

Threat of the Downtrodden The Framing of Arab Refugees on CNN

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After September 11, 2001 Arabs and Muslims became the topic of interest for the global media, drawing attention from news outlets worldwide. Recently, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) along with civil wars in the Arab region have forced hundreds of thousands of Arab citizens, particularly from Syria and Iraq, to flee their homelands. The resulting refugee crisis drew substantial attention and debate. Therefore, studying the framing of Arab refugees and asylum seekers in the global media is of notable significance, especially in connection to ISIS, the war on terrorism, and the upheaval in the Middle East.

This article questions how Arab refugees and asylum seekers were framed in global news, represented by the online international edition of one leading news network, namely CNN. Based on framing theory, this article presents the results of a quantitative content analysis that assessed which news frames were existent in the news coverage of the Arab refugee crisis. The sample of this study consisted of the news articles published by CNN online during January 2016. This month was chosen because it witnessed a series of negative events involving Arab refugees and asylum seekers in their countries of resettlement, such as the Cologne sex attacks and Istanbul suicide bombing.

Reviewing the literature of scholarly articles relevant to the framing of refugees and asylum seekers and the stereotypical representation of Arabs in the media sheds light on the impact of news frames addressing particular groups. This is in accordance with what van Dijk (1995, 19–20) wrote two decades ago about the effect of power on news coverage; blaming news structures for framing refugees as threats and problems by calling them economic migrants, and using the cultural differences of language and religion to explain the failed integration of Muslim and Arab immigrants.

Framing of Arabs in Western Media

The research scope that focuses on the framing of Arabs in global media has its roots in literature long time before the emergence of ISIS or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Western misrepresentation of Arabs was discussed by Ridouani (2011, 1), who contended that stereotyping Arabs is not a recent trend, but rather an old tradition that could be traced back to the earliest interactions between Arabs and Westerners; when Arabs entered Europe, or since the Crusades. The distorted image of Arabs in the West could be traced back to the medieval ages, as pinpointed by Al-Olaqi (2012), who studied the English medieval literary portrayals of Arabs. That is, Arabs were portrayed as lustful, filthy, weak, or tyrannical, whereas Arab women were

depicted as immoral. In modern English literature, Arabs and Islam were mostly depicted as a threat to the West.

In the field of media, and according to Hamada (2001, 32), Western journalists were found to have negative stereotypes, which helped the formation of false, biased, and distorted images of Arabs and Muslims (32). Consequently, the negative frames of Arabs and Muslims disseminated by the media help sustain a set of negative perceptions and aggressive attitudes toward these groups in the West. It is no surprise that media stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims were the subject of a considerable number of media studies.

According to Shaheen (2003), since 1896 filmmakers were depicting Arabs negatively, especially in American movies. Arabs in Hollywood were depicted either as other or as a threat, portrayed in the characters of religious fanatics, heartless murderers, brutal rapists, and abusers of women (172), whereas Arab women were showed as humiliated slaves, demonized maidens, and erotic belly dancers in endless Arabian nights (183).

The stereotypical representation of Arabs and Arab Americans in Hollywood films between 1994 and 2000 was the topic of a qualitative study conducted by Elayan (2005). The results found that Arabs and Arab Americans were portrayed negatively in popular movies. The personal traits most depicted in the Arab and Arab American movie characters were negative too, that is, they were either portrayed as hostile, aggressive, or associated with terrorism. They were depicted as acting “natively” and speaking with an accent (2), indicating they had not assimilated into Western society.

After September 11, the association between Arabs and terrorism became persistent. Dana (2009) questioned if Hollywood films portrayed characters from Middle East after September 11 differently than before (6), and the study found they were portrayed as less intelligent and more likely to commit terrorist attacks than before September 11 (21).

The image of Arab Americans in newspapers in the United States, five years before and five years after September 11, was examined by Parker (2008) who analyzed pertinent articles in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. Between 1996 and 2006, Arab Americans were most commonly portrayed as out-group members, rather than as in-group members or victims. Surprisingly, in the year following September 11, journalists were cautious in portraying Arab Americans as out-group members, and there was a vast increase in the amount of articles depicting them as victims. However, this phenomenon could only be related to the increase of violent crimes against people of Arab origins after the terror attacks (67–68).

Frames used in American news coverage of September 11 were analyzed by Ibrahim (2003, 200–201), who found two types of frames. The first portrayed Muslims outside the United States as a threat to the country, for being angry, irrational, and violent. By contrast, the second frame portrayed Muslims inside the United States as an integral part of the country, following a peaceful mainstream version of the religion of Islam.

The depiction of Arabs and Muslims as a possible threat did not result from media portrayals alone, but was thought to be influenced by the political leadership of the United States and its war on terrorism. Merskin (2004) conducted a textual analysis of the public statements and speeches made by the President George W. Bush to the nation following September 11, to spot the dependency on preexisting stereotypes portraying Arabs as terrorists, helping construct an image of an enemy that violates the human rights of Arabs and American citizens (157). It is in that sense that the political speeches affect and get affected by stereotypes of Arabs in the American media.

In an extended study conducted by a group of researchers, a total of 19 newspapers from different cities inside the United States were scrutinized, in order to determine their coverage of Islam in the year following September 11 and highlight the links between news frames and the characteristics of each city. This community structure research approach found that different city characteristics could have a negative impact on the coverage of Islam, such as the percentage of Arabic-speaking people, or the percentage of citizens who were born outside the United States. Nevertheless, most of the cities presented neutral to positive coverage of Islam (Pollock, Piccillo, Leopardi, Gratale, and Cabot 2005, 15).

On the topic of the media in and after September 11, Kellner (2007, 142) wrote a review essay of eight books. It emphasized how necessary it was for Western media to abolish the stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in its production, in addition to giving more time and space for Arab and Muslim voices to allow for informed dialogue. These concluding remarks take into consideration the dominance of Western media on the global field of media, a dominance that was recently threatened by the emergence of modern Arab media that could play a role in a better understanding of Arabs and Muslims.

Framing of Muslims in the West, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, was discussed by Morey and Yaqin (2011) in terms of contemporary stereotyping and cultural representations after September 11. Following the attacks, variable media responses have been influenced by government sentiments, cues, and themes of the war on terror. Television programs in the United States that used to have one domestic and localized media agenda for ages were forced to exert genuine efforts in order to explore the Muslim world; however, this naïve exploration covered Islam in security terms, as a threat to the strategic interests of the United States (p. 214). Similarly, the media agenda in the United Kingdom is influenced by national security agendas, opening the door to more alienation and injustice. Hence, the only way for Muslims to escape this frame is through representation by politicians, only if they believe in the importance of addressing all social, economic, and political factors that have created the frame (215).

Two American newspapers, namely, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Times*, were examined by Schönemann (2013), who analyzed their coverage of two topics—the veiling of Muslim women, and the cartoon controversy of the Prophet Muhammad, in order to determine the stereotypes in American media. The results of the analysis showed that most of the news stories were negative. In addition, there was a pattern of generalization in the coverage of Islam and Muslims that prevailed over individual frames, allowing for the labeling of all Muslims as a unified community

with similar ideologies and characteristics (93). The study could not conclude that all media portrayals of Muslims are stereotypical or negative; however, a tendency toward stereotyping was found and is believed to be affected by different events and factors (91). The certain stereotypes that were found in the coverage show that the prejudice against Muslims is existent, and the American media construct Arabs and Muslims either as enemies, or as alien strangers (94).

In a similar manner, two international news magazines, namely, *TIME* from the United States, and *The Economist* from the United Kingdom, were examined after the death of Osama bin Laden, by Yusof, Hassan, Hassan, and Osman (2013). They conducted a content analysis of the news articles published about Islam, along with a discourse analysis that extracted the dominant themes in the articles (104). The study concluded that the international media is not yet neutral toward Islam, putting forth for a negative perception of Islam, even after the death of bin Laden (119).

Conversely, Alsultany (2013, 161) highlighted some positive representations of Arabs and Muslims after September 11 in the American media, including Hollywood films, television dramas, and news reports between 2001 and 2009. Nonetheless, these sympathetic depictions were not in accordance with the attitudes of Americans toward Arabs on the ground, as Arabs faced discrimination at work, for example.

An explanation of the sympathetic portrayals of Muslims after September 11 could be extracted from a study by Smith (2013), who analyzed the anti-Islamic sentiment of the media in the United States after September 11 and its effects on the public opinion of Americans during a whole decade. The study pinpointed an interesting inverse correlation, by which Americans were at their most favorable attitude toward Islam directly in the wake of the attacks, an attitude that later tended to become negative, despite the reduced threat (1). This interesting finding was attributed to the role of media framing, particularly to the immediate political and media efforts exerted to frame Islam positively in order to face possible discrimination. Later, the framing of Muslims in media focused on negative depictions of terrorists responsible for the attacks; helping to facilitate a negative shift in public opinion about Islam in the United States (7).

Representations of migrants and minorities in media were discussed by Bleich, Bloemraad, and de Graauw (2015), who highlighted the national disparities and differences in the coverage of migrants and their issues, calling for further explanations of this phenomenon. However, they contended that the empirical effect of securitizing immigration and portraying Muslims negatively does not exceed the spread of fear (868).

The extent to which stereotypes could affect the perceptions and attitudes of people toward Arabs was studied by Saleem and Anderson (2013, 84), who conducted an experiment to measure the impacts of a video game on college students in the United States. Interestingly, the study reflected the presence of an association between Arabs and terrorism in the perception of the participants, as terrorism videogames could increase negative attitudes toward Arabs, even if no Arab characters appear in the videogame. In general, the videogames could prime aggressive perceptions of the stereotyped group, especially in videogames that are based on violent contexts and terrorism themes, rather than non-violent contexts.

The psychological effects of biased representations and discriminatory portrayals of the Arab-Muslim community were examined by Hamza, Yaseen, El-Houbi, Duncan, and Diaz (2009) who conducted a survey on Americans in order to measure attitudes toward Muslim and Arab Americans, and the effects of these representations on their psyche (p. 18). The findings showed the presence of biased attitudes and behaviors against Arab and Muslim Americans. The awareness of existent bias was not found to be associated with any behavior that could mitigate bias effects. Despite the fact that more than half of the respondents were aware of the media bias against Arabs and Muslims, more than 75% showed no intent to change the station. The study contended the importance of education and knowledge in mitigating the media effects of bias toward Arab and Muslim Americans (29).

The educational implications of the negative images of Islam in the United States were studied by Jackson (2010, 21–22), who contended that the students in the United States will eventually learn to label Muslims as terrorists, even if the media do not teach them to do so. This contention is based on the argument that the negative stereotypes of Muslims appear to be accepted in the media. The media in the United States, which seemed to lack the ability of expressing the diversity of the community worldwide, accept the negative narratives of Muslims as violent, irrational, and a part of a conflict.

The research concerning the framing of Arabs and Muslims after September 11 was not exclusive to the United States but extended to other countries. Canadian mainstream media after the attacks was examined by Ismael and Measor (2003, 101–102), in order to pinpoint the major themes in the news coverage of the Middle East. Canadian news reports on the Middle East were found to be inspired by cultural values, personal beliefs, institutional interests; rather than being based on neutral accounts of realities and facts.

Canadian print news coverage of the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly headlines, were analyzed by Steuter and Wills (2009), who found a trend of dehumanization, apparent in using animal metaphors to frame Arabs and Muslims, whether enemy leaders or citizens. In so doing, Canadian media frames could justify abuse of prisoners, racism, and genocide (7). Examples of these metaphors include using references to hunting prey to refer to captured enemies, and caging to refer to their imprisonment (9).

The representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western media was questioned by Ridouani (2011), who argued that the American view of Muslims as a threat accords to that of Europeans, where the West is considered as having the authentic right to defend itself by all economic, military, and cultural means (2). One cultural defense is stereotyping Arabs, by distorting Islamic terminologies and Arab costumes, in addition to portraying Arab men as uncivilized and Arab women as harem maidens and belly dancers (p. 4). In addition, distorted facts of the Arab–Israeli conflict and associating Arabs with terrorism, all turn Arabs into what Ridouani identifies as social scapegoats of the West (10–11).

Some views may contend that the negative nature of events relating to Arabs and Muslims and their association with terrorism is the factor responsible for their

negative portrayals in media. However, this contention was found unsupported when Powell (2011) examined the news coverage of a series of terror events that the United States witnessed after September 11 and were not completed, to determine the salience of a thematic frame by which the triangle of Muslims, Arabs, and Islam was constructed as a threat to the United States. That is, there was a dominant fear of international terrorism as a part of an organized war of Islam on the United States. In contrast, domestic terrorism was framed episodically as a milder form of threat, taking place in individual occasions (90). Powell developed a model of terrorism, reflecting how this news coverage enhanced Islamophobia among American citizens (106).

Other views may contend that the news coverage in the West may not be neutral toward religion in general. These views were not found unsupported when Dahinden, Koch, Wyss, and Keel (2011) investigated the Swiss media, not only with the aim to determine how Islam was represented, but to examine the representations of Christianity and other religions as well. This aim was achieved through analyzing different news formats in print, radio, and broadcast media, in addition to conducting interviews with journalists and religious figures (197–98). The analysis of the stereotypes associated with various religions reflected the negative portrayal of Islam and its followers; in contrast to the positive archetypes of Christianity and Buddhism, or the victim depiction of Judaism. Regarding the frames, Islam was rarely portrayed as a religion through focusing on its rituals and beliefs, but was depicted mostly as a political group (203).

Framing of Arab Refugees

The media representation of Syrian refugees in the United Kingdom was discussed by Venir (2016, 1), who conducted a quantitative analysis to four prominent English newspapers, namely the *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Mirror*, and *Sun*, to find a positive representation of Syrian refugees. The frames of this positive representation emphasized the moral responsibility of the United Kingdom in offering a helping hand to the Syrian refugees, who were portrayed as being genuine refugees in contrast to economic migrants who exploit refugee rights, as well as being vulnerable and innocent, through an individualized coverage of personal stories and human tragedies.

Inspired by the haunting image of the drowned child Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee escaping the civil war, visual representations of Syrian refugees in European newspapers were analyzed by van Schaik (2015). The analysis found an over-representation of children, and their photos were mostly used to attract attention to particular issues. Syrian refugees were often depicted in a large group, except if they were children, while their photos holding modern mobile phones seemed to imply that they are not in need of urgent help (57–58).

The official discourse related to Syrian refugees in Lebanon during a four-year period between 2011 and 2015 was the topic of a study conducted by Turbay (2015). Based on the concept of politics of representation alongside framing theory (7), the study analyzed the existent frames in the official discourse about Syrian refugees. Some of this official discourse was available through English-speaking Lebanese media, whereas the rest was extracted from official governmental websites, in addition to the speeches given by Lebanese political leaders (6). The findings of the study pinpointed a humanitarian trend in the coverage of Syrian refugees especially during 2011 and 2013, although terms relating to security were present as well. Moreover, content

addressing Syrian nationals seeking refuge in Lebanon referred to them as a quantitative mass or numbers reflecting the impact they may have on the Lebanese state, but did not address their problems as individuals (25).

Syrian refugees in Turkey as represented on social media users were the topic of a study conducted by Yıldırım and Yurtdaş (2016, 103), in a critical discursive psychological approach. The findings pinpointed seven repertoires, by which Syrian refugees and asylum seekers were either portrayed as threats, or marginalized as others, or depicted as Muslims who share the same identity as Turkish citizens, or framed as humans who deserve empathy. The other three repertoires asked whether Syrians fit in as normal refugees and tackled the administrative problems and economic burdens of allowing them into Turkey.

The current refugee crisis was examined by Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore (2015), as covered by the press of five European countries, namely, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden, in 2014 and 2015. The content analysis reflected the cross-national disparities between the five countries in reporting about the issue, where the most positive portrayals of refugees and migrants were found in Sweden. While Sweden, Spain, and Italy showed homogenous coverage of the issue, internal variations in reporting within the national press systems were found in Germany and the United Kingdom that reflected a trend of polarization (10). Few news reports tackled the positive impacts that asylum seekers may have on the countries of resettlement, or addressed the resolution of issues that drive the influx of refugees out of their home countries (12).

In Spain, the five most read daily newspapers were analyzed by Durán (2013), with reference to their discourse regarding Lampedusa crisis, or the incoming flow of people from North Africa following the Arab Spring in 2011. The comparative analysis showed that displaced incomers to Europe during Lampedusa crisis were framed as intruder immigrants, rather than being framed as asylum-seekers or refugees. This frame was dominant in the analysis regardless of the newspaper and the time period.

Negative portrayals of Syrian refugees on social media were summarized by Rettberg and Gajjala (2016) in a short essay about the stereotypical dangerous image of men from the Middle East. The portrayals of social media that emphasized danger depicted Middle Eastern male refugees as potential rapists, terrorists, cowards, or even as non-masculine (179–80).

In contrast to these negative and misrepresentative portrayals of Syrian refugees on social media, Salhab (2015, 1–2) compared some excerpts from both mainstream and social media coverage of the same issues in the refugee crisis, concluding that social media is more capable of presenting a truthful image of the crisis. This is due to a set of advantages of social media, such as being independent and able to work for public interest, rather than being profit-oriented or owned by media tycoons.

The online portrayal of Syrian refugee women in global and mainstream media was studied by Alhayek (2014), who examined a case study of social media, in application to one feminist campaign on Facebook called “Refugees Not Captives”. The study discussed how the discourses of the online campaign promoted orientalist depictions

of Syrian women, and overlooked the voices of women refugees in an act of double marginalization (696). This marginalizing discourse came in accordance with the Western media and its dominant representations of women in Arab culture (700).

The Palestinian refugee issue was investigated by Khatib (2009), who focused on the editorials and reports published in the *Guardian* and *The Times*, regarding the Arab–Israeli conflict of 1948 (4). The study found a little coverage of the refugee issue as it underwent various shifts and increased over time. This coverage suggested resolutions for Palestinian refugees outside Israel, such as resettlement in other Arab countries, framing internal solutions as infeasible. It took the *Guardian* sixteen years to demand the right of return (29).

It is worth noting that the first section of the literature review highlighted how Arabs were framed negatively in Western media, with particular focus on the United States, as the study investigates the framing of Arab refugees in one American news network. The review of around 24 studies reflected a tendency toward negative framing of Arabs in the Western media, which posits a question on how Arab refugees would be framed in CNN.

The second section of the literature review was concerned about the portrayals of Arab refugees in the media, and helped the researcher to decide the categories of content analysis that would be under investigation in the study pinpointed. For example, analyzing the images of Arab refugees and asylum seekers was influenced by the study of van Schaik (2015), while adding up the dichotomy of humanitarian and security frames in the design of the coding sheet was a result of reviewing earlier studies, such as Turbay (2015) and Durán (2013), that ask whether Arab refugees were framed as victims or as threats.

Similar to the methodology of a study of d’Haenens and de Lange (2001) on asylum seekers in Dutch media, the study pinpointed measured the existence of the five news frames as inducted by the well-known study of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), but in application to the coverage of Arab refugees and asylum seekers in the media. The study measured the proportion of thematic frames and episodic frames in the coverage of Arab refugees, as clarified by Iyengar (1990) in his application to American television news broadcasts and the issue of poverty in the United States. Although these studies were not addressed in the literature sections, they helped this study to design one synthesized application of framing research to the topic of Arab refugees in the media.

Method

This article presents the results of a quantitative content analysis, by which a sample of news stories was collected and analyzed with the aim to determine how a major news outlet frames Arab refugees and asylum seekers in their coverage. To represent global news, one leading international news network, CNN, was chosen based on its prominent popularity worldwide as a leading English-language outlet.

The unit of analysis was news stories published in CNN’s online website, and the coding categories covered textual and imagery items in each article. The international edition of CNN on its official website (www.cnn.com) was searched for news stories relevant to Arab refugees and asylum seekers by typing ‘refugee’ in the embedded

search engine. News stories were considered in the sample only if they regarded Arab citizens who seek refuge or asylum, which excludes news stories about any refugees from any other nationalities. For the purpose of this study, refugees who possess any Arab nationality were considered Arabs, regardless of their ethnicity or native language.

The selection of articles was set to be limited to news stories published between January 1–31, 2016. This time frame was deliberately chosen because it witnessed a series of events that involved Arab refugees and asylum seekers. One of these events happened in Germany, when Arab asylum seekers were charged in mob sex assaults that took place in the city of Cologne on the New Year's Eve. Another event took place in Turkey, when a Syrian suicide bomber who was registered as a refugee, killed ten Germans in Istanbul. In the United States, January witnessed a vote on a bill that was presented to the Senate and caused debate between Democrats and Republicans. This bill, blocked by the votes of Democrats, was trying to ban the entry of refugees from Syria and Iraq into the United States, unless they have been granted a security certificate. These events, to name a few, gave January its significance as a suitable time period for the study.

This study adopted the deductive approach, by investigating the literature, in order to predefine an appropriate set of news frames, such as thematic and episodic frames, before measuring the frequency by which each frame is present in different articles that cover the issue of Arab refugees and asylum seekers. In addition to determining the salient news frames in the coverage, the study investigated the quotes and photos that involved Arab refugees or asylum seekers in the news stories of CNN, in order to determine its amount of existence and to assess its neutrality. Furthermore, the study evaluated each article in order to decide whether the news stories framed Arab refugees and asylum seekers in security or humanitarian terms, as well as to decide the overall portrayal of Arab refugees.

Results and Discussion

The attribution of responsibility frame, which was found to be the most salient frame ($M=0.39$, 65%), included five aspects that were existent in the coverage of Arab refugees and asylum seekers, of which the most common aspect was the contention that within Western nations, different levels of government could put an end to the crisis of Arab refugees.

The reference to various governmental levels pinpointed European governments, not in terms of their ability to alleviate the whole refugee crisis, but of imposing certain measures to reduce the influx of refugees into their countries. For example, a report focused on the call by German President Joachim Gauck to the European governments to take in their share of refugees (Kottasova 2016), where another report tackled the stronger border controls introduced by Sweden in response to the large number of arrivals (Shubert 2016).

The governments of the countries of origin being responsible for the Arab refugee crisis was another aspect that commonly appeared in the coverage. One reason for this attribution of responsibility was that these governments posed a threat to their citizens so they were obliged to flee. Case in point, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was held responsible for “torturing and gassing his own people” (Melvin 2016).

Another reason for ascribing the responsibility of the crisis to certain governments was the open policy toward refugees that allowed outlaws to enter their countries. Examples include Turkish President Erdogan, who was blamed for hospitality to Syrian refugees that caused domestic instability (Watson 2016), and German Chancellor Angela Merkel who took the blame of welcoming thousands of refugees from the Middle East, among them those accused of Cologne attacks (Melvin and Botelho 2016).

The third aspect of the attribution of responsibility frame, by which some groups are framed as the reason for the Arab refugee problem, became very common due to the amount of news stories that framed ISIS as the reason behind the large influx of refugees. For instance, the mass killings of Iraqi civilians by ISIS were framed as the horror that pushes Iraqi refugees out of their homelands to Europe (Shah and Hume 2016). The necessity of taking an urgent course of action regarding those who flee terror was an example of the fourth aspect of responsibility frame, such as the urgency of immediate psychological assistance to Iraqi children who escaped from ISIS (Elbagir and Wilkinson 2016).

The fifth aspect concerning resolutions of the Arab refugee crisis included different political, economic, and social initiatives. An end to the Syrian civil war through political transition was framed as a prerequisite for combating ISIS, where the extremism of the latter was said to be fueled by governmental corruption (Labott 2016). Initiatives include the designation of a special fund for refugees from Iraq and Syria coming to the United States (Johns 2016), the call for big companies to solve the humanitarian crisis (Ulukaya 2016), and the medical assistance to keep a million refugees healthy (Senthilingam 2016).

The human interest frame was not only employed to influence only positive feelings toward refugees, but also utilized to stir anger and outrage, depending on the news story context. Having said this, the commonality of human interest frame ($M=0.34$, 62%) among the stories about Arab refugees and asylum seekers should not itself be considered as an advantage for a more humanitarian coverage. This is because human interest frame could be used to frame Arab refugees in security terms, as dangerous or as potential threats, stirring outrage and anger against them. In this case, human interest frame is said to be existent, but Arab refugees are still framed in security terms, rather than humanitarian frames.

On one hand, positive emotions toward Arab refugees, such as sympathy and compassion, could be drawn from news stories that employ the five aspects of human interest frames, by showing how people are affected by the crisis, using personal adjectives, providing human examples, featuring visual representations, and presenting personal experiences.

Examples of positive frames include a story on the Yazidi children who escaped from ISIS after suffering from loss and torture, “like coming back to life” (Elbagir and Wilkinson 2016). Another story interviewed the children who seek refuge in northern Iraq after mass graves were found in Sinjar (Elbagir 2016). Syrian war refugee girls were the theme of another story, in particular those who have been married off at a very young age with the hope of protecting themselves from the civil war, being described as a “lost generation” (Patterson 2016). A fourth story featured

the “heartbroken” Syrian pen-seller whose image with his daughter in Beirut was spread online stirring compassion (Abdelaziz 2016).

On the other hand, negative emotional feelings, such as anger and disgust, were stirred particularly by the coverage of the aftermath of Cologne sex attacks which involved Middle Eastern asylum seekers on the New Year’s Eve (Melvin and Botelho 2016) and the Istanbul suicide bombing by a registered Syrian refugee (Shubert and Melvin 2016).

The conflict frame featured four different aspects, the most common of which was the disagreement between different entities or parties, followed by the aspect when one party reproached another, then featuring two or more sides of the issue, and making reference to winners and losers. This frame was very frequent ($M=0.34$, 65%) due to the fact that January witnessed a debate between Democrats and Republicans in the United States that dealt with allowing refugees from Syria and Iraq into the country. The Senate was considering a bill that could ban any refugee from these two Arab countries unless he is granted a certificate that he does not pose a threat to the United States, by security institutions such as the FBI.

News stories featured the debate on the bill between Democrats, backed up by the White House and President Obama, who was planning to veto the bill, and Republican lawmakers and Senate members (Barrett 2016a), until the bill was blocked by the Senate (Barrett 2016b). Similar debates about allowing refugees into Germany took place after the Cologne sex attacks and a series of robberies (Kottasova 2016), and after the Istanbul suicide bombing (Shubert and Melvin 2016).

Although the morality frame was found unsupported by the sample in an earlier study by d’Haenens and de Lange (2001) regarding the framing of asylum seekers in Dutch newspapers, the morality frame was found supported in this study ($M=0.12$, 23%), in application to the coverage of Arab refugees and asylum seekers in global news.

An example on the moral messages regarding the issue of Arab refugees and asylum seekers is when the German president emphasized the moral necessity of setting limits to the refugee influx in order to sustain the state existence (Kottasova 2016). Religious principles were existent in the coverage of Yazidi refugees and their beliefs (Elbagir 2016). Social prescriptions include a call by German Chancellor Angela Merkel for Arab refugees to integrate into the community (Melvin and Botelho 2016).

The economic frame was existent ($M=0.17$, 23%) in the coverage of Arab refugees and asylum seekers in relation to the consequences, losses and gains, and expenses and costs. This came as no surprise as January witnessed the World Economic Forum in Davos, where the debate about refugee crisis and the affordability of Europe took place (Thompson 2016).

Arab refugees and asylum seekers were not solely framed as an economic burden on the countries they enter. One report adopted another perspective, addressing the potential economic gains of having refugees who may have skills unavailable in the labor market and are more willing to do jobs that others may refuse (Ulukaya 2016).

In regard to thematic/episodic frames, this study found that one third of the news articles employed episodic frames in coverage of Arab refugees and asylum seekers. Episodic frames in this sense tackle the issue by representing individual incidents, which may include human faces and tragedies, rather than thematic patterns concerned about broader issues, which may report on refugees as numbers and emphasize the impact of the crisis on economy.

Examples on existent episodic frames include Nadia, the refugee teenager who escaped from ISIS to Germany (Ulukaya 2016), Abdul Halim, the Syrian refugee who works as a pen-seller in Beirut (Abdelaziz 2016), Abdulkarim, who escaped the Syrian war to Jordan (Senthilingam 2016), and Nouri, the 11-year-old Iraqi refugee who was abducted by ISIS and whose leg was broken when he refused to join their military trainings (Elbagir and Wilkinson 2016).

Although this study is not concerned with framing effects, it is worth noting that thematic frames could stir less sympathy with victims than episodic frames, as argued by Houston, Chao, and Ragan (2008, 217). Another concern with the thematic frames used for Arab refugees is that it could allow for negative generalizations, by linking the Arab refugee crisis to other larger issues such as terrorism and illegal activity.

For instance, when two Palestinian refugees were arrested in terror-related crimes in the United States (Shoichet and Berlinger 2016), the reporters employed a thematic frame, rather than an episodic frame that would tackle the case as individual episode that must not be generalized on all of Arab refugees. The employed thematic frame posited the question of whether the United States should keep accepting refugees with Syrian ties.

On the contrary, episodic frames were used in the news reports to frame peaceful Arab refugees who fled the war. For example, when one of the guests of the State of the Union seated with Michelle Obama was a Syrian refugee named Refaai Hamo, the frame used was an episodic frame (Malloy and Acosta 2016).

Regarding the humanity/security frames used for reporting on Arab refugees and asylum seekers, the majority of the articles were found to frame them in security terms, rather than in humanitarian terms. Half of the articles framed Arab refugees and asylum seekers in security frames solely (e.g., as dangerous or potential threats), while 17% of the articles used humanitarian frames (e.g., as victims), whereas one-third of the articles could be described as neutral as they employed both security and humanity frames.

Whether the news story was about the security measures taken in order to deal with the huge numbers of arrivals (Shubert 2016), or a suggested bill that made its way to the Senate in order to limit the entry of Iraqi and Syrian refugees (Barrett 2016a), the frames were mostly discussing the refugee crisis in security terms. Furthermore, the countries that welcomed Arab refugees, such as Turkey, were blamed for causing domestic instability that could extend to the rest of Europe (Watson 2016).

Rather than using security terms, some news articles framed the refugee crisis in humanitarian terms, as a cause that needs the cooperation of the whole world. This

was done either by presenting humanitarian stories of refugees in an episodic frame as they flee war and mass killings, or by praising countries that have presented substantial assistance to refugees. This was the topic of one news story that featured an online petition nominating Greece for the Nobel Peace Prize for its role in welcoming people fleeing conflict in the Middle East and Africa (Hume 2016b).

Although around three-quarters of the articles pertinent to Arab refugees and asylum seekers included quotes about Arab refugees and asylum seekers, only 10% of these articles included quotes said by them. This percentage is lesser than expected, and was mainly existent in episodic frames, rather than thematic framing.

The quotes about Arab refugees and asylum seekers in the pertinent news articles were found as tending to contain negative portrayals. Examples of these negative frames include quoting one banner held by German protests after the Cologne sex attacks that read “*Raperefugees not welcome.*” (Hume 2016a), and the announcement made by German Chancellor Angela Merkel afterwards “*I don't think these are single cases*” (Pearson, Botelho, and Schmid 2016).

Although being absent in around two-thirds of the articles, the photos of Arab refugees tended to be positive. Examples of positive photos included a well-dressed Syrian asylum seeker in Denmark who carried his daughter on his shoulder, then another photo of her sleeping besides him inside a German train station near the Danish borders (Krever 2016).

Overall, the general portrayal of Arab refugees and asylum seekers in the news articles tends to be neutral, which is an important finding of this study, taking into consideration the series of negative events that involved Arab refugees or asylum seekers and took place in the time period of the study.

Finally, it is worth noting that the tendency toward the neutral coverage cannot be interpreted as the result of a high percentage of news articles being balanced. Instead, this represents the aggregate result of a series of articles that frame Arab refugees and asylum seekers positively, in response to another set of news stories that frame them negatively. That is, the balanced coverage is the pattern of the full sample of news stories as a whole, but neutrality cannot be spotted separately in most units.

Conclusion

The framing of Arab refugees and asylum seekers in news stories published on CNN were mostly achieved through employing the frame of the attribution of responsibility. This frame, which was found to be the most salient and frequent among the five types of news frames, was directly followed by the conflict and human interest frame, where the morality and the economic frames were less frequent, although existent too. The most salient aspect within the five frames was a particular aspect under the conflict frame, by which a disagreement between two different parties or individuals was featured. The second most salient aspect was within the attribution of responsibility frame, by which some levels of government were framed as able to resolve the problem of the Arab refugees.

The content analysis of news articles concluded that Arab refugees and asylum seekers were framed in thematic frames more than episodic ones, implying that the issue of

Arab refugees and asylum seekers was most frequently framed in relation to broader issues, rather than focusing on individual accounts and personal experiences. Similarly, framing Arab refugees in security terms was more common than humanitarian frames. That is, Arab refugees were most commonly portrayed as potential threats, rather than victims.

There was a lack of voices and photos of the Arab refugees and asylum seekers in the coverage. The quotes by Arab refugees were much less frequent if compared to the total quantity of featured quotes about their issue. Accordingly, the portrayals of Arab refugees in the quotes tend to be negative. However, the featured photos of Arab refugees and asylum seekers presented more positive frames of them, despite its absence in around two-thirds of the articles.

Although the overall portrayal of Arab refugees and asylum seekers tended to be balanced, this finding should be taken with a grain of salt. This result could only underpin the variety of positive and negative news frames employed to frame Arab refugees in CNN, however, the neutral frame itself was absent in the majority of articles.

Having said this, it is time to call for a preferable neutral coverage of the issues of refugees that overlooks the stereotypes surrounding their races, ethnicities, or religions, and treats them more as humans. In this regard, I would like to quote Pope Francis who tweeted on April 15, 2016: “Refugees are not numbers, they are people who have faces, names, stories, and need to be treated as such.”

Hopefully, it is not too late for global media to balance its framing of Arab refugees. A major component of this would be increased exposure, particularly of their own voices and experiences. If American and European journalists are “once bitten, twice shy” as they frame Arabs, they should consider that Arab refugees are “twice bitten” by terrorism, as many have fled the very threat they are accused of perpetrating in their countries of resettlement.

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