

## 9/11, Language, Islam, and the Arrogance of Ignorance

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### **Abstract**

*The US media has played an increasingly important role in shaping the Muslim identity. An Anti - Muslim rhetoric led by news channels only promoted fear and anxiety among Americans towards the Muslim world post 9/11. This paper tends to explore one such news channel - CNN and its contribution towards demonizing, vilifying, and racializing the Muslim world hence, reducing it to one region and language. In doing so, the researcher contends the existence of a systemic web which operates in conjunction to maintain the dominant ideology about Muslims. By means of critical discourse analysis it is argued that CNN under the pretense of its liberal stance has managed to reproduce the same rhetoric which reinstates the many stereotypes existing with regard to Muslims. However, this research also examines the representation of Arabic language and the subtle ways in which fear and negative connotations around Arabic has been induced among the audience.*

**Keywords:** *Representation, Arabic, Muslims, Arabs, CNN, Linguicism, Linguistic Ideologies*

The term Islamophobia now encapsulates a much broader spectrum. It seems to be ever-expanding and constantly engulfing within it the many distinct facets and aspects associated with the everyday life of a Muslim. Discrimination appears to have moved beyond and is no longer limited utterly on the basis of stereotypical traits. The latest addition to this "profiling index" (Aljazeera America, 2016) is language.

The racial profiling of a Muslim to that of an Arab is so profound that anyone speaking the language of the Arab world instinctively becomes a threat, hence, now criminalized according to this new dimension. Arabic has recurrently conflated with terrorism and continues to be labeled as the language of the terrorist. Numerous cases have been recorded in the past where Muslims in general /Arab Muslims or Arabs of other religions have faced discrimination. This was either on account of the scriptures they carried or the language they spoke. In order to understand such recurrences Al Jazeera (2016) stated that "Their [Arab/Muslim] Arabic language is so darn mixed up with their religion and their religion is so inseparable from their daily lives that it is enough to give a ... sheriff headache if not a scare" (para 19). However, they continue by explaining that "this identification of language with faith and people, on the one hand, and with extremism on the other, must be a matter of grave concern to all sane people" (para 20). In the case of Islam, the distinction between language and religion is vague to many. Their source of knowledge and general understanding stems from what comes out of their television screens.

The fact that most people fail to realize that Arabic is the language of the Arab world comprising of 25 countries many of whom do not even belong to the Muslim faith, elucidates the urgent need for critical discourse analysis of media coverage.

Media's role in shaping perceptions and stereotypes has been and continues to be influential. Islam, in the media, has historically carried with it a negative, villainous identity which overtime manifested in people's attitude towards Muslims - their faith, culture, customs, and language. (Kincheloe, Steinberg & Stonebanks (2010), Shaheen (2009), Beydon (2018), Ahmed & Mattes (2016), Ridouani (2011)). The Overton window for public discourse around Islam and Muslims has been pushed to a point where racist remarks seems inherent and permissible to the Muslim identity. The same narrative is reproduced in the media without ever finding the need to question the premise. Hence, critical inquiry into the representation of all things Muslim of which language is an integral part has become immensely crucial.

Hate crimes against Muslims grew ten-fold soon after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 2002). This added to the already existing hostility directed towards the religion and its followers particularly those belonging to the Middle East.

Moreover, a report published by Gallup Organization (2002) indicated that Americans voted in favor of policies to enact laws which reduced immigration from Middle Eastern countries. The internalized stereotypical notions within American consciousness about Arab people had now erupted and materialized into discrimination after September 11. Kite and Whitley (2016) borrow Lipmann's (1922) definition of stereotypes to explore and understand this concept further. He described stereotypes as "pictures in our head noting that what each (person) does is based not on direct or certain knowledge, but on the pictures made by (him or her) self and given to them" (p. 13).

In another definition stereotypes are described as "beliefs and opinions about characteristics, attributes and behavior of members of various groups" (Hilton & Vonhippel, 1996, p. 240).

People often acquire these images through media, peers or even parents. These images or prejudices we form about groups may or may not translate into racism and discrimination.

Prejudice is described by McLeod (2008) as "unjustified or incorrect attitude" (para. 1) we hold of an individual pertaining to the social group they belong to. However, in the case of Arabs it has been observed that more than one kind of prejudice persists. In addition to the cultural prejudices (including but not limited to their language) and stereotypes the West hold of Arab people particularly of Muslim women, another core element to that is religion. The surge experienced in Anti Muslim prejudice particularly after September 11 has compelled researchers to study this phenomenon in depth. The relation between prejudice and discrimination has become more profound in the near past. Research into incidents involving Arabs indicates that prejudices have now transformed into frequent acts of discrimination particularly with respect to their language - Arabic. Although, both print and visual media contributes extensively to such occurrences there have been instances where advertising campaigns have further worked towards crystallizing negative attitudes and perceptions Americans hold of Arabic.

One significant example to verify this claim is the ad campaign led by Pamela Geller who also holds the position of the director of Pro-Israel Group - American Freedom Defense Initiative.

These ads which were displayed on billboards in New York used the Arabic word Jihad and associated it with the notion of violence and savagery. These ads which ultimately appeared in the New York subway system in 2016 read

"In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel, Defeat Jihad" - (New York Times, 2013). These ads contested in court, however, were later allowed to be displayed citing first amendment rights.

In order to counter such initiatives of defamation, in this particular case using Arabic to regurgitate the same stereotypical notions of Muslims as savage and uncivilized once again, many Muslims particularly those belonging from Muslim's advocacy group the Council on American - Islamic Relations attempted to create awareness among people regarding the true meaning of Jihad - without any negative connotations attached to it. Many ads were displayed where Muslims highlighted that Jihad simply means "to struggle or strive" in every aspect of one's life. However, another stream of ads appeared soon after this, featuring photos and quotations impersonating terrorists such as Osama Bin Laden with made up statements such as "Killing Jews is worship that draws us closer to Allah" (The New York Times, 2013).

Such ad campaigns attain two objectives. On one hand it builds a negative language attitude towards Arabic and on the other hand connects religion and faith in Allah as culminating in terrorist activities as if they are synonymous.

The aforementioned is just one example, in depth investigation suggests an existence of a small but effective network in place perpetuating Islamophobia. "Roots of Islamophobia network" - a report published by the Center of American

Progress (2011, 2015) suggests "more than \$40 million being flowed over the past ten years" (p.vi). A more recent report highlighting the same published by the Council on American - Islamic Relations (CAIR) in 2021 recorded an influx of \$105,865,763 into this network between 2017-2019 with an aim of "spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories about Muslims and Islam" (Islamophobia in the mainstream, 2021, p.1).

This influx of money seems to come from seven major foundations namely:

- (i) Donors Capital Fund
- (ii) Newton and Rochelle Becker Foundation
- (iii) Newton and Rochelle Becker Charitable Trust
- (iv) Richard Mellon Scaife Foundation
- (v) Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation
- (vi) Russell Berry Foundation
- (vii) Anchorage Charitable Fund and William Rosenwald Family Fund

These funds are then distributed among a small group of experts who then choreograph "misinformation" about Muslims. This "misinformation" is further spread into American consciousness through a number of activists, politicians, most importantly the media and supported by schooling. It contributes significantly to an individual's process of learning and simultaneously influences their sense of figured worlds. It shapes our perceptions by means of language used, images displayed and discourse models in place. Media along with schooling is a major contributor in shaping or reshaping and establishing or sustaining certain beliefs and identities. Hence, the role of media (in addition to schools) cannot be undermined in educating, informing, and shaping ideologies. The fact that the mass media plays a role in perpetuating propaganda tied to ruling class interests has been

well established (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Hazen, 1997; Klein, 2000; McChesney, 2004). Herman and Chomsky (1988) have eloquently pointed out that the matter does not suggest a conspiracy theory, so much as choices that arise out of “internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market and political power. In most cases, however, media leaders do similar things because they see the world through the same lenses, are subject to similar constraints and incentives, and thus feature stories or maintain silence together in tacit collective action and leader follower behavior (p. xii).” The media does so by determining what is to be included and excluded from reportage and fashioning the debate on topics that shape up people’s perceptions.

It is interesting to note that many of the above-mentioned foundations are part of the Israel lobby in the United States and simultaneously work towards promoting the interests and future of Jewish people and Israel. For example, The Jewish Communal Fund funneled over 3 million dollars into the Islamophobia network between 2017-2019 of which \$50,000 was given to the American Freedom Defense Initiative. This according to CAIR (2021) has been characterized as an extremist anti-Muslim hate group, known for its demeaning print media advertising that has likened Muslims to savages. The president of the organization is Pamela Geller – who was also responsible for Support Israel – Defeat Jihad campaign in 2013. The group protested the construction of Park 51, stating that the project would “insult the victims of 9/11” and “establish a beachhead for political Islam and Islamic supremacism in New York.” In 2015, the organization held a “Muhammad Art Exhibit and Cartoon Contest” in Garland, Texas, attempting to counteract an anti-Islamophobia event hosted by CAIR at an earlier date” (CAIR, 2021, p. 18).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the basis and rationale of each foundation, although the cornerstone of the mission remains to inculcate in American consciousness and normalize conversations around impressions that Islam and Muslims are threatening to the Western and in particular American interests. Such initiatives coupled with open hate speech by political leaders has expanded the Overton window to a point that even extreme steps such as the 2016 Muslim Travel Ban deem acceptable to the general public.

The impact of such networks also manifests in the form of unjust and biased understanding of international conflicts among the general audience particularly in the matter of the Israel – Palestine conflict.

How else would one justify the duplicity of the western media in reporting violence against Palestine by Israeli forces?

Many experts continue to raise significant concerns over exclusion of reportage highlighting the Palestinian plight. The amount of coverage sanctioned is minimal including in times where attacks and bombardment by Israeli forces extend over days. Western media's ignorance was evident in 2020 where Israeli forces continuously bombarded Gaza for over ten days however, these attacks were entirely barred from coverage in any of the mainstream media outlets including CNN (Inside Arabia, 2020).

The Western media has also come under intense scrutiny for its blatant duplicity in their reporting of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war when compared to the Palestinian – Israel conflict, the ongoing genocide in Yemen or the invasion of US in Iraq and Afghanistan is appalling. The hypocrisy



of the Western media is laden in their discourse, compassionate coverage for the Ukrainians and use of language.

Once such shocking report came from CBS's correspondent Charlie D'Agatha on February 25<sup>th</sup> in which he stated "This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European - I have to choose those words carefully, too - city where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it's going to happen" (CBS News, 2022).

This openly racist commentary brought to the fore elements of white supremacy labelling, who is worthy and unworthy of war, civilized and uncivilized.

On the contrary, news about Palestinian youth being killed by Israeli forces on a regular basis seldom gets attention as it does not align with the established narrative. However, tales of heroism of Ukrainian citizens standing in the face of Russian military have garnered larger than life coverage. The same heroic resistance has been and continues to be presented as incidents escalating violence for Palestinians. This extreme hypocrisy of the Western media is demonstrated when similar if not instances of more acute nature such as the invasion of Iraq, the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people lack any real empathy from the broadcasters. Baroud (2022) highlights one such event of the past and expresses that it is outright appalling to see the same channels who "in the first days of the invasion of Iraq on CNN and fox news use to speak how beautiful American weapons work" and remembers the time when journalists very openly high fived each other after a massive bomb shook a bridge in Baghdad.

In the same vein conservative political commentators like Sean Hannity who were ardent supporters of the invasion of Iraq have blatantly called for Putin's assassination multiple times. Such war mongering has led to little to no room for discussion for alternative perspectives on the Russo-Ukrainian war other than overtly painting Putin as the new evil force (Johnston, 2022, para 15).

Additionally, social media such as Facebook who is known for blocking voices supporting Palestine and highlighting the continuous violence in the region have made amendments in their hate speech policy to accommodate a call for violence against Russia. A spokesperson from Meta elaborated that "As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine we have temporarily made allowances for forms of political expression that would normally violate our rules like violent speech such as 'death to the Russian invaders.' We still won't allow credible calls for violence against Russian civilians" (Reuters, 2022, para 3).

In the same vein, the achievements of the Arab civilization have been more often than not downplayed if not entirely eradicated in the media coverage of Islam. In order to assert this point, Hammad (2016) states that the "distorted perception of the Arab and Muslim world and the stereotypical features attributed to it are also explicitly meant to give rise to a monolithic view of the Arabs and the Muslims among the political community, the media and the world of academe so as to negate the rich cultural and scientific heritage of these people and their contribution to Western civilization" (p. 3). He emphasizes the need to humanize the Arabic language by highlighting the significant contributions made by Arab scholars and Arabic texts. In doing so, he cites Brook (2003) who argues that "We learned our Greek heritage by translating Arabic into Latin. For centuries, the fundamental texts of budding European scholarship were based on Arabic translation, and

Europe's scholarship continued to be informed by its more learned Arab contemporaries... But soon we were spinning the myth that we got it all directly from our Greek ancestors" (p. 3). Further introspection into history suggests that the West have not been reluctant in the past to even Latinize the names of various Arab scholars as if to "blot out of the Western history the contributions of those Muslim torch bearers to Western civilization" (Hammad, 2016, p. 4)

Another significant factor contributing towards the continued misrepresentation and demonizing of Arabic language is the lack of language proficiency even among the so called "experts". Edwards Said (1997) elucidates this point further and in doing so highlights the work of Judith Miller - a journalist working for the New York Times who has dedicated much of her life to present a distorted and demonized picture of the Arab world. He considers experts like Miller to be "unqualified" to write about "any other religion or part of the world"(p. xxxvi). On many occasions Miller proclaims that even though her involvement with the Middle East expands over 25 years she has failed to "accumulate any real knowledge" of Arabic and constantly requires assistance from translators. Said (1997) further states that "it would be impossible to be taken seriously as a reporter or expert on Russia, France ...perhaps even China and Japan, without knowing the requisite languages, but for "Islam" no linguistic knowledge seems to be necessary since what one is dealing with is considered to be a psychological deformation, not a real culture or religion". (p. xxxvi). The crux of the matter is that when even the "experts" find it unimportant to learn or gain any real knowledge of the language in order to understand and indulge for themselves in the meaning making process of the spoken or written texts they are claiming to analyze what can then be expected of the general audience? It makes it all the more easier for media to manipulate a language which most of their viewership have no knowledge of. The general

audience usually accepts the constructed or intended set of meanings established by the media which often utilizes Arabic to promote the Islamophobic agenda and connect terrorism with religion and particularly to an Arab identity. This process of racialization has been accomplished to an extent that hearing the word "terrorist" generates an image of an Arab wearing their traditional shemagh and uttering angry words in Arabic. It is worth pointing out that in order to de stereotype the negative connotations or promote understanding of the language there are still very few bilingual programs within US contrary to the need and expectation. This will be discussed in more detail later in the paper. These labels that have been assigned to races by the media have their own histories and have implications on the social identity and character that is then construed by individuals (Mastro, 2011). Often, reporters know the art of creating these labels and connections by repetition, reproducing the same rhetoric again and again by debating topics within the same established premise.

All of this has helped the media to maintain the current image of the Arab world within the US audience and generalize that image to all Muslims - one that is primitive, lack any real intellect or potential for scientific advancement and needs the Western world to guard and oversee their internal matters. This lack of awareness about the many achievements of the Muslim world upon which the European Renaissance stood negates any real chance for the perceptions about Arabs to change within the American consciousness. There is a need to strongly acknowledge that misconstrued media representations have not only shaped public consciousness and their world views but have also contributed towards shaping discriminatory policies. They justify bigotry and systemic discrimination or initiatives such as the 2016 travel ban on Muslim countries (all Arabic speaking

nations with the exception of Iran) as justifiable and imperative to sustain national security.

Other instances where "racialization of Muslims" have become apparent is through the state surveillance experienced by Muslims. Cankar (2009) as cited in Alimahomed-Wilson (2018) asserts that preexisting negative social constructions of Arabs and Muslims as possessing an inherent proclivity towards violence prior to 9/11 paved the way for their institutional mistreatment after the attacks ... their racial status as inherently pathological and fundamentally different from white Christians" (p. 6).

This justifies the need for further state scrutiny and surveillance since they are racialized to be "inferior to the whites, potentially violent and threatening, and therefore deserving of policies that target them as a distinct group of people and criminalize them without evidence of criminal activity" (Jamal, 2008, p. 116). In her lecture 'Constructing the Terrorist Threat' (Media Education Foundation, 2017) Deepa Kumar details how the FBI designs false sting operations which seem and are reported as real terrorist attacks. Such attacks are rarely clarified by the media afterwards.

Another example of how extensive media stereotyping and vilification translated into an oppressive policy is the NYPD surveillance program. This program saw an expansion from years of cultural/social to material oppression. This "unconstitutional religious profiling program", (ALCU, 2017, para1) allowed the NYPD to surveil Muslims in the New York City area on the premise that Muslim beliefs and practices were a justifiable cause of examination.

This program operated by placing a number of informants (often-former prisoners) in mosques and other gatherings who then initiated conversations about Jihad and terrorism. This incited in Muslims a fear to exercise their freedom of speech and being. They constantly feared their opinions to be taken out of context and then used to frame and prosecute them criminally. This program also brought about a sense of apprehensiveness towards engaging in everyday Islamic practices which for all Americans is their constitutional right. Measures such as the NYPD surveillance program also imposes within the wider community a stigma around Islamic way of living as inherently suspicious. Key to this surveillance regime, of course, was linguistic inspection.

This, however, has implications within the educational system as well and reciprocates in terms of resistance and backlash from parents and other stakeholders when sincere attempts are made to introduce Arabic as a foreign language in schools. This could enable and encourage students to learn and form their own opinions of the language and Arab culture. Hence, it is imperative to understand how words, pictures and Arabic language has been used by the news media in conjunction to deliberately misrepresent Islam as an extremist religion but most importantly so as to create an intended negative language attitude and ideology around Arabic. This has been achieved by building connotations, prejudices, and beliefs in regard to the Arabic language - either directly or by other means - such as constantly vilifying the Middle East or by using Arabic words from the Quran to justify extremism as a part of Islamic faith. In any which way in addition to vilifying Islam media has also been successful in simultaneously fabricating a negative attitude towards Arabic. This attitude repeatedly comes to the fore in the shape of incidents of resistance, discrimination, and hatred.

## 2.1 Language Attitudes, Discrimination and Linguicism

The notion of forming attitudes towards a language has been an area of interest for many sociolinguists. Giles & Niedzielski (1998) explains this further by stating that language attitudes "are the result of a complex of social, cultural, regional, political and personal associations and prejudices." (p. 92). People's perception of a certain language emanates from "profound negative stereotypes" (p. 91) that they hold of that group.

A great deal of scholarly work has been produced concerning the topic of language discrimination (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988; Alim, Rickford & Ball, 2016, Lippy-Green, 2012). This work has been critical in the formulation of policies that ties language, foreexample, to race and national origin discrimination. Such discrimination is prohibited by federal civil rights laws such as Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Furthermore, research equates teaching in a dominant language such as English which is different to the mother tongue of a child with violating human rights to education (UN on the Rights of a Child – Article 29). Research overtime attests that bilingual programs yield better academic performance and instruction in a student's native language and that it is conducive to cognitive enhancement (Crawford, 1998; Bialystok, 2018). However, the debate focusing on the validity of bilingual immersion programs and the resistance it faces is perplexing and longstanding. This is partially because it encompasses political and educational issues if not only those pertaining to culture and identity.

U.S. states vary in their state laws and statutes regarding the issue of language. However, language discrimination claims can routinely be circumvented through legal and policy loopholes making discrimination difficult to prove in some cases. Indeed, a number of U.S. states and organizations working towards the

transformation of discriminatory policies continue the attempt to develop stronger frameworks to name language discrimination and to assess its occurrence. Of course, given the current political environment in the U.S., such a task is certainly not simple. This research is not so much centered on legal and policy worlds, but rather takes a cultural studies approach. The researcher's interest is in the various ways that people are socialized into standpoints whereby they come to privilege a certain language or language variant over others. More specifically, the researcher is interested in the ways in which the Arabic language is represented and discussed and how it is anchored to a negative linguistic ideology or what has been termed *linguicism*.

Phillipson & Skutnabb - Kangas (1988) coined the term "linguicism" to acknowledge / recognize language as a mechanism to discriminate against a particular group of people. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, p. 13) defined linguicism as the "ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language. Skutnabb - Kangas (2015) identified "indigenous /tribal people, autochthonous, immigrant and refugee minorities and minoritized groups" to be the major recipients of this form of discrimination.

In her categorization (adopted from Lippy-Green (2012) linguicism could be in terms of "(a) which language(s) one uses; (b) how one uses them; and (c) which language(s) one does NOT use/know, or one is not competent in, all according to the norms of those who (arrogate to themselves the power to) judge others by their languages".



Skutnabb-Kangas (2019) further states that doing so “prevents access to education because of the linguistic, pedagogical and psychological barriers it creates” (p. 1). Hence, it becomes significant that in order to prevent genocide (both linguistic and cultural) students of other languages have a right to their mother tongue medium education and learning English or other dominant language should not happen at the expense of their own mother tongue. (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008)

In the seminal text, *Borderlands. La Frontera. The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999) eloquently captures the painful consequences of linguicism.

Anzaldúa’s chapter *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* concerns the pain of linguistic erasure and living at the intersections of language and being made invisible or seen as somehow deficient given one’s cultural and linguistic location. Despite the focus of her writing, she captures similar anxieties that unfold when Arabic enters the public and private sphere in the U.S. and in Europe. She writes, “So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself...as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate (p. 81).” The dynamics embedded in the colonization of indigenous and Mexican people in the U.S. is significantly different than the oppression of Muslims and Arabs who have immigrated, yet both groups are terrorized linguistically given their existence at the crossroads of racialization and linguicism or what some linguistics now refer to as raciolinguicism.

Language ideologies denotes our formulations and perceptions about particular languages and groups they represent. "These are best understood as beliefs, feelings and conceptions about language that are socially shared and relate language and

society in a dialectical fashion" (Piller, 2015, p. 4). Hence, it can be argued that language ideologies do not exist in a vacuum and should rather be studied as a "nexus of language, culture and politics" (Irvine, 2012). To put it in simple terms, Arabic is often received "uncomfortably" by on lookers. Arabic is frequently perceived as the language of terrorism or even as the language of Osama Bin Laden. The ramifications of such negative language ideology and narrow perception of Arabic have resulted in escalations of hate crimes along with increased scrutiny and surveillance at airports for those speaking or carrying texts in Arabic.

Arabic terms such as "Jihad - (Struggle)" or "Allah o Akbar - (God is Great)" are commonly understood devoid of their contexts or are inevitably associated with violent actions. This intolerance towards Arabic and anyone speaking it, to be associated as a threat to security and American identity have only perpetuated Islamophobic sentiments among Westerners. In this case it is sufficient to say that Arabic is shaping the image associated with an Arab and vice versa - a concept termed by Alim (2016) as raciolinguistics. As mentioned above the discrimination and racism that ensues has implications around foreign and educational policies.

Arabic is now classified as the seventh most spoken language in US households (PEW Research Center, 2016). The number of people who speak Arabic at home escalated to 1.3 million according to the data submitted by the Census Bureau in 2018 (Center for Immigration Studies, 2019). Although, these statistics demonstrate the growing population of Arabic speakers within US, Arabic is also ranked as the fifth most spoken language in the world (Lessons learned from Arabic Immersion Programs in the US, 2020). The growing population of Arabic speakers around the world and in the U.S. speaks of its importance as a language.

However, the state of Arabic language programs remains a site of contestation in the U.S.

This resistance when coupled with a negative linguistic ideology that encapsulates Arabic makes it particularly difficult to implement and sustain Arabic language programs and initiatives. Even if such programs continue to operate, they generally lose the essence and the intent with which they were started and become nothing less than transitional programs using Arabic as a mean to transition students towards English language skills. This exudes shades of not only rising Islamophobia but also linguisticism in the form of Arabicaphobia.

An overview of the most recent statistics suggests an active enrollment of 3,740 students over 161 language programs in 38 states. These include programs offered by both private and public schools (The National K-12 Enrollment Survey Report, 2017).

Out of these 161 programs which include a combination of traditional classrooms, online, both online and face to face, immersion, and dual immersion only five are reported to be dual immersion programs. (The National K-12 Enrollment Survey Report, 2017).

1. Arabic Immersion Magnet School (AIMS) PK-4 – Houston, Texas
2. Elizabeth Learning Center (K -12) - Cudahy, California
3. Baltimore International Academy (K-8) – Baltimore, Maryland
4. PS/IS 30 – Mary Ovington School (K -8) New York City, New York

These too have experienced their share of resistance from groups funded by the Islamophobia network, and other stakeholders who have accepted the propaganda

created by the news media. Schooling and curriculum which excludes teaching about the achievements of the Arab civilization and the language itself aligns to the narrative that the media has been propagating from years. An example of this comes from Lynde and Harry Bradley foundation - a known supporter of "conservative causes" who contributed \$6,540,000 to the Islamophobic network of which \$430,000 were given to the Middle East forum and \$1,020,000 to the Center for Security Policy (Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Center of American Progress, n.d.).

The Middle East forum founded by Daniel Pipes in 1990 states their mission as "to promote American interests in the Middle East and protect Western values from Middle Eastern threats" (Middle East Forum - CAP, 2011). Their publication "Middle East Quarterly" continues to insinuate sentiments of fear and an anti-Islamic ideology. In addition, the forum extends this fear to Arabic as a language and view its usage as a tool to further radical Islam and imposing Sharia law in the West. An example of this was Daniel Pipes (founder of Middle East forum) fierce opposition to the Khalil Jibran International Academy in Brooklyn, New York. This school which offered bilingual instruction (English and Arabic) not only received immense backlash but was also accused to exacerbate a jihadist agenda. Daniel Pipes who was at the forefront of this resistance was quoted in the (New York Times, 2008) stating "it is hard to see how violence, how terrorism will lead to the implementation of Sharia. It is much easier to see how, working through the system - the school system, the media, the religious organizations, the government, businesses and the like - you can promote radical Islam"(para 10). He continued by critiquing the initiative to create a school with Arabic instruction to be "problematic" in practice. He stated that "Arabic language instruction is inevitably laden with Pan-Arabist and Islamic baggage"(para 34). This instills in American

consciousness a phobia for Arabic where the entire language is received with suspicion, is feared and alienized. Pipes used the word "madrassa " (para 34,35) repeatedly while making references to the Khalil Jibran Academy. (New York Times, 2008). This word which simply means school in Arabic has negative connotations attached to it of a place where radical Islamists are trained. Such misuse of words from anti- Muslims such as Daniel Pipes have far reaching and deeper consequences. This not only infuses / promotes fear surrounding the language but also shapes and reproduces a negative ideology towards Arabic resulting in linguicism.

In the same vein Lynde and Bradley Foundation contributed \$1,020,000 to the Center of Security Policy (CSP) (Center for American Progress, 2015). This center established by Frank Gaffney in 1988 has produced numerous reports and video series to label Sharia Law as a "totalitarian ideology" and a threat to America (Center for Security Policy, 2015).

Edward Said (1998) highlighted establishing "preconceived notions" around the identity of an Arab. These notions resulted from representation in the news and popular culture and often lacked any realistic base. An example of this in the past verifying the above mentioned was to show videos of people speaking/conversing in Arabic while reporting terrorist incidents or setting forth a scene in a movie with a terrorist plot. However, anyone knowing the language could point out that the conversations or what was being said had no relation with terrorism. Although, when viewed in context with the news or narrative where an Arab Muslim is usually portrayed as a fanatic it reciprocates into a "commonsense assumption" about Arabic - as it being the language that a terrorist speaks. The Arab identity, which is essentially that of a barbaric, dumb villain is now intertwined with the

language they speak or that which runs in the background. Hence, language also is now inevitably a part of the stereotypical image that has been created of an Arab. It is now unsurprising why Americans have internalized negative stereotypes and prejudices around Arabic naturally regarding anyone speaking the language as one with ill intentions.

Rosina Lippi-Green's work among many others (Lambert et al., 1960, Rickford, 1965, Carranza & Ryan, 1975, Giles & Ryan, 1982) focuses on the impact accents and languages have on social stereotyping which promotes "language - focused discrimination" (p.164). Although, the criteria upon which linguists assess a nonnative speaker's ability is more varied, general public makes the judgment heavily based on the accent. To a common man "accent is how the other speaks" and serves as the "first diagnostic for identification of geographic or social outsiders" (p. 166).

However, the bias only escalates in the context of an entirely different language. An experiment conducted by Ryan (2014) for the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences revealed that political views among Anglos only intensified after having Spanish speaking Mexicans take the train with them for two weeks. This when compared to the pre - experiment questionnaire they filled, their beliefs were increasingly exclusionary in terms of the immigration policies and other amnesty programs in place. Although, the experiment conducted is in context of a different language facing discrimination, similar attitudes are experienced with Arabic speakers as well. The implicit bias and the panic that ensues, usually stems from the fear of the unknown. This may then manifest into discriminatory slurs and incidents. However, with Arabic the anxiety is more profound since the onlooker connects it to violence and hence, it is also more scrutinized than usual. The media

has seldom done anything constructive to expand the viewer's perspective to counter such issues rather have mostly contributed to it.

It is also significant here to elaborate on the importance of understanding the workings of representation and image formation in the media. Hall (1997) asserts that "we come to believe images as part of the real and natural world as they are represented in the media" (Media Education Foundation). The images and texts used by the media gives meaning to everything that is demonstrated hence, it is important to "interrogate the image".

However, it is also important to determine the mechanism by which a certain meaning is instilled or insinuated among audiences.

### Encoding and Decoding of Information

Hall (1972-1979) refers to the media as one of the most significant and robust tools in the circulation of information and hence, in the meaning making practice. He explains broadcasting as a circuit which begins with production - the active construction of the message. This step is crucial in the process since it is at this point that discursive knowledge is brought into existence. This process also referred to as encoding is however, influenced by a variety of factors such as professional ideologies, definitions, assumptions, and institutional knowledge to name a few.

This production process which creates the television discourse, however, is not a closed system. Audiences contribute to this system by means of feedback. Hall (1980) refers to Marx to explain this further and states "circulation and reception are, indeed, moments of the production process in television process and are

reincorporated via a number of skewed feedbacks into the production process itself" (p.118). These feedbacks though, can often prove to be ineffective in terms of changing the discourse around a topic but can provide information about the effectiveness of the communication process.

The encoded messages, however, must be presented in some form of meaningful discourse which can then be decoded by its audience. "It is the set of decoded meanings which have an effect, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences" (p. 119).

However, it should be noted that the codes used while encoding and decoding may or may not be aligned or as Hall (1980) refers to it be "symmetrical" (p. 119) - what this entails is that the message could have been encoded using a specific code, but it can be received and decoded differently. In such a scenario the meaning the message intended to impart/inculcate or insinuate amidst audiences may be compromised. This usually results in television producers going back and altering the encoding process to improve the "effectiveness of their communication" (p. 124).

Although, the process of assigning meaning (encoding) is more complex and is usually politically and ideologically driven. Heck (1974) referring to Eliseo Veron in her paper titled "The Ideological Dimension of Media Messages" pinpoints that a message is measured not in its "literal meaning" (denotation) but also significantly in terms of what is implied or what could be implied. Messages, therefore, are loaded with connotative meanings. The fact that these meanings or connotations are not fixed rather fluid gives hope for stereotypes to break and



prejudices to be unlearned. It is also in this fluidity and contest for meaning that gives an opportunity for ideologies to transform or opposing ideologies to contend.

Though, from the standpoint of Hall denotative (literal meaning) of a sign does not operate outside of ideology. He regards the distinction between connotation and denotation "a highly analytical one" (p. 122). He asserts that "we could say (referring to denotation) that its ideological value is strongly fixed - because it has become so fully universal and natural. The terms ... then, are merely useful analytical tools for distinguishing, in particular contexts, between not the presence/absence of ideology in language, but the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect" (p. 122). However, the connotative meanings still bounded yet open to a degree are heavily influenced by representation.

At this point, it is sufficient to say that as representation changes meanings have the potential to change as well.

Representation becomes pivotal to the way we associate meaning to images, visuals etc. Even though images or visuals in themselves have no fixed meanings and are open to interpretation, power and dominant ideology plays a significant role. It intervenes to fix meanings resulting in the reproduction and re- presentation of images, visuals, texts with the same meanings. Hence, in such situations where messages are operating under a set of tightly fixed codes, they are likely to be decoded in the same, undifferentiated manner - highly symmetrical. Hence, it can be concluded that receiving a dominant meaning from a visual or text in the same form as it was intended, will be to observe a dominant hegemonic position or to be functioning inside a dominant code.

The issue of distortion and editing is worth highlighting. One of the crises of the media in terms of Hall pertains to its credibility, access, bias, and distortion particularly in case of representing events of controversial character. This is highly imperative when discussing in the scope of this paper. It is significant to mention that choice of language, images, visuals, topics of discussion, selection of personnel all work together in order to reproduce the dominant code. It is important that audiences receive the code and derive from it the same meaning that was intended.

Another significant instance where media is extremely powerful is in providing contextual knowledge. To assert this point Hall claims that "the media's role in shaping the secondary environment and in providing the essential contextual knowledge in which social action and conflict unfold, their influence on the ethos in which public opinion and policy decisions are taken, their power to establish and sustain a limited range of prevailing definitions of problematic events, their ability to transmit "pictures of the world" ...in socially differentiated societies, there can be little doubt that broadcasting does transmit the essential knowledge about unfamiliar situations and events to people who have literally no alternative access to them" (p. 279).

This becomes even more crucial when considering the case of the "Other". American audiences are dependent on the media to create for them their perceptions about other societies. In such scenarios the audience relies on the media to provide them with the knowledge they can base their images upon. It has been observed that in reality few Americans are acquainted with Arab culture rather what they know of it majorly come from the media. This makes it easier for stereotypes to sustain and reproduce. Many disparate fragments put together to construct a narrative heavily laden with connotations aids the media to successfully

enable audiences to decode the story in the same fashion as it was created. However, the history of social knowledge that we all possess or regard commonsensical is crucial here. As Hall points out that "the schemes of interpretation which we regularly but tacitly employ for the recognition and decoding of social scenes -they partake of the stock of social knowledge at hand which men employ to make sense of their world and events in it. Such a stock of knowledge is not a "neutral structure" it is shot through with previously sedimented social meanings" (p. 290).

This is where decades of representation of Arabs in Hollywood movies as barbaric, villainous, and primitive comes in effect. However, this extends beyond and into the representation of Arabic as well. Hollywood movies have left no stone unturned to depict Arabic language in a negative light. This is usually implemented through a demonstration of the bad guys (Arabs) conversing in Arabic to strategize an evil plan or by way of the call of prayer in the background followed by terrorists training and/or plotting. However, research on television's account of reporting particularly those of political nature regards television as a "key agenda setter". This notion coincides with Noam Chomsky's (1993) viewpoints. This is often achieved by broadcasters in a variety of ways from deciding which issues enter the discussion and who is 'selected' to 'speak on these topics'. This has implications on awareness and consciousness among audiences. Chomsky (1993) terms this as the propaganda model. He asserts that the type of news that is displayed is not raw rather the topics are selected, framed, filtered, with certain aspects emphasized and discussion constricted to certain limits. Again, all this in an attempt to maintain and reproduce the dominant ideological stance. Ian Connell (1979) digs a little deeper and states that the issue at hand is more profound than just a case of bias and distortion. In his paper 'Television news and

social contract' he argues that television news often does not 'question the premise' rather only builds upon it. It is often the dominant position which is considered as the 'basis of reality' from which the discussion emanates. For example, in the debate of women empowerment in Muslim societies, the discussion usually commences from a premise that Muslim women are inherently oppressed and in need of liberation. Often the broadcaster fails to acknowledge or even bring up during the course of the debate the many achievements of Muslim women in various sectors around the globe. Rather a visual of women clad in burqa is displayed to assert and signify the role and the need of freedom for these women.

From Connell's standpoint this is the moment where the television discourse and dominant ideologies align. He asserts that "Television is an ideological instance... and can be seen for example in the shaping of topics... the explanations proffered by news and current affair programmes are made to seem the 'best sense' of a given situation. They are ... categorized as common sense, moderate public opinion, rational understanding, or the consensus. the basis of these explanations are the already constructed definitions in dominance" (p. 128). Television actively incorporates these dominant stances in their explanations under the pretense of consensus. This contributes to the reproduction and maintenance of dominant ideologies in a society with some perceptions about people or groups that are different, and we know little about.

### News Media, Films and Policies – An Intertwined Web

In order to understand the mechanism in which media has been able to demonize Arabic in tandem with the Muslim identity, it is imperative to acknowledge, recognize and remind the reader of the construction of Muslim identity in the discourse of Hollywood movies and thus its role in cementing certain ideological

perceptions of Arabic in American consciousness. It is no coincidence that the narrative / storyline or debates that are shown or occurs on news channels about Muslims and Islam aligns with their representation in Hollywood movies. This intertwined systemic web is unsurprising given that the entertainment industry and news media operates closely and are often owned by the same companies actively investing in producing and distributing highly Islamophobic movies. Hence, it becomes imperative to understand with a critical lens the ways in which Hollywood movies portrays Islam and its culture including language. In doing so, the reader will be better placed to perceive, make connections, and critically deconstruct the discourse in the media.

One example of the aforementioned is the case of Warner Bros of which CNN Worldwide is a subsidiary. Warner Bros also distributed the highly Islamophobic venture "American Sniper". It is also significant to briefly note here that Warner Bros also owns HBO which airs Real time with Bill Maher - a show which in itself has yielded tremendous limelight for often using insensitive, offensive and Islamophobic statements. American Sniper released in 2014 was laden with sequences synonymous with the debates we hear about Muslims and Islam on CNN. The audacity with which Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) kills unarmed Iraqis throughout the movie as if they inherently deserve to die just for being Muslims is the same presumption with which CNN reporters blatantly discusses an intrinsic connection between Islam and violence / extremism. This coincides with the global silence on the atrocities of Israel and the exclusion of coverage on Palestine. Either they are regarded unworthy of coverage as if their lives do not matter (identical to the visuals in American sniper) or reports that do make it are always written with an extremely neutral stance. They lack any real condemnation, and the killings are often justified by providing the audience with a sense that Israeli forces were

defending themselves. For e.g.: A recent report published on CNN (April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022) highlighting the killing of a young 14-year-old Palestinian boy as part of the violence that ensued in the West Bank in the month of Ramadan read “Israeli soldiers had fired at him after he threw a Molotov cocktail” hence “used live ammunition to stop the immediate threat”(para 5, 6). Even though the report vaguely mentions an eyewitness stating that the boy was merely seeking shelter from the firing there was no actual criticism of the Israeli violence in the report. Comparatively, resistance and fighting back by the Ukrainian youth continues to be reported as acts of heroism in the face of Russian violence. These indicators are necessary to understand as they influence and shape up people’s emotions surrounding the conflict – a technique otherwise known as psychological operations.

This also makes visuals such as broadcasters openly celebrating blasts on a Baghdad bridge (already detailed above) seem normal, acceptable, and aligned with what is being shown in movies. Similarly, when hurtful incidents such as the burning of the Holy Quran are reported they lack any real condemnation or discussion that this may be a ploy to incite and trigger violence. The discourse around Islam and teachings of the Holy book have been repeatedly intertwined with terrorism to a point that extreme incidents against the Muslim faith appear justifiable to the average audience. The Overton window is constantly being pushed by far-right leaders such as Donald Trump who openly state “I think Islam hates us” or Geert Wilders “I don’t hate Muslims, I hate Islam”. Wilders is also a member of the House of representatives of the Netherlands and was also responsible for coming up with a short movie “Fitna” which aimed to create a connection between the teachings of the Quran to terrorism.

Even before we conduct a discourse analysis on the many debates produced by CNN in an attempt to find this connection, it must be noted that a sudden surge in these debates were experienced a couple of months before American sniper was released. It is also interesting to note that just the headlines or titles given to these discussions were highly indicative of labeling the whole religion, the entire Muslim population, and the Quran responsible and accountable for the horrific acts committed by a handful of individuals.- Some of the headlines on CNN Tonight read "Is Islam more violent than other faiths?" aired on September 04, 2014. (Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014), "Islam is "mother lode of bad ideas" aired on October 14th, 2014. (Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014), "Chris Cuomo on violence of Islam" aired on October 3rd, 2014. (Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014).

It is imperative to highlight that all these examples use the Arabic word Islam to discuss violence. If these discussions were verbal on CNN, American sniper soon after provided the audience with a visual manifestation. This aligned web of news and movies that is created shapes the worldviews of larger audiences on which their perceptions and stereotypes stand. They use these worldviews, their biases, and prejudices to make and give meaning to all that is shown in the news media (Johnny & Sheriff, 2007) and to get a "surface meaning" of a text (Frith, 1998, p. 5) which can be defined as the very first sense a viewer or reader gets from a message (Frith, 1998).

This "sense" usually originates from all that we receive and internalizes from our television screens. It is evident from the many headlines mentioned above that the first sense derived from such titles is usually to link Islam as a religion which is also inherently an Arabic word with violence or extremism. This is unlike the coverage or framing any other religion gets. For example, research suggests that a

white supremacists usually depicted as a distinct individual committing a terrorist act with no relation to religion. There is a notion of individuality in there whereas the news media portrays Muslim terrorists with a collective agenda driven by the teachings of Islam. (El Masry & El Nawawy, 2019). This was particularly the case in the coverage of Omar Mateen (the shooter responsible for the Pulse Bar shooting in Orlando, Florida in 2016) and Stephen Paddock (responsible for the Las Vegas shooting in 2017). A comparative study conducted by El Masry & El Nawawy (2019) revealed the stark differences in the labeling of the two shooters. Mateen was constantly linked with his jihadist motives and connections with the ISIS where Paddock was portrayed as an isolated individual whose motive behind this terrible act remains unknown and unclear. Hence, it is not surprising when people internalize the current dominant viewpoints about Islam and Muslims, thinking all Muslims (highly racialized to be Arabs, speaking one language - Arabic) are collectively responsible or capable of committing violent incidents. Apart from increased Islamophobic incidents this also results in structural Islamophobia (Beydon, 2018) which have more profound consequences for Muslims. They justify bigotry and systemic discrimination or initiatives such as the 2016 travel ban on Muslim countries (all Arabic speaking nations except for Iran) or increased surveillance as justifiable and imperative to sustain national security. Another example of how extensive media stereotyping and vilification translated into an oppressive policy is the NYPD surveillance program. This program saw an expansion from years of cultural/social to material oppression. This “unconstitutional religious profiling program”, (ALCU, 2017, para1) allowed the NYPD to surveil Muslims in the New York City area on the premise that Muslim beliefs and practices were a justifiable cause of examination.

In her lecture 'Constructing the Terrorist Threat' (Media Education Foundation,



2017) Deepa Kumar details how FBI designs false sting operations which seem and are reported as real terrorist attacks. Such attacks are rarely clarified by the media afterwards. This program operated by placing a number of informants (often-former prisoners) in mosques and other gatherings who then initiated conversations about Jihad and terrorism. This incited in Muslims a fear to exercise their freedom of speech and being. They constantly feared their opinions to be taken out of context and then used to frame and prosecute them criminally.

This program also brought about a sense of apprehensiveness towards engaging in everyday Islamic practices which for all Americans is their constitutional right.

Measures such as the NYPD surveillance program also imposes within the wider community a stigma around Islamic way of living as well as their language as inherently suspicious.

Again, this interrelated web of mainstream news, movies, and policies (which pertains to both government and education) calls for the need for critical media literacy through teacher education, schools, and other platforms so that the larger audience can critically analyze and recognize how our worldviews are closely aligned with those of the dominant ideology (Giroux, 2006).

This web has deeper implications. Firstly, it is imperative to recognize media as an ideological pedagogue. It serves to the dominant class reiterating and reproducing their ideology and working to benefit the elite. This helps immensely when harsh government policies are laid out under the pretense of American nations security. Chomsky (1991) & Hall (1997) have highlighted that news channels achieve this by framing, selecting, editing and (re)directing discussions a certain way, which

eventually produces or contributes to the same narrative benefitting the privileged class to maintain its dominant position and their definitions of the world.

Secondly, and more importantly, it reciprocates in terms of educational policies. This is usually, in terms of overt resistance towards the need to educate teachers and students that media does not operate in a vacuum and is far from being neutral (Macedo, 1997). This understanding is significant if substantial steps have to be implemented towards unlearning the deeply rooted image of Islam in American consciousness. Arabic language too endures deep disapproval and fear from the community at large, often an extension and in alignment with how the language is portrayed in the media. Hence, any attempts to teach Arabic at school level is accused of an endeavor to implement "Sharia" law or convert students to Islam.

An example of this intertwined web and how representation on news channels aligns and extends in terms of governmental and educational policies is demonstrated in the 2016 incident in Lubbock, Texas. A banner appeared on one of the buildings in Arabic reading "Love all". The message was of love and peace and least bit threatening, but it was taken down immediately, with the FBI involved for further investigation. This news was published by many news mainstream news channels. This undisguised and normalized hostility for Arabic where every word written in the language calls for scrutiny and inspection elucidate media's success in inculcating among its audience a sort of Arabicaphobia. Arabic too now is synonymous with violence and terrorism and must be feared. The same antagonism is experienced when Arabic is introduced within a school in any capacity. An introspection of the history books would suggest the same exclusion. Macedo (2007) in the same vein states, that media becomes complicit with the dominant posture that demands that the enemy's story is never told. More specifically, the teachings of history must also be manipulated and distorted" (p. xxi). This is

reflected through the curriculum where the achievements of many Muslim and particularly Arab scholars is greatly undermined. To reiterate, there exists a strongly aligned media - government-education web which works to maintain the dominant ideology in which Islam is the enemy.

### The Illusion of Objectivity

According to a poll conducted by PEW Research Center (2020), 70% of "self-described liberals Democrats" in the US, trust Cable News Network otherwise commonly known as CNN as their source of information for daily events. An earlier poll conducted by PEW (2014) also ranks CNN to be ideologically liberal and predominantly watched by those who have consistently identified themselves as liberal.

However, a detailed discourse analysis of the many discussions held on CNN and many articles published surrounding Islam, reveals little to no element of liberalism or objectivity.

In the same vein Macedo (2007) referring to CBS, who closely follows CNN on the liberal - conservative scale explains that there often "exists a pretense of journalistic objectivity" which either "collapses under the weight of their own ideology" or under the compulsion of "ideological obedience" (p. xx). It is presumed of the liberal media to be instrumental in presenting an alternative way of perceiving and understanding dominant issues. In other words, to highlight the story of the enemy. However, when this lack of objectivity and failure to provide a counter-dominant narrative reaches the mind of an average American, it leaves no or little scope for further scrutiny. In other words, when the audience acknowledges the distinction between liberal-conservative news channels but, the

platforms responsible to provide a more balanced narrative (i.e., the self-proclaimed liberal media) also furthers the same representation of events, groups, or religion it is then accepted as the ultimate truth.

It is a misconception that CNN given its liberal stance provides an alternate narrative to the hegemonic beliefs about Islam and Muslims. Malcolm X (1963) while explaining the difference between liberals and conservatives stated, "I only cite these things to show you that in America the history of the white liberal has been nothing, but a series of trickery designed to make Negroes think white liberal was going to solve our problems ... white conservatives are not friends of the Negro either, but they at least do not try to hide it... the white liberal are more dangerous than the conservative" (para 33,44).

In this section using evidence from various discussions and debates held on CNN, it is argued that objectivity or the notion of liberal media is an illusion. The news anchors select, edit, direct the course of the debate, and manipulate data to deliberately establish a connection between Islam and violence. They also attempt to generalize all Muslims to be violent, and with no knowledge of Arabic repeatedly try to find justification of it from the Quran and hence, simultaneously succeeds in representing Arabic in negative light. The nature of the debate and the extent to which they condemn Islam is usually aligned and dependent on and in accordance with the ongoing political campaigns and governmental policies or are usually in conjunction with other endeavors the owner companies have invested in.

### Procedure

Numerous discussions aired on the channel as well as articles printed were analyzed for this research. A list of all the articles and videos are listed in

Appendix A. The keywords used to search were Muslims, Islam, Arabic, and representation. Furthermore, the videos and articles were filtered according to the context of the study.

### Discussion and Findings

It was argued earlier in the paper that there exists a "systemic web" of institutions all working in a highly interconnected manner to maintain hegemony. This immensely well-calibrated network makes it easier to justify governmental policies. Implementation of these policies are often preceded by discussions which once again, tries to establish a relationship between Islam and inherent extremism to normalize the future implementation of anti-Muslim policies in the interest and safety of the American people. Under the pretense of presenting liberal points of view and balanced narratives, CNN has time and again covertly and sometimes overtly provided people with the same highly monolithic and conservative storylines centered around the negative stereotypes and ideologies, the current government basis its discriminatory policies and increased scrutiny against Muslims.

This is evident from the fact that both air and ink time devoted to questioning if the fundamentals of Islam inherently support violence increased from September 2014 to mid-2015. A number of discussions which ensued during this period were loaded with titles and text bars using words such as "Islam", "Islamism", "Allah" and other Arabic words to generalize the notion of extremism to Islam and then automatically to all Muslims. By means of manipulation and distortion of statistical data, news anchors directed the conversation towards maintaining the hegemonic and racialized viewpoint about Muslims and Islam in today's America.

It is significant to note that at this time Donald Trump was simultaneously orchestrating a presidential campaign highly dependent on an anti-Islamic rhetoric and pushing towards a travel ban of mostly Arabic speaking nations.

Other dominant patterns that emanate from various debates held and articles printed are discussed below and corroborates that CNN has played its part in not only demonizing Islam and Muslims but has also managed to maintain a negative language ideology around Arabic.

#### 1. Generalization to maintain stereotypes

On September 4, 2014, a discussion on CNN Tonight titled " Is Islam more violent than other religions?" saw the former FBI Assistant Director arguing that since "Islamists" accept committing the horrific crimes in the name of their religion or calling themselves "Islam and then cutting people's head off" there remains less scope for further debate on whether Islam as a religion supports violence. It is astounding that a former FBI Assistant Director who have in the past been in a critical and important position to influence policies and decisions reduces the complexity of the notion of interpretation in religion and labels a fanatic's version as the official interpretation and then generalizes it to everyone who follows the religion.

The news anchor often cuts off counter arguments which suggest the presence of extremist elements in every religion. This will be discussed further under "refusing to acknowledge it as an extremist issue".

The idea is to maintain and promote throughout the discussions the stereotypical notion of Islam and Muslims as being stagnant and not progressive. However, what is significant here is that a handful of extremists are compared with the mainstream of other religions. Again, the many achievements of the Muslim world and Muslims are not highlighted or seldom brought into discussions. This coincides with the curriculum and history books which calls for an inclusion of Muslim achievers from around the world to break down the label of being unprogressive. Irshad Manji, the founder of the Moral Project highlights in a debate held shortly after the Orlando attacks (2016) how broadcasters avoid presenting an alternative image of the Muslims since they fear losing out on advertisements or believe that the stereotypical image is so deeply ingrained into American consciousness that any efforts would result in protests. She states, "that we cannot make shows because broadcasters think average American is stupid to understand these complexities, would hear the word Islam and Muslim and start protesting" (Reliable Sources, 2016).

This reiteration of Islam as inherently a violent religion promoting repressive practices is a constant on CNN. One example worth highlighting is a discussion between broadcasters and Professor Reza Aslan on CNN Tonight (2014). This interview is primarily a response by Aslan on comments made by comedian Bill Maher linking Islam and violence. It is evidently observed throughout the course of the interview that broadcasters are attempting to establish and reinforce the notion that Islam as a religion stimulates violence, mistreatment, and subjugation of women. This is apparent when Aslan responds to reinstate repeatedly that the problem lies in talking about a religion of 1.4 billion people and generalizing. He states that we "are not talking about women in the Muslim world, we are using two or three examples to justify a generalization and that's actually the definition of

bigotry".

Western media has over the years intensified their efforts to constantly "paint the whole Muslim world from a single paint brush as though Pakistan and Turkey are the same or Indonesia and Saudi Arabia are the same and what happens in the most extremist, repressive countries is representative of what's happening in every other Muslim country"

(Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014).

This is important to consider since all these nations have distinct languages and this racialization process have also resulted in the general American public assuming that all Muslims speak Arabic. However, we do not see any debates where discussions are held on the absurdity that experts who without any knowledge of Arabic blatantly dissect and interpret direct quotes from the Quran.

Of course, Aslan's own frame of analysis centering on the term "country" is also somewhat problematic. Although one suspects given his line of argumentation that he understands the frame to be all encompassing, he could have also been explicit in explaining that there is no such thing as stability at the intersection of culture and "country". This case highlights another curious contrast that one witnesses time and time again.

However, this discussion was revisited the next day, titled "violence of Islam". The transition to this extremely discriminatory discussion was aired right after a story about a "sperm mix- up" and a white mom refusing to accept a biracial child. With the audience still reflecting on the idea of race and the mother's inability to accept "difference ", the news anchor swiftly makes the shift. The news anchor criticizes



and labels Aslan's ability to strongly defend and denounce Maher's comment about Islam and its connection to violence as "the conversation getting primitive"(Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014). This is instrumental given that news anchors are expected to be objective, and not inclining towards a certain narrative. In this case, it is evident that the channel felt the need to revisit and criticize Aslan, label him as being primitive, render his argument wrong, mention that one town in Indonesia still publicly cane homosexuals (this was in response to a point made by Aslan highlighting that we need to acknowledge countries where women are empowered such as Indonesia) all in an attempt to re- form or reinforce the narrative which aligns with the stereotypes - primitive, backward, violent and all belonging to one region. This is also an example of the need to revisit an argument if a certain dominant code is not received as intended (Hall, 1980). This video ends with Chris Cuomo stating that "the Muslim world is responsible for a really big part of religious extremism right now and they are unusually violent, unusually barbaric"(Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014). It is imperative what you leave the audience with as your ending statement.

Such discussions proves that CNN has contributed significantly towards a biased, prejudiced, and monolithic viewpoint of Islam and the Muslim world, all at a time when Donald Trump was running an extremely Islamophobic campaign explicitly connecting Islam to violence. At this time CNN could have lend a more balanced or objective perspective but in actuality they furthered a highly Anti-Islamic narrative. The repeated use of words such as "Islamists" "Islamism" "Jihad" and even "primitive" attached to the Muslim identity are examples where language is maneuvered either to shape connotations or form new vocabulary which primarily uses Arabic in an extremist context.

The fact that there is a severe lack of discussions highlighting this issue of linguisticism is an active example of the news channel's bias and agenda in reproducing the same notions, ideologies and stereotypes surrounding the Muslims.

## 2. Manipulating data and baseless allegation

Another vital pattern that is observed is in presenting data without supporting or backing it with credible sources. These factual figures usually suit the villainous, barbaric, and racialized image of the Muslim world who are at a constant war with the West. For example, in a conversation labeled as "The truth about Islam, bigotry vs. facts" Sam Harris claims without any factual data that "20% of Muslims are Jihadists or Islamists" (Reliable Sources, 2014).

Another example how false information goes unquestioned on CNN comes from a discussion between Ben Ferguson - a political activist known for his anti-Muslim rhetoric and Marc Lamont Hill. On CNN Tonight he states that a large number of "Muslims in the Arab world celebrated 9/11 in front of mosques and no other religion does what Islam does" (Lefkowitz & Figueroa, 2014). He does not have any data to support this claim. However, upon persistence to provide the source of information by the other panelist, the news anchor intervenes to redirect the conversation. The impact of such statements is immense as the larger audience may begin to accept fabricated statements without requiring any credible source to back it up. The emphasis in this false statement of celebrating an unfortunate event in front of a mosque is vital as well. It connotatively associates a site of worship (predominantly in Arabic) for Muslims as a location to also celebrate extremism and further hatred and extremist values. A similar tactic was used by Donald Trump who too, used baseless information to lure a large section of the society to believe that Islam is the enemy and hence, a travel ban is justified.

The role of a news anchor becomes imperative here, but it is often observed that they further this anti-Muslim rhetoric by providing data which can be easily manipulated. For example, in the same discussion mentioned above Don Lemon who was facilitating this debate provided with a PEW poll showing the percentage of people supporting Shariah Law in many Islamic countries. However, this does not suggest any concrete link as those who support Shariah law also supports violence or terrorism.

This was also the case in the discussion with Sam Harris who when shown a poll where 91% of Iraqis and 80% of Pakistani respondents voted against suicide bombings stated that if flipped around it means 20% of the respondents say that it is justified. Such manipulation of data in any other issue would be perplexing but goes unquestioned in discussions concerning Islam. We do not see such polls or a need to discuss if all Christians or Hindus support or condemn violent acts such as suicide bombings or shootings. Also, Islamophobes such as Sam Harris insisting to undermine this as a doctrinal issue and to not complicate it by breaking it down according to countries is an example of how media contributes in their own way towards maintaining this racialization of Muslims to be Middle Easterners who speak Arabic. However, such discussions and polls are imperative if the whole Muslim world has to be generalized as inherently capable of committing extremism to then justify the policies and surveillance programs implemented under the pretense of security.

### 3. Refusing to acknowledge this as an extremist issue

After every major shooting by a Muslim fanatic the debate around Islam supporting violence is revived. This often is not the case after shootings by a white supremacist. Even though several attempts by those lending a counter argument

have highlighted a need to consider this as an extremist issue rather than a religious one. However, fact less claims by individuals like Sam Harris, Ben Ferguson and even news anchors help sustain this connection. Given CNN's liberal stance it should hold discussions that oppose this connection or move beyond this false premise to more progressive and balanced discussions. Instead, it is observed that counter arguments which highlight similar extremist elements in Christianity are seldom acknowledged and downplayed by the anchors by either re directing the conversation or regarding it as an issue of the past. It is often understood as commonsense knowledge that mainstream Christians do not support violence and any shooting then is an individual act which can be attributed to other reasons.

### Conclusion

In this article I examined the deeply rooted workings of the media that have overtime cemented an extremely negative picture of all things Arabs in American minds. This led to the linguisticism, discrimination and increased surveillance of Arabic which expanded to all Muslims given their racialized identity as Middle Easterners. I also highlighted the presence of an extremely vicious cabalistic network between media-government and education in terms of policies. It was then argued that the notion of liberal media is an illusion and is rather more dangerous since it in its pretense of objectivity it is less likely to be scrutinized. Research suggested that an openly liberal organization like CNN works to protect the interest of the privileged class, maintain the dominant ideology and feed into the stereotypes that have already been created.

In order to move beyond and reverse what has already been ingrained and normalized into the American consciousness requires the systematic inverting of the entire media-government-education web. This would require an effort which is

once again aligned between these institutions in order to provide an alternative representation of Muslims. For instance, attempts to introduce Arabic in schools will not be accepted unless, the representation of Arabic language in movies is positive and incorporates stories which humanizes the experiences of Iraqis, Syrians, or Palestinians. Simultaneously, FBI and other regulatory bodies have to be more accepting of Arabic with less surveillance. The implications of misrepresentation of Muslims, issues of linguisticism and racialization have to be discussed overtly on news channels rather than reproducing the same arguments again and again. There need to be better representatives of Islam with lived experiences on the talk shows as well as more informed opponents who at least have a sense of Arabic before claiming to assert certain interpretations of the teachings of the Quran. Lastly, teacher education programs require reforms with more emphasis on media literacy and understanding of the Islamic world.

The possibility of learning Arabic as a language to subvert some of the common misconceptions and stereotypes White Americans hold of the Arab world has to be explored with more seriousness. It is clear that language learning can entail positive outcomes required to move beyond the monolithic and obsolete perception of Arabs and initiate resisting or at the very least questioning the media representations and reflecting on their process of socialization. These predominantly include executing a right pedagogy and exposing learners to the language for a longer period of time.

This necessitates a revised curriculum at school level for students to be able to widen their perspectives. This requires a shift from white centrality in history books and media stereotyping of the White - good vs the Arab – evil to initiate an early understanding of the importance of multiple perspectives among Whites. The

constant messages - Whites being more valuable through dominant institutions such as the schools and media reproduces the same perspectives and notions of racial arrogance and white fragility among them (DiAngelo, 2017) This is particularly true for a language as weaponized as Arabic and a race as vilified as Arabs.

The role of the teacher is significant. In this aspect the “significance of the teachers’ understanding of the political nature of education” (Bartolome, 1994, p. becomes imperative. Bartolome (1994) cites Freire, 1987 to explain the importance of political clarity and a teacher’s ability to adapt their strategies in accordance with the diversity of the learners. She states that “teaching is not a politically neutral undertaking ... educational institutions are socializing institutions that mirror the greater society's culture, values, and norms. Thus, the unequal power relations among various social and cultural groups at the societal level are usually reproduced at the school and classroom level, unless concerted efforts are made to prevent their reproduction. Teachers working toward political clarity understand that they can either maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural reality at the classroom” (p. 4).

Arabic language cannot be taught without acknowledging the material and linguistic oppression that the Arabic speaking people experiences and hence, pedagogy should be directed towards incorporating this reality.

Language immersion programs and a culturally integrative curriculum are vital to this process. It is evident that language learning can be conducive to subverting or resisting stereotypes. Learning one or multiple languages can yield significant results, however these results can be magnified if inculcated from an early age. An

early exposure to target language speakers can initiate a cycle of liberation through introspection and raising consciousness (Harro, 2018). This exposure to power dynamics and symbolic and real lived violence encountered by speakers of subordinated languages as well as the privileges and oppressor identities formed by speakers of the dominant language can widen perspectives and prepare individuals to be knowledgeable and accepting of other cultures early in their lives. Language acquisition has to be looked beyond solely as an addition to skill set and requires to be inserted with in a broader framework. This synthesis will bring social issues to the fore within the classroom and into the context.

The wider social issues and ideologies associated with Arabic have to be amalgamated into the pedagogy. An updated curriculum which is representative of the Arabic speaking world in its true sense is a necessity.

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## Appendix

Headline	Date Aired	Show / Website link
Are Muslim being portrayed unfairly?	Sept 4, 2014	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvk42yotfds">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tvk42yotfds</a>
Reza Aslan: Bill Maher 'not very sophisticated'	Sept 30, 2014	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pjxPR36qFU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pjxPR36qFU</a>
Muslims accurately represented by U.S. media?	June 19, 2016	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2016/06/19/muslims-accurately-represented-by-u-s-media.cnn">https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2016/06/19/muslims-accurately-represented-by-u-s-media.cnn</a>
Fareed's Take: Anti-Semitism & Islam	Feb 16, 2019	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2019/02/16/exp-gps-0217-fareeds-take.cnn">https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2019/02/16/exp-gps-0217-fareeds-take.cnn</a>
Michael Flynn in August: Islamism a 'vicious cancer' in body of all Muslims that 'has to be excised'	Nov 22, 2016	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/22/politics/kfile-michael-flynn-august-speech/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/22/politics/kfile-michael-flynn-august-speech/index.html</a>
The truth about Islam: bigotry vs. facts	Oct 12, 2014	<a href="https://edition.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/10/12/rs-the-truth-about-islam-bigotry-vs-facts.cnn">https://edition.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/10/12/rs-the-truth-about-islam-bigotry-vs-facts.cnn</a>
Chris Cuomo on sperm bank mix-up, violence of Islam	Oct 2, 2014	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsRfEdOIuAI&amp;t=2s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsRfEdOIuAI&amp;t=2s</a>
Is Islam more violent than other faiths	Sept 4, 2014	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yftrJ-R-RQY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yftrJ-R-RQY</a>

Headline	Date Aired	Show / Website link
Are news outlets portraying Muslims inaccurately?	Jan 18, 2015	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJTuLmfTWtM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJTuLmfTWtM</a>
This is the part that really makes my head explode	Oct 6, 2014	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQHx8LDW78Q">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQHx8LDW78Q</a>
Western allies reject ISIS leader's threats against their civilians	Sept 22, 2014	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isishttps://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isis-threatens-west/threatens-west/">https://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isishttps://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isis-threatens-west/threatens-west/</a>
After Paris attacks, 7 questions being asked about Islam	Jan 13, 2015	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/10/living/questionshttps://www.cnn.com/2015/01/10/living/questions-islam/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/10/living/questionshttps://www.cnn.com/2015/01/10/living/questions-islam/index.html</a>
On Islam, Trump is consistently inconsistent	May 22, 2017	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-islamhttps://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-islam-inconsistent/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-islamhttps://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-islam-inconsistent/index.html</a>
ISIS audio tape: Attack the U.S.	Sep 22, 2014	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isishttps://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isis-threatens-west/threatens-west/">https://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isishttps://www.cnn.com/2014/09/22/world/meast/isis-threatens-west/threatens-west/</a>
Harris: Islam "mother lode" of bad ideas	Oct 14, 2014	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/10/14/cnnhttps://www.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/10/14/cnn-tonight-sam-harris-islam-mother-lode-bad-ideas.cnn">https://www.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/10/14/cnnhttps://www.cnn.com/videos/bestoftv/2014/10/14/cnn-tonight-sam-harris-islam-mother-lode-bad-ideas.cnn</a>
Affleck, Maher in heated debate about Islam	Oct 16, 2014	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/showbiz/tv/affleckhttps://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/showbiz/tv/affleck-maher-islam-real-time/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/showbiz/tv/affleckhttps://www.cnn.com/2014/10/06/showbiz/tv/affleck-maher-islam-real-time/index.html</a>

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