iranian attempts to make nuclear weapons,' 'seeks nuclear weapons,' 'not cease activities that could be used to make such weapons,' 'trying to secure components clandestinely,' 'Iranian nuclear bomb,' 'Iran's atom program'
Domestic unrest	'The June post-election riots,' 'convulsed by its most serious domestic unrest,' 'disputed presidential election,' 'at the time of heightened tension,' 'protests have turned violence,' 'voting was rigged'
International threat	'world leaders concern over the Iranian nuclear program'
Atom researchers	'expert in neutron transport which is at the heart of nuclear chains in reactors and bombs,' 'atom scientist,' 'he participated in developing (...) the explosions needed to trigger a nuclear warhead,' 'worked on projects linked to nuclear weapons development,' 'his project will closes Iran to nuclear explosion,' 'atom researchers,' 'individuals involved in(...)the Iranian military's nuclear program'

Table 4. Positive self-presentation in The New York Times

Themes related to 'us'	Relevant news extracts
Innocence	'mysterious explosion in Iranian capital,' 'unidentified motorcyclist,' 'mysterious blast,' 'quick to say that Israel was behind the assassination,' 'the US and Britain denied involvement in the slayings,' 'the US and Britain have denied any roles,' 'US denies role in Iranian scientist's death,' 'US had nothing to do with Ahmadi-Roshan,' 'US condemns all acts of violence,' 'The US accusation is absurd,' 'the motive for killing Ali-Mohammadi remains unclear,' 'Washington has denied involvement,' 'we do not have any information on what happened,' 'five scientists have died under mysterious circumstances,' 'a charge categorically denied by the US,' 'the US strongly worded denials of responsibility,' 'the white house condemned the attack and denied any responsibility,' 'we strongly condemn all acts of violence,' 'American officials deny a role in lethal activities,' 'the White House disavowed any American complicity,' 'categorically denying any US involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran'
Diplomacy	'We discuss financial sanctions if diplomacy fails,' 'Western efforts to employ diplomacy and sanctions,' 'not pursuing sabotage or assassinations,' 'we decry acts of terrorism wherever they occur,' 'diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program,' '[attacks] could backfire by undercutting future negotiations,' 'the cocktail of diplomacy (...) is the right policy'

Table 5. Negative other-presentation in *The New York Times*

Themes related to 'them'	Relevant news extracts
Untruthfulness	'broadcast <i>purported</i> confessions,' ' <i>claims</i> arrested suspects,' ' <i>alleged</i> links to assassinations,' ' <i>provides little or no public evidence</i> supporting the accusations,' ' <i>alleged</i> US spy ring,' ' <i>claims</i> it uncovered extensive CIA-run espionage network,' ' <i>claims</i> [assassination] is part of covert operations led by Israel,' ' <i>claims</i> it arrested Israeli-linked suspects,' 'they <i>claim</i> [the arrested group] was affiliated to Israel,' '[spies] arrested for <i>allegedly</i> spying for Israel,' ' <i>claimed</i> uncovered a spy base of Mossad in a neighboring country,' ' <i>alleged</i> US or Israeli spies,' ' <i>allegations</i> ,' ' <i>Iranian claims</i> ,' 'Iran has a history of making these types of <i>claims</i> ,' 'Jerusalem was not taking <i>the allegations</i> seriously,' 'Tehran's <i>alleged</i> secret research,' 'Ali-Mohammadi <i>did not work in Iran's nuclear program</i> ,' 'Iran's <i>claim</i> [Ali-Mohammadi is a loyalist] seemed <i>dubious</i> ,' 'This is <i>an old trick</i> ,' 'Washington dismissed the accusation of the US involvement as <i>absurd</i> ,' 'Iran <i>routinely accuses</i> Israel,' ' <i>without elaborating</i> ,' 'the <i>alleged plot</i> '
Bomb threat	'aimed at producing <i>nuclear weapons</i> ,' 'Iran's <i>disputed</i> nuclear works,' 'stockpiling enriched uranium as potential fuel for <i>nuclear weapons</i> ,' 'trying to develop technology needed for a <i>workable bomb</i> ,' 'the decade-long stand-off over its <i>nuclear ambitions</i> ,' 'has <i>military goals</i> ,' 'development of <i>nuclear weapons</i> ,' ' <i>nuclear arms development</i> ,' 'to halt its <i>nuclear enrichment program</i> ,' 'trying to build a <i>nuclear weapon</i> ,' 'IAEA suspects Iran uses facilities to test explosives capable of <i>detonating a nuclear charge</i> ,' 'Iran is seeking to build a <i>nuclear bomb</i> ,' 'Iran is seeking to build a <i>weapon</i> ,' ' <i>controversial uranium enrichment efforts</i> ,' ' <i>bombing reactor sites</i> ,' 'effort to acquire a <i>nuclear warhead</i> ,' 'Tehran's aim to build a <i>nuclear bomb</i> ,' 'developing a <i>weapons capacity</i> ,' 'Iran may be accelerating its production of <i>nuclear materials (...)</i> to make a <i>weapon</i> ' 'Iran's <i>disputed</i> nuclear program,' 'seeking to develop the capability to make <i>nuclear weapons</i> ,' 'suspect that Iran is working toward building a <i>nuclear weapon</i> ,' 'possibly continuing efforts to construct a <i>nuclear weapon</i> ,' 'determined progress toward a <i>nuclear weapon</i> ,' 'quest for a <i>nuclear capacity</i> ,' 'a potential fuel for <i>nuclear weapon</i> '
Undemocratic	' <i>Iranian Mullahs</i> ,' ' <i>the regime</i> '
Terrorism	' <i>Tehran sponsors terrorism</i> '
Violence and domestic unrest	' <i>Harsh actions</i> against opponents,' ' <i>demonstrators</i> shot at the armored car of opposition leader,' ' <i>brutal crackdown</i> ,' ' <i>stifle dissent</i> ,' ' <i>anti-government student demonstrators</i> ,' ' <i>try protesters</i> ,' ' <i>try and jail</i> minority Bahai religious group,' 'for fear of <i>official reprisals</i> ,' ' <i>killed dissident professors</i> after presidential <i>dispute</i> ,' ' <i>issues death sentence</i> for protesters,' ' <i>violence</i> against the <i>opposition</i> ,' 'the country's <i>divided leaders</i> ,' 'at least some of the murdered scientists might have been <i>killed by the Iranian government</i> ,' ' <i>Iran carried out many assassinations</i> of (...) Iranian opposition figures'
Bad scientists	'they are <i>bad people</i> whose work is exactly what you need to design a bomb,' 'a field that lies at <i>the heart of nuclear chain reactions in bombs and reactors</i> ,' ' <i>working closely with a leader in Tehran's effort to acquire a nuclear warhead</i> ,' ' <i>deeply entwined with secretive aspects of the Iranian effort</i> '
International threat	' <i>international tensions</i> over the Iranian nuclear program,' ' <i>western leaders suspect</i> Iranian scientists (...) the creation of a nuclear weapon,' ' <i>international sanctions</i> ,' ' <i>the US and its allies [confronted] difficult choices(...)</i> to limit Iran's nuclear abilities,' ' <i>the West fears</i> Iran,' ' <i>threatens</i> Israel and <i>upsets the regional power balance</i> ,' ' <i>Inconclusive talks</i> in Vienna between Iran and IAEA,' ' <i>the growing tensions</i> with Iran,' 'the focus of <i>profound disputes</i> '

As the above tables show, *The New York Times* and *Y-net* have similarly adopted positive words for 'us' (Israel and the US) and negative words for 'them' (Iran). The following example shows *Y-net's* positive self-presentation by implying Israel's unawareness of the assassinations and describing them as 'mysterious' which makes readers conclude that Israel too is surprised with the events, hence indirectly rejecting Israel's hand.

(1) Professor Massuod Mohammadi (...) was murdered in a mysterious assassination in Tehran. (*Y-net*, January 13, 2010)

Another example demonstrates *The New York Times'* construction of 'we'-group when it describes the US as innocent by calling Iran's accusations as 'absurd' and attributing 'us' (the West) with diplomacy toward Iran's nuclear program by pursuing diplomatic efforts to stop its nuclear program.

(2) (...) Western efforts to employ diplomacy and sanctions in the enduring crisis over Tehran's nuclear program. (*The New York Times*, May 16, 2012)

The two newspapers have constructed 'they'-group (Iran) negatively in many aspects. To be more precise, as the main instances of different lexical choices that the two newspapers employed, one can refer to the words and expressions they used to describe Iran, the assassination events, the assassinated scientists, and the assassins. Throughout the newspapers' accounts of the events, the newspapers justify the assassinations through specific lexical choices and strategies that formulate negative evaluations of Iran. For instance, in reporting the assassination of the Iranian scientists they represent them negatively by relating their work to building bombs. *Y-net* has depicted the scientists as 'atom scientists' involved in making 'nuclear weapons', thereby guiding the readers to demean their deaths so that they are led to legitimize the assassination events. The following extracts from the two newspapers might be considered as relevant instances:

(3) Western sources have said Ali-Mohammadi, a physics professor, worked closely with Mohsen Fakhazadeh-Mahabadi and Fereidoun Abbasi-Davani, both subject to UN sanctions because of their work on suspected nuclear weapons development. (*Y-net*, January 10, 2011)

(4) Abbasi Davani, a target of UN sanctions, replaces Ali Akbar Salehi who was endorsed as foreign minister last month. (*Y-net*, February 13, 2011)

(5) The slain scientist, Majid Shahriari, managed a 'major project' for the country's Atomic Energy Organization, Iran's nuclear chief, Ali Akbar Salehi, told the semi official IRNA news agency. His wounded colleague, Fereidoon Abbasi, is believed to be even more important, he is on the United Nation Security Council's sanctions list for ties to the Iranian nuclear effort... "They're bad people, and the work they do is exactly what you need to design a bomb."... He [Shahriari] was an expert on neutron transport, a field that lies at the

heart of nuclear chain reactions in bombs and reactors. (The New York Times, November 29, 2010)

(6) Rezaei was reportedly a physics professor whose area of expertise was neutron transport, which lies at the heart of nuclear chain reactions in reactors and bombs. (Y-net, July 24, 2011)

(7) A man shot dead on a Tehran street by motorcycle-riding gunmen last weekend was a scientist involved in suspected Iranian attempts to make nuclear weapons and not a student as officially claimed. (Y-net, July 28, 2011)

(8) After reporting the assassination of one of the scientists, Rezaeinejad, the "the shooting came amid Western concerns that Iran may be accelerating its production of nuclear materials to get closer to being able to make a weapon." (The New York Times, July 24, 2011)

(9) The scientist was identified as Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, 32, a professor at a technical university in Tehran, and a department supervisor at the Natanz uranium enrichment plant—one of two known scientists where Western leaders suspect Iranian scientists are advancing toward the creation of a nuclear weapon. (The New York Times, January 11, 2011).

(10) The scientist, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, was a department supervisor at the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, a participant in what Western leaders believe is Iran's halting but determined progress toward a nuclear weapon. (The New York Times, January 11, 2012)

(11) The scientist was identified as Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, 32, a professor at a technical university in Tehran, and a department supervisor at the Natanz uranium enrichment plant—one of the two known sites where Western leaders suspect Iranian scientists are advancing toward the creation of a nuclear weapon. (The New York Times, January 11, 2012)

In addition, *The New York Times* and *Y-net* have constructed doubt about Iran's statements which lead to representing it negatively as untruthful mostly by the recurring use of the words 'alleged' and 'claim' in order to encourage readers to read the Iranian reports of the events critically. Of all relevant instances, we only cite the followings:

(12) In January, Iran said it arrested 10 people who allegedly had links to Mossad and were implicated in the killing of at least two Iranian scientists. (Y-net, August 20, 2011)

(13) Intelligence minister claims suspects moved between Iran, Israel through neighboring country. (Y-net- June 17, 2012)

(14) While providing specifics, the new details of the arrests which were first announced last week, appeared to link the alleged plot with the killing of scientists from Iran's disputed nuclear program. (The New York Times, April 18, 2012)

An interesting finding in this regard is that both of the newspapers have not condemned the arrested assassins as terrorists and also have not regarded the assassinations as terrorist attacks. Even, in quoting Iran's statements, the words such as 'terrorist incident' are placed within quotation marks which in Volosinov's terms, the words within quotation marks in indirect discourse 'accommodate shadings of the author's attitude- his irony, humor, and so on' (1973, p. 131). Hence, the authors of *The New York Times* and *Y-net* indirectly reveal their critical attitude toward Iranian statements contributing in this way to a positive self-presentation. In the mean time, it can be considered as a negative other-presentation because throughout the articles, the newspapers, by so placing Iran's calling the events as terrorist acts within quotation marks draw the readers' attention to these particular parts which they should approach critically. Thus, Iran and its scientists are associated with negative attitudes that deserve any kind of punishment so that the scientists' deaths are not regarded as terrorist acts, but they are simple killings. Here are some examples:

(15) After a broad investigation, Iran succeeded in arresting "the main agents behind the terrorist incident" and dismantling a network "of Israeli spies and terrorists," the semiofficial Fars news agency quoted a ministry statement as saying, according to Press TV. (The New York Times, January 10, 2011)

(16) Iran received information days ago that Israeli and US intelligent intended to carry out 'terrorist acts' in Tehran, its parliament speaker said on Wednesday, after the killing of a university scientist. (Y-net, January 13, 2010)

(17) Iran said on Tuesday it had identified a 'major terrorist group' it said was affiliated to its arch-foe Israel and had arrested some of its members, the official IRNA news agency reported, citing a report by the country's Intelligence Ministry. (Y-net, April 10, 2012)

(18) Iran has arrested a 'network of spies' linked to Israel's Mossad intelligence service that it blames for the assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist in 2010, its state television reported on Monday. (Y-net, January 10, 2011)

(19) Iran reports killing of nuclear scientist in 'terrorist' blast' (The New York Times, January 11, 2012)

(20) President Ahmadinejad says 'UN in cahoots with Zionists' in carrying out 'terror attacks on Iranian nuke experts. (Y-net, December 01, 2012)

Moreover, in their reaction to Iran's convicting them of having role in the assassinations, *The New York Times* has denied it while *Y-net* has used silence strategy, that is, no explicit response is provided. Israel indeed has not commented on Iran's accusations. Instead, it has remained silent while indirectly questioning credibility of Iran's reports and statements. In reacting to Iran's claims, the idea of Iran's approaching bomb has been very much in the foreground in the two newspapers which can be regarded as a 'diversion strategy' used to deliberately take readers/listeners' attention away from something unpleasant by making them notice other issues which are not against the writers/ speakers' interests. They constructed a negative picture of Iran's nuclear program as being aimed to develop weapons, a claim that always have been denied by the Iranian officials who assert Iran's nuclear program as peaceful to be used in science, electricity, agriculture, and industry. We have seen that the newspapers' use of negative lexicon to describe 'other' (Iran) which contributes notably to the strategy of negative other-presentation focuses mainly on Iran's seeking a bomb. Iran is demonstrated as a bomb threat that is seeking nuclear weapons and bomb. It is depicted as an international threat that has concerned 'world leaders' over its nuclear program. Both have frequently used these labels throughout their description of Iran's nuclear program: Iran's 'controversial,' 'disputed,' and 'suspected' nuclear program. They have also used generalization strategy which according to Teo (2000) is extending the attributes or activities of a specific group of people to a more general set. Indeed, they have generalized the negative attitude towards Iran as a bomb threat to the whole west as well as other nations, hence while demeaning the main news events of the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists, they have foregrounded the image of Iran as a serious international threat that concerned the whole West and also other nations. Some examples of making the international opinion concern about Iran's nuclear program as a major crisis are provided below:

(21) Western leaders suspect that Tehran is seeking the capability to build a weapon. (The New York Times, May 16, 2012)

(22) The West suspects Iran's nuclear work is aimed at developing bombs. (Y-net, January 13, 2010)

(23) Israel, the United States and other nations suspect Iran is intent on using its civil nuclear energy program as cover for developing atomic weapons. (Y-net, August 28, 2011)

(24) Iran denies Western suspicions that its nuclear program has military goals, saying it is for purely peaceful purposes. (Y-net, April 10, 2012)

(25) Western nations suspect that Iran is working toward building a nuclear weapon. (The New York Times, January 13, 2012)

(26) Iran is at odds with the United States and its allies over its nuclear program, which the West says is a cover to build bombs. (Y-net, July 24, 2011)

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the discursive construction of ideologies in the two American and Israeli newspapers' reports on the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists by examining the most frequent discursive strategies which might be considered to construct the newspapers' preferred models in the readers' minds. In order to analyze ideology, Van Dijk's (1998, 2001) multidisciplinary approach was adopted which relates cognition, society and discourse, hence considering the socio-cognitive nature and functions of ideologies that are expressed and reproduced in discourse. The discursive analysis of the two newspapers' accounts of the news events (all 68 news articles) showed that the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation was the most prominent strategy. Ingroup-outgroup distinction was prevalent in the two newspapers since 'we' in both of them was associated with positive values and 'they' was portrayed negatively. Indeed, *The New York Times* and *Y-net* employed us-them polarization by a series of lexical items consistent with a threatening image of Iran implying untruthfulness, bomb threat, dictatorship, terrorism, violence, and international concern about its 'bad scientists'. In these newspapers, 'we' (the United States and Israel) was associated with positive values like innocence and diplomacy. The findings proved that there was similarity between *The New York Times* and *Y-net* in their reactions to the assassination events since both of them constructed a negative image of Iran as an international bomb threat. The analysis of newspapers' reports showed that *The New York Times* and *Y-net* referred to the events simply as motiveless incidents and did not condemn the terrorists in connection to the events. In addition, we could witness the processes of justification and legitimating which naturalized the events, representing the scientists very negatively by labeling them as 'bad scientists' and 'atom researchers'.

Moreover, in their reactions to Iran's convictions of the US and Israel for having a hand in the assassinations, *The New York Times* denied any responsibility and *Y-net* adopted a 'silence strategy'. Both newspapers highlighted a negative presentation of Iran, its scientists and its nuclear program as an international threat and pushed the main news event of the Iranian nuclear scientists' assassination into the background, thereby contributed to the legitimating of anti-Iranian ideologies in the mind of the public and therefore naturalized the events. They legitimized assassinations by constructing a very negative image of Iran's nuclear program where the scientists worked so that they were associated with illegal professions. In fact, this foregrounding strategy was an attempt to immediately divert the readers' attention to the portrayal of Iran's nuclear program as related to bombs and weapons. This diversion strategy guides the readers to consider the assassination events as minimal and as acts of punishment since the scientists were associated with an illegal profession.

In this paper, it was also shown that all aspects of manipulation, being a form of discursive power abuse in Van Dijk's terms (2006), was evident. Indeed, *The New York Times* and *Y-net*

tried to manipulate politicians and people's ideologies, the case that happened when the US legitimized war on Iraq in 2003. In this same international manipulation supported by the US and Israel governments that is carried out by their respective newspapers, the two newspapers represented 'us' and 'them' based on Van Dijk's ideological square in order to manipulate the public in to accepting taking various actions including going to war on Iran without providing any plausible argument and evidence. They manipulated the public in to believing that the world is unsafe because of Iran as it was unsafe because of Iraq. As Van Dijk (2006) points out, manipulators emphasize those properties of mental models that are in their own interests and deemphasize the properties that are inconsistent with their own interests. Governments, dominant groups or institutions try to form or modify general, socially shared attitudes or ideologies which are more influential and stable or permanent than the specific mental models of language users.

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