

Iran's Nuclear Programme: An Analysis of Face in Political Interviews

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ABSTRACT

We adopt Spencer-Oatey's approach to examine face concerns relating to self-presentation and identity attributes. Selected extracts from political interviews involving Western interviewers and Iranian interviewees were analysed to examine how participants constructed and negotiated their personal, collective and relational selves as they unfolded in the interaction. The number of political interviews examined was 19, amounting to ten hours of talk. Extracts presented for analysis came from four interviews. The topic raised was concerned with Iran's nuclear power programme, which had aroused concern and had been the focus of international attention. Iranian public figures interviewed on global broadcast news were often questioned about Iran's refusal to give up its nuclear power programme, which they had to address with care to present Iran and the Iranian people and their individual selves with a more positive self-image to the global public at large.

Keywords: Attributes, face, identity, Iran, nuclear programme

INTRODUCTION

The article seeks to make a contribution to the study of face in political interviews involving interviewers who hold politicians accountable before the public (Ekström et al., 2006). Anchimbe (2009) described political interviews as "a highly ritualized, mediated, public game of ... face-threatening thrusts by the interviewer and parries by the interviewee". Political figures are invited to provide an account on an issue with

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which they are associated (Montgomery, 2008), for example, the issue of nuclear energy in Iran, which is the concern of the interviews selected for investigation. Face is particularly at issue here.

The aim is to examine how face from an identity perspective emerges dynamically in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee which focuses on Iran's nuclear programme, an issue which is not only face-sensitive but also of international concern since the early 2000s, making it newsworthy (Epstein, 1973). Guided by Spencer-Oatey's (2009) action-oriented identity approach, we address two face-related issues: face sensitivities relating to attributes ascribed, claimed or contested that emerge in the course of an interaction, and the performance of self-presentation acts to project positive self-image in the context of responding to questions containing face-sensitive concerns.

Analysing face in interaction is appropriate because "Face ... is something that resides not within an individual but rather within the flow of events in an encounter" (Holtgraves, 2002). Spencer-Oatey (2009) examined face using data from official meetings in intercultural business contexts. We extended Spencer-Oatey's work (2009) which examined face using data from official business meetings to analyse face in the context of political interviews. Adopting the interactional aspect of her approach, we examined the emergence of face concerning issues sensitive to the interviewee's face taking into consideration the contributions of both interactants.

Spencer-Oatey investigated face issues related to interactional goals. This study looks at those related to self-presentational concerns and identity attributes. The focus is on how the interviewee deals with the face needs of self in individual, relational and collective terms in the context of responding to the interviewer's questioning. Anchimbe (2009) examined political interviews to highlight face-saving strategies used by politicians which address their individual face demands and their 'political face'. Whereas Anchimbe analysed linguistic avoidance as a face-saving strategy, we concentrate on what interactants do to address their face concerns as they emerge in the course of the interaction.

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Face in Political Interviews

Political Interviews. Political interviews are formal and institutionalised, managed through questions and answers (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), and produced for an overhearing audience that do not play an

active role in the interaction. They are “both a consumable news product” for the public and “an emergent process of news production”, a form of interviewer-interviewee interpersonal communication (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), which can develop towards “a higher degree of aggressiveness and argumentativeness” (Hirsch & Blum-Kulka, 2014).

Interviewers are expected to be appropriately adversarial (Bull & Wells, 2012) to hold interviewees accountable before the viewing public (Clayman, 2002) and to prevent them from using interviews as a platform to propagate their agenda (Li, 2008). Interviewees are expected to answer questions which set up restrictions to their responses (Sacks et al., 1974), but they can resort to different ways of disaligning from the agendas or presuppositions embodied in the questions. When responding to questions, politicians must strive to create a favourable impression of themselves on the audience not only as an individual, but as members of a group and representatives of their government and country.

Face. Reported to originate in China (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003), interest in face in Western scholarship can be attributed to the work of Goffman (1959) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), which offers “useful insights, drawing attention to different analytic perspectives” (Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015, p. 51). Goffman (1967) defined face as the positive social value effectively claimed for the self by the line others “assume he has taken during a particular contact”.

According to Goffman (1967, p. 5) “Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes (...), as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing of himself”. This ‘socially attributed aspect of face’, which embodies the individual as a social being managing and negotiating the self in social interaction is fundamental to theorising about face (Watts, 2003). Interlocutors maintain or enhance not just their own face but also the face of the addressee, by behaving in a manner that shows they are worthy of respect (Ruhi, 2007).

Although Brown and Levinson’s notion of face is drawn from Goffman, it differs from Goffman’s original formulation which is realised in interaction (Watts, 2003). Face is viewed from the perspective of an individual, which is the concern with his or her face, the public self-image. It is a personal possession consisting of two sides, negative and positive face. Negative face is defined as a person’s “want to have his freedom of action unhindered” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129), and positive face is concerned with a person’s “desire that he wants ... should be thought of as desirable” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 101). Critiques of the notion of negative face which is more individualistic in nature from researchers in Asian languages (Koutlaki, 2009; Matsumoto, 1988), have stimulated renewed interest in face.

In her analysis of spontaneous conversations among acquaintances, Koutlaki (2010) postulated that Persian

face consisted of “two interrelated aspects”: *šæxsiæt* and *ehteram*, also known as *aberu*. *šæxsiæt* (social standing, personality, character) was “rooted in the individual’s characteristics” and demonstrated through the speaker’s behaviour which reflects his upbringing and education. *Ehteram* (respect, dignity, honour), which is more dynamic, is demonstrated through a show of mutual respect by adhering to the conventions of ritual politeness (*‘tæarof’*) and other norms of behaviour. Both are constituted in interaction between interlocutors and “come into play in Persian communication and behaviour” (Koutlaki, 2010).

According to Izadi (2017; see also Don & Izadi, 2011) *ehteram* which he refers to as *aberu* (literal ‘water of the face’) is “the semantic equivalent of the term face”, which can be gained, maintained or lost. Persian face is associated with the “image of a person, a family, or a group, particularly as viewed by others in the society” (Sharifian, 2007, p. 36). It is somewhat similar to Spencer-Oatey’s (2005) respectability face defined as the ‘good name’ a person holds and claims within a community.

In a collectivist society like Iran, individual face and collective face are equally important. Iranians do not see themselves only as individuals but also as members of social groups including primarily their family, professional networks and Iranian nationality (Koutlaki, 2009). They are expected to show allegiance to the group, uphold the group’s collective face and stake their claim to their face by adhering to the established behavioural

conventions expected of them as members of the group (Koutlaki, 2010). In political interviews designed for public consumption, both *šæxsiæt* and *ehteram* are particularly relevant. The role that Persian culture plays in the performance of face in public space is important and will be brought into the discussion at relevant points in the analysis.

Face and Identity. The critiques led to alternative notions of face, some going back to Goffman’s original concept and others extending it, e.g. reconceptualising face from the perspective of identity (Blitvich, 2013; Hosseini et al., 2018; Spencer-Oatey, 2007, 2009). An issue widely debated in the recent literature is whether face is similar to identity; if so, what the interconnection is (Spencer-Oatey, 2009). This explains the need for empirical studies on the relationship between face and identity in real interaction, which this study attempts to address.

Face and identity are “widely accepted as two separate conceptual entities” (Blitvich, 2013). Arundale (2005, 2010) and others (e.g. Imahori & Cupach, 2005) differentiated the two concepts treating “identity as situated within an individual” and “face as a relational phenomenon” (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

From a social psychological perspective, identity as a relational concept seems to be linked to face which can be negotiated in interaction (Locher & Watts, 2008). In cognitive terms face and identity are closely related; both “relate to the notion of self image” comprising multiple self-aspects or attributes (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

Sifianou's (2011) conceptualisation of face as encompassing "qualities accumulated over time" seems to concur with Spencer-Oatey's notion of face as comprising a range of attributes.

What distinguishes face from identity is that while identity refers to all positive, neutral and negative attributes that are not necessarily sensitive to the interactants,

face is only associated with attributes that are actively sensitive to the claimant. It is associated with positively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge ..., and with negatively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others NOT to ascribe to him/her. (Spencer-Oatey, 2007, p. 644).

Taking an *a priori* approach to face disregards the dynamic aspects of interactants' face sensitivities. Spencer-Oatey (2009, p. 144) proposed an action-oriented identity perspective to the analysis of face which highlights three key issues: "participants' self-presentational concerns, the identity attributes that they became face sensitive to and their interactional goals". The first two are further discussed below.

Self Concept and Face Sensitive Attributes.

The relationship between face and identity examined through self makes it necessary to focus on the face needs of self, which has been neglected due to concern for the face needs of others (Haugh, 2009). Applying Simon's (2004) insights into identity, Spencer-Oatey and Ruhi (2007) argued that

Brown and Levinson's negative and positive face disregarded people's self-concept. According to Spencer-Oatey (2009) self-concept comprises "beliefs about his/her own attributes" distinguished at three levels: "at the individual level, there is the 'personal self'; at the interpersonal level, there is the 'relational self'; and at the group level, there is the 'collective self'" (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

Individual self refers to a unique identification of the personhood that distinguishes the self from all others. Collective self is the social extension of the individual self derived from significant group memberships which relies "on shared symbols and cognitive representations of the group as a unit independent of personal relationships within the group" (Brewer, 2007, p. 3). Both entail claims to different attributes (Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Relational self represents the self-concept derived from connections and role relationships with significant others (Chen et al., 2011), which in the context of interviews involves relationships between interviewer and interviewee. This differentiates it from the collective self which involves a connection with people whose identities may not be known. Spencer-Oatey (2007), thus, argued that Brown and Levinson's model with its focus on individual sensitivities to the exclusion of collective and relational perspectives was 'an incomplete analytic perspective'.

Self Presentation. Drawing on theatrical metaphor, the 'self' is constructed through self-presentation performances during

which impressions are *given* or *given off* (Goffman, 1959). The former refers to those that speakers intended to communicate, and the latter those not intended but nevertheless received by the audience (Goffman, 1959). The self in interaction, continuously projects, maintains and negotiates and produces an impression of self which is amenable and open to acceptance by those one communicates with.

In social settings, interactants constantly engage in self-presentation and impression management, presenting themselves or behaving in a way that will make others have a good impression of them and prevent the embarrassment of themselves or others. They are concerned about the identity attributes they wish to communicate to project a positive public image. This image or face as defined by Goffman (1967) claimed by speakers to be associated with approved social attributes, is bestowed by others "as a result of what the speakers project" (Dippold, 2009).

Analysing how interviewees respond to conflictual questions concerning Iran's nuclear programme in highly evaluative situations like political interviews will demonstrate that self-presentation is an integral part of the management of face. People adhere to certain conventions to convey an impression to others which it is in their interest to convey (Goffman, 1959). Failing to do so will cause the loss of face.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The corpus consisted of nineteen political interviews amounting to ten hours of

talk conducted wholly in English and downloaded from YouTube. These were transcribed orthographically and presented in tabular form during 80 hours of work. The transcribed data were examined in detail to identify those most relevant for the study of face in political interviews from an identity perspective. Four interviews were identified as particularly relevant, and five extracts were selected from these interviews for further analysis. Table 1 presents information about the interviewees and interviewees.

The analysis focused on interviewees' self-presentational concerns and face-sensitive attributes construed in terms of individual, relational or collective face. Concerning self-presentation, we examined how interviewees projected a positive self-image of themselves and avoided negative impressions ascribed by others. Schütz's (1998) taxonomy of self-presentational styles was used where appropriate to describe the interviewee's self-presentation. These included assertive self-presentation which involved strategies to achieve a positive self-image; offensive self-presentation which included aggressive moves that made the self look good by making others look bad; protective self-presentation which involved damage avoidance or opportunities to avoid negative impressions, and defensive self-presentation which included compensatory acts to repair self-images that had been threatened or damaged (Ruhi, 2010).

The face-sensitive attributes examined include positively valued attributes that interviewees wanted others to acknowledge,

Table 1
Interviewers and interviewees

Interviewer	Role/Position	Interviewee	Role/Position	Duration	Date
George Robert Stephanopoulos	an American television journalist and a former U.S. Democratic Party political	Mohammad Javad Zarif	Iranian Foreign Minister since 2013	15 minutes 33 seconds	29 September 2013
Charlie Rose	an American television talk show host and journalist	Mohammad-Javad Larijani	Head of Iranian Human Rights Council of Judiciary and the adviser to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei	53 minutes 59 seconds	18 November 2011
Jon Davies	A journalist with the English service in Euronews	Mohammad Javad Larjani	Same as above	8 minutes	13 March 2012
Charlie Rose	Same as above	Mohammad Khazae	Ambassador of Iran to the United Nations from 25 July 2007 to 25 July 2015	28 minutes 33 seconds	8 January 2014

and negatively valued attributes that interviewees denied and wanted others not to ascribe to them. Context plays a central role in determining how attributes are evaluated, and consequently, the face claims made, and the importance given to them varies across people in different contexts. This suggests that “frameworks that make *a priori* assumptions about face sensitivities will inevitably be inaccurate” (Spencer-Oatey, 2009, p. 142).

RESULTS

Face in Face Threatening Contexts

Extracts 1 to 5 deal with Iran's nuclear programme, which has become a major international issue and a source of concern for the P5+1 group comprising the US, UK,

Russia, China, Germany and France. Iran's nuclear programme is a sensitive issue because of the allegation that it is “a cover for an eventual nuclear programme”, which Iran has denied (Jenkins & Dalton, 2014).

We examine how the contentious issues concerned with Iran's nuclear programme are brought into the interaction through skilled questioning and how they are dealt with accordingly. Government spokesmen are expected to take the opportunity of this public appearance to promote their government's or country's public image, which will influence the way the interviewee seeks to save face in responding to questions that challenge this image (Li, 2008; see Goffman, 1967 on the relationship between face and image).

From its early development in the 1950s until the 1979 Iranian revolution, Iran's nuclear programme was supported by the US. Iran was then the ally of America, under the control of the West-friendly Shah of Iran. After the revolution, Iran became anti-Western, and its nuclear activities were initially stalled but started again in the 1990s with the support of Russia. In 2002, Iran faced international censure concerning its nuclear activities, when the International Atomic Energy Agency (henceforth 'IAEA') discovered that Iran failed to declare its two nuclear sites, a uranium enrichment plant in Natanz and a heavy-water reactor at Arak.

Iran signed an agreement in 2003 to suspend its nuclear enrichment programme. When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office as president in 2005, Iran resumed its nuclear enrichment programme and halted any progress in talks. There was a lot of distrust concerning Iran's nuclear activities, and it was suspected that Iran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons. In June 2013, an interim deal was agreed. Then, the six world powers asked Iran to curb its nuclear programme in return for the lifting of UN sanctions imposed on Iran in 2006. High-level negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme between Iran and the P5+1 which started in February 2014 continued. In April 2014, a framework deal was reached. After lots of negotiations between Iran and P5+1, the nuclear agreement was eventually signed on 14 July 2015. This information provides the context for the analysis and interpretation of our data.

Presentation of Self. Goffman (1959) argued that in any interaction, the individuals employed different presentational acts to project the preferred social image. The texts analysed present a preferred image of the self, and a negative image of the other, which could be done explicitly or by implication. Interaction is dyadic, and interviewers' questions provide the context for the interviewees' responses, which explains why interviewers' contributions are also analysed.

Extract 1 from Zarif (2013), is concerned with the tense relationship between Iran and America concerning Iran's nuclear programme, and whether "there is a fundamental shift in the relationship" (lines 1-3). This relationship is a face-sensitive issue, which worsened when Ahmadinejad became president. The interviewer (IR) began the exchange with a yes/no question which sought confirmation of the change in the relationship between America and Iran, but the interviewee's (IE) response (lines 4-21) went beyond the question and addresses issues not specifically called for:

Extract 1

George Robert Stephanopoulos (IR)
and Mohammad Javad Zarif (IE)
ABC News: This Week: 29 September
2013, 15 minutes and 33 seconds

- 1 IR: "Has there been a fundamental
- 2 shift in the relationship
- 3 between the U. S. and Iran?"
- 4 IE: "Well, I think *we* have taken
- 5 the first step to address an
- 6 important issue both for Iran

7 for the United States and for
 8 the international community,
 9 an issue which *I believe* ...
 10 should not have become an
 11 issue in the first place but it
 12 has unfortunately become
 13 a global problem and now
 14 we need to resolve it and the
 15 resolution of that issue will
 16 be a first step, a necessary
 17 first step towards removing
 18 the tensions, doubts and
 19 misgivings ... that we have
 20 had about each other for the
 21 last thirty years”

IE oriented to his accountability to respond to the agenda in the interviewer's question which was expected of him in his role as interviewee (lines 4-21). He used assertive self-presentation as a strategy to make 'we' the collective self looked good and prevented the loss of 'aberu'. Instead of a simple *yes* or *no*, IE made collective face claims to achieve favourable impressions for Iran at a global level: 'we have taken the first step to address an important issue'. Here, IE wanted 'we' to be perceived as being proactive, as indicated by the phrase "the first step" in "... we have taken **the first step** to address an important issue...". The use of 'we' (line 4) to represent group membership to speak on behalf of the government was appropriate for IE as Iranian foreign minister. There was a shift from 'I' when expressing his opinion as an individual to 'we' when representing Iran as the foreign minister.

The second 'we', which was inclusive, as in "we need to resolve it" (lines 14-21) included "the United States" and "the international community" because Iran nuclear issue had now "become a global problem". This is a strategic assertive move which suggests conformity to what 'we need to do', i.e. to remove 'the tensions, doubts and misgivings' that both Iran and America "have had about each other for the last thirty years". Embodying his 'šæxsiæet' as an Iranian, IE mitigated his views with 'think' and 'believe' to make them more acceptable without at the same time giving them up. This self-presentational behaviour is primarily driven by a desire to avoid social conflict and reduce tension.

Extract 2 from Larijani (2011), is concerned with the suggestion that Iran is involved in the development of nuclear bombs. IR began by steering the talk towards nuclear issues, which were sensitive to IE's collective face as an Iranian. Iran has always asserted that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only, and has denied the allegation that it is seeking to develop the capability to produce nuclear weapons. IR's claimed that IAEA "had credible information ... there is [sic] ongoing activities to develop an explosive device" (lines 1-9) questions Iran's assertion that its nuclear programs are benign, which is face-threatening. Let us examine the extract:

Extract 2

Charlie Rose and Mohammad Javad
 Larijani
 PBS: Charlie Rose, 18 November
 2011, 53 minutes and 59 seconds

1 IR: “Let’s first talk about nuclear
2 issues. IAEA says that it
3 has credible information
4 gathered from Iranian
5 documents and other sources
6 including Russian scientists
7 that suggest there is ongoing
8 activities to develop an
9 explosive device”.

10 IE: “Well as Iran explained
11 before, the evidence that is
12 cited by the Agency is *an old
13 laptop gathering of different
14 pieces which none of them
15 could be considered a
16 document in the professional
17 sense. Four years ago* has
18 been put to Iran by the
19 Agency. *Iran explained in
20 detail and it was considered
21 by the Agency a year
22 acceptable answer* but it is
23 interesting the whole thing
24 again has been revived”.

25 IR: “*There’s a new document and
26 new information here not old
27 information*”.

28 IE: “Well, information and
29 documents they have
30 professional meaning in
31 the Agency’s vocabulary.
32 Anybody could pass any
33 piece of information but
34 the Agency should create
35 documents. Countries can
36 claim a lot of things against
37 each other. *No single*

38 *document in the professional
39 sense indicates that Iran is
40 leading or was attempting
41 to build a bomb. This is
42 absolutely true*”.

43 IR: “*But they read it differently.
44 IAEA reads it differently and
45 they see there is*”.

46 IE: “Well, in fact, the Agency
47 has plenty of difficult time
48 to convince others that this
49 document is relevant”.

Calling attention to the existence of credible information (lines 1-9) concerning Iran’s “ongoing activities to develop an explosive device” threatens IE’s collective face as Iranian and gives negative impressions about Iran as it raises doubts about its real intention in developing its nuclear programme. The interviewee used ‘Iran’ (“**Iran** explained before ...”; “**Iran** explained in detail ...”) to represent his collective self derived from a group membership as Iranian in response to a suggestion that Iran was involved in “ongoing activities” related to the development of “an explosive device”. Using defensive self-presentation, IE criticised the agency’s outdated data gathering method (“an old laptop gathering of different pieces”, line 13) and questions the veracity of the evidence “which none of them could be considered a document” (lines 14-16). This is followed by IE’s assertive self-presentation that “Four years ago” Iran’s detailed explanation “was considered an acceptable answer by IAEA”.

IR denied that the information was old, stating his claim as a fact: "There's new document and new information here not old information" (line 25). The unhedged and unmitigated disclaimer may threaten IE's relational face, and the suggestion that what the interviewee claims about the evidence and the documents is not true may threaten his individual face. To save face, IE used offensive self-presentation which implicitly challenged the reliability and validity of the evidence ("information and documents ... have professional meaning in the Agency's vocabulary. Anybody could pass any piece of information ...") and questions the claim ("Countries can claim a lot of things against each other").

IE ended his turn with the rejection of IR's assertion in the previous turn (line 42), and using the assertive presentational style, stated with conviction that it was "absolutely true" that none of the documents "in the professional sense" "indicates that Iran ... was attempting to build a bomb". This face-challenging encounter shows IE's concern for his identity image when his individual face is threatened by IR's assertion which challenges his explanation.

IR continued to challenge in his next response (line 43), marking it as a disagreement with the word "but". He contested IE's assertion with a third party attributed claim that "IAEA reads it differently and they see there is", posing a threat to IR's individual face. Also, the interviewer's unmitigated disagreement stated as a fact ("But they read it differently. IAEA reads it differently ...") which does

not allow for any dispute may threaten IR's relational face.

IE's subsequent response which adopts an offensive presentational style draws attention to the difficulty faced by IAEA to convince others of the relevance of the document raising doubts about its status (line 46-49). Notice how IE responds to IR's seemingly face-threatening acts. IE produced strategies which challenge IR's assertions, namely that Iran continued to produce "an explosive device", that there was new information supporting that Iran was still doing it and that IAEA thought Iran was still doing it. These strategies satisfy IE's face-oriented end, namely that what he says about Iran not intending to "build a bomb" is true and that there is no contrary evidence.

In Extract 3 from Khazae (2014), IR asked IE for an explanation of how Iran was going to convince others that its uranium enrichment was not for the development of nuclear weapons, but for 'peaceful purposes' (lines 1-6). The question presupposes that others are not convinced, which is a threat to IE's collective face indicated by the use of "we" (underlined in the extract).

Extract 3

Charlie Rose (IR) and Mohammad Khazae (IE)

PBS: Charlie Rose, 8 January 2014, 28 minutes 33 seconds

- 1 IR: "How does Iran convince
- 2 others that it does not want
- 3 enrichment of uranium
- 4 because it wants nuclear

5 programme but it wants to do
6 it for peaceful purposes?”
7 IE: “I think at least the last 30 or
8 35 years of Iranian history as
9 well as the negotiation that
10 we had before and all the
11 reports by the Agency have
12 made it clear for everybody”.
13 IR: “No it hasn’t, with respect, it
14 has done exactly the opposite.
15 It has not convinced people of
16 your real intent because of not
17 fully disclosing because of
18 things would be revealed that
19 the international community
20 did know about”.
21 IE: “... these kinds of allegations
22 or suspicions comes from the
23 countries and a regime in the
24 region that they already have
25 nuclear bombs”

IE’s first response (lines 7-12) was in the form of assertive self-presentation, which claimed that Iran had made clear its intention concerning its nuclear programme through history, its past negotiations and the Agency’s reports. However, IR’s unmitigated refutation (‘No it hasn’t’, line 13), although downtoned with ‘with respect’, was a direct threat to IE’s relational face, and contradicted the interviewee by stating categorically that these had the opposite effect which was a threat to his individual face. IR then asserted that Iran had not convinced the international community that the real intent of its nuclear programme was for peaceful purposes

on account of its failure to make a full disclosure of its activities (lines 13-20). This threatens IE’s collective face. To repair the possible face damage, IE adopted an offensive presentation style labelling the claims as mere allegations, which implied that they were unsupportable, made by ‘the countries and a regime in the region that already have nuclear bombs’, perhaps suggesting that there is a vested interest in stopping Iran from embarking on its nuclear programmes.

Face Sensitive Attributes. We aim to capture the dynamic face sensitivities associated with attributes that emerge in the course of the interaction. Two extracts are examined to illustrate how the interviewees claim positive attributes or contest negative ones, and how they make face claims to different positive attributes which are more important to them in that specific context, and how they are in turn appraised. Face-sensitive attributes that emerge can be collective, individual or relational, depending on the specific interactional context.

In Extracts 4 and 5, the interviewees contested the negative attributes ascribed to them as individuals, and as Iranians and representatives of the Iranian government, and how they, in turn, made face claims to positive attributes. Extract 4 from Larijani (2012), illustrated the threat to IE’s collective face when three negative qualities were by implication ascribed to the Iranian government: ‘lack of transparency’, ‘lack of cooperation’ and ‘untrustworthiness’. IE chose to contest only one, namely the lack

of transparency which was judged as more important in this specific context. The other two were claims made as a consequence of the alleged lack of transparency. Consider Extract 4:

Extract 4

Jon Davies (IR) and Mohammad Javad Larijani (IE)

Euronews: Larijani on Iran's new democracy, 13 March 2012, 8 minutes

1 IR: *"You say the nuclear*
 2 *programme is transparent,*
 3 *but even the Russians have*
 4 *said ... Iran must keep its*
 5 *promise to allow international*
 6 *inspectors' access to the*
 7 *nuclear programme which*
 8 *didn't happen early in*
 9 February when the mission
 10 from IAEA came back
 11 empty-handed having said
 12 that they were being refused
 13 and blocked along the way.
 14 *Where is the transparency?"*
 15 IE: Monitoring is continuous
 16 over there, the cameras are
 17 there. ... obviously, they
 18 should define their mission
 19 beforehand. They cannot
 20 wave their hands I want to
 21 watch to go there and watch
 22 it, but let's go to the idea of
 23 transparency ... Even in a
 24 transparent system it is (.)
 25 it doesn't mean that you
 26 can give a telephone call
 27 I want to go to that place.

28 We agree to transparency
 29 fully-fledged".

IR began by attributing the claim of transparency to IE ('You say'), and ended his turn by challenging the claim 'Where is the transparency?' There is a clear threat to face at individual, collective and relational levels. The turn (lines 1-14) was designed to challenge IE without overtly taking up a position in his own right. The suggestion of a lack of transparency threatens IE's collective face as an Iranian and as a representative of the Iranian government.

At the same time, IE's individual face is also at stake when IR nominates IE as the sayer of the attribute claimed ('You say... but'), then raises doubts about the claim using 'but'. The presupposition is that there is no transparency. The comments from the Russians (1-7) drawn intertextually were presented as evidence that the claim was questionable. This face-sensitivity concerns IE's individual, personal quality. IR's unmitigated and unhedged question 'Where is the transparency?' threatens IE's relational face. It is designed to directly challenge IE's claim that 'the nuclear programme is transparent' and to expose contradictions.

To regain face, IE implicitly contested the suggestion of the lack of transparency. He raised other issues that could have contributed to 'the mission from IAEA' coming back 'empty-handed' including strict security at the nuclear programme sites, the lack of planning, and what transparency means. Implicit is the suggestion that the failure is not due to Iran's lack of

transparency but to the lack of planning on the part of the international inspectors. IE implied that a transparent system did not give the mission *carte blanche*, i.e. the inspectors did not have complete freedom to act as they wished: ‘Even in a transparent system ... it doesn’t mean that you can give a telephone call I want to go to that place’. By making group face claims related to the attribute of transparency (‘We agree to transparency fully pledged’), IE rejects IR’s initial appraisal that it is not. IE claims a collective identity using ‘we’ on behalf of the Iranian government.

Another negative attribute implicitly ascribed to Iran and contested is untrustworthiness, especially its nuclear programme. The issue of ‘distrust’ is a threat to the IE’s collective face. IR begins by orienting to the relational face needs of IE. He shows objectivity and unbiasedness, behaving neutrally and recognising the rights and obligations associated with their relationship as interviewer-interviewee. Consider Extract 5 from Larijani (2012):

Extract 5

Jon Davies (IR) and Mohammad-Javad Larijani (IE)

Euronews: Larijani on Iran’s new democracy: 13 March 2012, 8 minutes

1 IR: “What would you recommend
2 be done to show clearly that
3 there is no programme? Yet
4 you *have the right* and the
5 United States recognises
6 this, to develop uranium
7 for peaceful uses including

8 medical. How do you get past
9 *the distrust* and *the evidence*
10 that the IAEA says there is”

11 IE: “Well, distrust is mutual from
12 both sides at least. I believe
13 sincerely the United States of
14 America definitely knows that
15 we are not after the weapon
16 this is my sincere belief but
17 politically they say something
18 else ...”

The benign question does not express or imply anything critical to threaten IE’s individual or collective face. IR ascribed to Iran a positive attribute that the interviewee wanted to claim, namely that Iran had the right to use uranium for medical purposes (line 8). Following this was a request for the interviewee to present the case for Iran concerning the issue of distrust and the evidence for the existence of the nuclear programme (lines 8-10), which are face-sensitive and face-threatening.

IE oriented to his accountability to respond to the question’s agenda, which implied that there was a strong case against Iran. To pay the appropriate amount of ‘*ehteram*’ to IR and maintained relational face, IE did not respond with an outright denial or contest the attribute assigned, but evaded a direct reply by stating that “distrust is mutual”, i.e. America distrusts Iran, and Iran distrusts America. Through conformity to the behavioural norms in interviewees, IE demonstrated his ‘*šæxsiæet*’. Here he identified the relational element of face, namely the lack of trust between

Iran and America. IE claimed the group attribute of sincerity signalled by 'we', and at the same time ascribed by implication negative attributes to the United States: untrustworthiness and lack of sincerity. He claimed that his belief that "the United States ... knows that *we* are not after the weapon" was sincere. Notice the claim to group membership through 'we'.

DISCUSSION

We examined in detail the way the interviewees deal with face-threatening encounters centred on the Iranian nuclear programme. Findings from the analysis show that they conformed to social norms expected of them as Iranians. Although the main goal of the interviewees was to enhance their face through positive self-presentations, and claims of positive attributes and denials of negative attributes, they avoided socially reprehensible behaviour. By paying the appropriate amount of '*ehteram*' to the interviewers they demonstrated their own '*šæxsiæet*' thus upholding their face as Iranians.

The incorporation of self-presentational concerns into the analysis of face elucidates the way the interviewees deal with threats from the interviewers, who have strong opinions on the controversial issues brought into the interview. Examining face as self-image expressed through self-presentation deepens our understanding of the relationship between face and self in interaction. The interviewers exercised their right to the fullest, threatening the interviewees' face with hard-hitting and non-neutral questions

and assertions. The interviewees responded in a manner expected of them in their roles as interviewees, while at the same time making a conscious effort to protect their self-image against the negative impressions associated with allegations that Iran was seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

The interviewer raised issues that represented the view or opinion of some powerful group, which might offend not only the interviewee's individual face but the face of the whole nation, which are threats to collective face. For Iranians, the loss of face is more serious because it reflects adversely on their family's or group's collective face (Koutlaki, 2010). Here, the interviewees' face claims are associated with attributes potentially sensitive for Iran and Iranian people, which illustrate that the emerging face concerns go beyond the demands of the individual face.

By adopting Spencer-Oatey's analytic frames, we can unpack face concerns from individual, collective and relational perspectives. The interviewee's claims to face in the extracts analysed are usually related to their collective rather than individual attributes. The issues raised are not personal, but of national and international interests. The relational aspects of political interviews are somewhat different from other kinds of social encounter. They involve evaluation and contain questions and assertions which are highly threatening to the interviewees' face. In general, there is a tendency on the part of the interviewer not to mitigate actions which are critical and accusatory, and not to minimise disagreement as would

be expected in other contexts to maintain good communicative relations. However, the face-threatening acts which play a central role are considered normal and appropriate in this specific context. One of the strategies commonly used by the interviewer to justify a face threat and package the questions as neutralistic involves attributing the assertions to a third party.

CONCLUSION

This study takes an identity perspective to the study of face, examining the self-presentational concerns of the interviewee in response to the interviewer's line of questioning, and the sensitive attributes which are ascribed and acknowledged, and claimed and contested or denied. The theoretical approach lends itself to an analytical model that can be successfully applied in the analysis of real interaction. We do not only consider the unique relationship that the interactants jointly construct but the self in interaction, with a focus on self-presentation and attributes. The implication here is that face from this perspective has to be examined as it emerges dynamically in interaction because the claim to face "with regard to individual attributes, relational associations and collective affiliations ... can all vary in an ongoing interaction" (Spencer-Oatey, 2007, p. 647).

Face linked to self-image is not only located in the person as an individual or group but constituted through interaction in the dialogical sphere. Although face has cognitive foundations, it is also interactively achieved in the sense that while a person

may have face claims, face is ultimately ascribed by others. This explains the need for analysing face in real-time verbal exchanges which will help us understand what is going on interactionally with participants interacting and negotiating with one another, and responding to the changing context.

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