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Under Western Eyes
The BBC and the Iranian Revolution 1978-1979
A Discursive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

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This study explains, from a discursive approach, how the Iranian revolution of 1979 was constructed by the BBC (Persian Service) as news story, and how this constructed story as a text provided the Iranian audiences, who participated in the revolution, with a " preferred reading" of the events. The study gives a media narrative of the revolution as a historical "context", and deals with the BBC as a "sender" in terms of its *mythic* reputation for" impartiality" and "objectivity" in representing the world events as news. The way in which the BBC as a Western broadcaster mediated in the highly anti-Western context of the Iranian revolution of 1979 is the core question that the study attempts to explore. It does so by analyzing the BBC news-discourse based on a narrative model and by showing the process through which the BBC' "message" was *encoded* and *decoded* as a text. One conclusion of this thesis is that the BBC broadcasts to Iran *cultivated* in the audiences an image of the revolution different from what was cultivated by the most Western media, at the time, in their domestic or international audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking aspects of the Iranian revolution in 1979 has been the role of the local and international media in its formation and dynamics. The Iranian revolution offers an opportunity to study the function of revolutionary ways of communication as the "alternative" media (cassette tapes, leaflets, strike bulletins, newsletters...) and that of international media, significantly radio broadcasting via short wave, as it was "controversially" attained by the BBC (Persian Service). During the revolution, the BBC, Persian Service, through its news-discourse, connected the Iranian people and reflected the revolutionary developments in a way that even the local revolutionary media, at least in some stages, could not achieve. The way in which this result was obtained in a highly

anti-western revolutionary context by a western broadcaster is the core question that this study intends to explore.

It seems that each revolution provides scholars with its particular complex narrative(s), and in this regard, the Iranian example is not an exceptional one. Yet, the Iranian revolution in some respect still has remained and probably will remain as an unsolved riddle. Its narrative, seemingly, contains some unreadabilities, or in other words, it contains sub-stories, which still have not been completely told. Almost like political or economical models in dealing with the Iranian revolution, what have been given by scholars based on communications model seem also incomplete accounts. It is so because not only a grand narrative of the Iran revolution, but its media-based narrative also renders its unreadablities in terms of unclear or hidden aspects of certain mediated trends and events. The BBC news-discourse during the revolution with its disruptive effects, if not as an unreadable instance, but as a sub-story in this narrative still needs to be read. What has been said by the communications scholars about such a crucial role of a radio broadcaster in the revolution is mostly in the form of short descriptive episodes in their full accounts.

Yet, it should be noted that, for obvious methodological reasons, this study does not attempt to reveal "hidden aspects" of the BBC's role - i.e., those aspects which a theory of conspiracy used to assign to the BBC broadcast during the Iran revolution. Rather, this study tries to explain and clear up, on a certain theoretical ground, why and how the BBC's message, as news-discourse, was effective in its target area in a given historical period.

Based on a Jakobsonian model of communication, the three chapters of this study deal with the BBC news-discourse in terms of "context"; "sender" and the "message"; and thus, the whole work attempts to delimit a subject position as "receiver". These three chapters are connected together by what is proposed and examined through the whole work as "representation". From a discursive approach, "representation" has been used in this work as a process through which social and cultural "meanings" are produced, and further, as a source of social knowledge and power. The three parts of this study open up different perspectives on the issue by exploring representation, first, as a "closed system" in the pre-revolutionary Iran; second, in the context of a Western news-discourse – that is, the way in which the BBC has undertaken to represent the world to the world; and third, by examining the narrative structure of the news as a mode of representation.

The first chapter deals with representation as a closed, unitary system which was imposed by Pahlavi regime on the whole communication networks. Thus, the chapter gives a media narrative of the Iranian revolution as a context for the BBC news-discourse. The BBC's message, in fact, represented this context to itself. From a discursive approach, the Iranian revolution is studied as a crisis of a mediated modernity (modernization) and the problematic of representation as reflection of such a crisis in the pre-revolutionary Iran is discussed. It should be pointed out that, the main focus of this chapter is on broadcast media, because broadcast media is dealt here as the main stream of mass-mediated signs of modernity in Iran. Furthermore; in confrontation of the

State, as "power", with its opposite (the revolutionary movement), it was broadcast media that represented exclusively the "power". During the last months of the revolution, the print media were not controlled by the State and to a large extent could reflect the movement. However, what is explained in respect to broadcast media could be also regarded as constituent of an ideological agency which operated in relation with the print media.

The second chapter characterizes the BBC news-discourse as a myth on a Barthesean model (1972). Thus, the chapter tries to read the BBC news-discourse as a whole, as an "identity" in the network of international communication - that is, the BBC's global reputation for " impartiality" and "objectivity" in representing the world to the world. Such a reading has been attempted in order to expose discursive configurations of the myth as well as its paradoxical influence, and intended or unintended function. It has also been attempted in order to encapsulate the long and complex history of the BBC world service as an organization- that is, historical formation of the myth. It should be noted that, here, the BBC's message as "news" is also dealt in terms of its discursive moment of "encoding". For this purpose, Hall's model (1980) of encoding/decoding (although it is originally proposed for television message in a domestic setting) has been adapted for a transborder radio message.

The third chapter, through a textual analysis, examines the way in which the BBC mediated during the Iranian revolution. Therefore, a number of relevant broadcast news-texts has been selected and analyzed to demonstrate how the BBC constructed the revolutionary events in the form of news-discourse and how

such a discourse provided the Iranian audiences, who participated in the revolution, with a " preferred reading" of the revolutionary events and developments. In undertaking this analysis, the third chapter draws on a variety of semiotic approaches to the news including Hartley (1982) and Hartley and Montgomery(1985) . The chapter specifically attempts to adapt the analytical strategies provided by Barthes (1974; 1988) to propose a narrative model for investigating the structure of the message as radio news.

The main goal of this study, as a whole, is to read one of those mentioned unreadabilties of the Iranian revolution of 1979. This reading has been tried through exploring the "paradoxical" and "contentious" effects of an international (Western) broadcast in the course of the Iranian revolution. Accordingly, the study undertakes to fulfill a twofold task: first, to explain the Iranian crisis, its causes and dynamics in communication terms (what has been seldom done by media scholars in their critical analysis based on "development" and "dependency" paradigms); and second, to explicate the BBC news-discourse as a polysemic and highly contextual message by examining it as a text in the process of encoding and decoding. The latter task can be seen as an effort to re-conceptualize of what has been defined by some Third World-oriented scholars as the Western "hegemony" in international communications, and stereotyped as "media imperialism", "cultural invasion" and the like, in xenophobic rhetoric of dictatorial and totalitarian regimes of the so-called Third World.

CHAPTER ONE

A Historical Context

From Grain Prices to Mother Goose...

On the evening of February 11, 1979, in the last moments of the Pahlavi regime,

Iran radio was broadcasting to the whole country and to the world a piece of

classical music. The few staff of National Iran Radio and Television (NIRT), who

were not on strike, chose Maurice Ravel's Mother Goose as a "link" for the

occasional military communiqués. At the very moment of the fall of NIRT, Ravel's

piece suddenly stopped, then came a silence... This silence, or "dead air",

marked the end of a period in Iran history that had begun with another silence.

that is, a halt in National Radio broadcasting in August 19, 1953. At that time, Dr.

Mohamad Mossaddegh, the leader of Oil Nationalization Movement, and the

prime minister of Iran was overthrown during a coup staged by Britain and United

State, and the Shah who had fled to Italy was brought back to power. Kremit

Roosevelt, the CIA agent and the organizer of the coup in Tehran, in his diaries wrote about the crucial moment of capturing the radio station:

> The first signs were odd. The tempo of the price quotations
> [grain prices] slowed, as if the announcer were falling asleep.
> Gradually, agonizingly, the sound grated to a halt. For what
> seemed an eternity, there was dead silence...then a voice...
> came on air, ...the Shah's instruction that Mossadeq be
> dismissed has been carried out. The new Prime Minister...
> is now in office...(Roosevelt, 1979,p.191)

In Iran, like most parts of the Third World, radio is not simply a medium for broadcasting news and entertainment. Its mere transmitted code, even when it does not contain any verbal image, as a metonymy, conveys a "voice", a voice of the nation which ironically is nothing but the State's voice. This voice, first of all, connotes a sense of continuous regulating "presence" which the television image traditionally and technically could not. Any halt, silence, or disturbance in its transmission, as the above quoted words shows, would be understood by the audience not only as dysfunction or non-function of the medium, but as a cease, a fatal destruction in, or " absence" of, what structurally relates the State to the nation: power in the broad sense of the word.

It might be said that two distinct periods in Iranian history in the mid and late twentieth century have been marked by such an "absence" or halt: from 1949 till 1953, a period of troubled parliamentary democracy, free press, political unrest and lately a national movement against the Britain's monopoly of Iranian oil resources led by charismatic prime minister Dr. Mohammed

Mossadeq; and, the post-coup period from 1953 till 1979, a period of autocracy, "depended modernization", political repression and economic boom. The latter "halt" occurred at the crucial moment of capturing radio and television by the revolutionary forces. This time (1979), the voice that came to air, announced victory of the people, of freedom and followed by congratulatory messages, speeches and endless pieces of revolutionary music. It was a euphoric moment of victory for the revolution, the end of an era and beginning of another, the nature of which nobody could then foresee.

The Iranian revolution was an indigenous, populist, urban, upheaval in an oil-rich country that mobilized millions of the people into nonviolent demonstrations against the Shah's regime. From its occurrence in 1979 onwards, it has been studied and analyzed by most existing theories of revolution.[1] However, no single theoretical perspective has explained fully the complex nexus of varied social, political and cultural facts which brought about such a grave change in political life of the country at the end of 1970s (Kamrava 1990, Tehranian, 1980). It could not be thought of and explained by categories such as class struggle or economic oppression. Its most unique characteristic was the way it did mobilize and unite such a population in various classes and with heterogeneous ideologies and political interests. It demonstrated the collective will of a people, a phenomenon that, according to Foucault, was hitherto only a "political myth". Nobody had ever encountered it in the history of other revolutions (Foucault, 1988). Conjecturally, the revolution was initiated by a

media event,[2] brought down the Shah and his army with "radio cassettes" and popular masses as its instrument (Said, 1997). And it was "liberating" the radio and television that brought the revolution to its "glorifying" and "triumphal" end. Not the fall of garrisons, SAVAK's[3] headquarters, police stations and prisons had such significance as a symbolic terminating point. From a communications approach, the Iranian revolution reveals its most unique constitutive traits as well as its contradictions. It was a revolution in the television age while it was ideologically embedded in a rising powerful secondary orality (in Ong's sense). In the lack of political parties and revolutionary cadre the Iranian revolution utilized the modern mediated communications along with traditional ones as its organization. Historically, it was rooted in a deep cultural and political crisis that the modern media had played, if not the main, but central role in its creating and provoking. The mass media could not make a pervasive popular support for the Shah's modernization and during the years of rapid social changes and economic boom of the seventies, unintended effects of medial programs created a deep identity crisis which manifested itself in a full-scale revolution (Tehranian 1980, Serberny and Mohammadi 1994).

In their limited but well detailed accounts, communications scholars have explained the Iranian revolution as a confrontation of two opposing forces: A) the despotic modernization under the Shah's rule that was promoted by

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[1] For an account of these analyses see Kamrava, (1990).
[2] This media event or "crisis-initiating" event (in Green's terms) was an article carried by daily newspaper Etelaat, on January 7, 1978. It contained insulting remarks and made allegations against Khomeini and led to the first demonstrations in the holy city of Qom. Khomeini at the time was living in exile in Iraq. Dariush Homayoun, the Minister of Information at the time later said that the article was ordered directly by the Shah.
[3]The Shah's national security agency.

governmental media; and B) the Iranian people's cultural and political claims as a reaction to, or an outcome of such a modernization which was manifested through popular, revolutionary means of communications. Accordingly, the revolution has been described as tradition versus technology (Mowlana, 1979); re-traditionalization versus modernization (Tehranian, 1980) and re-emergence of an indigenous identity represented through small media (cassette tapes, strike bulletins, newsletters...) against an alienated, illusory identity which had been provided by the State-run big media (Serberny and Mohammadi, 1994). The central problem in almost all these critical analyses of the Iran crisis based on communications model is their unilateral approaches towards modernization. Based upon the paradigms of "development" and " dependency", these approaches failed to explain modernization as a process full of internal contradictory currents and interplay of ambivalent stances. They have defined the process almost in socioeconomical rather than communications terms, as "pseudo –modernization", "development from above", "Westernization", "Americanization", and explained its side effects as the very causes of the revolution. According to these accounts, modernization in Iran was initiated by foreign powers (mainly Britain) in order to facilitate their commercial, political and even military interventions (telegraph technology in the late nineteenth century for instance), and later, was undertaken by the Pahlavi monarch in a despotic way which caused uprooting of indigenous social, economic, political, educational and legal institutions.

Although it is historically justifiable that modernization in Iran was a forced transplantation serving the State's despotic goals, but it is also historically true that such transplantation, significantly under the Reza Shah, was brought about as a fulfillment of those national demands that had been frustrated since the Constitutional Revolution of 1906.[4] Furthermore, these accounts, whether from liberal perspective (Tehranian) or leftist (Serberny and Mohammadi), are based upon an essentialist conceptualization. They have conceptualized the crisis through the binarization of tradition/ modern which is, in fact, laid on a prior binarization of nature/culture. Thus, they have assumed a "natural" order for the original culture in an Eastern society like Iran, which in exposure to the illusory, alien modernization (modernity) will eventually re-assert its lost originality, and its supposedly privileged position. In avoiding such a reductionist approach, this study tries to make a distinction between "modernization" as a strategy for development of infrastructure, and "modernity" as a "culture" or in other words, as a discursive dynamic. It begins by this assumption that modernity in Iran de-familiarized what had been familiarized as originary culture. Although agonizing, this de-familiarization opened up new spaces for new political claims and initiatives as well as new cultural forms and products in a process of displacing and hybridity. Passing from a pre-modern to modern society even in the West has not been a painless transition. Modernity since its beginning has been

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[4] Trans- Iranian railway is an example, Completed in 1938, it was the first project that had been constructed without any foreign financial aid. While from a radical perspective, it has been criticized as a project planned in a way which facilitated invasion of Iran by the allied forces during World War II, it has also been described from a liberal perspective as a fulfillment of a national demand rather than a mere economic measure achieved by the first Pahlavi monarch.

correlated with instability and non-conformity and has engendered formidable

resistance and discontent in terms of counter-modernization in the East (the

Third World countries) and de-modernization in the West (Berger, 1973).

From the first decade of the Twentieth Century onwards, Iran went through

several stages of social transformation simultaneously: transformation from a

quasi-feudal to a modern industrial economy; from an absolutist monarchy to

political participation (the Constitutional Revolution 1906); from oral traditions

to multi-media communications systems, and from a closed belief-system to

an open system of beliefs (Tehranian, 1997). The process of these

transformations was intensified during the Reza Shah period (1925-1941).

Reza Shah, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, tried to establish a modern

army, a secular legal system, Western style education, modern industry and

new dress codes that allowed the women not to wear the veil (Banani, 1961).

It was during this period that the Iranian government transformed from a

powerless tribal aristocracy to a nation-state (Ashuri, 1990), and the modern

apparatus of such a government was reinforced ideologically by nationalism

and secularism. Serving such ideological goals, the foundation and expansion

of modern means of communication was an integrated part of modernization

that Iran as a Third World country experienced during more than 50 years of

the Pahlavi rule.

Before the establishment of the first radio station in Iran, there were a

few hundred radio sets in Tehran. These sets along with phonographs and

records were brought to Iran from Europe by the multilingual elite who used

to listen to the Berlin, Ankara, Moscow and London broadcasts. It was on 24 April 1940, in the last year of the Reza Shah reign that the Iranian national radio (Radio Iran) started to work. The first message that this two-kilowatt medium-wave radio station broadcast was the national anthem. Also in the first transmitted program the Prime Minister, Matin-daftari, in a short speech stated that radio could be a source of news, information and entertainment for the public and he promised to establish listening centers where people could listen to radio for free. On the same day, the daily newspaper, Etelaát, described the radio as "one of the most important human inventions...among the most valuable gifts of civilization and progress"[5]. The programs of Radio Iran ran from 7 to 11pm and contained Persian and western music, drama, educational features and the news (in various languages). The radio sets mostly were owned by the upper class or upper-middle class. The people from lower classes used to listen to radio programs in the coffeehouses and the bakeries.

One could not reach any conclusion from a short period of broadcasting (1940-41) about the whole media policy of the Iranian government during the reign of Reza Shah[6]. However, by generalizing the regime's treatment of the press to the radio broadcasting, some components of this policy have been explained by the communication

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[5] Etelaat, April 24, 1940. Cited by Serberny and Mohammadi. (1994), p.53.
[6] In 1941 following the German invasion of USSR, because the Allied forces were suspicious of the number of Germans in Iran, the country, despite of her declared neutrality, was invaded by the British, USSR and later by the US. Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favor of his son (Mohammad Reza) and deported to South Africa where he died in 1944.

scholars. From the beginning, radio broadcasting in Iran was largely kept

and controlled by the central government (Beeman, 1984). It was treated as

an instrument for political propaganda and was monopolized by the

government for maintaining its political hegemony and promulgating a

simplistic ideology (Serberny and Mohammadi, 1994). According to

Mowlana, the government in treatment of the media followed if not a fascist,

an authoritarian theory which was practiced by imposing a strict censorship

on the whole communication system. Under Reza Shah's regime, freedom

of thought, of speech, and the press were suspended, "...any discussion of

political topics let alone criticism of the government was unthinkable,

dangerous even in private conversation." [7] According to these general

views, a certain concept of radio broadcasting was formed in Iran. It was a

concept imposed by the government and as a result, from the very

beginning, radio was recognized by the Iranian audience as a government

owned institution, as the State- organ (the government's mouthpiece) and

such a notion remained intact in the Iranian political culture for years to

come. What becomes problematic is that such views could not define the

full effects of radio and television and the cultural space which was forged

and filled by the newly introduced media in the Iranian society[8]. Although

the constructed notion of state-organ was an indispensable constitutive of

that cultural space, how can the vast popularity of radio programs in

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[7] Hamid Mowlana, Journalism in Iran, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University,1963. Cited in Serberny and Mohammadi, p.51

postwar years, and later, that of the national Iranian television's, be explained? The huge impacts of mass media on the Iranian urban and rural life were not, and could not be, imperiously predicted or determined by the government. Furthermore, the Iranian government at the time, significantly in the 40s and to some extent in postwar period, was not an exception for its manipulation of media. Not only in Asia but also in most parts of the world radio was monopolized, owned, and controlled by the governments or ruling elite[9]. Therefore, the formation of the Iranian concept of radio and television as State-organ seems to need more explanation in terms of its distinct cultural and historical particularities.

It should not come as a surprise that while there is a relatively extensive historical literature (mostly anecdotal,) and analytical studies (principally content analysis) about the press, one could hardly find any on broadcast media.[10] It shows the extent to which the notion of the media (first radio and later television) as a State-organ has been normalized by an agency (the State's agency), and as a result, how far it has been pre-assumed in terms of either an exclusion of the broadcast media from the field of study, or in terms of a "totalization" in the historical and communications researches. This notion typifies the government's media policy in Iran based on some historical facts, while at the same time, as a totalized notion, it excludes some particularities of

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[8] Beeman (1984), to a certain extent, and from an anthropological standpoint, has dealt with cultural effects of mass media in Iran during the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and his father Reza Shah.

[9] See, for example, Maurice Charland on formation of National broadcasting in Canada in the early twentieth century, in his "Technological Nationalism" (*Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 10-1,1986, pp.196-221).

[10] See, for example. Serberny and Mohammadi's *Small Media, Big Revolution* : "bibliography"

the Iranian case. Deliberately or not, such a totalization overlooks the inherent effects of modern media in favor of an over-determination of State's free will as the main basis of power. It seems that for any elucidation of failure (and also success) of Pahlavi's media policy we need to detotalize the notion of State-organ by investigating its effects not only in political but also in cultural space.

Such a detotalization is in fact a recontextualization. It is an attempt to place the notion of State-organ in a historical context that was not and could not be solely determined by the State's free will embodied in the King. From a totalizing point of view, the notion of State-organ has been explained as a concepualization of the State's repressive and coercive political agency. Accordingly, this agency, which could be elucidated as well on some factual basis, resulted in the delegitimization of the State that in turn led to failure of the Pahlavis' media policy. According to this view, while the legitimacy of the regime was an issue, despite all its efforts and investment for creating a legitimacy through founding a national identity, the mass media could not make a pervasive popular support for the Shah's modernization (Serberny and Mohamadi, 1994). In dealing with the crisis of the legitimacy of the regime, this view takes for granted a certain subjective perception for the individual, and obviously disregards those cultural forces that in any given historical moment affect such a subjectivity. It is difficult to determine the extent to which all the Pahlavis' reforms and endeavors met with resistance from the people. Significantly, with regard to Reza Shah, to what extent one can attribute a

despotic nature to all his reforms (modernization from above), and not find in their course, though imposed by the State, a recourse in form of a resonance of what had been proposed by the bourgeois liberal revolution of 1906 in Iran? Reza Shah's reforms from the beginning were challenged within traditional layers of the Iranian society (including the religious establishment), and as a result, the opponents of the Shah's reforms were forced to a silent discontent, but at the same time those reforms were, "...inspired, encouraged, and supported by an articulate majority of the intelligentsia," and they were also, "approved and applauded by a majority of the urban middle class."(Banani, 1961, p. 44)

The problem is that how the notion of State-organ could be defined by posing it in relation not only to power in terms of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression exercised by the State, but also in relation to the networks of power operating in a different historical situation. How was this notion being constructed, as a meaning, through a process of encoding (State's ideology) and decoding (subject position) in an altering historical context? Detotalization in this sense might not be taken as an attempt for reducing and neglecting the effects of power in its negative form. Rather, it is an attempt to re-construct a meaning in order to explore its different articulations according the nature of the media and the varied modern / pre-modern social and cultural forces. In short, it is an attempt to draw out the very specific components of the notion in the Iranian political culture.

The first year of radio broadcasting exemplifies the State's media policy during the whole Pahlavi period. It shows the formation of the notion of State-organ in its outset. One might say that the notion of State-organ was constructed on a techno-political disposition and generalization. It was rooted in (paraphrasing McLuhan) the "bias" and "blindness" induced in the Iranian society (like most other society in the world) by "wireless" technology which in Iran existed before radio and was monopolized by the government, first for military, and then for civic purposes. It should not come as a surprise that, for a long time since establishment of radio, the Iranian people used to name the radio station as "bisim-e-Pahlavi"[Pahlavi's wireless].[11] Radio came to Iran at the time when the Iranian urban communities had had a short and restricted experience of what McLuhan termed as Gutenberg culture (literacy and ideas of tolerance, rationality).[12]However, one could hardly attribute a monopolistic effect to the radio broadcasting in the last year of Reza Shah's reign and the whole period of Mohammad Reza Shah. Neither under the father nor under the son was Iran a country ruled by a totalitarian regime in the full sense of the word (Tehranian, 1988, Halliday, 1979). The Pahlavis never could or intended to deploy what is, according to McLuhan, in the very nature of radio, its power to turn the " the psyche and society into a single echo chamber."[13] Yet, radio by reviving "archaism" and "ancient memories" was used to elevate a pre-Islamic culture (as a constituent of the State nationalist ideology) in order to

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[11] In Britain the word "wireless" was used for radio (McLuhan, 1964, p.304), and of course with different connotation.
[12] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p.p.297-307.
[13] Ibid., p. 299.

posit it against an Islamic one. Moreover, as Etelaat's editorial reflected, radio was referred to as one of the most valuable gifts of Western "civilization" and as a means of inaugurating modern values and orders in the Iranian society.

The notion of State-organ was an outcome of a treatment not only of the media (print or broadcast) but the whole project of "modernity". Aside from its varied aspects, the Pahlavi regime's treatment of modernity was of a dichotic nature. This dichotomy could be traced back in terms of an "openness" which was, at the same time, a "closeness". It was open to modernity through its commitment to progress significantly in technological sense, secularism, nationalism and cultural pluralism. As such, radio was supposed to represent all those principles as constitutive of modern civilization, which inevitably meant Westernization. It served to promote a national identity, universal culture and set up a "present" in terms of a linear Occidental sense of time that seemed a rupture, a break with the "past". Yet, such a treatment was a closeness in form of a denial of the very dynamic of modernity. It denied what is not merely an aspect amongst others, but at almost the center and very sense of modernity (Modernization). In other words, its closeness was to the core concept of modernity: the self-identity and its will to represent itself through a rational discourse, through a communicative process[14]. Consequently, only a unitary representation was permitted and constructed through the media and the whole communication system including political parties, unions, professional associations, clubs, and

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[14] I have taken this idea from Gianni Vattimo's The Transparent Society (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992).

literary and cultural circles. The Pahlavi regime by way of this treatment succeeded to make of the Iranian people a unified nation, a nation with almost all modern communicative institutions, but deprived of institutional representation.

The notion of State-organ as conceptualization of such a unitary representation remained relatively unchanged in post-war years when the central government was weak, a variety of political groups were emerging and the newspapers were freely published. The allied invasion, according to Halliday, "almost destroyed the Pahlavi State. It was politically discredited by failure to resist the foreign armies and was undermined by the political freedoms allowed to the opposition by the occupying forces. Liberties not enjoyed since the days of the Constitutional revolution were restored: trade unions, a free press, rival political parties all thrived." (1979, p. 24) In spite of that freedom, the Iranian democratic movement failed to institutionalize a party politics (Azimi, 1997) and independent press and broadcasting. Almost all published newspapers and periodicals were partisan papers. There is no evidence of a significant role of radio in making a national consensus through newscasting independent from the court as well as its political rivals. However, as Serberny and Mohammadi put it, Dr. Mosaddeq, the Prime Minister, for the first time used radio "to master public opinion, and developed a chatty manner of speaking to the whole nation over the air. He mobilized public support for his policies and informed people about government actions once they were accomplished (p.57). Beeman pointed to some relaxation of the pattern of rigid

State-control over the radio broadcasting in 40s and early 50s (p. 206). And Tehranian wrote, "during the political turmoil of the 1950s radio was often used for political mobilization both by Prime Minister Mossaddeq and later by the succeeding governments." (1977, p. 258) Nevertheless, the broadcasting system did not assist any public participation, nor did it encourage a political awareness in order to mobilize people against the coup.

The expansion of mass media was a central developmental priority of Mohammed Reza Shah, the last monarch of Iran. In the post-coup years the Iranian society experienced a process of rapid industrialization and Westernization (or, as some scholars have described it: "Americanization"). According to Tehranian this process led the country "into a period of reckless spending on all fronts—transportation and telecommunication infrastructures, heavy and import substitution industries and imports of consumer goods of all kinds." (Tehranian, 1990,p.188). During this period, the mass media developed and produced specific effects that politically at the time were not predictable. The media were manipulated and largely capitalized by the government not only because of a desire for providing cheap popular entertainment, but rather as valuable tools for effecting social mobilization (Green, 1980), and a public legitimization (Serberny and Mohammadi, 1994). During these years the effects of radio on the Iranian urban and rural society were enormous. In a geographically vast and mountainous country radio connected the population politically and culturally and became a vital link between urban and rural traditions (Beeman, 1984).

The first television station in Iran was founded in 1958. It was founded, owned and operated by the private sector.[15] This commercial network, the first one not in Iran but in the whole Middle East, was unexpectedly taken over by the National Iranian Television (NTV) in 1960.[16] The NTV sent its first broadcast message in October 26, 1966, and the National Iranian Radio and Television started to work in 1971. The television network had been already separated from the Ministry of Publications in 1966 and from the establishment of the NIRT onward, the whole broadcasting system worked as an independent government corporation. At the beginning, NIRT broadcast covered about 4.8 million and in 1974 its coverage rose to 15 million (about half of the total population). In the last year of the Pahlavi regime almost the entire country had been covered by radio and more than 70 percent of the population had television sets (Serberny and Mohammadi, 1994). From 1971 onwards, the NIRT expanded rapidly in size and in the range of activities. It operated a total of fourteen television and transmission regional centers with 153 transmitters of total power in excess of 144KW, covering eighty-eight cities and towns (Tehranian, 1977). In 1973,the NIRT, established its

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[15] The founder and owner of the first televison station in Iran was Habib Sabet, a prominent businessman who had brought to Iran some American consumer products including soft drinks (Pepsi Cola). He was representative of some American and European companies in Iran (General Electric, Kelvinator, Westinghouse, General Tyres, Volks Wagen, RCA...). Sabet was literally the creator of the Iranian Pepsi Generation (Serberny and Mohammadi). His entrepreneurship was referred to by the Iranian leftists as a very example of "comprador bourgeoisie ".

[16] The reason behind this act was never fully explained by the government. Even Sabet's diaries, published after his death, are not clear on this issue (Sabet, 1996). The most plausible reason might be that the Shah could not tolerate the development of any potential autonomous base of social power other than his own (Serberny, and Mohammadi, 1994).

educational station and covered 73 percent of the schools population and, later in 1975, an English channel for foreign residents in Iran. In addition to broadcasting, the NIRT had its own publishing house and published periodicals as well as books. The NIRT also sponsored a center for preservation and propagation of Persian traditional Music, a children's music workshop, a theatre workshop, the City Theatre of Tehran, the Shiraz festival of Arts, the Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU)-Shiraz, the Young film-makers Festival, the Chamber Orchestra and undergraduate/graduate programs in communications arts and techniques (Tehranian, 1977; Katz and Wedell, 1977).

The development of communication system in this period, as Serberny and Mohammadi put it, like other development projects undertaken by the Shah, was a project "...both functional and flamboyant, a prestige symbol of development in itself as well as a potential carrier of development"(1994,P71). Though symbol or carrier, radio and television in this period played an immense role in shaping a new political as well as a cultural (symbolic) sphere in Iran. The Political and social stability along with the significant economic growth provided the best situation for entertainment and cultural programs of radio and later, television. Radio started its golden years in the mid fifties (Khatibi, 1994) along with television in the sixties gave birth to a new popular culture of middle class (Beeman, 1984), a "mass-public " (Cottam, 1997), which was a shift in Iranian society demanding politically and culturally a space for its agencies. In responding, the regime could not adapt its policy

with the pluralistic and decentralizing forces of these agencies on the one hand, and with the pluralistic and decentralizing nature of modern media on the other. This treatment reflected itself in media effects that were contradictory and conflicting. Mass media, significantly television, demystified the monarch and gave him a vulnerable image, "He was seen now not only by the palace elite who knew him in person, but by 35 million of countrymen and women"(Mowlana, 1979, p.111).

These contradictory and conflicting effects need to be defined in respect to discursive form of the message that was provided by media at the time, and the way in which it was received by the audience. This would be to define the message based on two distinct structural moments of encoding and decoding that at both moments, the notion of State-organ operated as a 'code'. At the first moment, the notion of State-organ, as an outcome of a unitary representation imposed on the communication structure, was the dominant code in which the message was encoded in a hegemonic manner (in Hall's terms)[17]. It operated as an ideological determinant of preferential, selective and rhetorical connotative structure of discourse in terms of what were preferred as 'reality' in newscast and current affairs programs, what was selected as news, and the way in which the message was framed and presented in order to convey its persuasive content. Within this dominant code, unfavorable and opposing views were excluded, and thus, mass media, were not used for promoting a real political participation, agenda-seting, and social feedback. Television, significantly, was treated mainly

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[17]Here I have used a structural model proposed by Stuart Hall in his "Encoding/Decoding" in Culture, Media, Language. p.p.128-138.

as "a device to awe, attract and mystify"(Tehranian, 1980,p.16). The activities of the royal family and especially the Shah were always the top stories of the news bulletins. The Western and Third World news, athough enjoying a reasonable coverage, were checked and selected in a way that always reflected the government views. The editorials, comments were dominantly political rhetoric of the government and the feature programs were mostly partial and restricted. It was a vicious circle at work through which, according to Tehranian, "the government imposed its own construction of reality upon the audiences and received in turn, through the media and intelligence network, its own prettified reconstruction of unpleasant truths" (ibid. p.17).

The failure in acquiring social and political effectiveness could not be attributed to the media apparatus simply by saying that, as Serbemy and Mohammadi have maintained, the new national broadcasting system (NIRT), "...was a powerful weapon that was poorly used"(1994, p. 67). At the time, there were highly trained staff working for NIRT, they had access to almost all modern sophisticated technology of broadcasting, and, according to Mowlana, " to find out what kind of mass media were needed by the Iranians, several multi-million dollar contracts were awarded to American and British universities and communication research institutes." (1979, p.109) Yet, the broadcasters along with the whole technical infrastructure as " professional code" (in Hall's terms) could only operate inside the dominant code of the State-organ. Unlike the ideological apparatus of Western media that permits this operation to be done unconsciously, covertly and almost independently, in Iran at the time, it was done

overtly, dependently and even naively. The Shah, himself, was never represented by media as a "person", as an "individual". He was always represented as an "institution", as "WE" in his speech rather than "I", who used to address the audience not as other individuals but as the nation, another "institution". The relative autonomy of NIRT and its structural openness to the modern cultural trends in the seventies was regularly altered by censorship or at times by programs that had been sponsored by the government or even by its security forces. The National Iranian News agency (Pars) and the newsrooms both in radio and television were controlled and directed by those editors or executives who had affiliation with the SAVAK or political elite, rather than by professional independent journalists.

The imposed unitary representation not only governed the encoding process, but also determined the process of decoding at the second discursive moment. At both moments, an agency in terms of producer-encoder and receiver-decoder was repressed and excluded from the communicative chain. Thus, the media apparatus failed to constitute an adaptive, negotiative (in Hall's terms) subject position for its discursive product. The message was not read from a position which usually seeks to understand and take for granted what is dominantly defined and professionally signified through discourse. At this moment, the notion of the State-organ once again operated, but here as an "oppositional" code (in Hall's terms) through which the message was read in a contrary way and interpreted within a frame work of reference completely opposite to what was intended and supposed to be meant at the moment of

encoding. Thus, the media apparatus at the time produced exactly what it was not supposed to- that is to say an incredible discourse.

This incredibility was rooted in the very nature of the relation that had been set up through a unitary representation between the two discursive mentioned moments. Closed to any effective mediation between the State and the people, it was an antagonistic relation that provided a subject position in terms of resistance to and denial of the whole mediated discourse. This subjectivity was in fact a product of various negations. Being deprived of political agency and any real representation (de-politicized) it was, at the same time, reinforced through other discourses, those of the opposition which had been formed and radicalized in context of the same antagonistic relation. Along with the radical discourse of the left which eventually turned to violent confrontation with the regime, popular modes of anti-modernist discourse had been shaped in terms of cultural reversion to nativism, traditionalism (Ale-Ahmad, and Shayegan)[18], and later Islamic revivalism (Shariati) which dominated the Iranian intellectual panorama in the late sixties and seventies (Boroujerdi, 1992). Here again, another vicious circle was at work. The opposition, in turn, tried to construct a subjectivity by imposing its unitary

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[18] The leading discourse in this regard was initiated and elaborated by the Iranian writer Jalal Ale-Ahmad, in his monograph entitled Gharbzadegi [translated into English as Westoxication, Westomonia, Euromania, Plagued by the West...]. As a term, Gharbzadegi , had been coined by the Iranian philosopher Ahmad Fardid, then theorized and popularized by Ale-Ahmad the most prominent writer and social critic of the 50s and 60s. Both Fardid and Ale-Ahmad were influenced by Heidegger in their anti-technological views and critiques of Western civilization. Another Iranian intellectual, Darush Shaegan should be noted here for his critique of the West as an ontological " other". Later, after the "deep shocks " of the Iranian revolution, Shayegan acknowledged that, " ... we should not view these civilization [the Western and Eastern] as two distinct geographical worlds or opposing cultural poles." (in "Quest-ce qu'une revolution religieuse?", Le Presses Daujourdhui, Paris, 1982).Cited in Boroujerdi, p.46.

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representation in terms of denial and negation of not only the State's political discourse, but also the whole mediated modernization. Any attempt to initiate a rational discourse between the nation and the State had to be resisted and disavowed because it was supposed to legitimize the State.

There were crucial developments in the last decade of Pahlavi rule which changed the social structure, aggravated the mentioned cultural antagonism and consequently, brought forth the crisis of 1979. The 1970s saw a rapid growth of industrialization, urbanization, a modern middle class formation with new political and cultural demands, and most importantly, an immense increase in oil revenues which provided a context for polarization of the Iranian society. In confronting with the increasing social and economic complexities, the Shah, in 1975, eliminated the two-party system and formed a single party named rastakiz-e melat-e Iran (Iran National Resurgence Party). Ironically this totalitarian party was planned to fill the widening gap between the people and the State by facilitating, though coercively, political participation and mobilizing new popular demands. Yet, this attempt from the outset was a fatal strategic failure (Azimi, 1997). Rastakhiz could only provide a pseudo-participation which precariously increased popular desires for real participation (Green, 1980), and thus placed the regime in a more vulnerable position. From 1970 onwards, the regime banned almost all the free press including intellectual periodicals, even some independent popular journals and posed a restricted censorship on films and books whilst the vast religious communication network remained intact. The network, organized around some 60.000 to 200.000 mullahs was supported

financially and ideology by traditional middle class (bazaar) and new emerging vast layers of urban migrants. The increasing repression of secular opposition and its socialist, nationalist discourse led to hegemonic formation of Islamism as a revolutionary ideology and correlatively segmentation of secular opposition. Thus, in Fischer words, "what produced the Islamic form of the revolution was not Islamic revivalism so much as repression of other modes of political discourse."[19]

Politically failed to adapt to the structural changes, Pahlavi regime by its cultural policies created also an ideological polarization (Moaddel, 1993). Hence, there existed two cultures at the time: the official State culture that was produced and promoted by the media, governmental institutions, academic structure; and a radical, non-official culture as a space of resistance. There were two opposing narratives of the Iranian identities: One was advocated by the regime through its rhetoric and that of the opposition. The other was dominated by anti-modernist discourses which by identifying the Pahlavi's narrative of modernity with the whole European modernity, and by elaborating an imaginary Occidental "other", tried to conjecture an essential, non-fragmented, non-problematic Oriental "self". This inverse Orientalism gave way to theoretical transformation of Islam to a revolutionary ideology or what is now known as Islamic fundamentalism. According to these narratives, there were different "pasts" as well as different "presents". Each of these narratives denied, negated and distorted the others. There were three distinct institutionalized forms of censorship at work: the official governmental censorship, the non-official religious one, and that of the left.

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[19] Michael, M. Fischer, Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution (Harvard University Press, 1980). Cited in Mashayekhi (1992) p.84.

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Unlike what has been mentioned by Serberny and Mohammadi (1994, p.38), in Iran at the time there was not a set of different collective memories. Rather, there was a collective amnesia. This state of amnesia, exacerbated by a fatal lack of any political dialogue, prepared the ground for the subsequent emergence of a new generation that was, according to Serberny and Mohammadi, " with little independent political education and even less memory of political participation, but who were product of the television era and economic boom, were to be an active element of the revolution under Islamic banner once the boom faltered." (Ibid. p.73).

In a historical perspective, the Iranian crisis of 1979 was not an inescapable consequence of modernization in a pre-modern country; rather it was rooted in a specific narrative of modernity. The dichotic nature of Pahlavis' treatment of modernity created a discursive dichotomism in the whole political and cultural sphere of the Iranian society. This dichotomism had been reinforced for the years by imposing a unitary representation on the communication system. As a result, the modern media in Iran succeeded to regulate a national time, bind a national space, but failed to contribute in making a national identity in the modern sense of the word. In the presence of arrangements of modernity, but in the lack of its dynamic elements, there had been shaped a subjectivity deprived of any institutional representation which rendered a repressed identity. A concept of nation was known. Yet, the people were deprived of any real political agency. And though as modern subjects, they were deprived of self-articulation in cultural

sphere. The Iranian revolution of 1997 was embedded in a crisis of representation.

The incredibility of the mediated discourse led to vulnerability of the whole communication system in the time of crisis. The Cinema Rex fire in the city of Abadan (the site of oil refinery in the southern Iran) in the summer of 1978 revealed the extent of this incredibility and vulnerability. More than 400 of the audience burned to death in the cinema. The incident shocked the entire country and led to the decisive strike of the oil industry workers in the south. While the arsonists were from an Islamist militant group, the religious opposition and some secular groups blamed the government and announced the fire as the SAVAK plot for discrediting the movement. The government and its media network could not convince public opinion and completely failed in their counter-propaganda against the propaganda of the religious opposition.[20] In context of such incredibility and vulnerability the revolutionary alternative communication means along with the foreign (Western) media played a subversive role. The effectiveness of the BBC broadcast discourse significantly might be seen in this context. It was Sharif-Emami, the Shah's prime minister that, in October 1978, in the time of the big crisis, acknowledged this incredibility by persuading governmental media to provide better coverage of domestic events, "Why shouldn't we write about strikes?

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[20] Immediately after the Cinema Rex fire, Khomeini released a communiqué in which he proposed that, "the available evidence points to a conspiracy by the brutal regime of the Shah to cast blame on the opposition groups and condemn the humanitarian principle of Islam"(cited in Serberny and Mohammadi, p.149). However, it was after the revolution that some documents and testimonies cleared up a link between the arsonists and the clerical leaders. See Hamid Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran", in Iran, Political Culture in the Islamic Republic (London: Routledge, 1992).

The people themselves know what is going on ... If our radio doesn't broadcast it, the BBC will..."[21] The BBC, Persian service, and to some extent other international print and broadcast media opened up a space through which the Iranian movement was represented to itself. In other words, while the alternative media represented the movement as an agency against the structure, the BBC news discourse re-presented the process to its context. It was through this re-presentation that the Iranian audience saw itself as a political agent with a voice which was being internationally heard.

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[21] Cited in Beeman, p.210)

CHAPTER TWO

A Sender as a Myth

Representing those who cannot represent themselves[1]

There has always been a "myth" about the BBC in the world. Through

transformation from a mere instrument of political propaganda during World War

II to an international broadcasting corporation in the post-war era, the BBC

(World Service) has provided a "myth" in the form of news-discourse. Flowing

across national borders, this myth (in the Barthesean sense of the word) has

conveyed a sense of objectivity/impartiality as a unique discursive "British

product". In Iran, however, the myth of the BBC has always induced conflicting

readings. It has been a myth with two opposing faces – that is, myth and

countermyth. As Julian Hale (1975) pointed out, in Iran reaction to the BBC has

been varied from "warm welcome" to "fury". It has been welcomed as far as its

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[1] With an allusion to this phrase of Marx in *The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." The phrase has been referred frequently by Edward Said in *Orientalism* as a conceptual constitutive of the Western attitude toward the East.

objectivity and impartiality have been concerned and used for checking up on news heard from other sources. Yet, it has also been mistrusted as an extension of the British policy, and thus, conceptualized furiously as a colonial mouthpiece. The present chapter attempts to examine the formation of this myth, the process through which historically and ideologically its discursive configuration has been made as well as the ways in which it has been read over time in a specific cultural setting (Iran). It might be noted that, to ascribe mythic "signification" to a news-discourse (as a whole) implies a second level of meaning for it – that is, its meaning(s) at the surface of speech, at the first level (in Barthes' terms) at any given moment of signification, is being read through that of mythic meaning at the second level.

From World War II onwards, several radio stations broadcast their programs to Iran. According to Serberny and Mohammadi, "by the mid-1970 an estimated nineteen international stations broadcast in Persian, and widespread listening to short-wave broadcast from Moscow, MonteCarlo, Cologne, Tel Aviv, and London increased in direct relation to the growing awareness of lacunae in the coverage of government-controlled media."(p. 133). During the course of revolution, in order to relay the message of opposition groups to Iran, several clandestine radio stations were set up including the one sponsored by Radio Moscow called the National Voice of Iran. The National Voice broadcast its anti-regime along with anti-U S propaganda from Baku in the Soviet Azerbaijan. There were also the VOA (Voice of America) and the BBC, World Service, both of which were broadcast in English and understood only by the middle and upper

classes. Among the foreign broadcasters, the BBC Persian Service was the most popular one. Its popularity and prestige were such that, according to one scholar who lived in Tehran, "persons who had never owned radios before, purchased them solely in order to hear the BBC. Stores in the Tehran bazaar used this public interest as a selling point, and would tune radios to the BBC when customers bought them." (Beeman, 1984,p. 214) The BBC, by transmitting its programs in Persian three times a day via short-wave as well as medium-wave, played a crucial role in revolutionary developments which have been described as, "...deprecating the regime, weakening the Shah's resolve, informing and instructing local opposition about the government's weaknesses and vulnerabilities...and even directing some of the rioters in their time and place of action" (Amuzegar, 1993, p. 20).

The BBC at the time transmitted to Iran mainly descriptive texts (news, dispatches...) and evaluative texts (talks, comments, and features)[2]. The sources for its descriptive messages were mainly from its local correspondent in Tehran, the international news agencies and the Iranian Media. The evaluative texts (talks, comments) were written by the BBC "talk writers" or were translated from the English newspapers (mainly the *Guardian*, *Times*, and, occasionally the French and American papers) or were made in the form of interviews with Iranian or the British sources: political or cultural figures, journalists and the authorities.[3]

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[2] According to Hamelink (1985), International (transborder) messages may have different forms corresponding to intentions of their originators: descriptive, evaluative, persuasive, instructive, fictional and factual (p.144)

[3] Author's interview with Lotfali Khonji and Shadaab Vajdi who worked for the BBC at the time as senior producers. According to Khonji and Vajdi, the BBC interviewed Khomeini once he was in Paris (Neuphle le Chateau), Dr. Shapur Bhakhtiar the last Prime Minister of the Iran before the revolution (three times

Furthermore, thanks to the revolutionary situation, the BBC broadcasting to Iran did not function solely as a "one-way flow of information" from the sender to the receiver. Through its local correspondents in Tehran, the BBC made possible some ways of audience's participation. Apart from Andrew Whitley, a well-known reporter in Tehran, a number of other BBC correspondents and the "stringers" spent short periods of time in Iran during the revolution[4]. Beeman has described how the BBC correspondent, Andrew Whitley, had been faced with "...an unending stream of telephone calls from all parts of the country telling him about clashes with military troops, strike actions, revolutionary deaths, and local political developments."(ibid.) Although Whitley was never forced to leave Iran, the regime's media reacted to the BBC by charging it with fabricating stories and inciting the people to riot. The Iranian authorities at the time accused the BBC of sabotage, destruction and being a colonialist mouthpiece. Though half-heartedly, they occasionally tried to jam the BBC broadcasts. There were, even, plans to sabotage the British transmitters in Cyprus and Masirah but they were vetoed by the Shah (Walker, 1992). He was notably conscious of his own image as well as that of his nation in the international community (Beeman, 1984). Yet, time and again Iran made official complaints concerning partial, disruptive, and provocative role of the BBC. These complaints were relayed through The British ambassador in Tehran or the Iranian ambassador in London to the British

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during his short-lived premiership), and Dr. Karim Sanjabi of the National Front (interviewed twice). The Iranian political figures who supported the Shah refused to be interviewed by the BBC.
[4] Among these correspondents was Richard Oppenheimer who had the opportunity to be one of the Khomeini companions during his historic flight from Paris to Tehran.

government. The diaries of the last Iranian ambassador in London show how the Shah had become paranoid about the BBC (Radji, 1993).

The BBC Persian broadcasting during the Iranian revolution, functioned as an information source, and, as a supplementary source, validating the internal sources of information (Serberny and Mohammadi, 1994; Beeman, 1984). In the confusing and chaotic moments of the revolution, it played the role of third party, mediating between the State-run media and the revolutionary media by giving impartial reliable reports of the events. Furthermore, its broadcast texts occasionally under such headings as "It has been rumored in Tehran," or "It has been said that..." were interpreted and served as a conduit for revolutionary messages by the audiences. (Pliskin, 1980) The BBC played its crucial role especially when the Iranian journalists were on strike. It filled a vacuum left by the domestic mass communication black-out which lasted from November 1978 to January 1979 (Tehranian, 1980). In this critical moment, according to Serberny and Mohammadi, " both the internal channels of information through small media and the international channels became vital sources of daily news and analysis. The BBC compiled nightly reports of the day's events across Iran and thus provided Iranians with a complete picture of their national struggle in a way that only extensive long-distance phone conversations could have replicated internally." (Serberny and Mohammadi, p.133) It was through international media, and significantly through the BBC that the Iranians could see how the revolution was recognized by the international community as a legitimate national movement against the dictatorship, "In fact, the population became almost giddy

with the orgy of media attention they were receiving, leading to statements like that printed in Kayhan [the Iranian daily news paper] on February 12, 1979, the day after the fall of the Baktiar government: ' The Iranian Revolution is one of the greatest events in the history of the world.'" (Beeman, p. 215) Aside from "giddiness" that is conveyed by such an exaggeration, it should be noted that international media attention was rooted in the grave significance of the Iran crisis and its consequences for the Western powers in the region, "a revolution in any country is a very strong news candidate. And the one in Iran was of tremendous global significance ...More than anything else, Iran's strategic position, not only as a supplier of oil to many countries, but as an important ingredient in the foreign policy of the superpowers, made the Iranian revolution top-rated news material." (Vilanilam, 1998, p.90)

The mythic signification of the BBC as a news-discourse has been conjured up historically through the ways in which its "message" globally has been read. As a myth[5], the BBC news-discourse is regarded here as a mode of signification which points out and notifies something to its reader. It signifies a chain of related, but not "fixed" concepts. These concepts are historical. They have come into being in different historical situations and in different cultural contexts. They have been shaped by intended or unintended effects of a proclaimed functionality for the myth: representing the world to the world...Not only the Iranian people but people all over the world (120 million regular listeners

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[5] According to Barthes, everything can be a myth, "... the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestion"(Mythologies, p.109).

in 37 different languages) have mythologized the BBC [6]. Regarded as the most

reliable source for news, the BBC has been a voice of "hope" for the people in

occupied Europe during the World War II, a herald of the " free world" for the

people in Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union during the Cold War, and a

hidden space of "freedom" shaped through the "short wave" for the people who

have been living under tyrannies in the Third world. The BBC news-discourse

has also been read as a "colonial voice", a voice of "imperialism" representing

false and biased account of the events. It has even been accused of toppling

governments in South Vietnam, 1975, in Iran in 1979, and later in Liberia, 1990

(Walker, 1992).

These "readings" not only by audiences in the Third World countries, but

also by the European listeners, have yielded a " counter-myth" for the BBC. This

counter-myth historically is based on some factual foundations. In the days of

1943, during the war of propaganda against Germany, a cartoon in Punch shows

a BBC studio and the presenter inside it who is calling upon all the people in

occupied countries to rise against the oppressors, but, the caption adds, "...with

the exception of India, of course!" (ibid.) This counter-myth is as old as the myth

itself, but from the post-war period onward, it has been the mythic concept that

has become the dominant one, and as Hale (1975) pointed out, though the

British did not have a monopoly on truth, the "objectivity "and "impartiality" in

international broadcasting, has been uniquely a British product, " as Chile exports

copper, and Australia wool, so Britain exports honest information." (p.49) The

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[6] According to an audience research conducted by the BBC in 1990, this estimation included 2 million
listeners in Latin America, 20 million in Africa, 10 million in the Arab world, 31million in Europe, and

decline of the British Empire did not effect such a reputation; rather it reinforced

the mythic signification of BBC news-discourse during the Cold War period. A

number of events of worldwide significance, such as the Suez Crisis in1956, the

Colonels' Coup in Greece in 1967, and the Vietnam War in the sixties and

seventies, have demonstrated to what extent the BBC could operate

independently in projecting views opposed to British government policies. During

the Vietnam War, the BBC played its role as an independent source and enjoyed

an incompatible "God-like" authority and credibility in maintaining news for both

sides of the conflict (Mansell, 1982). According to Oliver Whitly, a former

managing director of the BBC World Service, "It has been said in Saigon, that if

the BBC were to announce the death of the Prime Minister of South Vietnam,

and he were to appear next day in the streets of Saigon, no one would recognize

him."[7]

Historically, short-wave radio broadcasting has been an instrument of

propaganda as well as a means for projecting the foreign policy of governments.

The first short-wave radio station for propaganda purposes was set up by the

Soviet Union in Moscow in 1925. The BBC foreign language services (the

Overseas Service, now called The World Service) began work in 1938 in order to

reinforce the Britain position against German propaganda not only in Europe but

also in the Middle East and Latin America. One can trace the origin of the World

Service to the Empire Service of the BBC which had been founded in 1932 with

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53million in South Asia. (cited in Wasburn, 1992, p.65)
[7] Cited in Hale, p.48

the aim of, in Reith's[8] words, "bringing the scattered dominions closer to the

mother country and seeing that British expatriates were not deprived of the

benefits derived from listening in to the Home Service."(Hale, 1975, p.49) More

than its elitist, parochial tone and the content of its program (Anglophilic

information), the Empire service was impressive as a technological achievement

for its audience. Its foundation should also be regarded in the context of British

serious challenge with the Dutch colonial broadcasting service for the indigenous

population in the East Indies. (Wasburn, 1992) The BBC World Service initiated

the "War of Words" by broadcasting in Arabic, German and Italian. The Arabic

service the first BBC broadcast in a foreign language, started its program as a

counterweight to Radio Bari (in Ethiopia) which had been established by Italy for

broadcasting to the Arab world in 1935. The Persian service of the BBC began its

life in December 1940 in response to radio propaganda by Nazi Germany in

Iran.[9]

By definition, international news as a component of international

communication is " the total volume of message that flow across national

borders" (Hamelink, 1985, p.143). International news, and to some extent news

in general, has been mostly analyzed from sociological, economical and political

perspectives based on its production, distribution, and consumption (VanDijk,

1985). From these perspectives, and from critical approaches, international news

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[8] Sir John Reith (1889-1971), the first General Manager and then the Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The Empire Service and later The World Service of the BBC has been Reith's brainchild.

[9] The first broadcasts were15 minutes bulletins of news, four days a week, which soon increased to two daily transmissions. But according to Walker (1992), "it was found that hardly anybody could hear the second one because it was at a time when there was no electric power available, so it was dropped." (p.68)

has been dealt with in quantitative and qualitative researches in order to elucidate its various economic, professional, institutional (political, legal), corporate or organizational biases, and thus, according to Hamelink, " sufficient documentation has been amassed to show that the international flow is in fact one-sided, ethnocentric, and unequally accessible to the nations."(1985, p.146) However, what has seldom been explained, or mentioned as a necessary result of those biases and restrictions, is the very nature of "product", its specific properties as a text in relation with other determinants (production, reception) in the whole process of communication. The problem is how far a synchronic approach to discourse, and here, significantly the BBC news discourse, can define "historicity" which discourse renders as a polysemic, highly contextual text. The BBC news-discourse, its very specific configuration and the way it was received by the Iranian audience could not be explored unless it is examined in terms of such a historicity as a determinant in its discursive moments of production as well as its reception.

This historicity as an overall meaning reflects the very interplay of the myth in any given instance of discourse. It could be defined by exploring the myth itself – that is, its historical limits as well as its condition of use. The BBC news discourse as a myth, accordingly, is not only a "form", but also a "history"[10]. It embodies two parallel histories; on the one hand, the long, detailed and complex history of the BBC as an organization, as a sender, and on the other hand (in the case of Iran), the long and problematic history of Anglo-Iranian relations. It has

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[10] This approach to a text assumes that, as Barthes maintained, " the more a system is specifically defined in its forms, the more amenable it is to historical criticism" Mythologies, p. 112.

been subjected to a long process of formation and reformation at the moment of production, and like any other myth, it has been open to appropriation at the historically conditioned moment of its reception. It has implied certain orientations at the first discursive moment, and since it has not been received passively at the second discursive moment, it has been subjected to a process of alteration and differentiation.

The mythic formation of the BBC news-discourse can be seen in the context of wartime. It was during World War II that the BBC gained a reputation through its broadcast propaganda against Axis powers. It is generally agreed that such a reputation was achieved by telling the truth in a "bold factual" way and through objective, accurate reporting of events which were enhanced by reflecting Allied defeats as well as victories (Rawnsley, 1996). During the war, the BBC represented a social cohesion for the British at home and was regarded by its audience abroad as an "island of truthfulness amid a sea of rumor and propaganda." (Crisell, 1994, p.13) Such a reputation for "truth-telling, honesty and reliability", however, was to some extent due to Allied victory and Nazis defeat which destroyed effectiveness of their broadcast propaganda (Hale, 1975). The biggest failure of Goebbels, "coincided with military Failure."(Wasburn, 1992, p.22) His reputation for being "Big Liar", to some extent, was successfully constructed through Anglo-Saxon propaganda (Ellul, 1973). The Germans at the time were well aware of how far the effectiveness of their propaganda was depended on its "truthfulness". Their accounts of events, particularly between 1939 and 1942, in terms of propaganda or news were

regarded by the audience as being more truthful, clear and concise than the Allied's. Goebbels, himself, used to say that "everybody must know what the situation is..." (ibid., p.54) one can find the same claim to truth in Hugh Greene's[11] words about the BBC policy during the war:

> To tell the truth within the limits of the information at our disposal and to tell it consistently and frankly. This involved a determination never to play down a disaster...Then our audience in Germany and in the German forces, having heard us talking frankly about our defeats, would believe us when we talked about our victories, and the will to resist in a hopeless situation would, one hoped, be effectively undermined.[12]

Truth in propaganda, as Ellul puts it, has no a content of its own. Significantly at wartime, one can hardly make a clear distinction between news and propaganda, and thus between "truth" and "falsehood". However, the relative and situational "truthfulness" implied by these two "claims" could only be explained in terms of different social-historical contexts in which their distinct discourses as propaganda/news were produced.

The BBC, unlike the German radio, was not a branch of the British government and such a position ensured, though relatively, independence of its broadcasting. Following Reith's directives, the world service of the BBC as a part of the BBC as a whole, served to be trusted, "where the government might not be"(Hale, p.50). And thus, in order to be trusted by the audience, it admitted,

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[11] Sir Hugh Greene, organizer the war programs of the BBC and later Director General of the corporation.

during the war, defeats as well as military successes (Wasbum, 1992). Such a position, consequently, maintained a "validity" for the BBC voice, which was not affected by the success or failure of the British forces in the fields.

In a completely different context, radio broadcasting for the Nazis was inseparable from the State. It was regarded as an effective means for reinforcing the power of the State, and as an ideological institution, it was monopolized by the State in order to captivate the audience for ideological manipulation (Hale). The Nazi propaganda, ideologically determined by what was mentioned by Goebbels as the so-called" German race, blood and nation", served the truth as far it served German victory. And news, in particular, was defined (again, according to Goebbels), as a " weapon of war" which its purpose was waging war and not necessarily giving out information (ibid., pp. 2, 10). Such a propaganda was as a whole a mixture of fact, drama and language manipulation (Wasbum), its validity needed increasingly to be reinforced by dramatic military victories and it was effective as far as the audience was physically enslaved (Hale).

In responding to hectic shouting and the neurotic heroism of the German radio, the BBC broadcast its "straight news ", and thus, through "a sincere voice, calmness of the speaker, the straightforward matter-of-fact tone of the commentaries"(Mansell, p.163), could provide what was later termed and criticized as " indirect propaganda" or " propaganda with fact" – that is, a covert propaganda structurally based on balance and truth in order to sell a specific political message (Rawnsley). The mythic formation of the BBC, one might say,

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[12] Cited in Hale, p. 52.

was initiated through "mytholgizing" its message as a "democratic propaganda" (in Ellul terms) during World War II.

The socially and historically structured context of the BBC message could be defined according to those institutional and organizational positions and professional practices which have determined it as discourse. The process of making news, as Tuchman maintains, could not be accomplished in a void and thus, professionalism assists organizational interests through " reaffirming the institutional process in which newswork is embedded (1979, p.12). From a discursive approach, the institutional and organizational positions and practices constitute the "professional codes" which operate within the hegemony of a "dominant code" at the discursive moment of news production which is framed by, according to Hall, " Knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about audience and so on" (1980, p.129). It was during World War II that the BBC as a whole improved its techniques of newscasting from " straight bulletin" to its present format as a combination of reading, correspondent's report and sound actuality (Crisell, 1994). The "objectivity" and "impartiality" as professional codes were enacted in this period in terms of a "commitment". This commitment has been, in fact, a strategy taken by the BBC in order to justify diversity of its positions and thus, in order to avoid conflict with government (Wasburn, 1992). It has been functional solely in the context of what Hale described as British middle class political culture which is founded on a notion of legitimate adversarial relations between

government and media (ibid.). Yet, in the same context, as Wasburn pointed out, there have been varied forms of cooperation permitted between the BBC and the British government (Ibid.) Therefore, in a historical perspective, commitment to "impartiality" and "objectivity" has maintained the relative autonomy of the BBC as an organization, and at the same time it has provided a necessary condition for "dominant code" as an ideological agency to operate at the very moment of constructing the message as discourse.

According to Hall, the dominant code is a position which, " the professional broadcasters assume when encoding a message which has already been signified in a hegemonic manner." (1980, p.163) Further, while the professional code (that is, organizational positions, journalistic practices...) is relatively independent, it operates within the hegemony of dominant code. In applying Hall's model here, some functional characteristics of the BBC broadcast message as an international news-discourse should be noted. First, the mentioned codes in responding to their socio-historical context at both moments of production and reception have been subjected to development and to change. The BBC in the late seventies (at the time of the Iran revolution) was not the same organization as it was during the wartime. Secondly, there has not been an equivalent relationship between the BBC as "source" and its audience as "receiver" over the world. It can be hardly said that the sender of an international message is made through a number of skewed and structural "feedbacks" by the receiver. The audience, here, is not and could not be both the source and the receiver as it is presupposed for a domestic television broadcast (Hall's model).

Nevertheless, the lack of an equivalent relationship between the sender and receiver does not imply that there has not been any assumption about the audience at the moment of encoding the message. Rather, it should be noted that at this stage, assumptions about the audience have been made routinely upon pre-assumption of a center as sender and a periphery as receiver. Such a pre-assumption could not be reducible to the intentions of the writers, producers and editors. It might be seen as an ideological outcome of a complex institutional process.

It is widely agreed that international radio broadcasting organizations serve their sponsoring nations and by constructing political reality via short wave, they reflect the interests of their governments. These "interests" have been defined by the British government for the BBC external services in terms of national obligations which were reflected in the "License Agreement", "White Papers" in 1946, or the Drogheda Committee's report in 1952. According to this report, the British government has defined and recognized three fundamental objectives for the BBC broadcasting abroad:" i) The support of British foreign policy; ii) the preservation and strengthening of commonwealth and Empire ties; and iii) the promotion of trade and protection of overseas investment." (Rawnsley, 1996, p.20). These objectives have been achieved by the BBC while it has tended to remain an organization, as a whole, free from commercial pressures and political interference (Crisell, 1994). As a result, although the BBC does not reflect everything in terms of news, its broadcasting has hardly been wholly associated with the British government. Thus, while the VOA

unquestionably has been recognized by its audience throughout the world as the voice of American government, the BBC has succeeded to set up a reputation as an organization with a voice of its own in the wide network of international communications.

Since its beginning, the BBC's relations with the government have been subjected to various political influences and have passed through several critical moments of conflicts and clashes. Nevertheless, as Rawnsley puts it, " on the whole, it has been a striking success; initial apprehension on both sides have been ironed out, if not altogether resolved." (p.17). In spite of The Treasury and the Foreign office involvement in its activity, the BBC has succeeded in maintaining its relations based on a mutual understanding, or as described by Hale, on a "gentleman's agreement". The Foreign Office provides the BBC with information regarding target areas. It is also the Foreign Office that determines the languages of the BBC broadcasts, but in practice, " the Foreign Office interferes very little beyond ensuring that its views are known at the relevant levels of the BBC. On the whole, what the BBC does with that knowledge is its own affair."(Hale, p.55) Thus the autonomy of the BBC as an organization sustains its editorial independence which maintains the prevailing credibility of its news-discourse. Historically, this autonomy, however, has been relative. It has been dependent on the varied political involvement of the government in different areas of the globe, while it has been conditioned through the process of diminishing imperial power of Britain from the Second World War onward.

The Suez crisis was the beginning of this process, marked a critical

moment in the history of the relations between the British government and the

BBC. Nevertheless, Britain since then, though not as an empire, but as a major

Western power has had her formidable influence on the world political stages

(Rawnsley, 1996). In the early fifties during the Iranian oil crisis, the British policy

of "gun boat and power propaganda" exemplifies such an influence. The crisis

also demonstrated how far the BBC operated not as an independent

organization, but overtly as an extension of British foreign policy in a country of

the third world. The extent of such an involvement will be briefly mentioned in the

following chapter as an historical constitutive of the code of conspiracy.

Furthermore, during the post-war period and in responding to the Soviet Union

propaganda, the relative autonomy of the BBC enhanced the credibility of its

news-discourse. From a pragmatist perspective, as Richard Crossman, the

leading expert on British wartime propaganda, puts it, such a credibility in

"peace-time" had to be built up in order to, "studying the enemy, getting the

organization set up so that, if the day comes for a more positive it can be carried

out immediately."[13]The same position has been elaborated by Maurice Latey, the

once head of the East European Service of the BBC, as follows:

> At present we are pushing at an opening door. The door may close
>
> again. In that case, we have our minimum objective. Broadcasting can
>
> still keep our foot in the door. It can guarantee that the Stalinist model
>
> of a completely isolated communist world can never again be

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[13] From a lecture in 1952 to the British Royal United Service Institution. Cited in Hale (1975,p.64)

attempted with any hope of success; and that is a great service to the cause of peace.[14]

The credibility of the BBC news-discourse to a large extent has been bound to its legal separation from the government. This credibility for the government, as Hartley pointed out, "is more important in long run than any short term setback caused by particular piece of adverse publicity or damaging revelation."(p.52) The separation between these two institutions needs to be realized in practice through "impartiality" and "balance" as codes (conventions) which operate at the moment of encoding the message as news. These codes are projections of the British culture, operate within it and are conditioned by the same culture. The British society, according to Hale, "is a society in which the middle class is the ruling class, and the BBC has to reflect that society. " (p.57) Thus, impartiality and balance can be seen as reflections of the "British liberal centrism" which used to aim at supporting the middle position. Operating within a system of liberal parliamentary democracy, these notions as professional codes translate the so-called approach of the "first the Tories said and then Labour said" into a journalistic practice. In this respect, the BBC news, as the basis of its credibility and its mythic reputation, is nothing but the British view of the world constructed in a way which projects liberal centrism and the positivist notion of "objectivity" as a "British tradition" (Hale1975, Mansel, 1982).

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[14] Broadcasting to the USSR and Eastern Europe: BBC Lunchtime lecture, Third Series, No.2, 1964. Cited in Hale, ibid.

As far as it is constructed through a media discourse, this view is by its very nature a Manichean projection of the world. It is based on a binary opposition which, as Hartley and Montgomery argued[15](1985), operates at the deeper layers of discourse as a primary opposition between us/them; friends/enemies (war propaganda); Home/foreign... furthermore, such a dualism operates through a central consensus on what is pre-defined as the Britain (the West) and what is the other and thus, it shapes the whole discourse in terms of framing and newsworthiness. This consensus, in turn, as Said (1997) puts it, is not determined involuntarily, dictated by deterministic laws or a dictatorship, it is a result of culture. The covert dualism of discourse as a view of the world, accordingly, is not necessarily, determined through a self-conscious manner by those who produce it (the journalists). Rather, this is their culturally determined idea of objectivity, impartiality and balance that in terms of "framing" embodies such a dualism, which legitimizes and normalizes the ideological goals of the organization (the dominant code). Accordingly, as far as the other is to be addressed, and as far as mapping their realities is to be articulated, the journalistic "routine" implies some discursive translations including "objectivity" into "discretion" in order to normalize our interests as

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[15] Their argument is based on what Ecco and Laclau maintained as oppositions inherent in popular discourse.

their interests:

> We explain rather than proselytize...We do not seek to over-persuade, but
> rather to remind our listeners of those elements in the British case which it
> would be in their own interests to recognize.[16]

Yet, it might be noted that this view is not constructed on the basis of a simplistic formalization of the other- that is, as far as they are not for us, they are against us. Unlike naïve power-assertive American viewing of the world in terms of news-discourse (Said, ibid.), the British definition of the other is founded on a long relations with the world, and based upon an old experienced attitude particularly toward the East including Iran.

The BBC news-discourse speaks the "truth" of the world in terms of mapping it out, and thus, determines how the people of the world see it. As a myth, it represents the world to the world as a matter of fact. Like the traditional myth of the British policeman which is associated with concepts such as friendship, reassurance, solidity, non-aggressiveness, and lack of firearms, that of the BBC conveys concepts of "impartiality" and "objectiveness" in the form of a representation. The BBC news-discourse is a myth as far as notions of "impartiality" and "objectiveness" achieve their natural state through it – that is, in Barthes terms, as far as the (mythic) signifier gives a foundation to its signified. One might even go further to say that it has been through this mythic signification that the BBC has succeeded to constitute an "identity" of its own– that is, a very

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[16] From BBC Handbook, 1968, written by Sir Charles Curran, the BBC Director-general and Managing Director of the External Services. Cited in Hale (1975,p.60).

specific sense of Britishness[17]. Yet, as a myth, while (paraphrasing Barthes) it "hides nothing and flaunts nothing", it conceals its very raison d'être[18] – that is, to maintain a *presence* as a sound that crosses every border and tends to be heard as sound of the world. It represents the world to the world and thus establishes itself as a *hegemonic center* which provides an immediate knowledge of the world accessible at any place at all times. [19] This presence in a symbolic space retains another one – that of old colonial Britain which presently is a lack. In this regard, the myth also has concealed its inherent dualism significantly in representing those who historically by the European Subject have been objectified and discursively presumed as those who cannot represent themselves – the Indians, Arabs, Persians... Here, of course, the BBC does not represent " *those who...*" to a Western audience (as the case of *New York times* mentioned by Said in *Orientalism*,[20]) rather, the BBC represents *those who cannot represent themselves* to themselves. What in this representation counts, as Said pointed out (by paraphrasing Harold Lasswell)[21], is not what " *those who...*" actually are or think, but what they can be made to be and think. The BBC propaganda against Reza Shah in 1941 was made through reflecting the Shah as a dictator versus Iranian people's desire for freedom, democracy and the full implementation of Iran Constitution – that is, reflecting *our* (Britaish) interests as

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[17] It has been mentioned by Donald Wilhelm that, " in broadcasting circles the story is told of an English woman tourist who, visiting Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, found herself surrounded by an angry mob who thought that she was Russian. She kept shouting, British, British! But nobody understood. On an impulse the terrified woman then shouted BBC, BBC! Whereupon the mob suddenly relaxed and departed leaving her in peace." (1995, p.68)
[18] It is so because, as Barthes put it, as a myth it is a distorted signification (*Mythologies*, p.129).
[19] This explanation is drawn from Derrida's *The Other Heading*, pp.40-3.
[20] p.293

their (the Iranians) interests. Even there were suggestions by the BBC that Reza

Shah had stolen the Crown jewels, used labor by force in his textile mills and

diverted the Capital's water sources to his own vegetable plots (Shahidi, 2000).

Ironically, it was by the British and not the people of Iran that Reza Shah had

been seated on the throne in 1925. Later, during the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute in

1950-51 which led to the coup in 1953 organized by Washington-London, the

BBC was asked to explain to the Iranians ("those illiterate people") what the

Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had been doing for them, what would be the

consequences of the nationalization of oil industry, and how they become the

helpless tools of the nationalists and communists (Shahidi, ibid.). It should not

come as a surprise that at the time amongst the first broadcasters of the Persian

Service of the BBC there were at least two Orientalists who were affiliated with

Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. [22]

The conflicting meanings induced by the BBC message (the two opposing

faces of the myth) have been shaped by such mentioned historical precedents.

Historically, the BBC message has been received in Iran as an impartial,

objective, reliable account, while it has been also read (decoded) as an

ingredient of a foreign (Western) plot – a conspiracy. No wonder if the shah and

his generals during the revolution were anxious to stop the BBC broadcast

(Green, 1982). And no wonder if the Iranian people interpreted the BBC message

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[21] Ibid. p.292

[22] Laurence Paul Elwell Sutton, a Briton of English-Prussian origin and Anne Katherine Swynford Lambton, a very example of Orientalist as agent of Imperialism (in Edward Said terms). It was Lambton who wrote provocative talks against Reza Shah in 1941 from Tehran for the Persian Service (author's interview with Fakhredin Azimi, former producer of the BBC Persian Service and professor of history at University of Connecticut).

along with the messages of other Western media as part of an orchestrated

campaign against the Shah which had been initiated by that of US President

Carter for human rights. This reading of the myth cannot be merely conceived as

a reflection of the so-called Persian fatalistic psyche (Amuzegar, 1993). Rather, it

was a reading nourished by a collective experience and can be defined only in

the context of Iran relations with the West and particularly, as noted before, in

context of the long and traumatic history of Anglo-Iranian relations. Although Iran

has been never colonized by a Western power, it has experienced all the

traumas of colonized nations. In other words, Iran has been colonized, but in the

absence of colonizer, and thus, subjected to hidden intrigues and interventions –

the unseen hands of conspiracy. Furthermore, such a reading was not a mere

utilization of the message by the receivers (Serberny and Mohmmadi, 1994), it

was provided as a *preferred reading* by the message itself. This very textual

feature of the BBC message will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MESSAGE

The Big Ben, a sound from *somewhere else*...

The sound of the Big Ben bell chiming at the beginning of the programs

broadcast by the BBC (World Service) is an iconic sign which connotes authority

and tradition as well as contemporaneity and immediacy. It is followed by a short

verbal sequence, a voice, that announces the Greenwich time and provides a

consistent identity by pronouncing itself as *the BBC from London*. The Big Ben

as a sign gives the myth of BBC news-discourse a concrete form. In this sense, it

denotes a presence, a sound, but this *signified*, in turn, operates as a *signifier* for

another *signified* – a cluster of concepts obtained through a mythic *signification*

such as *balance, objectivity and impartiality*... These mythic concepts as an

overall meaning, frame the whole discourse. As a result, any given news story is

not *what has been said* as the news, rather it is what the BBC from London

said...Thus, the title sequence of the BBC program denotes the Big Ben chiming, but it also connotes a regulating, penetrating sound from *some where else*, which crosses borders, restrictions, censorships, even jamming... It provides an uncontrollable space within private space, while is always received from a distance, a remote *center*, wherein everything seems organized, efficient, and *just* on a *universalized time*.

Radio is a blind medium. Its message as an aural discourse consists of sounds and silence. It is coded through auditory codes and as an array dominated by linguistic signs, exists in time rather than in space (Crisell, 1994, p.6). Thus, it is a linear sequence of signifiers that can be only received one at a time (Hartley, 1982, p.31). Radio sound signifies a presence (as silence in radio discourse signifies a lack) which is conventionally emphasized by deploying a spoken mode for radio language. Even the news as scripted speech in radio declares itself as an un-scripted, authorless text that is supposed to have originated from the event itself. Such a restriction gives the radio message a fictional nature. Everything has to be told, and thus, things are "imaginary" rather than "real"(Crisell, ibid.,pp.8-11). According to such a restriction – that is, the strictly verbal component of signifiers in radio message, this chapter will examine the BBC news-discourse as a *factual fiction* in order to show how it has as a text translated the *events* into *meaning* by organizing their account through forms determined by a narrative structure.
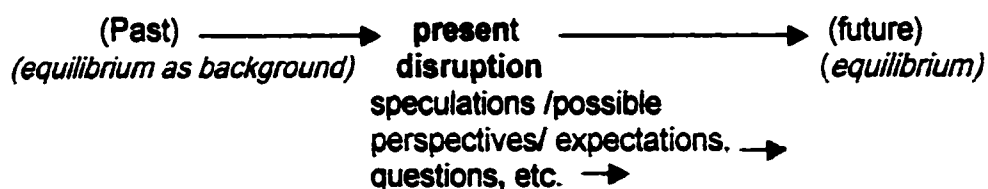
The present chapter has adopted the method of textual analysis (Hartley1982; Hartley and Montgomery1985; Bignell1997) and used a selection of the BBC news texts broadcast to Iran from November, 1, 1978 to February, 11, 1979, as its material basis. Since the audio texts of the broadcast programs have not been accessible (almost not available), this analysis is confined to written texts of the news stories. The narrative structure has been assumed, here, as the most *translatable* textual feature compared to the semantic, stylistic and rhetorical structure of news. Thus, the selected news texts will be analyzed based on the original version (English) and not in their broadcast version (Persian). For the purpose of this analysis, a sum of 80 news items in 100 pages has been randomly selected from about 1000 pages that covered the period under study. The news texts have been selected form BBC Written Center (WAC) and will be referred to according to their formats (news story, dispatch, talk) and to their date of broadcast. The period under study is significant because of a crucial role that was played by the BBC. It was during this period that, as noted in the second chapter, the BBC, as the main source of the information, filled a vacuum left by the domestic mass communication black out.

In analyzing the narrative structure of the BBC news, the present chapter begins with the assumption that, as Tuchman (1976) maintained, there is not an antithetical relationship between reporting "facts" and producing "tales". News, so far as it tells story (through language) about reality, is not reality itself (Bird and Dardenne, 1988). News, as one of the almost infinite number of narrative forms in the world (Barthes, 1988), constructs a sequence of events in time, and thus

renders a structure upon which it can be formally analyzed. Yet, it is worth remembering that such a treatment of news does not deny its informative function by ascribing an "invented" nature to it. Such a treatment can be seen as an effort to put news as a text in specific symbolic space by revealing its discursive constituents. In other words, it is an effort for exploring " enduring symbolic system of news", which frames the changing "facts", "names" and details, and through it, audiences learn more than any other informative, provocative, and entertaining components of news (Bird and Dardenne, ibid.).

From a narrative approach, news story basically depicts a "disruption" in a state of affairs, a lack of "equilibrium", and in responding to a provoked "desire" for "resolution" or "truth", it pronounces some speculation or opens up some perspectives. Thus, the news story moves from "present" to "future". The basic narrative structure of **equilibrium disruption equilibrium**, can be seen in the form of the news story as below:

```
(Past) ──────────▶ present ──────────────▶ (future)
(equilibrium as background)   disruption                (equilibrium)
                              speculations /possible
                              perspectives/ expectations. ──▶
                              questions, etc. ──▶
```

According to this structure, news story provides a "frame" for depicting events, which, in fact, operates as a signifier for what is signified – that is, what the audience perceives as a meaningful account of events. The frame constitutes the narrativity of news in terms of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic order of its units as well as its "factuality" in terms of a denotative space in the text. This textual

frame, in any given instance, implies a "preferred" reading by positioning a *subject* for the audience, while at the same time, it naturalizes itself as a true representation.

In dealing with the narrative construction of the BBC news-discourse, this study attempts to adapt Barthes' model of analyzing narrative (1974; 1988) as a methodological basis. Such a model, though originally elaborated upon as a strategy for the interpretation of literary works[1], here serves to show, firstly, the generic structure of the BBC news as narrative; and, secondly, its construction of representation as discourse. In this respect, the narrative text is regarded as a signifying process which manifests itself as a network of meaning. The analysis tends to explain such a network by identifying the various codes that determine the meaning(s) in the text. For this purpose, the news text is regarded here as a cluster of codes which operate through connotative level of signification. Following Barthes' textual microanalysis in *S/Z*, the news story will be segmented (though arbitrary) into a series of reading units, or blocks of signification (*lexia* in Barthes' terms) and the codification of each segment will be explored. The meaning of the story as a whole can be investigated through the relationship of the segments within the text. This overall meaning is, in fact, a "secondary" relationship between the textual segments through which the news as a narrative text frames the reality.

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[1] It should be noted that Barthes model in S/Z even for analyzing literary works has been criticized for being "too arbitrary, too personal, and too idiosyncratic". See in this regard, Robert Scholes: *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press,1974), p.155. However, Barthes himself, acknowledged the arbitrariness of his method and preferred to term it as *operational arrangements* rather than a method. See in this regard, " Analyses" in *The Semiotics Challenge*, p.229 .

The Codes (Levels of Meaning); Definitions

Before proceeding to analyze the selected texts some clarifications in terms of definition here are necessary. The meaning(s) scattered through the narrative text can be, deliberately, identified in certain levels according to what has been enumerated by Barthes as main codes operating in the text. The codes, here, are regarded as associative fields (in Barthes' terms); as supratextual organization of notations which provide a bridge between a given text and other text, and thus, maintain a meaningful perspective as cultural and historical instances within the text. In the news, like the other forms of narrative, the codes determine the various levels of meaning as fragments (again in Barthes' terms) of what have been already read, seen, done, or experienced. Thus, as the " wake of that already" the codes constitute an *intertext* for the news as a narrative text. According to their specific functions and operation in the selected news story, these codes can be identified and proposed (based on Barthes' model) as the main levels of meanings:

1) **Semic code**: Linguistically, "seme" is defined as a unit of the signified. The semic code operates in the news as a unit of signification and comprises proper names (persons, places...), descriptive details. It thematizes some of those questions that a news story intends to answer (*where, when, who...*). The following example can be identified as the operational field of this code:

> ...An estimated *half-a-million Iranians* are taking part in a huge rally in
> Tehran called by *religious and political leaders* oppose to *the Shah* and military
> led *government. The crowds*, waving banners and picture of the exiled religious

leader, *Ayatollah Khomeini,* are gathering in *Shahyad Square* in the center of *Tehran* to hear speeches from the opposition leaders. The crowd sang, demanding an *Islamic republic* and an end to links with *the West..*[2]

A proper name functions in the text as semic code through a set of attributes or through conceptual formation which is clustered around it, as in two following examples:

> *Starting from virtual obscurity* he [Hoveida] established himself as a *popular and flamboyant* Prime Minister *in an era of expanding growth.*[3]

> A BBC correspondent said the Shah *was smiling, but there was inevitably some strain in his face.*[4]

The specific function of the semic code can be identified in the news texts as

connoting objectivity, impartiality, transparency (mythic connotation); subject

positioning through defining a situation; exposing a set of power relations or what

Hartley and Montgomery (1985) suggested as *relational dimension.*

> Unless unexpected *new civilian* support surfaces for *Dr.Bakhtiar,* the crisis in Iran may scarcely be affected by his efforts to form a government. *The Shah's* principle opponents-the *Muslim clergy* and in particular *the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris,* and the *national front*-show no signs of being willing to compromise. *The strikes and demonstrations* in their support are as solid as ever...[5]

2) Hermeneutic code or the code of "enigma": This code, according to Barthes,

provides an enigmatic "space" in the semic space of narrative. It is a "signified"

which refuses to connote. It posits the situation as an enigma and speculates a

solution(s) for it. The enigma code also operates in the news texts as a code of

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[2] News, 10. 12. 78
[3] Talk, 10.11.78
[4] Despatch from Tehran, 1.1.79
[5] Talk, 1.1.79

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"rumor". In this sense, the code is a signified which refuses to denote. The specific function of the hermeneutic code in the news texts can be identified as connoting disruption as an enigma; providing "closure" for narrative by mentioning possible perspective, or simply by restating the enigma. In this sense, the enigma code operates as a *phatic* code and thus maintains only the relation between narrator and narratee. The following example can be read as an enigmatic instance in a news-dispatch:

> ... *Most observers here feel that the Shah's departure will cease the pressure considerably on Bakhtiar's Government and be the one chance of defusing the massive anti-Shah feeling in the country, though what precisely will follow is still anyone's guess...*[6]

3) Proairetic code or the code of action: this code connotes a meaningful order for events in the narrative (news). It operates at the syntagmatic level of the narrative, determines the generic value of an action (an explosion, strike, shooting...) and constitutes a temporal and casual sequence for the events in the narrative (chain of events). The code also connotes the agency of the persons, groups and masses involved in the event:

> ...While General Azhari *was speaking,* much of Tehran *was blacked out* by an electricity workers' *strike,* the first in *a planned series of politically inspired actions* by them.[7]

> ...And in some cases it's claimed tanks *drove into the protesters* and *crushed them to death.* Troops are also reported to *have opened fire* on the residence of the Ayatollah Shirazi, Many people *died* in the attacks, according to the opposition, but the spiritual leader himself *managed to escape.*[8]

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[6] Dispatch, 15.01.79
[7] Dispatch, 21.11.78
[8] Dispatch, 31.12.78

4) Symbolic code or symbolic field: For defining such a level of meaning in news text, the "symbol" has been taken in broad sense of the word. This code posits groundwork for the "symbolic structure" of the narrative. It is through this code that news text renders implicitly its intrinsic binary oppositions through articulating the relationship between opposed cultural, political and personal constitutives of events. Thus, it provides a discursive zone specifically in the editorials (talks) as well as other formats of the news:

> ...Without doubt, what the world is witnessing in Iran is the impact of *extensive economic development on a society which combines in extreme form the elements of modernism [sic] and backwardness, blue jean and the power of an aged and exiled Ayatollah*[9].

> ...*Mashad is a holy city, a center for pilgrimages, and two weeks ago soldiers were reported to have opened fire on worshipers in the precincts of the Imam Reza*[10].

5) Cultural code or historical code: a code that governs the text in terms of referring to other texts, other discourses (a body of knowledge, a common wisdom, public opinion...):

> ...A change in Iran's political alignment could produce a decisive change in *the strategic balance of power over a great part of the globe.*[11]

Although the cultural code can hardly be isolated from semic and symbolic codes in news story, as a body of knowledge (historical), it lays the ground upon which "mythic" meaning of the BBC news-discourse is conveyed. The following

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[9] Talk, 24,11,78.
[10] Dispatch, 31.12.78
[11] Talk, 15.11.78

examples can be identified as the associative fields of the cultural (historical)

code that were decoded by the audiences as a campaign against the Shah was

planned by the Western Powers:

> *...Labour Members of Parliament have been complaining for several*
> *weeks now to have the Queen visit to Iran early next year cancelled. And*
> *many of them have also been critical of British Government's continuing*
> *support of the Shah.*[12]

> The Time today devotes its Main editorial to the *future of the monarchy in*
> *Iran*, which it sees as necessary to the future stability of that country. But
> *it draws a clear distinction between the survival of the monarchy and the*
> *continuance of the Shah's personal rule.*[13]

This code also connotes common sense; naturalizes what has been connoted

through symbolic and semic codes in the narrative text of news:

> *...Generally speaking, people remain content so long as the values seem*
> *to be in harmony with the everyday world. It is when the traditional values*
> *have been undermined and are being widely questioned that people lose*
> *their bearings and become acutely aware of the injustice of society.*[14]

Needless to say, that there are some other codes operating in radio discourse

such as code of order, code of interview, musical framing, vox pop and the like.

Yet, due to unavailability of the audio texts of the BBC programs, this analysis

does not include those codes and their operations.

Operational procedure

The analysis hypothesizes a typical representation for the BBC news-discourse

and tries to explain it through investigating the narrative moments and the way in

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[12] Dispatch, 12.12.78.
[13] Asian Topical Talks, 29,11,78
[14] Ibid.

which these moments have been constructed in the selected texts. Thus, for exploring the "secondary" relationship between the textual segments of news story, each segment will be examined in terms of its codification-That is, by exposing its codes and showing the contribution of each code in providing narrative moments of *focusing, realizing* and *closing*. For this purpose, first, one single news item will be focused and analyzed in details; and second, by comparing its narrative components with identical components in the other news texts; third, the analysis attempts to define a "framing" through which, the news text represented the revolutionary events and thus, rendered a *preferred reading*.

The selected news item in "dispatch" format exemplifies the most recurrent features of the news-texts under question and will be referred to in this analysis as exemplary text. It represents the violent demonstrations in Tehran in November 4, 1978, which escalated on November 5 (the Day Tehran Burned). Consequently, total martial law was imposed, the Prime Minister Sharif-Emami and his civilian cabinet resigned and were replaced by a military government headed by General Azhari. At the time local newspapers were on strike and no one believed the information disseminated by the governmental media.

The Exemplary Text

CUE: In the Iranian capital, Tehran, it's been a day of mounting political excitement as well as widespread rioting and destruction in which at least five people are believed to have been killed. From Tehran. Andrew Whitley reports.

SEG. 1)

Gangs of demonstrators on the rampage wrecked shops and banks over a wide area of central Tehran and even attacked the prestigious Intercontinental Hotel where many foreigners are staying. In response to telephoned threats the Hilton Hotel in the north of the city also closed its doors to everyone except residents.

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As dusk fell the light of bonfires built by the demonstrators out of tires and looted material could be seen over a wide area. By then the running battles with troops that had lasted for five or six hours were dying down. The trouble began, predictably, around the main campus of Tehran University. After a mass meeting within its grounds several hundred students and other young people charged out, hurling stones at the army units stationed nearby. In the shooting that ensued unconfirmed reports say five demonstrators were killed and an unknown number of others injured. After a brief lull, gangs of youths spread out in all directions causing havoc. On one major street near the International Hotel, every bank had had its windows systematically smashed. It was the worst day of violence in the Iranian capital since the imposition of martial law eight weeks ago.

SEG. 2

The revival of trouble underlined the urgency of the political moves now under way to install a new government capable of commanding public confidence and ending the bloodshed. A former British Foreign Secretary, Lord George Brown, has been visiting Iran and seen a wide range of figures, including the Shah, leaders of the opposition National Front, and the most influential religious leader in the country, Ayatollah Shariat Madari. And in his opinion a broad consensus now exits on the formation of a new Government, replacing that of Prime Minister Sharif-Emami. If the last hurdles in these highly delicate negotiations can be overcome it is expected that the Shah will go on television in the next day or two to announce the formation of a government in which the National Front would play a leading part, for the first time for a quarter of a century. The Front's leader, Dr. Karim Sanjabi, is expected to see the Shah soon after returning to Tehran from Paris after an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Shah's most implacable opponent, Ayatollah Khomeini, to moderate his position.

SEG. 3)

The big imponderable, of course, is how will Ayatollah Khomeini and his many followers within Iran react to the sort of new government that seems to be in the offing?

Analysis

The first segment of the news story presents a sequence of events through a set of different codes connoting a disruptive situation. It is followed by segments 2 and 3 that present possible perspective(s) for re-establishing equilibrium as the final moment of the narrative. The equilibrium as the first narrative moment has been presented here through a "lack" which has been focused and explicated first by "cue" as, "...mounting political excitement, widespread rioting and destruction in Tehran", and then in the body of the story as, " the worst day of violence in the Iranian Capital". It should be noted that, equilibrium as the first narrative moment, as a background for the current events, has seldom been pronounced in the news-stories and news-dispatches. Yet, there are talks (editorials) that deal with this moment in terms of a "past", a political, economic condition from which the "disrupted present" has been generated:

> Over the last decade Iran has had two basic problems, one
> economic the other political. The political problem was essentially
> that power was concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite centered
> on the Shah and that the majority of the country's inhabitants felt
> excluded from government and its benefits. The economic problem was
> simply that Iran's vast income from oil exports allowed its rulers to
> dispense with caution and opt for undisciplined politics of rapid growth.[15]

This past has also been presented by codifying the Shah as a semic:

> Events have moved swiftly in Iran this year. Twelve months ago
> The Shah seemed to be firmly in control and the Rastakhiz Party,

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[15] Talk, 9.11.1978.

> His officially sponsored political grouping, was the only legal
> Political organization.[16]

Or: The Shah's appeal to nation, admission of the past excuses,
        errors, and corruption and promise to rectify these was effective
        emotionally but a critical question was the degree to which these
        words would have concrete meaning.[17]

The lack of equilibrium as a disruptive situation in the basic text has been

realized through a set of descriptive details- that is, a cluster of semic codes

(proper names of the places) and proairetic codes (sequence of events in terms

of the actions such as attack, hurling stones, shooting...). The text codified as

such, constructs a narrative as being narrated by a reporter (though here an

effaced narrator) at the location (equals an eyewitness) and thus, the segment as

a whole connotes the objectivity (the mythic meaning), transparency, and

immediacy of the BBC's report (always at the spot). In the subsequent dispatch

broadcast by the BBC on November 5, the uncertain political situation in Tehran

has been dealt with as a "continuous" news story and presented through semic

and proairetic codes. Yet, the presence of the reporter as an extension of the

BBC, an always reliable, objective, impartial voice (mythic meaning) at the

location has been emphasized:

> A university lecturer told me that a few minutes ago he saw two men in
> army uniform assisting in the general orgy of destruction as another
> foreigner watched demonstrators embracing soldiers and climbing onto
> their trucks.[18]

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[16] Dispatch, 21.12. 78.
[17] Talk, 10.11. 78
[18] Dispatch, o5.11.78

By the statement of " unconfirmed reports say five demonstrators were

killed and unknown number of others injured", the segment opens up a space for

a specific encoding and decoding. This statement provides a code which might

be named as "code of rumor". The audience simply decodes the message

as " the BBC said that, then it is confirmed ..." By stating the "unconfirmed

reports", the broadcaster here mystifies the source of information in order to

present the content of rumor as a fact (Pliskin, 1980). From a semiotic

perspective, here the sender deploys an "accessed voice" which is according to

Hartley (1982) separated from the reporter's own voice (account) in order to

connote impartiality,

and thus, to provide the effect of reality:

> The huge Tehran bazaar has reopened after several weeks shut-
> down, but well informed sources expect it to close again in a few
> days' time.[19]

> Yesterday (Sunday), soldiers in the eastern town of Mashad shot
> at civilian demonstrators, killing as many as seven hundred of
> them, according to some estimates.[20]

> An American embassy spokesman here said the general [Robert
> Huyser] did visit Iran from time to time but he had no knowledge of
> his present whereabouts. It's a comment that doesn't completely
> discount the report but it's felt here that the visit by a top American
> military figure is unlikely.[21]

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[19] Dispatch, 21.11.78
[20] Talk, 1.1.79
[21] Dispatch, 05.01.79

> No doubt the government will strongly deny this, though the
> carting away of bodies by the army and burying them secretly is
> widely held to be a common practice.[22]

It was through this code that the BBC validated and widely re-circulated

the information which had been sought by the receivers of the message in the

"liminal" period of the revolution – a period in which, according to Pliskin, one

social order was breaking down and was not yet replaced by another one (ibid.,

p. 58). The disruptive situation at the narrative level of the text signifies the

liminal period, the in-between state of the revolution and thus, positions a subject

seeking explanation for what is unknown (ambiguity of the events, the situation).

The code of rumor explains, "what is unknown" through "what is known". The

BBC at the time broadcast a fusion of news and rumor throughout the country:

> There are still persistent rumors in Tehran that a new civilian government is
> about to be formed...[23]

> In the capital, the mood just before the Ayatollah's arrival is a strange
> mixture of tremendous excitement and nervousness. Rumors are flying around
> about possible coups and, more unlikely, about the return of the Shah.[24]

Thus, by quoting comments, opinions, speculations and estimations from other

sources (groups, individuals...) the BBC news-discourse presented the desired

information while maintaining its position as an impartial and reliable "institutional

voice". In the texts under question, various forms of "accessed voice" can be

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[22]Dispatch, 03.1.79
[23] Dispatch, 1.12. 78
[24]Dispatch, 01.01.79

distinguished which were used for presenting and even conducting information such as follows:

> Senior doctors in Mashhad including the heads of the medical school there, claim that altogether, about 200 people were killed.[25]

> In a statement issued from the small villa outside Paris...The Ayatollah has called on his followers to undertake a campaign of civil disobedience, including a refusal to pay taxes, an embargo on oil exports and a campaign of denunciation of the Shah during the month of religious mourning which begins in December...the message has gone to religious leader, students, groups, shopkeepers and trade unions.[26]

> Earlier Ayatollah Khomeini told his followers – the overwhelming majority of the population – to ignore the new curfew starting in the middle of the afternoon.[27]

The segment 2 of the exemplary text opens up a perspective on restoring equilibrium in terms of re-establishing "public confidence" and "ending the bloodshed" which has been realized through a combination of semic and proairetic codes. This perspective has been also provided and emphasized by employing another accessed voice in the form of a comment made by Lord Brown:

> ...in his [Brown] opinion a broad consensus now exists on formation of a new government, replacing that of Prime Minister Sharif-Emami.

In the texts under study, quoting from the British and American sources (individuals, newsmedia...) can be seen as a recurrently used form of accessed

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[25] Dispatch, 03.01.79
[26] Dispatch, 23.11.78.

voice. Yet such a device has been utilized mainly for presenting a conflicting view in terms of comments and counter-comments on the issues such as the future of the Shah, Iran stability, Western interests in Iran and the like. Whether intended or unintended, the outcome of such a device was a message open to two different ways of reading-- that is, while it was encoded as an impartial reflection of varied attitudes amongst the Western authorities, it was decoded as the shaky status of the Shah who was supposed to be firmly supported by the Western powers at the time of crisis (mythic meaning of the message); e.g. a comment by President Carter:

> Though when he [President Carter] was asked whether he thought the
> Shah would survive his answer was more than somewhat tactless, " I do
> not know", " I hope so".[28]

which is followed by a counter-comment stated below in the same text:

> In the view of Richard Helms, who is both a former director of the
> American Central Intelligence Agency and a former Us ambassador to
> Iran, the Shah has been a loyal friend of the US and the US in return
> should make sure he survives.

Or another accessed voice in the form of a quotation from a newspaper:

> It [Financial Times] argued that the West's interest lay in the stability of
> the country and not in the survival of a particular monarch. [29]

which is followed in the same text by:

> Mr. Temple-Moris [a conservative MP] says he agrees with the Financial
> Times that the religious leaders are not strong enough to ensure an

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[27] Dispatch, 10.02.97
[28] Dispatch, 15.12.78
[29] Asian Topical Talks, 07.11.78

Islamic state but, he says, they are strong enough in present circumstance to ensure chaos, and that is the important point.

In realizing the mentioned perspective, the segment 2 as a semic unit locates a set of proper names in the narrative sequence. The proper names such as George Brown, the Shah, Sharif-Emami, Karim Sanjabi, Ayatollah Shariat-Madari and Ayatollah Khomeini have been also isolated through a cluster of proairetic code in terms of visiting, replacing, negotiating, announcing...By codifying the proper names as semic and the *value* of their action in the syntagm of the narrative (provided by proairetic codes), the perspective has been realized according to a set of power relations exposed in the flow of the discourse:

Lord George Brown: has been visiting...connotes an active agency; connotes involvement of Western powers; code of conspiracy; mythic meaning.

The Shah: has been visited, has been expected to announce...connotes a passive agency; no adjective has been mentioned for this name in the text.

Sharif-Emami: as the Prime Minister, he is supposed to be replaced ... another passive agency.

Karim Sanjabi: the National front's leader; his agency has been transformed from an active to a passive after his unsuccessful efforts to persuade Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris to moderate his position.

Ayatollah Shariat Madari: codified as the most influential religious leader in the country; an active agency at the time of reporting.

Ayatollah Khomeini: codified as semic in terms of adjective as well as conceptual formation within the text: the most implacable opponent of the Shah;

He does not moderate his position against the Shah; a religious figure in exile with many follower within Iran; an active agency.

Yet, the exposed relations of power have already been depicted through symbolic codification in terms of a primary opposition around which the text is structured. This primary or basic opposition can be seen in the segment one as "the people", as an agency, versus the "structure". Segment 1 as a semic unit, in fact, shows the extent of visibility of such an agency in imposing its power on whatever represented the structure – shops, banks, international hotels...The primary opposition in the text frames a set of derived or secondary binary opposition upon which the narrative has proceeded and a homology has been established as the underlying structure of the story. These primary and derived oppositions can be seen as the symbolic codification of the exemplary text as below:

Primary:	the people	structure
Secondary:	opposition	government
	Khomeini	the Shah
	demonstrators	army units
	students	

According to these binary oppositions, Ayatollah Khomeini has been posited against the Shah and a homology has been made by setting up a relationship between him and the movement, demonstrators on one hand, and between the Shah and army, banks, hotels (equals westernization, modernization...) on the other. Furthermore, at the discursive level, the relationship between Khomeini and "public confidence" has been taken to be equivalent to the relationship between the Shah and "bloodshed".

The selected news texts may be seen to be structured around the same basic binary opposition of the people versus structure which subsumed other oppositions as follows:

Secular	religious
corporeal	spiritual
modernization	tradition
government	movement
dictatorship	freedom
regime	opposition
elite	masses, majority of country inhabitants etc.

Thus, the Shah has been posited against the whole nation and related to modernization and rapid growth as well as to oppression, elitism, westernization, corruption and secularization... And Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader has been related to the tradition, masses, the excluded, new expectation, the oppressed and so on. Through such homologies a binaristic view of the events has been provided by the BBC that can be regarded as a reflection of the "development paradigm" in dealing with Third World issues:

> The Shah doubtless has problems which are unique to him and his country, but in a wider context the problems of Iran are shared by all other countries which are undergoing experience of economic development and social modernization.[30]

It is worth noting that such a view, however, was completely different from that which was cultivated in their audience (domestic or international) at the time by the majority of other Western (mostly American) news organizations

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[30] Talk, 24.11. 78.

(Hamelink, 1985). Based on the same binary oppositions, though by different

homologies, those organizations viewed the Shah as the modern leader, one

who is equal to progress, development...(good) and one who was challenged by

an unlikely coalition of Moslem traditionalists and leftists which are equal to

obstruction of progress, hindering development...(bad):

> Moslems of the dominant Shi'ite sect are opposed to the Shah's
> efforts to modernize ...by granting freedom to woman and
> redistributing church lands...(Associated Press, October 29, 1978)[31]

> The Shah also has broad base of popular support, particulary in the army,
> and among farmers, and a newly created industrial working class, who
> have benefited from land reforms. (TIME, June 5,1978)[32]

The last unit of the text (segment 3) as a fragment of semic space

provides a "closure" for the narrative in terms of a hermeneutic code which here

restates the enigmatic situation and requests a solution for it:

> The big imponderable, of course, is how will Ayatollah Khomeini and his
> many followers within Iran react to the sort of new government that seems to be
> in the offing?

Ayatollah Khomeini as a semic code has been termed by the conceptual

formation of "imponderability of his reaction". This reaction is thematized as a

" big question" by which the values of the mentioned actions in the previous

segment have been conditioned and as a result, all the efforts to re-establish

equilibrium are suspended. Thus, the code requests an answer for the question

that has already risen as a perspective in the narrative. In this respect, the last

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[31] Cited in Hamelink (1985, p. 151)

hermeneutic sentence renders an overall meaning, a secondary relationship between the textual segments and frames the whole story. Thus, the mentioned moment in the Iranian revolution has been framed in the exemplary news text as a tenacious confrontation of the people and the government – of those who are ready to be killed (and some of them have been actually killed) and those who are ready to kill... Such a confrontation reveals the highly vulnerable status of the Shah and his paralyzed government in challenging the movement. As a natural and legitimate outcome of this confrontation, the news story, through its "closure", registers the hegemonic role of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the formation of a leadership for the whole movement. Any change in the syntagmatic location of this hermeneutic sentence (removing it from the closure of the narrative and relocating it, for example, as one of the components of the segment two) will alter the overall signification of the story, and thus, imply a different " preferred reading".

There is a common ground, as Hartley and Montgomery (1985) pointed out, between news and political struggle that can be termed as popular discourse. It can even be said that the news in striving for clarity and impartiality tends to use populism as a means to make sense of the events. In this sense, the BBC broadcast news to Iran provided the revolution with a populist discourse. Yet, such a discourse was, in fact, a reflection of what had already been deployed effectively by the revolution itself. The BBC reflected it in terms of a text open to " aberrant" decoding, and as a narrative of day-by-day struggle of the

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[32] Ibid.

Iranian people against the dictatorial regime of the Shah. Thus, the BBC news-discourse constructed a *narratee* as an included, present, visible political agency – the people whose presence, visibility and real agency had been excluded and ignored for a long time by the Iranian government from any mediated discourse. In a revolutionary situation, the BBC news-discourse provided this *narratee* with the information, evaluations, and to some extent instructions while cultivating in him/her a legitimate image of the movement, and more importantly, a legitimate, *naturalized*, religious leadership for it. Unlike the most Western media which at the time were waging a kind of war against Iran and the revolution (Said, 1997), the BBC legitimized the revolution by reflecting its populist discourse and thus mobilized the Iranian audience into an active and well-informed support of it.

The following examples show two different cultivated messages in projecting the Iranian crisis. The first example is from the San Francisco Chronicle which cultivates a distorted image of the opposition against the Shah (Hamelink, 1985):

> What kind of government of Iran is imaginable without the Shah?
> [HERMENEUTIC c.] The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the intransigent, reactionary, Shiite religious leader [SEMIC c.], wants to set up an Islamic republic run by the mullahs, with women shown their place.The aging figure is now living in France [SEMIC c.]. Flora Lewis of the New York Times [ACCESSED vo.] interviewed him the other day. She was obliged to remove her shoes, cover her head and shoulders with a large white cotton square draped so that only the eyes showed, and kneel before the ayatollah to ask questions [PROAIRETIC c.]. It would be hard to convince us that [PERSPECTIVE] any modern State as large as and economically advanced as Iran could conceivably be ruled successfully or

for long by the kind of fanatic priesthood [SYMBOLIC c.] that Khomeini symbolizes. (November 10, 1978)[33]

The second example is form the BBC and reflects the same setting - another

Ayatollah (Shariat-madari) being visited by a Western reporter, in Iran in

December 27, 1978:

> The home of ayatollah Shariat Madari, who is 76, a wise and kindly looking figure in his black robe with his long gray beard but nevertheless a firm man [SEMIC c.], who weighed his words carefully when he was interviewed and took his time over answering each question [SEMIC c.]. How, I asked, did his position – his stand in Iranian politics differ from that of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini? [HERMENEUTIC c.] Asked such a direct question, he replied that " Ayatollah Khomeini would prefer to state to you his position and you can make up your own mind. " Ayatollah Shariat-Madari went on to say [ACCESSED vo.]: " our duty as religious leaders is merely to guide the people." On the question of the Shah's future, well, that was for the nation to decide through a referendum or by the people's representatives in Parliament [PERSPECTIVE] The problem was, he said, that the people were just not being consulted.... Then, as to the future, I asked, what did he see for Iran? [PERSPECTIVE 2] "I see a bright future," [SYMBOLIC c.] he replied, " but how many killing there will be before it comes about we don't know. The people cannot tolerate this dictatorship [SYMBOLIC c. / CLOSURE] for eve..."[34]

The two quoted pieces cultivate two different images, or, in other words, they

present two distinct *framings* according to their different codifications which

operated first at the verbal plane of the text - different connotations of the used

words such as "intransigent", "reactionary" or "kindly looking", "a firm man"...and

as the constitutive of their narrative structure - fanatic priesthood versus a

modern State (the first example); and, the people versus a dictatorial regime (the

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[33] Ibid.

second example). They also construct two different narratees - The first story, that of San Francisco Chronicle, addressed *us*, (versus *they*), while the BBC text addressed the Iranian people as an "included" audience. Thus, no wonder if, as Hamelink pointed out, The San Francisco Chronicle's text shows a total lack of understanding for Moslem custom (*their custom*) by stating that the reporter, amongst other things, was forced to kneel, because, " as several pictures show, in such a talk also Khomeini would be in kneeling position." Accordingly, the humiliation suggested by the text had never taken place. (1985, p.151).

It has been argued that by reflecting the revolution as such, the BBC reflected reality- things that actually were happening in Iran at the time (Walker, 1992). Yet, it might also be argued that such a reflection was obtained through a representational strategy which had been deployed within the news as discourse. Thus, by translating the events into a meaningful message, the BBC news-discourse played a significant role as constituent of what was happening and of what was perceived by the audience as reality.

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[34] Asian Topical Talks, by Geoff Robertson.

Conclusion

To fulfill a twofold purpose, this study has explored, though briefly, a historical

background of the media and modernity in Iran in order to explain the causes and

dynamics of the revolution of 1979. The role of the BBC broadcast during the

revolution has been dealt with in terms of a *representation* – that is, the BBC

news-discourse represented the Iranian revolution to itself, and thus, it opened

up a space through which the audience, at the time, could see itself as a political

agency against the power structure of the regime. In this space, the Iranian

people, not only saw themselves in the revolutionary conditions, but also saw

how they were seen under the other's (the Western media) eyes.

In the first chapter, it was argued that the Iranian revolution of 1979 was

not an inescapable consequence of the so-called *modernization* in a Third World

country. A distinction was made between modernization as a strategy for

development of infrastructure, and *modernity* as a culture - a discursive dynamic.
The crisis, thus, has been explained as an outcome of the Pahlavi regime's
dichotic treatment of modernity. Such a treatment was *open* to modernity in
terms of its commitment to technological progress, secularism, nationalism and
cultural pluralism while it was *closed* to the very dynamic of modernity by
imposing a unitary representation on the whole communication system. In the
presence of arrangements of modernity, but in the lack of its dynamic elements,
a repressed identity had been shaped which was, in fact, a subjectivity deprived
of institutional representation in terms of self-articulation through a rational
discourse. This repressed identity manifested itself in a set of anti-modernist
discourses such as *nativism, traditionalism* and *Islamic revivalism*, and, later, in
the full-scale structural crisis of 1979. It was in this historical context that the BBC
message represented the Iranian people - those who were deprived of
representation for a long time. Furthermore, the imposing unitary representation
on the media apparatus by the regime resulted in incredibility of its whole
mediated discourse. Such an incredibility in a time of crisis, led to a vulnerability
of the regime in challenging the opposition which could successfully utilize the
BBC broadcast for its propaganda. In this sense, the case of the BBC and the
Iranian revolution shows that international media could be exploited not only by
the Western powers, but also by non-Western people of a Third World country for
reflecting their movement against a dictatorial, dependent, regime.

The BBC message, according to its discursive moment of production has
been analyzed in the second chapter as well as its moment of perception as an

objective, impartial news-discourse. It has been shown how the BBC from World War II onward could achieve a reputation for " telling the truth" and thus gain an identity as a *myth* in the world of news-casting. The formation of this myth, as a universalized *presence*, has been traced in a historical perspective. Furthermore, from a discursive approach, its ideological configuration has been analyzed. It has been argued that, while the BBC news-discourse as a myth normalize, and naturalize its message as an impartial and objective account of world events, it conceals its inherent dualism – that is, constructing the events according to a binaristic view of the world, especially in representing *those* non-Western audiences that have been historically assumed by the Western subject (*us*) as those who cannot represent themselves. This myth, however, has been read in Iran through a negotiated code, and thus, as a myth/ counter-myth. Interestingly enough, it seems that, at two historical moments (the fall of Reza Shah in 1941, and the 1979 revolution) the Iranian audiences read the BBC message as a reflection of a foreign (British motivated) plot, or, as the later moment showed, as the component of a campaign planned by the Western Powers against the dictatorial monarch.

The BBC news-discourse as a text has been analyzed in the third chapter. The analysis, based on a selection of broadcast texts, shows how the BBC provided the revolution with a populist discourse as a projection of what had been already deployed by the revolution itself. The structural determinants of the selected texts reveal that the BBC had presented a narrative of day-by-day struggle of the Iranian people as a visible political agency against the power

structure of the regime. By reflecting a revolutionary condition, the BBC

intentionally or not, provided the hearer-reader with a *preferred reading* of the

events as a legitimate movement against the dictatorship led by the religious

establishment as a popular, legitimate, hegemonic leadership. Thus, the BBC

broadcasts to Iran *cultivated* in the audience an image of the revolution different

from what was cultivated by the most Western media, at the time, in their

domestic or international audiences. In this regard, the case of the BBC and the

Iranian revolution suggests a need to re-evaluate and re-contextualize of the

debates on international communications and the exchange of information.

The occurrence of revolutions requires the development of a set of

political and social conditions. Yet, the occurrence of the Iranian revolution of

1979 was partly, but significantly, conditioned by an international (external)

development – that is, the dwindling and diminishing Western Powers' support of

the Shah as was reflected through the Western media at the time. The BBC

presented this development to the Iranian audiences. Such a meaning was

conveyed by providing a preferred reading, emphasized through a mythic

signification, and thus, perceived as a meaning beyond the words and the

sentences of each single broadcast news story.

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