



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IRAN FROM 1979
TO 2009 IN THE NEW YORK TIMES***

MARYAM JAHEDI

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**THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF IRAN FROM 1979
TO 2009 IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES***

By

MARYAM JAHEDI



**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

June 2012

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to my parents, my husband and my two lovely children, Parham and Parisa.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Chair: Associate Professor Mohd. Faiz Sathi. Abdullah, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of language as discourse which focuses on the substantively linguistic and semiotic nature of social relations of power in contemporary societies. CDA is used to analyze texts in order to examine what structures, strategies, or other properties of language play a role in the (re)production of unequal power relations. Using a combination of analytical tools and approaches advocated by prominent scholars in the field of CDA, the study investigated the discursive features of *The New York Times* (*The NYT*) news media to highlight how discursive strategies, structures and related rhetorical devices were deployed to portray the Iranian nation and to provide insight into how the information presented in the news texts had ideological implications for geopolitical relations. The textual data of the study covered the period from the Islamic Revolution of

Iran in 1979 to the events of 2009. The headlines and leads of news items were examined: (1) to identify which themes or topics were recurrent in the media about Iran; (2) to describe the discursive devices, structures, and strategies used in the corpora of the news about Iran; (3) to analyze linguistic means or forms that were employed; and (4) to uncover the ideologies about the Iranian nation which seem to underlie its discursive representation.

The results of *The NYT* news discourse analysis showed that the predominant themes about Iran centered on the concepts of violence and threat (to other nations). Discursive strategies such as referential strategies, predication strategies and argumentation strategies were employed to promote these ideological themes on the portrayal of prominent Iranian social actors. The discursive analysis showed that there was a tendency to polarize between Us (good, righteous, peaceful, etc.) and Them (evil, violent, etc.) to associate stereotypical negative traits to the out-group. The study found that such ideological representations of the Iranian participants were linguistically realized via the dominant processes of transitivity, thematization, and lexicalization. The net effect of the discourse themes, strategies and their associated linguistic means of realization in the stereotypical construction of Iran in *The NYT* was that of the negative Other, a nation of people that formed part of George W. Bush's contentious "axis of evil"—evil, untrustworthy, violent, and a threat to world peace.

The findings of the study are expected to further illuminate our understanding of powerful role of dominant international news media discourse in (re)producing

unequal power relations and the discursive construction of an entire society in geopolitically negative terms to skew world opinion against it. In this way, the study contributes not only to the field of critical discourse studies but also to the related disciplines of journalism, international communication studies, and foreign affairs, among others.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**BINAAN DISKURSIF TERHADAP NEGARA IRAN DARI 1979
KEPADA 2009 DALAM *THE NEW YORK TIMES***

Oleh

MARYAM JAHEDI

Jun 2012

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Mohd. Faiz Sathi. Abdullah, PhD

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Analisis Wacana Kritis (*Critical Discourse Analysis*, yakni *CDA*) merupakan pendekatan multidisiplin terhadap analisis bahasa sebagai wacana berfokuskan kepada sifat linguistik dan semiotik secara substantif bagi hubungan kuasa sosial dalam masyarakat kontemporari. *CDA* digunakan untuk menganalisis teks bagi meneliti struktur, strategi, atau bahagian lain bahasa yang berperanan menghasilkan (semula) hubungan kuasa yang tidak seimbang. Dengan menggunakan kombinasi alat analisis serta pendekatan yang disokong oleh penyelidik terkemuka dalam bidang *CDA*, kajian ini telah menyelidik ciri-ciri diskursif dalam media berita *The New York Times* (*The NYT*) untuk menjelaskan bagaimana strategi diskursif, struktur dan peranti retorik yang berkaitan diatur bagi menggambarkan negara Iran dan membekalkan pengetahuan mendalam tentang bagaimana maklumat yang disajikan dalam teks berita mempunyai

implikasi ideologi untuk hubungan geopolitik.

Data teks kajian ini meliputi tempoh bermulanya Revolusi Islam Iran pada tahun 1979 hingga 2009. Berita utama dan arah tuju berita diteliti: (1) untuk mengenal pasti tema atau topik yang selalu diulang dalam media tentang Iran; (2) untuk menggambarkan peranti, struktur, dan strategi diskursif yang digunakan dalam korpus berita tentang Iran; (3) menganalisis sumber linguistik atau bentuk yang digunakan, dan (4) untuk mendedahkan ideologi tentang negara Iran yang mendasari persembahan diskursifnya.

Keputusan analisis wacana berita *The NYT* menunjukkan bahawa tema-tema dominan tentang Iran tertumpu pada konsep kekerasan dan ancaman (kepada negara lain). Strategi diskursif seperti strategi referensial, strategi ramalan dan strategi argumentasi telah digunakan bagi mempromosi tema-tema ideologi untuk menggambarkan pelaku sosial Iran yang penting. Analisis diskursif menunjukkan terdapat kecenderungan untuk menyebabkan berlakunya polarisasi antara Kita (baik, mulia, aman, dll.) dan Mereka (jahat, ganas, dll.) supaya mengaitkan sifat-sifat stereotaip negatif pada *out-group*. Kajian mendapati bahawa persembahan ideologi seumpama ini terhadap pelaku Iran dicapai secara linguistik melalui proses-proses utama transitiviti, tematisasi, dan leksikalisasi. Kesan keseluruhan tema, strategi diskursif, serta sumber realisasi linguistik yang berkaitan dalam binaan stereotaip tentang Iran dalam *The NYT* adalah *negative Other*, yakni masyarakat negara yang menjadi sebahagian daripada “axis of evil” George W. Bush yang dipersoalkan—jahat, tidak boleh dipercayai, ganas, dan pengancam

keamanan dunia.

Hasil kajian ini diharapkan dapat menjelaskan lagi kefahaman kita tentang peranan penting yang dimainkan oleh wacana media berita antarabangsa dalam menghasilkan (semula) hubungan kuasa yang tidak seimbang serta binaan diskursif terhadap sebuah masyarakat keseluruhannya secara geopolitikal dengan negatif untuk memesongkan pandangan dunia terhadapnya. Dengan cara ini, kajian ini menyumbang bukan sahaja kepada bidang analisis wacana kritis, tetapi juga kepada disiplin kewartawanan, kajian komunikasi antarabangsa, serta hal ehwal luar negara, di antara bidang lain yang berkaitan.

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I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my family for their encouragement and patience. I owe my deepest gratitude to my husband for his continuous support and motivation. My warm and special thanks also go to my two children who are the pride and joy of my life.

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 1 June 2012 to conduct the final examination of Maryam Jahedi on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “The Discursive Construction of Iran from 1979 to 2009 in *The New York Times*” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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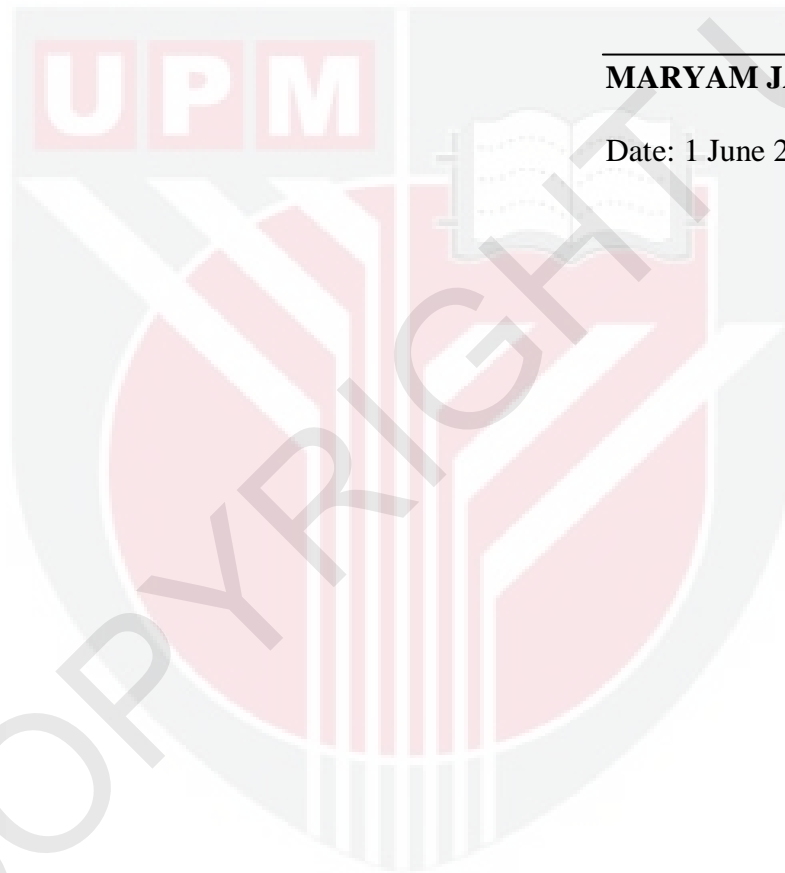
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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.



MARYAM JAHEDI

Date: 1 June 2012

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