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Eleonas

Elizabeth Lowe
Pepperdine University, Elizabeth.Lowe@pepperdine.edu

Sabrina Ballard
Pepperdine University, Sabrina.Ballard@pepperdine.edu

Zachary Edwards
Pepperdine University, Zachary.Edwards@pepperdine.edu

Tracie Loo
Pepperdine University, Tracie.Loo@pepperdine.edu

Gracelyn Sweeney
Pepperdine University, Gracelyn.Sweeney@pepperdine.edu

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And now the telling of…

Eleonas

Elizabeth Lowe, Sabrina Ballard, Zachary Edwards, Tracie Loo, & Gracelyn Sweeney

Assigned in COM 512: Intercultural Media Literacy (Dr. Roslyn Satchel)

Overview

Our six-part mini-series explores the lives of six different individuals from Iran and Afghanistan. Their stories intertwine in a Greek refugee camp where they are all currently living. As they form relationships and settle into their new reality, they start to share their lives prior to fleeing their war-torn countries. Each character's story is told through flashbacks and highlights their lives in their home countries.

Summary[2]

In the pilot episode, all of the historical background and character introductions are showcased to give context to what this six-part miniseries will contain. It brings to light the terror of living in Afghanistan and Iran, as well as the poverty and hardship of living in the refugee camps. However, it also shows that life goes on and that communities and friendships are being formed.

The first character introduced is *Atisheh Dariush*. Throughout her episode, the audience is able to see that she is 30 year old lesbian who has had to hide her homosexuality from her family and friends. After being outed, the controversy and violence surrounding the situation leads her to flee her home in search of a new life. This episode will focus on the intersectionality of her identity and the LGBTQ rights she is fighting for. The second character introduced is *Farhad Naseri*. He is a 24-year old medical student who is unable, due to his Kurdish ethnicity, to pursue higher education in Iran. This episode really focuses on his intellect, his drive to succeed, and how that influences his decision to find that in Europe. The third character is *Nafisa Kabir*, a ten year old girl who has fled with her family to Greece. In her episode, her parent's marital tensions are highlighted due to differing faiths, yet the audience sees how she wants to have a normal and innocent childhood in the refugee camp. The fourth character is *Chamran Raouf*. He is a 37 year old Iranian man who used to have a successful career as a professional basketball player. The audience sees his life with his wife, and the hardships of losing success and what it means to pursue a career he never imagined. The final character is Pastor Muhammed Koushani. He is the one who unites all of the characters together through his ministry at Agape Church. In his episode, the journey he makes from Afghanistan to Greece is told in great detail, showing the struggles his families had to endure. It also shows the sacrifices he has made to stay in Greece, despite being able to leave for a Northern European country, so that he can serve other refugees.

Throughout the entire miniseries, each character is complex and defined, carefully developed in their specific episodes. Their stories are intertwined and allow for growth and the breakdown of false stereotypes and generalizations. Overall, this miniseries tells the stories of Afghan and Iranian refugees who are not only trying to survive, but thrive in a new world.

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[2] This is the summary to a proposed miniseries.

Episode One: Pilot

First opens up with boat scenes from media, some people don't make it, voice-overs of newscasters, Obama commenting, scenes of Taliban, Iran hostage crisis, etc. Juxtapose that with showing the environment of Greece, the refugee camps, their personal trailers, etc, normal looking people playing soccer. Afterwards, they gather to eat and talk with Pastor Mohammed and other main characters.

Episode Two: Atisheh Dariush

Episode two follows a young Iranian woman at the age of 30 who came to Eleonas on her birthday. Her name is Atisheh Dariush. At the time of her arrival, she is frightened, scared, and silent. Many of her flashbacks of her episode pertain to her birthday the previous year in Iran, where birthdays are celebrated in the home with spicy traditional food, a cake, and candles. When the guests arrive, they greet Atisheh by saying "tavalodat mobarak" which means "happy birthday" in Farsi. Men and women customarily celebrate in different rooms. This day is special to Atisheh, as she is able to see her lover Fatima. The two have been enacting in a forbidden homosexual affair, which is prohibited in Shiite nations. The party is going well, until one of the women decides to out the couple. This leads to the great distress of Atisheh, violence ensues, and the night ends in a fury. Atisheh's escapes with her older brother in the middle of the night, and the rest of the story is history. Atisheh is seen without her Burka on when she gets off the boat. She is smart, articulate, and an accomplished women's divorce lawyer. Her new life mission is striving for the opportunity to share her experience with the world, and in her episode, she is starting to write a book that will become a *New York Times* best seller someday. For now, though, she is labeled as a displaced refugee.

Episode Three: Farhad Naseri

The third episode will be focusing on a 24-year-old male medical student named Farhad Naseri (see casting for character background). As this episode focuses on flashbacks of his life back in Iran and his journey to his present-day situation, many of his childhood activities, education, family experiences, and friendships and rivalries are highlighted.

Farhad's childhood flashbacks will consist of looking deeper into what it was like being a Kurd in Iran, and how his large family interacted. It will showcase what it looks like to be a normal child in this country while juxtaposing the hard life of a non-dominant group member. This section will also highlight Islam and the role it plays in the culture of his family.

In the education flashbacks, they will focus on Farhad's intelligence, his drive to become a successful doctor, as well as his rivalry with Sabrina's character all throughout school. It will highlight the trials and hardships he has had to overcome because of he of his Kurdish descent. The flashbacks will do this by highlighting the story of Farhad and Sabrina's character competing for the best grades. And while they both score high marks, Farhad is not given the same opportunities because of his ethnicity. And due to this inequality, his family decides to send him to Northern Europe in hopes of a better future.

The journey flashbacks will show the arduous tests and trials of a "boat person" and what it was like to travel alone. It will highlight the pressures of a young man who has been "invested in" by his family to get a job, make money, and send it back. This part will show the very human parts of Farhad as he struggles with loneliness, coming to faith, the controversy of telling his parents, and his path towards regaining respect and dignity in the eyes of the world.

Episode Four: Nafisa Kabir

The fourth episode focuses on a 10 year old girl named Nafisa. Her story is told through telling her story to an adult in Eleonas. Her father is Christian, while her mother is Muslim. Through flashbacks we see the marital tension between her parents, the political oppression of Christians in Afghanistan, and her family fleeing their home in Afghanistan.

After Nafisa leaves the adults she told her story to, she wanders around Eleonas and flashbacks to the boat they took to get to Greece. After arriving in Greece, Nafisa and her brother claimed Christianity as their religion, and their mother told them that she didn't love them anymore. After this, they went to Eleonas to live with their father. In the camp, their father struggles to find a way to move them to Austria. He's running out of money, and legally he can't work to make anymore. Nafisa and her brother, despite the financial struggle, try to make home within the Eleonas camp. They play sports with the other children in the day time, and a game of cards at night with their father.

Episode Five: Chamran Raouf

The fifth episode focuses on Chamram Raouf, a 37-year-old Iranian man born in Tehran who traveled to the refugee camp with his wife, Zenab. The episode uses flashbacks to develop Chamran's background but he has never really faced any struggle until having to leave Iran. His background includes his career as a basketball player with Iran's national team as well as his studies in economics at the University of Tehran.

We learn that he and his wife hope to reach London to work in economics and the embassy, respectively. Zenab teaches Chamran English to give him a chance at finding work once they arrive in London. Chamran is a stoic person so he acts as if he has everything together but his reality is that he is crumbling under the immense pressure to learn as doubts they will ever

leave. Chamran meets Farhad Naseri, who has doubts of his own; Chamran offers as much wisdom as he can, still acting like he has it together. The episode ends with him breaking down privately to his wife, she reminds him that they will eventually get through this time.

Episode Six: Pastor Muhammad Koushani

The episode begins with Muhammad reflecting on his life prior to arriving in the refugee camp. Muhammad was a businessman and a devout Muslim who loved his family and his. When the war struck his town, he tried to wait it out, hoping that the circumstances would change. However as the war progressed and the severity of violence increased, he had no choice but to flee with his family. He and his family walked for miles from Afghanistan to Iran, and from Iran to Turkey until he finally reached the coast. After hard negotiations, he found someone to agree to take him and his family to Greece.

The boat ride for Muhammad and his family was a traumatic and life-threatening experience. On the six-hour passage, there was a storm that flipped over the boat; separating him and his entire family. He was stuck in a situation in where he had to save his wife and his two children. Luckily, his daughter knew how to swim. So, he told his daughter to hold onto her baby brother while he attempted to save his wife. By the time he came back to his daughter she had lost her brother. Fortunately, they were close to land when they found him washed up on the shore. Muhammad performed CPR for hours until his son came back alive. In that time he prayed to Allah to save his son. His son was then resuscitated. The Flashbacks end and he is in the camp a week after the tragic event.

The following day he hears his wife scream and he runs into the tent. He sees his wife having a miscarriage. In his sorrow, he prays fervently to Allah, in where he has his first encounter with Christ. He hears his voice and Jesus tells him to

follow him. He listens and it jumpstarts his ministry. He struggled with what it means to be a follower of Christ without really trying to know him or his word. Soon Agape Church comes in to aid the refugees. He encounters the leader and becomes his mentee. He learns from him and then develops his ministry; uniting the characters in the other episodes together. The camera showcases all of the characters sharing their stories. Eventually, he and his family are granted asylum. They accept, but he decides to go back after some years to continue to work in his ministry.

Context for Series

A refugee camp in Greece named Eleonas: 5 people from different careers, socioeconomic statuses, etc. and the narration of their lives and experiences through present day and flashbacks. Each episode focuses on an individual character's story, encompassing their character now and in flashbacks creating a fully understanding of their personal stories. These episodes will discover the characters each individual dynamic nature, their culture they are from. This will be shown in a modern frame showing technology in Iran/ Afghanistan and the capability and sufficiency of a nation without westernization. These characters break stereotypes by showing their home countries, socioeconomic statuses, level of education, religion, romantic, familial relationships and most importantly, their individual intersectional identities.

Programming

Netflix, Inc. serves as a streaming internet subscription service company that distributes films and television on the internet. Netflix is very diverse operation in that it provides domestic and international streaming services and domestic rental DVDs. Netflix accesses its films and television shows from various networks and content providers "through fixed-fee licenses, revenue sharing agreements and direct purchases"

(Netflix, 2017). By having the ability to market and advertise its services in the global market, through various media, Netflix has ultimately become the new "cable" in our modern society. As result of its success in pioneering streaming services, its success has allowed them to have the capability and freedom.

Netflix has been a platform for shows that change culture, break boundaries, and create social change. It has presented documentaries, films, and TV shows with unconventional story lines and dynamic characters. Because it is an independent entertainment company, their revenue does not rely on solely on viewership, but rather it focuses on the number of subscriptions every month. Television broadcasting is a sponsored, corporate medium. Because of this, society may progress at a faster rate than TV shows in regard to race. Netflix does not rely on advertising, and they therefore have the freedom to be as progressive at they want in terms of content. Success of their shows relies mostly on this content rather than the sponsors of the show (Shanahan, 2015). They therefore have freedom to show diverse and progressive content that appeals to an extremely wide and diverse audience.

This platform is best suited for our mini series, Eleonas, because of our thought-provoking and unprecedented plot lines and characters. We believe that Netflix allows for creative and diverse shows that do not depend on high ratings or viewership, allowing us to tell the real and vulnerable stories of Afghan and Iranian refugees. By not perpetuating stereotypes, we hope to reframe the narrative surrounding these marginalized groups and the refugee crisis.

Primary Audience

We are targeting all Netflix subscribers, ranging from 18-35 years old. A large portion of this demographic have access to a Netflix subscription and are willing to consume more progressive content than would be shown on

network television. In our experience, people in this demographic tend to prefer thoughtful and innovative programming. Netflix has proven to make diversity within its programming a top priority with shows such as Master of None, Dear White People, and Orange is the New Black.

Competition

Due to the fact that we will use Netflix as our platform, our show will not need to compete for a particular time slot. As a result of the fact that as of today there are no shows out in the market producing similar content to ours, we do not foresee our show competing with any other program.

Literature Review
Afghan and Iranian Refugees in American Media

The media's visual images and events deeply influence the public opinion of Afghan and Iranian refugees in the United States (Husselbee & Elliott, 2002). The evolution of Afghan and Iranian refugee media coverage finds its basis in history and evolves with the current events. The limited amount of literature highlights how photographs, visual images, and the general media have skewed the way Americans perceive Afghan and Iranian refugee experiences. Negative stigmas have emerged through the generalization and simplicity of certain images. This problem is immense and pervasive, causing one to think of how to make the shift from generalization to specificity and care. The media construction project aims to make this shift happen through emphasizing the complex and rich lives of Afghan and Iranian refugees. This will not only fill the gap in the literature, but also bring awareness and education to the American public on the experiences of these people.

"The way issues are presented in the mass media has a significant impact on audience awareness and understanding of public problems and concerns" (Husselbee & Elliott, 2002, p.

835). The media create frames that help individuals form their own personal frames by providing pieces of news or information. They assign specific meaning to different events, allowing the media to choose which issues are most important (Ryan, 2004). The events that are not as emphasized may be just as salient, but are not interesting enough to air, meaning the media holds a great amount of power on what to include and what to exclude (Ryan, 2004). "The images we see on our television screen play a crucial role in determining how we construct our reality" (Wright, 2002). However, there is not much general knowledge on how information is communicated through these images, which is the problem (Wright, 2002).

Media Representation of Afghan Refugees

This can be seen in the United States with the concept of "clash of civilizations" (Cloud, 2004, p. 286). This refers to how the U.S. always faces problems and conflicts with Others- usually being the Islamic Other, which is a threat to Western capitalism (Cloud, 2004, p. 286). The Islamic Other is seen as a threat to capitalism because of the binary stereotypes that are highlighted in media. The image of the white man stands for nation, economic system, and capitalism. The inverse is anti-American and pre-capitalism which is the same as barbarity (Cloud, 2004). Due to this image sequence, the American public is primed to feel antagonism against the Afghan man (Cloud, 2004). On the other hand, there is the concept of the white man's burden. With images showing Others as being savages and inferior, many people feel like they have the right, responsibility, and privilege to go and save those people from themselves (Cloud, 2004). By choosing to highlight the threat of Islam to Western capitalism, audiences construct their own reality of seeing this Other as inferior, thus influencing their personal biases and generalizations (Cloud, 2004; Wright, 2002). These "images of Afghan women and men

establish a binary opposition between a white, Western, modern subject" adding to the "white man's burden" (Cloud, 2004, p. 286). By identifying Afghan people as savage and helpless, the media create an opposite for national identification, thereby strengthening it in the process (Cloud, 2004). The strategy of composing these images creates this binary opposition between the American self and the Afghan Other as enemy (Cloud, 2004).

Even before the September 11th attacks, there was a huge humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, however, many superpowers decided to ignore it (Wright, 2004). Ever since 1978, when the communist regime took power in Afghanistan, refugees have continued to increase in numbers. Shortly thereafter, Russia invaded, trying to uphold the communist government, and by 1986, there were 5 million refugees. However, there were not only political problems, but natural disasters as well. Large earthquakes left more Afghans homeless, and many fleeing for their lives (Wright, 2004). When refugees flee from oppression, destruction, and persecution, they are stripped of their humanity, along with their voice, presence, and agency (Nyers, 2013). No longer having a homeland or a sense of self-worth or self-identity causes this loss of humanity (O'Neill & Spybey, 2003). In response to all of this, Americans soon began to lose interest; calling Afghanistan a "basket case" that no one wanted to spend the time or resources in helping (Wright, 2004, p. 100). However, after the September 11th attacks, that was no longer an option, and with the ensuing media coverage, it made Afghan refugees an important influence on the United States' reaction to this terrorist attack (Wright, 2004). At that time, Afghans were largely portrayed as terrorists or victims when highlighted in the media.

Presently, Afghan refugees are fleeing war and violence, which has resulted in the highest number of women and children casualties in 2015 (Gossman, 2015). According to the United

Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, in 2015, the Taliban and other anti-government forces were responsible for over 70% of civilian casualties (Gossman, 2015). Many Afghan refugees are fleeing generalized conflict and will continue to escape to Europe as long as violence, persecution, and insecurity ensues (Gossman, 2015).

Media Representation of Iranian Refugees

Iran has had similar circumstances as well. Before the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, aware and educated Americans saw Iran as a country with rich heritage, culture, and viewed the people as intelligent and professional (Mohsen, 2006). However, after this event occurred, it created xenophobic views against Iranians and Islam (Mohsen, 2006). The media construed these people as uncivilized and violent terrorists (Mohsen, 2006). Headlines on several news outlets, such as the Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph, denoted negativity and anger due to the use of loaded terms like 'furious,' 'revenge,' and 'mob' (New, 2001). There was also intense detail on the religion of the hostage takers, which in effect, used islamophobia and created a binary opposition between the Christian West and Muslim Middle East (New, 2001; Cloud, 2004). Ironically, faith was not the motive of the hostage takers (New, 2001).

While Persia was seen as a great and exotic nation, Iran is juxtaposed as a demonized threat to the United States (Zand, 2010). This country is seen as an irrational other compared to the civilized West (New, 2001). Because the West associates any Muslim with Bin Laden, the West turns the Muslim into an enemy. Since Iran is a Muslim country, it is then considered an enemy of the United States (Zand, 2010). Rather than focus on the ordinary lives of regular Iranian Muslims who spend time with friends, play sports, and celebrate holidays like any

American, the Western media highlights only radical stories and extremist situations (Zand, 2010). This reduces the images of Iran and its people and makes them evil symbols to the United States and Europe (Zand, 2010). By using techniques such as hyperbole, distortion, selective reporting and factual omission, the media creates Iran into a threat against Western cultures (New, 2001). Instead Western media should understand "that the reality is much richer and more complex than such crude constructs, and [that] the Iranian is not a projection of Western interests and ideas, but determined, diverse, independently thinking and compassionate -- in a word, human" (Zand, 2010).

Presently, many Iranian refugees flee their country because of political persecution, human right abuses, the worsening economic situation, and the international sanctions regarding the nuclear program (Agius, 2013). The freedom of expression has been limited due to the presidential election in 2009. Because of this, many Iranians have left the country (Agius, 2013). Along with this, Kurds and other ethnic minorities in Iran are harshly discriminated against and are not given the same legal rights as the rest of the population (Agius, 2013). Coupled with the rising inflation and unemployment rate, many people continue to leave. The international sanctions also add an element to the people fleeing Iran. It is making life harder inside the country because of the numerous consequences of the sanctions that are put in place (Agius, 2013).

Reduced Stories

The literature shows that the refugees' complex stories and experiences have been reduced to simplistic ideas through the media shown. This was seen in the Afghan crisis. During live interviews, videos of nonspecific refugees were interspersed, showing dramatic scenes of women in burkas and children walking through the desert. It may have hooked the audience and appeared illustrative, but the images were arbitrary in relation to the commentary (Wright, 2004). This reduces horrific and extraordinary events into "visual wallpaper" (Wright, 2004, p. 101). There is no reason for the images to be there other than to provide some relief or evoke an emotional response from the audience (Wright, 2004). "The refugee crisis is framed within Western concerns; the connections made to the United States and Britain through the general narrative act almost as justifications for the refugee story" (Wright, 2004, p. 105). This style of reporting serves refugees poorly. While they are interviewed, shown in images, and invited to speak about their personal experience, they are unable to provide a commanding voice that gives a broader picture of the political situation (Wright, 2004). They have to rely on other people and organizations to get their messages across. Thus, the voices of the refugees remain in the framing that a reporter, NGO, or translator decide (Wright, 2004).

The literature also shows how Iranians have been reduced to demonized stereotypes, binary opposites, and incorrect ideology (New, 2001). Through different events like the Iranian Hostage Crisis and the student protests in Tehran, media headlines and content have made it easy for Americans to base their understanding of Iranians on stereotypes and binary representation (New, 2001). Iran's unique and historical experiences of experimentation with democracy and diverse religious practices are disregarded (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013; New, 2001). This is due to the photographs of groups of women wearing black chadors that "confirmed representations of Islam's anti-liberal nature in the popular imagination" (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013, p. 56-57). Media have represented the Iranian community in complete opposition between the West and their values of freedom and liberty and radical Muslim beliefs of intolerance and violence (New, 2001).

Victims, Terrorists, and Boat People

Several articles and researchers state that refugees are stuffed into constraining boxes because of the events that the media highlights. The visuals that have been shown on Sky News feature stereotypical refugee images-- a man with a bundle on his back walking past crumbling buildings into an unknown future (Wright, 2004). Women and children are made to look like victims in the media, disempowering them and perpetuating a cycle of helplessness (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010). For example, a photograph of an Afghan man with a gun is portrayed as a terrorist or violent jihadist, or a veiled woman is seen as oppressed, when in reality there are much more complicated stories behind these images (Wright, 2004; Cloud, 2004; Rane, Ewart, & Martinkus, 2014). Because extremists and the actions they commit are deemed as newsworthy, that is what the public sees as representing Islam (Rane, Ewart, & Martinkus, 2014). Another stereotype that is perpetuated by the media are "boat people" (Mannik, 2012, p. 264). These are the refugees seen coming from Turkey to Greece in rubber rafts and boats. They were negatively perceived by the public because they are seen as violating the norms of entry and therefore are illegally entering the country. Because of this violation, they are seen less as victims and more as threats to national security (Mannik, 2012).

Effects of Media Representation

People that rely only on mainstream media for their education on Muslims will not gain a full picture (Rane, Ewart, & Martinkus, 2014). "Regardless of whether refugees, [or boat people], are depicted as victims or as a threat to national security, photography and other visual imagery are used to distance, sensationalize and discriminate" (Mannik, 2012, p. 265). These images try to give a generalized representation of who refugees are, without letting audiences get close to who the actual individual is (Wright, 2004). While in reality, refugees are just ordinary people with incredible experiences (O'Neill & Spybey, 2003). Visual media has allowed audiences to objectify refugees and ignore their historical, cultural, and political circumstances (Wright, 2002).

After synthesizing the literature, one can see that many researchers have found a prevalent problem when the media covers stories and events surrounding refugees. With little regard to their cultural and historical backgrounds, the media simplify the refugees into several generalizations and categories. This, in turn, causes American viewers to acquire a very limited perspective on the actual lives of these people. With this in mind, the media construction project will serve to provide a new lens through which to look at Afghan and Iranian refugees. There will be a focus on developing each individual's unique journey throughout a specific episode within the six-part miniseries. The literature helped to create a bigger picture of what needs to be done to shift the stigma surrounding these marginalized groups of Afghans and Iranians. This project intends to do just that and raise awareness of the intricate and inspiring stories of the Afghan and Iranian people.

Functions, Experiences, and Successes of Afghan and Iranian Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognizes that our world is facing the highest levels of displacement on record. They claim that "an unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from their home. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18" (UNHCR, 2017). To adequately tackle the stereotypical portrayal of –primarily Afghan and Iranian refugees– 12 peer-reviewed sources from EBSCOhost have been selected based on the effects of 9/11, immigration policy, experience, and success.

9/11 Media Coverage

In Collateral Coverage: Media Images of Afghan Refugees, Wright (2001) addresses the post 9/11 media coverage and the role that visual images played in portraying refugee stereotypes. In the article, Wright examines the role of visual images– focusing primarily on three BBC Television News Special Reports. Wright proposes three factors that result in the likelihood of global media coverage: 1) in order to attract the attention of the West, the crisis must be so extreme that it is hard to ignore 2) in order to gain airtime, the crisis must produce dramatic imagery 3) the style of the media coverage needs to stimulate the interest of viewers (Wright, 2004).

With the destruction of the World Trade Center, in a matter of hours, not only was terrorism the center stage for the news, but also Afghanistan was placed at the center stage during the crisis. Looking back at the historical events that occurred during 9/11, it reveals that Afghanistan was not directly involved in the terrorist attacks. In fact, the 19 men that were charged were actually Muslim Al Qaeda–an international extremist Islamic group led by Osama Bin Laden. Significantly, at the time 9/11 occurred, Osama Bin Laden relocated his headquarters from Sudan to Afghanistan. According to The Invasion of Afghanistan, October 7, 2001: Did 9/11 Justify the War in Afghanistan?, Griffin (2010) claims that out of fear of a second attack, the United States justified its military operations in Afghanistan post 9/11 for three reasons: 1. because 19 Al Qaeda members led the first attack 2. because the offense was authorized by Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, while stationed in Afghanistan. 3. because Afghanistan refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden. However, when looking closely at the conflict between both nations, the United States insensitive communication styles accused Afghanistan of working alongside terrorists; threatening their face in the international arena. In

an attempt to save face and protect their global image, Afghanistan wanted to come to a formal agreement in that it would deliver Bin Laden to a third party rather than to the United States directly. However, the United States refused to negotiate and instead primed Afghanistan as a guilty conspirator with Al Qaeda. Embarking on an illegal war, unauthorized by the UN Security Council, the United States media began to frame Afghanistan and its citizens as terrorists. So, as a result of this framing and the inability to distinguish what ethnic group was apart from the conflict, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern nations were primed as terrorists; igniting the portrayal of refugees and immigrants in the media as undercover terrorists.

Through his research, Wright uncovers that the media consistently displays disasters and conflicts using Matt Frei's five-act structure: exposition, development, climax, resolution, and denouement (Wright, 2004). However, with regards to the refugee crisis, the media deviated from the formula and instead perpetually exemplified the plight and dehumanization those it affected primarily, the refugees.

Emergence of Xenophobia

Xenophobia that emerged after the attack on September 11, 2001, created extreme sentiments of hate and racism towards Muslims and Arab refugees. Just nine months after 9/11, the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee found over 700 violent attacks toward Muslims and found that 56% of Muslims in Canada experienced some form of discrimination (Rousseau & Jamil, 2007). Though the literature of Rousseau & Jamil deviates from the Afghan and Iranian focus, there is a direct relationship with 9/11 based on Pakistan's historical ties with Afghanistan. Because Al Qaeda's rule was recognized in Pakistan, the CIA and the international community–including Canada– came to the conclusion that due the Taliban's close

relations with Pakistan, it would not only view Afghanistan and Iran as suspected threats to the United States' and Canada's National Security, but also Pakistan would be considered a threat too. Although the article does not showcase racism and xenophobia in the United States, it does show how a bordering nation can be affected by the influence of media portrayals.

Rousseau and Jamil (2007) studied two Pakistani groups that received the most backlash and discrimination post 9/11– an immigrant community in Montreal and Karachi– with the hopes of discovering what the different meanings created by 9/11 by individuals and the affected perceptions of the self and others due to 9/11 were. In Montreal, they interviewed those who came from a community centered society that lacked proper education and had low income. In Karachi, they interviewed a group that were highly educated and fell between the middle and upper-income class. The results of the study showed that although both ethnic groups shared somewhat similar socio demographics, their sentiments post 9/11 were significantly different (Rousseau & Jamil, 2007). The effects of xenophobia and racism in Canada sparked a sense of anger and resentment in the Karachi group (Rousseau & Jamil, 2007). While sentiments of fear and subdued anger were more reserved by the Montreal group. Although both groups come from opposite socioeconomic groups, both have a concern of their image and how they are perceived in society. Unfortunately, this negative perception for a long time affected their mobility and capability to live normal lives.

Immigration Climate Before Trump

Before examining the present-day political activity surrounding the Iranian and Afghani refugee crisis, it is pertinent to analyze the immigration climate before President Trump's inauguration. Before his commencement, there was an already heightened sentiment of racism of xenophobia towards foreigners. On Sept. 20, 2001, Bush declared war on terror. His sentiments addressed to the Congress and American people are still deeply embedded in society today. As found on The Guardian President Bush stated,

> *Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done...On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country...The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated...Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world - and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere* (The Guardian, 2001).

At the end of his presidency, the war on terror was far from over. As President Obama came into office in 2009, he too was determined to end the war on terrorism. In Obama and Terrorism, Stern (2015) reveals that Obama's take on counter terrorism would be more transparent and ethical than President Bush. However, the political and social climate of foreigners traveling into the United States primarily from the Middle East and Southeast Asia– where the majority of Muslims reside– would be very strict.

In Bhattacharjee's (2010) article, Prominent Iranian Scientist Blocked From Attending Physics Meeting, he reveals that Iranian physicist Farhad Ardalan, a fellow of the American Physical Society, was not able to enter the United States due to the fact that his name appeared in the U.S. government records as a criminal (Bhattacharjee, 2010). Wrongly accused, Bhattacharjee was denied access into the United States because of having an ethnic connoted to terrorists. This is not the first time the United States government mistook someone's identity in

the visa process as a recorded criminal due to the similarity of extremist's names. Similarly, in 2006 Goverdhan Mehta, an Indian chemist, ran into the same problem when the U.S. embassy denied his visa application (Bhattacharjee, 2010). These unfortunate mistakes keep highly valued academics from continuing their research in the United States and improving our overall world. Further, this article provides insight into America's strict relationship with foreign immigration before Trump's presidency.

Trump's Immigration Policy

Next, it is crucial to look at U.S. immigration policy in light of the more recent refugee crisis. In David Grunblatt article, President-Elect Trump and Immigration Policy: The First Six Months—What Can We Really Expect Grunblatt (2017) correctly, predicted the possible actions that President Trump could take in the first six months of his presidency regarding immigration policy, rescinding President Obama's Executive Orders-- most significantly DACA and DAPA--and focus the National Budget removing and deporting undocumented people (Grunblatt, 2017). Most significantly, buckling down in immigration policy limited the number of refugees allowed to gain asylum in the United States. On September 5, his administration did precisely that. What he failed to predict was Trump's targeted crackdown on immigrants and refugees from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen.

In Immigration order threatens overseas talent, Stone (2017) showcases how Trump's 90-day executive order to stop entry from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen would threaten its foreign talent from continuing to work in and improve the economy of the United States. As a result of the 90-day executive order, the United States restricted international academics from entering the United States due to their ethnicity. For the academics who lived in

the United States such as professors and students, it caused fear that they might get kicked out of the nation and lose their jobs. Stone states, "More Iranian academics are likely to be hit by the order than any other nationality. The open letter notes that some 1500 students from Iran have received PhDs from U.S. universities in the past three years" (Stone, 2017). He further interviews Hananeh Esmailbeigi, who is an Iranian-born biomedical engineer at the University of Illinois in Chicago that if Iranian academics were deported, then the majority of the staff and department heads will be deported, as well (Stone, 2017).

Experiences

The next literature pertains to the experiences of Iranian refugees. Although Iran, did not have a direct relation to 9/11 like Afghanistan, it too was considered a threat to national security. Iranian researcher Flora Keshishian discusses how the media's portrayal of Iranians affected her acculturation process in the United States following the Iranian revolution; ensuing 53 Americans who were held hostage in Tehran by the followers of extremist politician Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Keshishian, 2000). The crisis resulted in Keshishian, as well as many other Iranians, left to defend their character and good standing. There was a sense of fear that Iranians living in the U.S. would meet the same fate as the Japanese, which could potentially lead to their placement in internment camps. Keshishian reflects, "I will never forget that as an Iranian during this period I had to go to the immigration office to prove that I was not involved in any political activities, that I was here legally, and that I could support myself financially... It was isolating, humiliating, and painful to be scrutinized as a suspect" (Keshishian, 2000).

This same fear and trauma is reflected in Mohsen Mobasher's article. After the hostage of the 53 Americans, frustration and anger on America's part led to the United States imposing

economic and political sanctions to Iran. Following the sanctions, Iranian students were forced to "register with the Immigration and Naturalization Service to determine whether they held proper documentation and had maintained their student status" (Mobasher, 2006). Most significantly, Iranian students experienced the worst scrutiny, disrespect, and discrimination in the in the United States. Part of the Iranian experience involved Americans burning their national flag, Iranian-owned business faced boycotts, anti-Iranian protests, and more Most significantly, Mobasher found that in almost every major university, there were protests and discrimination of Iranian students. During the crises, Louisiana state and New Mexico State University stopped enrolling Iranian students (Mobasher, 2006). Additionally, the Mississippi legislature approved the doubling of tuition for Iranian students in order to prevent them from accessing higher level education (Mobasher, 2006). In less than a few months after the crisis, Iranian men and women experienced extreme discrimination and hatred from the American people and institutions.

Psychological Effects Today

In Belongings Beyond Borders: Reflections of Young Refugees on Their Relationships with Location, Muir and Gannon (2016) study the effects of location on the psychological experiences of young separated refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan. Both Muir and Gannon interview a man named Karim about the process of finding a job in London. He states, "I hate the Home Office and Job Centre... because for example sometimes they can play with your mind, they can make you angry and you can't do anything with it... Because... they have a power, they can do whatever" (Muir and Gannon, 2016). Overall, all of these cases exemplify that though immigrants and refugees all have different experiences in their host country, they have similarities that at one point

they experienced some form of discrimination, helplessness, and/ or trauma.

Successes

In one study, Bozorgmehr Mehdi and Daniel Douglas look at the socio-economic success of such second-generation Iranians. They found that because second-generation Iranians did not have to face learning a new culture, language, or face settling in foreign countries, they were more successful socially and economically than the first generation. In addition, this study discovered that they faced fewer social problems in comparison to their parents and grandparents, but did face more discrimination than any other non-dominant group in the United States (Mehdi & Douglas, 2011). However, most significantly, as more second-generation Iranians become more educated and gain opportunities that were once impossible to their grandparents and parents, it is estimated that over the next decade we will see a stronger and more mobile second and third-generation Iranian Americans that have more strength and power in the United States (Mehdi & Douglas, 2011).

Based on the literature provided it is made apparent that the media has framed Refugees as terrorists. Rather than presenting the correct historical context of the events of 9/11 in the media, our nation, as well as our allies, have created a sentiment of anti-Muslim and anti-refugee in our society. Though there is a fear that if refugees are integrated into society there will be increased terrorist attacks; based on the information provided it showcases that Afghan and Iranian refugees are normal people who have nothing to do with the conflict. They, endure so much trauma and oppression all for the cost of freedom. Therefore, the perception of Arab refugees must change.

American Perception of Iranian and Afghan Refugees

Post 9/11 era began with deep American distrust of Middle Eastern refugees entering the country due to the fear of more attacks like the ones that happened in New York and Washington in 2001. Discrimination became justified in our societal psyche conditioned a new layer of cultural and political prejudice toward these perceived groups. This "othering" of groups such as Afghans and Iranians come from the disproportionate portrayal in media of Arabs as terrorists. Jaideep Singh (2010) describes the media's creation of the stereotypical, and in turn, feared conception of a what a terrorist "looks like;" darker complexion, bearded and wearing a turban. These physical attributes tied to the "othering" of Middle Eastern Muslim peoples are targeted (many of which are Sikh attributes not Muslim) to develop the negative framework and perception of "Muslim" or "Arab" people. Muslim and Arab people are not synonymous but mainstream ideology has framed the two in this way (Singh, 2010). More importantly for refugees, the general American public is not empathic about the crises in these countries, and as a society experiences very little exposure to media that portrays these refugees as "people like us." Any news of Iranian and Afghan refugees is distracted, to an extent, from any focus on the actual people or their humanity (Selm, 2003). While Syrian refugees are often portrayed as victims and a society who we may feel morally obligated to assist, American media rarely consults the similar refugee crisis in Afghanistan in the same manner. There were approximately 2.7 million Afghan refugees in 2015, the second largest group of refugees after Syrians. Afghans were also the second largest group of asylum seekers (Skodo, 2017).

Why then, are the perceptions of urgency and legitimacy of the two refugee crises so discrepant? Perhaps even beyond the lack of images and humanity portrayed in the media, along with American paranoia of the "Arab," lies a deeper political reason for the neglecting of Afghan refugees. Robert D. Crews (2016) describes that in Washington, it is common to hear the view of Afghanistan as "a country defined by a never-ending struggle among warlords, tribal chiefs, and religious fanatics" (p. 2). While our history of involvement in Afghanistan is complicated it is highly likely that the perpetuated narrative of these refugees, or lack of attention in the media, is due to our political history. During the height of the Cold War, the United States established its international position against the communist power of the Soviet Union, and chose to exercise this influence in Afghanistan preemptively. The U.S. backed Islamist group of the mujahideen fought in resistance the leftist government and its Soviet backers in the 1980's. While American policies and interference did not lead to the direct the rise of the Taliban, the mujahideen party leaders and their families who received U.S. financial and military aid during the anti-Soviet jihad continue to dominate Afghan politics to this very day (Crews, 2016).

This American perception of the inferior nation of Afghanistan has made it easier to shift blame of the refugee crisis back onto the Afghans themselves. Perceiving them as backward, tribal, or ungrateful for the gift of American intervention contributes to the American obliviousness with regards to its role in the war, and not having to confront the mess we made in our political interference in the 1980's (Crews, 2016).

This post-Soviet interference led to our political obligations in Afghan refugee interference, as funding for humanitarian assistance for Afghan refugees was prominent in the early 1980's. These refugee programs for Afghan families rapidly declined after 2001 in the post 9/11 era (Margesson, 2007). Many Afghan refugees on September 11th, 2001 had expected to make the trip to America but ended up waiting extensive amounts of time, even years, after the terrorist attacks before they could be reevaluated for entrance into the U.S. (Redden, 2004). This

illustrates a very sharp shift of the perception of what it meant to be a refugee in America and how people from the Middle East were treated as unwelcome strangers. Skodo (2017) explains this cultural and political shift in American society stating, "when it comes to being a refugee, your nationality really matters."

Preconceptions and perceptions of this "legitimacy" in refugees, or even the acknowledgment of refugee crises such as in Afghanistan have a lot to do with American perception and construction of who the "enemy" was after 9/11. Brathwaite and Moorthy (2016) analyzed refugees for the years 1951–2008 and the process through which states decide what refugees to host and which to decline. Their study showed a "strong support for our predictions that a country is likely to receive refugees fleeing its rivals and is reluctant to accept refugees originating from its contiguous allies" (Brathwaite & Moorthy, 2016, p. 11). States that see refugees as victims persecuted by an enemy state are far more likely to accept these exiled peoples into their country. Americans do not perceive Afghans as from an allied nation, nor as victims fleeing from an enemy- rather they are seen as encompassing the enemy. This is further proof of how far away American perception is from seeing Afghan refugees as legitimate refugees or victims of crimes against humanity. Afghans are perceived as neither from an allied state nor a people's fleeing a country of the enemy. The crisis is simply invisible to most Americans.

Although perceptions of Middle Eastern refugees lack a humanity element in representation in American media and politics, there is still hope. Perceptions on Middle Eastern refugees and inclusion are subject to generational differences of opinion. Shibley Telhami discusses statistical differences in age, party affiliation, and ambivalent moral responsibility Americans perceive to have toward the various Middle Eastern refugee crises. Sixty-eight percent of

millennials claimed they were supportive of taking in refugees from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries, assuming there were security screenings. There was also a difference between party lines, with 77 percent of Democrats expressing openness toward accepting refugees-compared to 56 percent of Independent voters and 38 percent of Republicans (Telhami, 2016). But while most Americans believe the U.S. played a part in creating the current refugee crisis, it has not translated to a sense of moral obligation to welcome Middle Eastern refugees into America (Dews & Snodgrass, 2016).

There is much to be said about this disjunction between consciousness and sense of moral obligation. Americans seem to be divided in their perceptions of Afghan refugees. This is due to a number of things, including media portrayal (or lack thereof), the creation of the "Muslim" terrorist, our lack of responsibility in our own political interferences, and the fear of depletion in the economic and social systems that might occur in the United States (Karasapan, 2017).

Racial Role in Casting Choices

Race has a huge impact on our everyday lives and heavily influences the choices casting directors make when it comes to what the end project looks like. Racial representation and the whiteness of program content have shown to be problematic for marginalized groups. One franchise that is actively resisting and criticizing marginalized group underrepresentation in movies is the Fast and Furious series. The films include characters of many different cultural backgrounds, "a cast that [reflects] the reality of our country's racial makeup" (Lee, Stack, & Sullivan, 2015). Given these films' global box office yield of $2.4 billion (Lee, et al. 2015), one may assume that a more diverse cast will yield better business upon a movie's release. A study conducted by Nina Terrero for UCLA's Hollywood Diversity Report concludes that, in 2013, movies with a diverse cast made up of at

least 41% nonwhites made over $50 billion more at the global box office than movies with casts made up of 10% or less nonwhites (Terrero, 2015). Box office success does not define the quality of a movie, but it does define the popularity of a movie or series; and movies that are more popular will make more money, so it is in the producers' best interest to make casting decisions with diversity in mind. One will notice that many of the modern American stars and heroes are still white and producers will create casts with some non-whites, but nowhere near the true racial complexity that is seen in America today (Lee, et al. 2015). Casting directors will cast one or a few non-white actors just to mark the diversity box off the checklist for a project, not thinking about actually portraying a true version of the American racial demographics.

This racial representation dysfunction may stem from the idea of in-group and outgroup as discussed by Weaver (2011). Weaver explains how, "audiences may be motivated to select content featuring same-race characters either because of a perception that such content will portray the in-group in a positive way (social identity theory) or because of a simple preference for characters similar to themselves (social cognitive theory)" (2011, p. 371). This thinking can be applied to the creation of media when the creator or controller of the media, in this case the producer, wants to portray their own in-group on screen. Since Hollywood studio heads were found to be 94% white (Hollywood diversity report, 2015), a large majority of people that belong to the in-group that ends up on screen make the bottom-line decisions for the film medium. This in-group may create for other groups but risk portraying the outgroup incorrectly, purposefully or not. This overwhelmingly lopsided representation of race, both on and off screen, only perpetuates the hegemonic nature of American media as well as the society at large.

In addition to the whiteness in representation, American media and society must deal with and acknowledge the systemic racism that plagues daily life. Alan Frutkin (1998) discusses black TV dramas and the racism that keeps them off air with the, "perception among many black artists that there is institutional-even if perhaps unintentional--racism in the network TV business in general" (p. 28). The notion that racism may not even be a conscious choice is unsettling, to say the least, and shows just how ingrained racism is in American culture. Frutkin goes on to explain TV studios' as being unsupportive of black dramas and claims, "that programming is still created by and for whites" (1998, p. 28). Despite the data that supports a multicultural cast as more profitable (Terrero, 2015), media gatekeepers such as television and film studio heads refuse to capitalize on the opportunity and continue to cast white actors in support of their own in-group because, "White audiences higher in prejudice, then, would be less interested in seeing films with mostly Black casts because such films, in their mind, would likely elevate the outgroup relative to the in-group" (Weaver, 2011).

Role of Stereotypes and Relevance to Afghan and Iranian Refugee Portrayals

Stereotypes have been a part of western culture forever, which means that it is impossible to create a portrayal of a group without potentially triggering a stereotype of that group (Gorham, 2013). Triggering a stereotype then, "[gives] viewers an example that helps reinforce the majority's dominance" (Gorham, 2013, p. 23). This becomes the question of whether to subscribe to stereotypes in order to develop a character more efficiently or to take more screen time and develop that same character by different means. Storytelling taps into the psychology of the audience and storytellers know this and consciously, or unconsciously, make detail decisions to make a point as effectively as possible. This can sometimes negatively or positively

stereotype a group, marginalizing everybody associated with that
group.

Jaideep Singh (2010) explores the public discourse of religion and the notion of "the so-called Muslim terrorist." Western media depicts the "prototypical terrorist" as wearing, "turbans and beards, as well as dark complexions" (Singh, 2010, p. 117). This depiction dangerously places a large portion of the American population into the terrorist box, which perpetuates the idea of the dominant culture's supremacy. Audiences often automatically perceive stereotypes as outlined by Srividya Ramasubramanian in her article on the reduction of stereotypes in news stories (Ramasubramanian, 2007). The audience is not always aware of the activation of the portrayed stereotype (Ramasubramanian, 2007). This can be extremely dangerous due to how media portrayals affect real life feelings toward marginalized groups.

Furthermore, exposure to TV messages negatively portraying Muslims affects Muslims' feelings toward themselves as those messages can alter the viewer's ideas about reality (Ibrahim & Halim, 2013). Ibrahim and Halim (2013) go on to explain that many Muslims watching news media feel unable to respond to negative discourse due to a devaluing of the Muslim point of view and an abrupt ending of the conversation.

Western hegemonic views represent all Muslims in a negative light and do not allow them to, in a sense, prove themselves innocent to the dominant group. In discussing a similar concept, Richard Dyer (1997) states that raced, or colored, people cannot speak on behalf of humanity as a whole, while non-raced, or white, people can. Due to their race being the at the forefront of their identity, raced people can only speak for their racial group while whites can speak for anybody (Dyer, 1997). In the case above, Muslims may only be able to speak for—or to, for that matter—other Muslims about the negative discourse they see in news media, which does nothing to stop the

perpetuation of western essentialization of Muslims.

Some people are fighting back and creating content that portrays Muslims more accurately. National Public Radio's Alex Cohen (2011) catalogs the 2010 film, MOOZ- lum, and its creators' attempts at breaking through Hollywood to depict Muslim characters outside of their stereotypical roles.

Applying real world scenarios to anti-stereotypical characters will allow any content producer to create multidimensional characters that allow the audience to see people in marginalized groups as fellow humans, breaking down many destructive western ideals that dominate modern American media.

Media Literacy and the Representation of Refugees in the Media

With our media project, we engage the refugee crisis, specifically focusing on Afghan and Iranian refugees. We chose the media construction project format because we want our audience to watch stories of refugees and to empathize with them. We are creating a six-part mini-series to highlight unseen refugee experiences, with the goal of evoking an emotional response from the audience. Manifesting this project into a miniseries is the best way for us to accomplish the following goals: (a) break down stereotypes surrounding refugees (b) paint a more accurate portrait of the refugee populations (c) improve mainstream portrayal of refugees and (d) to bring an aspect of humanity to refugees. By using video as our medium, we feel as though our content will be more likely to be consumed, as opposed to sharing our stories via news articles, books, or podcasts. The characters in our episodes include a lesbian young woman, a male medical student, a middle-aged basketball player, a young girl, and a Christian pastor. We created these characters with intersectionality in mind in an effort to paint a more colorful portrait of Iranian and Afghan

refugees. To bring meaning and validity to this project, this paper will cover the topic of media literacy and why it matters, how viewers read media content for its social and political function, what viewers read about refugees and how they're represented (or not represented), and the relevance of symbolic annihilation in relation to the issue.

Media Literacy

Kellner and Share give importance to the development in media literacy by stating that, "media representations help construct our images and understanding of the world…" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 370). This project is especially important for our time because there are very limited stories being told about refugees. From these stories, generalizations are made about refugees. People receiving this information are "not often aware that they are being educated and constructed by media culture…" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 372). In order to gain a clearer view of the world and marginalized groups, a critical approach to media is necessary (Kellner & Share, 2005). This is why media literacy is important.

Strate (2014) takes the concept of media literacy further and correlates media ethics with media literacy, stating that one cannot exist without the other. "There is a moral obligation on the part of media organizations to ensure that media audiences can decode their messages accurately, interpret them appropriately, and most important of all, evaluate them critically" (Strate, 2014, p. 101). Media literacy "helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media" (Kellner & Share, 2005, p. 372). This project's aim is that as viewers watch the miniseries, our messages about Iranian and Afghan refugees that portray them as intersectional humans will cause viewers to

question media that they've previously been presented with.

Viewers and Content

Deng, Lee, Li, and Lin (2013) coin the term "new media literacy" in reference to our digital age. Digital technology is a part of almost every aspect of our lives (Deng, Lee, Li & Lin, 2013). Dezuanni (2015) specifies digital media as being non-written forms of media such as, "film, television, print media, radio, video games, online and mobile media and the increasing convergence among these" (p. 417). "These new technologies make the media even more significant and influential than ever in human history" (Deng, Lee, Li & Lin, 2013, p. 160). With these emergent sources of news information "traditional literacy is no longer sufficient for an individual to competently survive in this new media ecology" (Deng, Lee, Li & Lin, 2013, p. 161). When traditional media literacy is not enough, how then, is a layperson, who isn't media literate to start with, find a truthful message? It is our goal with the miniseries to present a narrative that is transparent in its presentation of our message so that even the viewers that are not media literate, will see the differences between our miniseries' messaging and the media's messaging.

Media Representations

The function of media representations is that "mass media play an important role in the creation and distribution of ideologies, and thereby contribute to the overall cultural production of knowledge" (Ahmed & Matthes, 2016, p. 221). Ahmed and Matthes (2016) also go on to state that mass media depicts ideologies and developments as well as dominant social values, and that this often leads to "misrepresentation or stereotypical portrayals of minorities in the media (Ahmed & Matthes, 2016). According to Bleich, Bloemraad, and Graauw (2015) media representations are important to us because:

(i) The media provide a source of information about groups or issues related to migration and diversity; (ii) the media convey or construct particular representations of minorities and immigrants, including negative depictions; and (iii) the media act as a space for the participation of migrants and minorities in a public sphere where they can advance their interests and identities (p. 859).

According to Satchel (2017) "media producers' realities and ideologies inform social knowledge construction and shape what become cultural norms and values" (p. 29). Bleich, Blowraad and Graauw (2017) claimed that media is a source of information, and Ahmed and Matthes (2016) articulated that media could also construct representations of minorities. Representations of minorities in the media are important to understand and critique. Discerning the strategic message from a truthful message should always be in the audience's mind. Discovering media representations that portray a group in a false light should then help the media consumer find what the truth is. If one understands the crafted message, then one will have an easier time finding and discerning an authentic one.

Refugee Media Representation

Media offers a representation of white supremacy that usually depicts minorities as "a problem or threat, and mostly in association with crime, violence, conflict, unacceptable cultural differences, or other forms of deviance" (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 21). The media consistently links Afghan and Iranian refugees to Islam. The dominant white groups in western culture categorize Muslims as 'them' and are shown as a threat to 'us' (Osuir and Banderjee, 2004). When included in media rhetoric, Afghan and Iranian refugees are linked almost always with Islamic terrorism. Western media consumers learn about refugees as a generalized group, homogenous in their culture and religious beliefs. There are no individualized

stories of the refugee families. Most of the media representation surrounding Iranian and Afghan refugees involves death and/or violence. And in those stories, there is no call to action, only coverage of the violence and consequences involved. These stories show western peoples that refugees bring violence and turmoil.

Symbolic Annihilation

Symbolic annihilation is the absence of representation of some group of people in the media. Allen (2010) defines the sphere of invisibility as events and issues that rarely figure into news content; in our case this is Iranian and Afghan refugees. News content itself presents a narrow representation of refugees and generalizes the entire group of refugees into stereotypes. Tsfati (2007) claims that "minority perceptions of the strong influence of biased media coverage may indirectly lead to increased minority alienation" (p. 632). In light of this project, this study is relevant to our oppressed majority in relation to the rest of the world.

Currently, there aren't many countries that are open to accepting refugees. Closed border countries, like the United States, either don't talk about the ongoing refugee crisis, or refugees are painted in an undesirable way via the media. If they are seen as undesirable or threatening to the public, then they will not be welcomed into a new home. It's in this way, that the world has increased refugee alienation. This project adds to the narrative of alienated persons because Iranian and Afghan refugees are not alienated by a specific country, but by most countries.

Conclusion

Based on this research and collection of studies, our project will address the clear need for a different kind of refugee story. A media project is the best way to tackle this issue and achieve our goals. In order to change the media

landscape surrounding Iranian and Afghan refugees, we feel as though we must create content that alters that landscape. By adding our stories about Iranian and Afghan refugees in Greece, we are creating media that adds to and alters the constructed norm surrounding this topic. The intersectional stories we create with the six-part miniseries will highlight refugees as individual humans, instead of grouping them together and erasing their distinct cultures. Media literacy is important in accomplishing this, since we as the project producers need to stay constantly critical of the work we do, and keep our conditioned biases in check. Through our creation of a new type of message, we also hope to influence the way viewers interact with media content by providing a message so prolific that it causes viewers to question what they've seen before. We aim to expand the types of messages shown about refugees and work against the symbolic annihilation that occurs through traditional messages typically shown about refugees. This project should ultimately challenge the perceptions of refugees that Western culture has seen up to this point.

Casting and Background

ACTRESS: *Nazanin Boniadi*

Nazanin Boniadi was born in Tehran, Iran in the height of the revolution. She was raised in London, England and later moved to the U.S. to attend university. She is a British-American. She graduated with Honors from the University of California Irvine, where she received a Bachelor's Degree in Biological Sciences. Fluent in both English and Farsi. She is a human rights activist and served a spokesperson for Amnesty International USA from 2009 until 2015. She continues to partner with the organization as an Artist of Conscience. She joined the Board of Directors at the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran in October 2015.

CHARACTER: *Atisheh Dariush*

Atisheh Dariush is a 30-year-old Iranian refugee, gay in her sexual orientation though this is only mentioned in flashbacks and is not the dominant force of her identity. The audience recognize the character's sexuality, but it will only contribute to her story as part of intersectionality. She is an accomplished female divorce lawyer, which is a growing problem in Iran and is a very disliked profession by the community.

ACTOR: *Bobby Naderi*

Bobby Naderi was born in Tehran, Naderi had a cultured childhood having been raised between Iran, Europe, Canada and the U.S. Bobby by sheer chance found his way into the Arts in his early 20s which led him to study with Judith Weston then began working on stage and the indie film. He gained notice for his lead role in Sundance Festival Hit! "The Taqwacores" which he received high praise for his performance. Naderi had a Supporting role in Nina Menkes Sundance film "Phantom Love" and a part in Ben Affleck's Oscar winning "Argo". Bobby continues to study the craft. *Speaks fluent Persian and English.

CHARACTER: *Chamran Raouf*

Raouf, born on Feb. 20, 1980 in Tehran, Iran came to Greece with his wife, Zenab. He was a professional athlete on the Iranian National Basketball team. He studied economics at the University of Tehran and hopes to leave Greece and reach the London in order to work in the field. His wife, who is fluent in Persian and English, teaches him English and hopes to work in the Embassy of Iran in London. The couple have been at the refugee camp for three months and recently met Farhad Naseri. Naseri has been at the camp longer so he is able to help them with life in the camp as the couple attempts to keep him hopeful for his own escape. Chamran loses faith in himself as he struggles to learn English and forms doubts about ever leaving. He does not tell his wife about

his doubts because he does not want to let her down. Personality: outwardly stoic, internally emotional, lacks a sense of humor.

ACTOR: *Shervin Alenabi*

Shervin was born in Iran in 1995. He, along with his family immigrated to the UK in 2007. Wanting to continue acting, he learned to speak English and adapted the accent by watching and recording popular teen English films and television shows, such as Skins (2007). He is fluent in both Kurdish and Persian. Because of his age and Kurdish background, he is very similar in that sense to the character, Farhad Naseri. It is very important to emphasize the hardships and experiences that young male Iranian refugee men have to go through as they make the journey to Greece and northern European countries alone. Shervin's physical characteristics and linguistic abilities will be able to capture Farhad's personality and character perfectly.

CHARACTER: *Farhad Naseri*

Farhad was born in Tehran, Iran on March 27, 1994. His family consists of his mother, father, older brother, and younger sister. His childhood was hard, especially since his family is Kurdish- a minority group in Iran. Growing up, Islam was a huge part of his culture and family life. It was something that was never questioned, but expected to be a part of daily life. Up until he fled to Greece, he faithfully followed the Islamic religion.

As a young boy, he always had high aspirations for his future, and has strived to become a doctor ever since. However, because of his ethnicity, he faced a lot of political persecution. Even though he received top marks in school, he was never able to pursue higher education in medical school because of his Kurdish background. Because of this, his family decided to send him to Northern Europe to obtain a medical degree. He traveled from Iran to Turkey, then fled on a boat to

the Greek islands, where he finally landed in Athens. He has been alone throughout this entire journey and is adamant on finding a job so that he can send money back to his family.

Presently, he is in a Greek refugee camp, and has started to lose hope in leaving this country. He experiences waves of loneliness, but also conviction to take charge of his future. He has been there for the past 10 months, and during this time has gone to church and became a Christian. It was extremely hard telling his family this, but unlike many other families that would disown or persecute their Christian relatives, they have been supportive and loving.

ACTOR: *Fahim Fazli*

Fahim Fazli was born on May 30, 1966 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Fahim Fazli came to the United States when he was a teenager in order to escape the oppression and violence of the Russians. In his youth, prior to seeking refuge in the United States, he supported the resistance in Afghanistan. He came to California and pursued a successful acting career after his education. From 2009-2010 he decided to become an interpreter for the U.S. Marines as a way to give back and to support the resistance in Afghanistan. After his service, he wrote a book called Fahim Speaks which won first place for a biography from the Military Writers Society of America".

CHARACTER: *Pastor Muhammad Koushani*

Pastor Muhammad Koushani was a practicing pastor of a non-denominational church in Afghanistan. When the violence became too unbearable, he and his family fled to Greece to seek refuge. After overcoming the trauma, he endured, he continued his ministry in the refugee camps. He invited all Muslims into a welcoming space and invited healing from all religions in the camps. After some years of waiting he was granted asylum but gave up his spot to continue his

ministry. He made the decision to separate from his family in order to give them a better future.

ACTRESS: *Kinza Fahad*

Kinza Fahad is an Afghan child actress. She previously starred on a popular Middle Eastern show "Tumhare Siwa" as one of the main character's daughter. Due to her being a minor, there is not much information about Kinza. She has an existing Facebook page titled "Kinza Fahad Child Star" with clips and photos of her from the show "Tumhare Siwa" as well as other appearances at talk shows and with fans. It is not known if she has any experience with the refugee crisis. She is often described as "sweet" by her fans, and has experience playing the daughter of two feuding parents.

CHARACTER: *Nafisa Kabir*

Nafisa Kabir is a 10-year-old from Afghanistan. She lives with her mother and father until they find refuge in Greece, where her mother leaves their family due to differing religious ideologies. Through the flee to Greece and her parents' separation, Nafisa is struggling to be a child when so much of her past experiences have challenged her to be an adult. She and her brother try to make home in Eleonas while having flashbacks of their life in Afghanistan.

Changing the Media Landscape

This six part mini-series will alter the dominant media landscape of the U.S. by highlighting the realistic and humanistic stories of refugees in the Eleonas Refugee Camp. By making the stories dynamic, relatable, and full of life, they will give more understanding to those who have faced this specific systemic oppression and displacement. By creating content that focuses on their intersectional identities, this show will portray the refugees as more wholesome, competent, and personable human beings that otherwise are symbolically annihilated from media

representation in the United States. Our current political and cultural contexts need to be disrupted and readdressed, especially in light of islamophobia, the Muslim Ban, terrorism, and the refugee crisis.

Media representations help construct our understanding of the world (Kellner and Share, 2005). Our project is especially important for our time because we have limited stories being told about refugees, and many are based on stereotypes. Our audience, the general American public, is not usually aware that they are being influenced and educated via the media culture (Kellner and Share, 2005). Kellner and Share also articulate that in order to gain a clearer view of the world and of marginalized groups, a critical approach is necessary, hence where media literacy comes into play. Strate (2014) also argues that as content creators, we have a moral obligation to ensure that our audience is able to decode the messages accurately and evaluate them critically. Hence, media literacy is important for both us as the miniseries content creators, but it's also important for us to keep in mind as an audience consuming media.

American perception of refugees from the Middle East severely shifted after the 9/11 attacks. By way of media representation, there was a new vision and construction of the terrorist. This prototype was used to fuel the marginalization and blatant racism towards these individuals, and it was seen as essential and necessary to safety. The conflation of physical attributes, nationalities, and Islamic extremism created a triple layer of othering, working to enforce and reinforce one another as a cohesive representation of terrorist to the American public (Skodo, 2017). This conflation works to essentialize these people as violent barbarians, with terrorism as a natural byproduct of who they are (Crews, 2016). This construction of essentializing terrorism to a certain demographic is dangerous, and explains American indifference and lack of attention or understanding of the refugee

crises in the Middle East. Crews (2016) says that labeling these entire nationalities and their religion as producers of terrorism makes it easier to turn a blind eye to their suffering, or shift the blame of these refugee crises back onto the countries that are violently torn. In addition, the perception of legitimacy of refugees largely is influenced by media framing. There is a "strong support for our predictions that a country is likely to receive refugees fleeing its rivals and is reluctant to accept refugees originating from its contiguous allies" (Brathwaite & Moorthy, 2016, p. 11). This indicates that Americans who see refugees as victims persecuted by an enemy state are far more likely to be accepted into the country. Americans do not perceive Afghans or Iranians as from an allied nation, nor as victims fleeing from an enemy; rather, they are seen as encompassing the enemy, essentialized in terrorism. This is further proof of how far away American perception is from seeing these refugees as legitimate refugees or victims of crimes against humanity. Afghans are perceived as neither from an allied state nor a people's fleeing a country of the enemy. The crisis is simply invisible to most Americans, and so are the people and the lives they lead. Our mini-series' purpose is to re-evaluate these conflations and stereotypes with in nationalities, religion, and terrorism. The first step in this process must be to re-humanize these refugees as dynamic, complicated, ambitious, interesting human beings with past lives.

In Western media, Afghan and Iranian people are essentialized as radical Islamic terrorists, a threat to the United States and Europe, or victims in need of saving. In regard to Afghan refugees fleeing the country, the media reduced their extraordinary events into "visual wallpaper" (Wright, 2004, p. 101). They are framed within the American and British narratives, resulting in poor reports of refugees (Wright, 2004). By having to rely on others to report their stories and messages, the voices of the refugees remain in the framework of a reporter (Wright,

2004). The media has also used binary opposites to construct a specific image of Iranians. By using loaded words in several headlines during the Iranian Hostage Crisis, these people have been reduced to demonized stereotypes (New, 2001). They are only seen as being intolerant and turning to radical Islamic violence in opposition to Western liberty and freedom (New, 2001). Rather than focus on Iran's historical experiences of experimentation with democracy, the usage of specific photos of women wearing black chadors only perpetuates the stereotype of Islam's anti-liberal nature (Fayyaz & Shirazi, 2013). Refugees have been constrained into small boxes, disregarding their intersectional identities, through the events that the media highlights. By showing photos of victimized women and children, or an Afghan man with a gun, the media is perpetuating and supporting stereotypes to gain viewership, even if there are more complicated stories behind the images (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Wright, 2004; Cloud, 2004; Rane, Ewart, & Martinkus, 2014). This problem of essentialism, reductionism, demonization, and stereotyping is immense and pervasive. There needs to be a shift in the way that media represents this marginalized group.

Taking into account the current media portrayals of Middle Eastern refugees and, as Gorham (2013) states, that stereotypes can be triggered automatically and unknowingly, this project hopes to subvert the current landscape and replace it with a more accurate one. This new media landscape will sidestep the perpetuation of discriminatory sentiments toward refugees. By casting Afghan and Iranian actors to portray the show's characters, Eleonas seeks to break down the dominant western ideals that infiltrate daily life. Casting Afghan and Iranian actors allows us as creators to depict whole truth, and Cohen (2011) argues that Muslims want true portrayals in media, not false portrayals, positive or negative. False and dangerous perspectives have become banal for the common American media consumer due to a

desire to elevate one's in-group relative to the outgroup (Weaver, 2011). Casting and portraying Afghan and Iranian characters serves as a challenge when marketing to an American audience, but we strive to create non-stereotypical roles, highlighting the humanity and dynamics of the characters and the groups they represent.

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