**Research Statement Safiyya Hosein**

My research explores issues surrounding the representation of marginalized communities in popular culture, with a particular focus on Muslim representation, which I analyze through the context of race, gender, and sexuality. My work is situated in critical race studies, critical Muslim studies, postcolonial feminism, feminist media studies, comic studies, and audience studies. Muslim representation in comics, particularly the representation of Muslim superheroes, is a current area of interest in studies on Muslims in popular culture. Since 9/11, the two major publishers in superhero comics, Marvel and DC, have introduced Muslim superheroes of various ethnicities as part of their legion. The most successful of them, *Ms. Marvel’s* Kamala Khan, has become one of their most popular superheroes and is now set to debut on screen for the first time in the fall of 2021. For my PhD dissertation, I conducted an audience study on young adult Muslims exploring their perceptions of the Muslim superhero archetype. In addition to grounding the Muslim superhero in the imperialist project, my manuscript examines the erasure of Muslim masculinities from the superhero legion by examining the narrative of Muslim femininities in superhero comics. My audience study examined the representations of Muslim superheroines through a feminist lens and my dissertation provides a critical analysis of their responses while building theoretical arguments on the Muslim superhero and Muslim audiences.

I have also published several theoretical articles on the Muslim superhero. The first one, published in *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, examined *Ms. Marvel’s* Kamala Khan through the lens of modernity and gender in the Islamic world, concluding that she could be used as an instrument for advancing frameworks of the Western world as diverse, multicultural, and inclusive, when in fact that is not always the case. The second article, published in *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, was a comparative analysis of two veiled Muslim superheroines – one an Afghan-American in Marvel’s *X-Men*, and the other an Egyptian webcomic superheroine. In general, American superhero comics have experienced an infusion of diverse characters over the past several years – a trend I examined in my article, “The Proverbial and Image Hangover: A Discussion Between Comics Researchers” in *Word Hoard*. Editorial cartoons have often commented on racism, Islamophobia, and sexism, and my essay on the iconic *New Yorker* cartoon of the Obamas fist bumping in the White House explored these tensions through a rhetorical and semiotic analysis which was later published in the *The Functions of Argument and Social Context: Selected Papers from the Sixteenth NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation 2009.* I recently completed an essay on Canadian Muslim audience members’ perspectives of American Muslim superheroes, which won the “Mahmoud Eid Graduate Prize” at the Canadian Communication Association conference at the Congress of the Humanities. The paper will be published in the peer-reviewed *Global Media Journal*.

My dissertation analyzes the nuances of Muslim identity through an exploration of South Asian Muslim representation, anti-Black racism, savior rhetoric about Muslim women, millennial Muslim perspectives on LGBTQ Muslims, Saudi Arabian centrism in Islam, Islamic fashion, and body positivity. I first situate the Muslim superhero in the imperialist project in my literature review before analyzing audience reactions to the construction of Muslim femininity in superhero comics by discussing these elements of Muslim identity and community. One of my final chapters concludes with a section on South Asian Muslim masculinities in one of the superhero comics discussed, and examines participant outlooks toward these male characters. The conclusion expands on this and provides a theorization of Muslim audiences. I am currently in talks with the University Press of Mississippi about producing a scholarly monograph based on my dissertation. My conference activity has included serving on the boards and planning committees of several conferences, and I have presented a number of papers – a recent one focusing on Muslim fans of Manga, in which I analyzed the power of hashtags and fan art in constructing a Muslim fan identity. A paper I presented at the Comic Studies Society conference also analyzed Arab Muslim masculinities in *The Green Lantern* superhero comic from a post-9/11 context, while another analyzed the construction of an *X-Men* Muslim superheroine through a Madonna-whore dichotomy and analyzed the role of orientalist and imperialist desires in creating her character.

In recent years, marginalized identity has been ascribed greater priority in both prose and graphic fiction, with texts such as Brian K. Vaughn’s graphic series *Saga* and fiction novels like Suyi Davies Okunbowa’s *David Mogo, Godhunter*. My project will explore the rise in Muslim speculative fiction in the post 9/11 era and their trans-medial adaptations. Muslim representation in this genre has always been significant, its early influencing including the feminist science fiction short story, *Sultana’s Dream*, by Rokeya Sahkawat Hossain and the science-fiction classic, *Dune*,by Frank Herbert (now in its third cinematic production as of October 2021). In our current era, Muslim speculative fiction has grown significantly and gained popularity with works such as Karuna Riazi’s, *The Gauntlet*, featuring a Bengali-American Muslim girl protagonist) and G.Willow Wilson’s, *Alif the Unseen* (a story set in the Arab world that explores the world of the jinn). Wilson in particular has become a sensation in this genre with her books, *The Bird King* and *Cairo*, and her graphic series, *Air*, to name a few. There is also the Daevabad Trilogy by S.A. Chakraborty and Sumaiya Daud’s, *Mirage*, as well as the science fiction anthology, *Iraq + 100*, among many others. This trend marks a notable departure for a genre that has been dominated by Eurocentric stories from Norse, Celtic, and Christian mythologies that often catered mainly to the interests of white readers. My project will be a textual and visual analysis exploring the recent spate of Muslim speculative fiction in the post-9/11 era as a counter-narrative to Orientalist representations from earlier works. It will also build on theoretical works on cultural racism by examining this concept through Orientalist themes in speculative fiction. Considering that Islamophobic and Orientalist discourses are embedded in the language of racism, this project will examine the reinforcement of stereotypes of Muslims as racist. I will also examine the various Muslim cultures and ethnicities that are either prioritized or erased in this genre, since the Muslim world is by no means a monolith.

Through projects such as this multi-modal research endeavor, I hope to enhance the scholarly understandings of diasporic populations and their relationships with popular culture by focusing on the multiple layers that contribute to marginalized identity.