**Jackman Humanities Proposal Draft**

**Safiyya Hosein**

**Introduction:** Muslim superheroes are as much a niche in public-facing scholarship as it is in academia. If we understand labour as a medium for transformative justice, public-facing scholarship on Muslim superheroes has the potential to challenge implicit biases about Muslims while promoting understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. Such a task could not come at a better time as an increasing number of refugees from the Muslim world find themselves on our shores and the rise in white supremacy has resulted in fatal hate crimes against Muslims such as the Quebec mosque shootings and the attack on a Muslim family in London, Ontario.

**Project Proposal:** My project consists of creating a year-long podcast that examines Muslim superheroes from a rangeof ethnic and cultural backgrounds with the aim of challenging negative stereotypes about Muslims. This, in turn, speaks to the intellectual and emotional labour necessary to challenge implicit biases. The chronology of the podcast program will have a historical bend – focusing on the first American Muslim superhero, Kismet, who battled Nazis in WWII to the present-day where the Pakistani-American Muslim superhero Kamala Khan has become a chart-topping comic book sensation who will be debuting in her own TV series in 2022. The historical chronology is also the methodology for this project because it will illustrate the difference in Muslim representation in popular culture pre- and post- 9/11. Portrayals of Muslims prior to 9/11 were overtly orientalist. However, after 9/11 these representations, although less overt, were still regurgitated– a concept that the popular culture scholar, Evelyn Al Sultany, coined as “simplified complex representation” (Al Sultany, 2008, pg.14). I have chose a podcast as the medium for this project,as it is a very useful tool through which to disseminate research with minimal gatekeeping constraints. It also happens to be very popular amongst comic book fans, as evidenced through major comics podcasts such as “Comic Geek Speaks” and the “Comic Multiverse”. The medium is also able to reach many listeners through third-party apps such as Sound Cloud and Spotify. In keeping with labour constraints, I plan to hire a research assistant for this project. Because this is public-facing research, I plan on making each episode between 40 and 60 minutes in length to keep the listener's attention piqued.

An outline of the episodes is listed below:

1. **Orientalism and Comic Books** – This episode will introduce the framework of orientalism and define key critical race terminology such as “implicit bias” and “tone deafness”. It will present examples of orientalist representations of Muslims in comic books.
2. **Kismet, Man of Fate: America’s first Muslim superhero** – This episode introduces the first-ever Algerian-American Muslim superhero, Kismet, who debuted in the 1940’s. It will discuss the stereotypical portrayal of Kismet’s appearance and his reprisal in the modern age.
3. **Before 9/11: The Arabian Knight** – A discussion of the tokenized pre-9/11 Muslim superhero, the Arabian Knight. This episode will also discuss analyses of the famous popular culture scholar of Arab and Muslim representation, Jack Shaheen, who chronicled the buffoonish, villainous representations that characterised Muslim representation in the pre-9/11 era.
4. **The Muslim Superheroine Before 9/11: The Veil** – Continuing on from episode 3, this episode will focus on how gender played into these overt orientalist narratives with a discussion on the villainous Iraqi mutant from the first Gulf War, The Veil, and her sexualized costume.
5. **9/11 Changes Everything: The *X-Men’s* Dust** – A discussion on the first post-9/11, Muslim superhero, the Afghan refugee member of the *X-Men*, Sooraya Qadir (Dust). This episode will analyze Evelyn Al Sultany’s concept, “simplified complex representation”, which Sooraya personifies.
6. **Torture and the Muslim Superhero** – A discussion of the *Green Lantern* Muslim superhero, the Lebanese-American, Simon Baz, with an examination of his debut storyline’s commentary on the tactics of the War on Terror and racial profiling in a post 9/11 climate.
7. **The Nation of Islam and Josiah X** – A discussion on the African-American Muslim superhero, Josiah X, and his father, the first Captain America, Isaiah Bradley. This episode will discuss the commentary their storylines make about anti-Black racism and Islamophobia.
8. **Challenging White Nationalists: Monet St.Croix** – A discussion on the *X-Men* superheroine, the French-Algerian diplomat, Monet St.Croix, and a storyline where she confronts an angry mob of Islamophobes about being Muslim in America.
9. **The Ultimate Muslim Superhero: Kamala Khan** – A discussion on one of the most famous superheroes in American comic books right now, the Pakistani-American Muslim, Kamala Khan (*Ms.Marvel*). This episode discusses the use of Kamala Khan as proxy for white male saviourism in a storyline that glorifies the American invasion of Afghanistan.
10. **The Future of Muslim Superheroes** – This episode wraps up and discusses the themes analyzed in the previous nine episodes (i.e., orientalism, profiling, white nationalism, etc.). It also will discuss the future of Muslim superheroes by touching on Kamala Khan’s debut on Disney Plus which will inevitably introduce the Muslim superhero archetype to larger audiences.

**Research Expertise:** My dissertation, “The Iconic Muslim Superhero: Muslim Female Audience Perspectives of *Marvel’s* Muslim Superheroines” was an interdisciplinary feminist study of young adult Muslim women’s perspectives of three American Muslim superheroines in major American comic book titles. My research revealed that while the Muslim superhero provided relief to Muslim audiences, it also advanced orientalist discourses during the War on Terror by constructing a specific type of Muslim femininity. Some of the critical debates I intervene in in my dissertation are emerging scholarship on cultural racism, the representation of Black Muslims , South Asian Muslims, and LGBTQ Muslims, Islamophobia, and white saviourism.

**Public Scholarship:** I am a comic book writer who has been mentioned in the *Jerusalem Post* and was selected as one of *Vice Media Motherboard’s* “Humans of the Year” in 2017. I have published several articles on Muslim representation in popular culture with *The Conversation*. My article on Kamala Khan (Hosein 2020) was very well-received and was republished by several news outlets worldwide and gained me two interviews on Canadian radio. I have also appeared on a number of podcasts and I have written for the comics journalism sites, *Women Write About Comics* and *Sequart*. I am currently working on an article about the Afghan-American superheroine, Dust, for *Ms.* Magazine. I have also been interviewed by the Canadian publication, *Quill and Quire*, the Spanish publication, *Tebeosfera*, and the Saudi Arabian publication, *Thmanda*.