

CONSTRUCTING MUSLIM IDENTITY IN AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS AND GRAPHIC
NOVELS: REPRESENTATION AND PROPAGANDA

AARON ALAN WEISS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the representation of Muslim characters in American comic books and graphic novels, focusing on the role that historic and contemporary geopolitical relations between America and the Arab and Muslim world performs in the propagation and challenge of orientalist stereotypes. This examination begins with a historical overview of the origins and instruments of propaganda and counterpropaganda and the representation of those deemed “the other” within sequential narratives to establish the foundation for a comparative case study of pre-9/11 comic books featuring Iranian and Iraqi characters, such as Salima Baranizar in *Blue Beetle* (1991) and *Millennium* (1987) and The Veil in *X-Men* universe comics in 1991, alongside post-9/11 graphic novels *Holy Terror* (2011) and *Johnny Jihad* (2003).

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* provides the primary analytical tools and the theoretical framework to assess the language of comics. This includes icons (representational images), symbols (images that embody ideas), colours (for emotions), and, formal and/or structural components such as the gutter and panels. Vanessa Van Edwards and Hailey Van Braam contribute layers and depth to the examination through analysis of body language and colour psychology, respectively. In addition to visual semiotics, the dissertation also interrogates narrative structure, such as conflict and characters, and iconographic aspects, that communicate cultural stereotypes

This study highlights both evolving portrayals and the persistence of stereotypical conventions in the depictions of Muslim characters in sequential narratives. It argues that the post-9/11 period marks a shift towards counterpropaganda that functions to confront orientalist stereotypes so prevalent and normalized in pre-9/11 texts. This

investigation illuminates how progress is neither linear nor binary, but how a text may simultaneously resist and reproduce stereotypes; how authorship may impact representation of groups to which creators do not belong, independent of intent; that the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy can legitimize narratives of righteous hatred; and that sequential narratives both influence and are influenced by broader currents of popular culture.

Key Words: Propaganda, Comics, Graphic Novels, Representation

DEDICATION

For my late mother, Nicole Weiss, who gave me the fortitude to complete this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

We are in the midst of a global world war right now, but it is an information war. One of the significant consequences of this battle for control over truth and narrative was the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. This event was fueled by propaganda—specifically, atrocity-based propaganda propagated by right-wing groups, amplified by Republican figures and conservative media outlets like Fox News. The rioters acted on the belief that the 2020 U.S. election had been rigged by Democrats. In a similar vein, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was also ignited by atrocities, particularly incidents of police violence such as the murder of George Floyd. These acts of violence, however, led some protesters to respond with violence, including the destruction of a high-tech factory and an apartment building in Minneapolis in May 2020 (Stockman).

Though these two movements stand on opposite sides of the political, social, and racial spectrum, both—left vs. right, white vs. non-white—were influenced by atrocity-based propaganda disseminated through social and mainstream media platforms such as Twitter/X, MSNBC, and Newsmax. What unites these opposing groups is twofold. First, there is a shared certainty that both sides are victims of significant injustices. Second, both groups have internalized the belief that their hatred toward the perceived oppressor is not only justified but righteous. This mindset sees the oppression of one group by another as a moral wrong, and, in turn, the anger and violence that arise from the oppressed are deemed legitimate. Insurrectionists saw themselves as victims of left-wing oppression, while QAnon followers alleged a "global cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles in the Democratic party" (Polaris Project). Meanwhile, BLM activists argued

that systemic oppression, particularly by law enforcement bodies, stripped them of their basic human rights (Roose). Within this framework, acts of violence and aggression are not only seen as justified, but as righteous responses to perceived wrongs. Objective truths, once grounded in facts supported by evidence, have increasingly been replaced by subjective tirades shaped by individual political perspectives. We now find ourselves in a post-fact era.

Atrocity propaganda refers to the spread of information about crimes allegedly committed by the enemy, whether real or imagined ("Atrocity Propaganda"). Throughout history, it has been a potent weapon in warfare. During World War I, for example, the Allied press was filled with reports of German soldiers committing atrocities, such as the rape, mutilation, and killing of prisoners (Gullace 722). Similarly, during the Balkan War (1912-13), visual narratives, including photos of traumatized rape victims and mutilated bodies, were distributed with accompanying captions that played on emotional and political responses (Bokovoy).

Mass media has long served as the vehicle for this type of propaganda, using mass persuasion techniques to shape public opinion. For over a century, visual forms of storytelling, in particular comics, have been employed to instill and/or reinforce the "us vs. them" mentality, particularly in times of conflict. Some prominent historical instances of said practice in western comics were the casting of Germans and the Japanese as villainous antagonists during WWII and the positioning of the Russians as the Red Menace throughout the Cold War. In the case of the former, the fantastical intersected with realism, cementing the portrayal of real-world conflict that propagates notions of heroes and villains based upon geopolitical stances evidenced by the appearance of

leaders in the Axis alliance, Hitler and Hirohito, on a myriad of covers. Objects which illuminate this approach are *Superman* no.17 (1942), where Superman is pictured holding the two wartime leaders up and off the ground by their collars; *Master Comics* no. 29 (1942), featuring Captain Marvel Jr. whipping handcuffed Hitler and Hirohito; and *Batman* no.18 (1943), which punctuates comic book representation of those portrayed as the enemy in comics within the conflict between the Axis and the Allies by presenting Batman and Robin unleashing a bomb on all three members of the Axis: Hitler, Hirohito, and Mussolini (Cronin).

The Cold War continued this practice of propagating the “us. vs. them” binary based on geopolitical positionality that, in this case, situated the Russians as supervillains during the conflict between superpowers: America and the Soviet Union. Mirroring the approach undertaken by comics in WWII, there were both instances of portraying the leader of the opposition, the Premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, as well as Soviet troops. Such representative examples include *A Tales of Suspense* no. 46 (July 1963), where Ironman battles Russian super soldier, Anton Varko and include “a wildly unflattering caricature of General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev” (Gonzalez). Additionally, superheroes such as the Fighting American, Captain Marvel, Captain America, and The Incredible Hulk battled various incarnations of the communist threat represented by Poison Ivan and Hotsky Trotsky (*Fighting American* no. 3, September 1954); The Red Crusher (*Captain Marvel Adventures* no. 139, December 1952); Ivan Kronov (*Captain America* no. 78, May 1954); and Mongu (*The Incredible Hulk* no. 4, 1962) (“Cover to Cover: From Russia With Love”).

This dissertation focuses on selected comics and graphic narratives to explore how the representation of Muslims in American popular culture has evolved, particularly in response to shifting political and social contexts before and after the attack on the World Trade Towers on September 11th, 2001, known widely as “9/11.” Pre-9/11 comics often relied on broad stereotypes and superficial narratives that positioned Muslims in opposition to Western ideals, reflecting the geopolitical tensions of Middle Eastern conflicts. However, after 9/11, there was a noticeable shift, with the introduction of Muslim characters who were more nuanced figures caught in the complexities of the War on Terror in addition to more villainized portrayals. This investigation focuses on how these shifts—towards a more expansive model beyond the terrorist trope—mirror broader cultural and political changes, as well as how the evolving portrayal of Muslim characters in comics and graphic narratives both reflects and influences public perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

This dissertation acknowledges that comic books such as Kamala Khan’s *Ms. Marvel*, made by members of the community traditionally being othered, are more layered and expansive of said community, but independent of said example, no person or group of people can completely accurately represent any race, religion, or ethnicity in its totality due to diverse make-up, including but not limited to size, sects, and ethnicities. It would be anticipated that the use of socio-political and religious narratives such as comics as tools of propaganda would undergo a transformation from largely perpetuating orientalist stereotypes to, in some cases, challenging such one-dimensional portrayals following the events of 9/11. The nature of this transformation is explored throughout the dissertation. In his 1978 *Orientalism*, Edward Said defined

orientalism as a pervasive Western academic and artistic tradition that portrayed the Eastern world through a lens of cultural superiority and prejudice to justify colonial imperialism (1-3). The scope, in terms of objects of study, offers a diversity of content in North America, including independent publishers of graphic novels and mainstream superhero publishers (DC and Marvel); aside from *Johnny Jihad*, all are superhero-related. The primary texts are two pre-9/11 comics, *Blue Beetle* (1991) and *Millennium* (1987), along with post-9/11 texts: *Holy Terror* (2011) and *Johnny Jihad* (2003). These texts sharpen the focus of the dissertation on the representation of Muslim characters in American comics to two periods: 1987-1991 and 2003-2011. The analysis addresses the selected texts as case studies of the representation of Muslims in American comic books before and after 9/11. The methodology follows a close reading practice that attends to the multiple aspects of the comic book form, including the use of color, icons, symbols, and panel design.

Aside from Kamala Khan, a Pakistani-American superhero that assumed the role of *Ms. Marvel*, who is discussed briefly, this paper takes the road less traveled by analyzing lesser-known objects—graphic novels such as *Johnny Jihad* and comic book characters—The Veil and Salima Baranizar—instead of popular cultural staples like Moon Knight as one means to add to the discourse on representation of Middle Eastern characters and those designated as "the other."¹

The temporal scope of the objects of study was determined by their significance rather than by a prescribed historical timeline. The texts were selected in relation to geopolitical clashes between America and the Muslim/Arab world, particularly 20th- and 21st-century conflicts that were central to the analysis of representation through atrocity

propaganda and righteous hatred directed toward those deemed “the other.” The portrayals of Muslims in sequential narratives that mirrored real-life geopolitical events were the focus; as such, the timeline was responsive and shaped by flashpoints that embodied tensions between Western and Islamic/Arabic civilizations, as well as narratives that reflected and/or mirrored those events.

This rationale led to the selection of Salima Baranizar, an Iranian character featured in *Millennium* no. 2 (1987) and *Blue Beetle* no. 20, and the Veil, an Iraqi character featured in *X-Men* serials (1991). The other two objects of study, *Johnny Jihad* (2003) and *Holy Terror* (2011), similarly function as commentaries on and/or reactions to geopolitical events, in this case 9/11. These works were created in response to and/or linked to the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979–1981), the Gulf War (1990–1991), and the 9/11 terrorist attacks (2001), all of which were foundational events that contributed to a sense of “us versus them” and the “othering” of Muslims in American popular culture. This illuminates not only why these texts and periods were chosen, but also how they are interrelated.

The aforementioned primary objects covered four decades: the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. However, the literature review and historical context of sequential narratives expanded the temporal reach of the analysis to include the mid-19th century (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* [1852]; *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* [1860]), as well as the early 20th century (*The Shadow* and *Doc Savage* [1930s]), mid-20th century (*Kismet*, *Man of Fate* and *Superman* [1940s]), and late 20th century (*Captain Canuck*, *Captain Britain*, and *Green Lantern* [1970s]). In totality, the scope was both focused and expansive, but it was always driven by key texts on representation and their relationship

to the events that shaped them, whether geopolitical or social (domestic).

The conflict between America and the Muslim world is a complicated and layered discourse that requires volumes of scholarship to accurately and fully probe. The following is a *brief* summary of key historical events to ground our understanding of some of the flash points that contributed to these political tensions. Five key areas that contributed to the conflict are crusades, colonization, the hunger for natural resources, the clash of ideologies, and the war on terrorism. First, according to the Foreign Policy Research Institute, “the Crusades originate as the foundation of Western conflict with Islam” perceived “as an assault on the Islamic world” (“Islam and the West”).² Early examples include the “Mongol’s invasion of Baghdad in 1258,” the crusaders’ role in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of Christian Zionism in Britain (“Islam and the West”). Second, whereas the Crusades can be characterized as religious wars, Blakemore notes colonization is classified as “control by one power over a dependent area or people” where the conquerors enforce “its own language and cultural values upon its people.” In fact, by 1914, Europeans had colonized most of the countries in the world (Blakemore). Karen Armstrong lists the following examples of France’s colonization of Muslim lands, organized by occupier and occupied in brackets. France “occupied” the following nations: Algeria (1830); Britain Aden (1839); Tunisia (1881); Egypt (1882); Sudan (1889) and Libya/ Morocco (1912) (lines 38-39). Aside from France, to name a few more instances, “Britain colonized [Muslim countries like] Egypt in 1882 and “Sudan in 1899” (Asi).

Third, the Middle East’s large reserve of petroleum, which is coveted by the West, has led to conflict between America and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC). Founded in 1960, four out of five members are Muslim countries — Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, in addition to Venezuela (“Member countries”). Between 1973 and 1974, OPEC instituted an “embargo against the United States” in response to” the U.S. decision to re-supply the Israeli military” and to acquire “leverage in the post-war peace negotiations” (“Oil Embargo, 1973-1974”). Also, there are constant conflicts between the West and OPEC over supply and prices, evidenced by Washington’s outrage “by the decision on October 5, 2022,” to reduce production targets “by two million barrels per day,” which has also strained ties “between the United States and Saudi Arabia” (Luciani). In 1990, a war erupted—The Gulf War—when OPEC member Iraq invaded another member, Kuwait, leading to American intervention and military boots planted on Middle Eastern soil, in part to protect Kuwait’s oil reserves. Fourth, America and Muslim countries have fundamental differences in their ideologies; America is a democratic society, while many Muslim countries are historically autocratic, like Pakistan, Iran, Algeria, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, and Libya, to name a few. Another area where ideological clashes occur is with respect to American foreign policy, especially their support for Israel and their occupation of Afghanistan (“The United States and the Muslim World”).

Lastly, America has been pitted against the Muslim world over their war on terror. The US has been arming and helping to finance Israel’s proxy wars against Iran’s state-sponsored terrorist organizations like Hamas (Gaza Strip); Hezbollah (Lebanon); and The Houthis (Yemen). However, the 9/11 terrorist attack conducted by Muslim extremist terrorists leaving over 3000 people dead is the most prominent example. Small groups of hijackers took control of four planes circling the eastern United States. After that, they

were utilized as targeted missiles that struck New York and Washington landmarks (“September 11 attacks”). The World Trade Center in New York City was struck by two planes; the first plane hit at 8:46 a.m. with the second plane hitting seventeen minutes later (“September 11 attacks”). The buildings caught fire, engulfing the city in smoke and ensnaring those on higher floors. The two 110-story skyscrapers disintegrated into enormous dust clouds in under two hours (“September 11 attacks”). The western front belonging to the Pentagon, the massive US military headquarters located right outside of Washington, DC, was demolished by a third plane (“September 11 attacks”). On the fourth plane, passengers resisted, and the jet came down in a Pennsylvania field. The hijackers are believed to have intended to strike the Capitol Building in Washington (“September 11 attacks”). The 9/11 attacks led to America’s invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, which inspired more acts of terrorism, all of which amplified and gave credence to the Muslim terrorist trope in American popular culture. These events provide some context for the relationship between America and the Muslim world. The history between these parties is deeply complex and complicated. For further discussion of these issues, see Rashid Khalidi’s *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, Michael T. Flynn and Michael Ledeen’s *The Field of Fight: How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies*, and Michael Oren’s *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*. Khalidi applies a critical lens to America’s foreign policy towards Israel, placing it within a larger framework in terms of effect on relations between America and the Arab and/or Muslim world, whereas Flynn and Ledeen foreground the threat of Islamic terrorism at

the core of the conflict between parties, while Oren provides a historical analysis of America's involvement in the region.

Propaganda art has a long history and is often found in the most popular media and art forms. The historic role that comics performed as a type of mass media is significant. In the 20th century, sequential art narratives such as comic books were an immensely popular medium for spreading nationalistic values. In early 1942, during the Golden Age of comics and in the middle of World War Two, 15 million comics (mostly superhero-related) were purchased each month (Wright 31). By December of 1943, sales had risen to 35 million (Wright 31). Abroad, it was reported that 25% of all magazines shipped to US troops overseas were comics (Wright 31). Their large readership, the general public's awareness of characters like Superman, and their engagement with socio-political issues embedded them within the mainstream thereby situating them as a form of popular culture. Their perceived impact on their readers — uniting them against those perceived as the foreign menace, promoting western values, and normalizing violence—also consolidated polar opposition in condemnation of the art by those opposed to comics' impact.

What did UNESCO, ISIS, the US government, and Hitler have in common? They believed comics operated as a type of propaganda art and were corruptive agents—socially, religiously, and politically—and called for interventions like censorship to arrest their influence. They were right to the extent that comic books can influence the hearts and minds of millions due to their reach. In this context, during WWII, comics performed the roles of both propagandists for the US government, illuminated by Superman's role as New Deal enforcer, and counter-propagandists, as evidenced by Captain America,

who was enlisted to dismantle the policy of isolationism and replace it with interventionism (Cross 16).³

Comic books constitute a form of mass media that lends itself well to being examined through a popular culture lens. Jeffrey K. Johnson contends that “one of the most important attributes of popular culture is that it quickly changes to meet a society’s needs [evidenced by the introduction] of Patriot heroes who were introduced in 1940” (34). During WW2 and shortly thereafter, the popularity of comics as well as their predecessor, pulp novels (pulp), soon triggered anxiety surrounding their influence. This marks the period when comics were no longer viewed as a form of cheap, juvenile entertainment but as a means to influence and infiltrate hearts and minds.

The reach of sequential art narratives, which included a myriad of genres such as superhero, horror, and war, led to concern from the public regarding their content and influence. For example, a letter to the *New York Times* during WW2 stated, “furnishing these lurid pulp papers is certainly no way to produce an intelligent military” (Wright 31). Others soon followed suit, such as renowned psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, who raised similar concerns but focused on the effect of comics on children. He claimed a direct link between the content of comic books and juvenile delinquency, citing the case of a young child who was a comic book reader and was later accused of murder (Wertham 6). It must be noted that while children and youth can be a malleable audience, in part due to less life experience and the fact that their brains are still developing, making them “more open to learning and being shaped by outside factors,” so can adults be influenced based on adherence to religion and sociopolitical conditions, among other factors (“Brain Development”).

The anxiety surrounding comics would eventually grow into a chorus of concerned stakeholders targeting horror, crime, and superhero comics, resulting in the Comic Code Authority (CCA), formed in 1954 by the Comics Magazine Association of America, which dictated rules surrounding content. It was designed to propagate certain ideas over others that conformed to a period ripe with conservative, puritanical values that forbade the questioning of moral authorities. In the 1950s, two of the most popular genres were romance and war stories, aimed at conventionally defined female and male audiences, respectively (Wright 110). This speaks to the impossibility of the popular to escape the ideological implications of gender (Johnson 42). These comics served “cultural objections” by modeling, thereby propagating, specific gender roles and nationalism, underscoring the virtues and imperatives of domesticity (Wright 110). In the 1960s, Stan Lee added complexity and humanity with his “hero-with-a-problem” type of superhero, and the binary of hero and villain was expanded to include hybrids such as Hawkeye, Sub-Mariner, and Scarlet Witch (Coogan 260). These factors reinvigorated the superhero genre, and its popularity has collapsed boundaries as comics have spawned a multi-media cultural industry (comics/graphic novels, TV, movies, video games) with merchandising for every age group. As such, comics hold some sway over how readers (and audiences) perceive the world, themselves, and others.

A decade removed from the censorship of the Comic Code (1954-2010), publishers were emancipated from government restraints. However, the audience is still subjected to creator-produced propaganda and counterpropaganda. The consternation surrounding the social impact of comics shifted to graphic novels; by 2017, Michael Cavna notes that “the top two most challenged works were graphic novels for young

adults” where “challenged” refers to the act of banning graphic novels due to content that is deemed inappropriate for consumption by young readers given graphic language, nudity, and sexuality. One could ask the question, why does anxiety about comics and graphic novels persist today? This anxiety could be based on the realization that comics are a tried-and-tested tool for propaganda.

Terms and definitions

The proceeding terms are key concepts for examining wartime and/or geopolitical propaganda. This dissertation privileges the perspective of people in the field advocating human rights and uses operational concepts and terms. I focus on practical definitions in order to illuminate the role of comics as propaganda mainly in a North American context.

Propaganda for the purpose of this dissertation is defined as “Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view. Propaganda is a powerful weapon used to dehumanize and create hatred toward a supposed enemy by creating a false image in the mind” (Schaller 14). This dissertation focuses on three types of propaganda utilized in the representation of Muslim characters featured in the objects of study: atrocity propaganda, hate propaganda, and oppressor/oppressed propaganda.

First, atrocity propaganda, as noted earlier, is defined as “the dissemination of information about crimes committed by the enemy, which may be true but often contains or exaggerates deliberate fabrications and exaggerations” (“Atrocity Propaganda”). In this dissertation, the term is modified to: “the dissemination of information about crimes

[e.g., atrocities] committed by the enemy,” real or imagined. (“Atrocity Propaganda”).

This new definition is a valuable tool to analyze my objects of study because it can be applied to fictional works as well as stories inspired by real events. This addresses the subjective nature behind what qualifies as an atrocity. To some degree, what qualifies as an atrocity is based on one’s positionality, sometimes dictated by their interpretation of the oppressor/oppressed binary. To one group, what may be an atrocity is seen by others as an act of defense or a reprisal in response to a previous act. For instance, the war in Gaza post-Oct 7th, 2023, is considered an atrocity by those advocating for Palestine, whereas many Jews see said event as tragic yet responsive and justified to arrest future rapes, beheadings, and the murders of innocents.

Second, hate propaganda, according to York University’s Centre for Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusion, is defined as “the public promotion or incitement of hatred against an identifiable group” (“What is Hate Propaganda?”). This source extrapolates to include who is singled out and on what basis: “Hate propaganda targets persons and/or property based on such factors as colour, race, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or mental or physical disability” (“What is Hate Propaganda?”). This serves as a useful definition for a dissertation on war, propaganda, and representation.

Lastly, propaganda based on the oppressor/oppressed binary propagates the idea that one group with power uses it to oppress another, whether the perception of who is the oppressed or oppressor is real or imagined. These groups may or may not belong to the same ethnicity, religion, and culture. Oppression may be based on a myriad of factors, including but not limited to gender, socio-economic, religion, sexual

orientation ethnicity, national identity, language, and culture (“Diversity and Inclusion”). Titled “Power and Privilege Definitions,” this document by Vanderbilt University outlines four types of oppression: *Personal*, based on feelings, beliefs, and values; *Interpersonal*, related to language, actions, and behaviours; *Institutional*, policies connected to procedures, rules, and *Cultural*, driven by notions of right, beauty, and truth. Personal and cultural forms of oppression are of critical concern within the body of works addressed throughout this dissertation.

In addition to establishing different types of propaganda and their meanings, it is imperative to formulate a working definition for comics. This dissertation adopts Scott McCloud’s definition of comics: “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). This definition permits dime novels, pulp magazines, graphic novels, and comic books to be analyzed together under the umbrella of sequential art narratives, although the pictorial elements of these forms vary. Next, this dissertation’s investigation of the representation of those deemed “the other” leads to engagement with terms such as nativism and orientalism, both of which require clarity and understanding. Nativism is defined as “the policy of protecting the interests of native inhabitants against those of immigrants (“Nativism”). Within the context of this dissertation, the definition is broadened to include negative responses to Indigenous peoples. Independent of the fact that said people are native to the land, in a colonial mindset, they are seen as foreign. Unlike the application of nativism, which is rather expansive, the use of the term Orientalism and its meaning is grounded in Belal Abouesh’s definition, which supports this dissertation’s analysis of Asians and Middle

Easterners who fall under this category. Abouesh defines it as “how Western societies perceive Eastern societies, typically in an inferior light. This includes the fetishization, obsession, and eroticization of the cultures and people of the East, or what is and was perceived as “the Orient” historically by Westerners.” Edward Said explains orientalism as “A Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3).

Within the sphere of comic book representation, the orientalist identity is applied, as will be outlined later, through a reductionist approach that others Muslims and/or Arabs by amplifying difference through names (foreign-sounding), setting (desert-based), and religious and/or ethnic attire (Muslim and/or Arabic). In addition, their humanity is lessened through derogatory terms like referring to them as “towel-heads” and/or by likening them to animals such as camels, which removes their humanity while also reducing them to racist caricatures. All of which conform to Abouesh and Said’s claims that it paints those within the orientalist category as inferior, operates as a form of domination, restructures the reader’s view of them, and justifies authority over them whether in the fantastical world of comics or within a geopolitical framework. The last term to be fleshed out is religiosity, which is vital as it serves as one of the analytical tools and can be rather subjective. Religiosity is defined as “individual preferences, emotions, beliefs, and actions that refer to an existing (or self-made)” religion (Stoltz 347). In the context of this dissertation, references to G-d, rituals such as engagement in prayer and/or mentioning prayer as well as attending mosques or other places of worship, and the use of religious terms qualify as expressions and examples of religiosity.

Equally important to defining key terms is establishing how essential concepts are interpreted and assigned. Among the key concepts employed in this dissertation is righteous hatred. However, there is no clear definition for righteous hatred. The concept is related and rooted in biblical passages that speak of righteous anger as “an emotion G-d allows us to experience when injustice or wrong is done. We can use it as a tool to speak up for truth and stand up against evil” (“Righteous Anger: Meaning, Definition and Examples From The Bible”). The term is mentioned in the New Testament: “The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace” (Proverbs 13:5). A prominent example of righteous anger as an action in scripture is Jesus angrily flipping the tables of the money changers in the temple due to their desecration of a sacred site (John 2:13-17). In this dissertation, the biblical idea of righteous anger in the context of propaganda turns into righteous hatred, which is related to both atrocity stories and the oppressor/oppressed binary. In place of a definition, the following understanding of the term is proposed: Atrocity stories cultivate righteous hatred that permits violence and murder to be seen as a responsible, ethical, and dutiful response. One example in relation to the aforementioned propaganda types is the belief that the hatred of the oppressor by the oppressed is legitimized and even righteous.

Other concepts that require clear frameworks are Sharia, infidel, and jihad, particularly since they may inherit certain preconceptions whether positive or negative, among non-Muslim readers. It is imperative to note that the aforementioned terms are perceived differently among Muslims who are knowledgeable and educated about their history, applications, and the broader context behind their meaning. This examination analyzes the use of these words within the context of the discourse surrounding

terrorism, extremism, and the orientalist stereotype—key themes within this dissertation—which is a context that uses a far less nuanced lens. In the same manner, they are used negatively and simplistically by writers like Frank Miller (as discussed in Chapter Four) and would be interpreted similarly by many Western non-Muslim readers.

They are fundamental concepts in this discourse surrounding the representation of Muslim characters in comic books as threatening and villainous while they also serve to amplify difference. Sharia is defined by Britannica as “the fundamental religious concept of Islam—namely, its law” (“Sharia”). Sharia Law is an Arabic word that means “the Path to be followed” (Mashhour 565). The Sunnah, or the sayings and customs of Prophet Muhammad, and the Holy Quran, which Muslims accept as the inspired word of God, serve as the foundation for Islam's moral, religious, ethical, and legal systems (Mashhour 565-566). Sharia-based laws are found in around half of the world's Muslim-dominated nations, and many Muslims adhere to some form of sharia in their personal religious practices (Robinson). Sharia is not universally applicable; as in all religions, there are different interpretations and emphases. Sharia law is practiced by prominent Islamic terrorist groups like the Taliban, whose interpretation of Sharia law for “crimes, such as theft, blasphemy, and adultery, traditional interpretations of Islamic law prescribe...hudud punishments, which include stoning, lashing, and amputation” (Robinson).

It must be noted that Sharia, like many religious concepts, is understood and/or interpreted through the eyes of the beholder. Inherently, everyone has biases, both conscious and unconscious, based on their worldview or positionality, rooted in one or many of the following: religion, nationality, culture, class, ethnicity,

gender, family values, and philosophical leanings. This dissertation examines sharia through a western lens that encapsulates the geopolitical environment within which comics and graphic novels at the centre of this study were created: the intersection where Islam, 9/11, terrorism, and representation of “the other” meet that positions it as “a system of medieval times that imposes a harsh code of behaviour sanctioned by draconic punishments” (Berger 335). It is imperative to acknowledge that some Muslims do not interpret it in such a way, nor do they accept such a reductive reading of sharia; as Berger notes, they contend that sharia “represents a system that promotes goodness and justice” (335).

In addition to Sharia, infidel is another disputed term prevalent within the discourse surrounding representation of Muslim characters in comic books. “Infidel,” like “sharia,” is a term that creates much anxiety among Western readers. They both have implications that affect the Western reader’s view of Islam as a marker for terrorism. Infidel is defined by the Oxford Dictionary of English as “a person who has no religion or whose religion is not that of the majority” (Stevenson 895). Many Westerners view the term as a reference to non-believers, which justifies hatred of non-Muslims and encourages violence against them. This contention is disputed by some Muslim scholars who argue that “we don’t regard non-Muslims as infidels, meaning that we don’t hate them, we don’t consider them criminals, and we certainly don’t regard them as enemies. But we do believe that they are making a bad choice” (Karamali).

Islam is far too often judged by a standard not applied to other faiths. For example, in the New Testament, non-believers are sentenced to hell; in this biblical passage, “the punishment of unbelievers in hell will consist not only of suffering in the

"fires," but also banishment from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Religion is not the hate monger, but when religiosity intersects with extremist ideas and nationalism and is open to interpretation, it breeds absolutism that leads to a literal interpretation instead of a figurative and/or historical one, which the person then co-opts and disseminates, leading to the spread of hate. As noted earlier, this dissertation analyzes these texts through a Western lens, which perceives "infidel" as a derogatory term for non-believers that incites hate and violence. Moreover, writers of graphic novels like Frank Miller, as evidenced later, utilize it as a weapon to communicate Islamic characters' hate of the non-believers.

Jihad is another contested term. It is defined by The American Heritage Dictionary as "holy war" ("Jihad"). But from a Muslim lens, according to the Council on American Islamic Relations website, the real meaning, which appears in said dictionary, is as follows: "individual struggle for spiritual self-perfection" ("IN: Meaning of 'Jihad' Misunderstood by Many"). The Council on American Islamic Relations uses references to the Quran as evidence to substantiate their claim, noting that "The word 'jihad' is mentioned about 36 times in the Quran and does not refer to fighting" ("IN: Meaning of 'Jihad' Misunderstood by Many"). Instead, citing the following passage, which states that it "encourages" followers "to strive in the cause of God with sincerity and discipline" (Quran 22:78), the Council on American Islamic Relations situates its meaning as personal and non-violent.

Interestingly, later in the same article posted on their website, the council notes that jihad is "Derived from the word 'Juhud' and that jihad signifies rightful strife, endeavor, or struggle to repel evil" ("IN: Meaning of 'Jihad' Misunderstood by Many").

The writer then clarifies that “such struggle can be of intellectual, mental, physical, or material nature and is done only to win the pleasure of God” (“IN: Meaning of ‘Jihad’ Misunderstood by Many”). The etymology of jihad that they provide speaks to it as an act intended to “repel evil” and that such a struggle can be physical, validating the fact that the historical meaning could conform to an understanding of jihad as an act of a holy war. Either way, it does not change the fact that for the term *jihad*, perception often trumps reality, and within a North American popular cultural setting, which is the lens through which this analysis is conducted, it is frequently understood to mean holy war.

Aside from jihad, othering is a key concept requiring a clear focus and/or parameters. Media Smarts, Canada’s Centre for Digital Media Literacy, defines Othering as “acting like a certain group of people are all the same, exaggerating the ways that the “Other” members in a group are different from us, and even acting like they aren’t really human. This makes it harder for us to feel empathy for them.” Within the context of the dissertation, this creates the conditions for the readers to see Muslims as inhuman, thus undeserving of equality, while also fostering a sense of us versus them, all of which transforms and/or cleanses any expression of hatred into a righteous act.

Understanding the relationship between propaganda and ideology is crucial to avoid conflation. Ideology is defined as “a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture” (Merriam Webster). According to Xiaoping Li, propaganda and ideology are intertwined: “Propaganda gives ideology a concrete social mechanism for its reproduction and a means of functioning--usually by dissimulating or reinforcing the prevailing ideology in society--whereas ideology

provides propaganda with themes and contents and hence gives the latter credibility” (Abstract). This speaks to the relationship between propaganda and ideology in this dissertation, where propaganda serves as the mechanism for spreading ideology. One example of this interplay is how nativist attitudes, such as the supremacy of Judeo-Christian norms and values, are propagated and reproduced in comic books through the representation of certain groups such as Muslims, and their culture as the other.

Positionality

As noted earlier, this dissertation examines selected comics and graphic narratives to explore the representation of Muslims in American popular culture over the past five decades. The subject matter may cause some to wonder why a Jew would do research on Muslim representation, especially in the current global socio-political context with antisemitism reaching new highs since the Holocaust? This dissertation is a direct reflection of my identity as a researcher and son of a Holocaust survivor and my family being victims of antisemitism in Canada. My Jewish experience not only requires me to be a critical thinker but also an advocate for social justice and foregrounding of issues of oppression and prejudice against ‘the other.’ My mother embedded within my constitution the importance of never judging a person by their difference (race, religion, culture, class, nationality, ethnicity, etc.) and impressed upon me the need to confront hate whenever and wherever it occurs. This justice seed that she planted in a little boy grew and flourished and gave me purpose while confronting my own trauma. The latter fueled a mission to study and combat social injustice through my work in various media forms (radio, TV, internet content, documentaries), in volunteerism, and in my undergraduate research (diversity and inclusion in wrestling), master’s research

(Indigenous representation in Canadian TV), and PhD research (Muslim representation in comics). My MRP on the representation of Indigenous Peoples in two Canadian serials used a socio-political and historical lens and addressed authorial intent, Indigenous and non-Indigenous content creators, and the effects of colonization (such as intergenerational trauma). I also conducted PhD coursework research on epigenetic inheritance of trauma (transmitted genetically from receiver to offspring) among survivors of the Holocaust and other victims of persecution.

My passion for confronting injustice also focused on combating anti-Black racism by producing and writing a documentary on Canada's first publicly funded Africentric school entitled *Our School*, working with Viola Desmond's family, and helping to launch a think tank entitled The Ripple Effect Circle that worked towards combatting anti-Black racism. *Our School* has become a part of the academic discussion on equity in education. As a founding member of The Ripple Effect Circle, which was formed to tackle anti-Black racism, I volunteered with stakeholders from a variety of fields—school boards, police services, NGOs, employers, labor unions, and politicians. I wrote and published an anti-bullying superhero comic book, *Gary's Global Heroes Battle Bullying*, which features a diverse group of superheroes working together to fight bullying and speaks to race, religion, and other differences. Among the superheroes is Khadija, who is based upon a real person, Nuha. Nuha's experience with Islamophobia is the featured story and serves to educate children about hatred. This comic is the primary learning tool used as part of AWEISS COMICS anti-bullying workshops that have been run for after-school programs, camps, and community centers and were implemented at Toronto District School Board schools (as a program partner).

This dissertation is an extension of my professional work, volunteerism, and previous academic research over the years. The proposal and dissertation began years prior to the global geopolitical events that invigorated pre-existing strains of antisemitism in the classrooms and corridors of university campuses. It is not a response to the current climate but a continuation of my personal journey, and the intent is to be critical and dispassionate and strive to eliminate bias and promote objectivity with a positive approach, while knowing that subjectivity and interpretivism are also constants for me as the researcher. My positionality and declared worldview, grounded in my own history, underpin the research, which seeks to disrupt stereotypes and reductive portrayals of Muslims by outsiders, while being an outsider myself. These types of portrayals in media and popular culture breed prejudice and hate, which lead to more othering and hatred. Hatred is a virus, and a virus needs new hosts to survive. I see my research as a mechanism to interrogate and disrupt the hate virus, which in this case is in popular culture texts created by outsiders, but also foreground positive representations from insiders, specifically Muslim authors.

Chapter summaries

Divided into four chapters, the dissertation begins in Chapter One with consideration of wide-ranging questions regarding propaganda, its uses and forms. Chapter One addresses the etymology of the term “propaganda” and how its meaning has evolved from the 17th century onward. It explores the role of art - paintings, sketches, monuments and comics - as both propaganda and counterpropaganda as well as the instruments and applications of propaganda in various social, religious and political contexts. The chapter concludes with an overview of the relationship between

representation, propaganda, and social and political movements such as nativism and anti-slavery in the precursors to comics: novels, dime novels, and pulps.

Chapter Two shifts to reading comics, mapping out the theoretical framework and analytical tools utilized to examine the messaging produced by the objects of study through a geopolitical lens, about Muslims and/or Islam, America and/or the West, and religion. The study of comics requires examination of both the words and the pictorial content. This chapter outlines how Scott McCloud's foundational scholarship *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* provides tools and methods for examining the formal and stylistic elements of the comic book form. This section also includes a commentary on early representation of Muslim characters in comics dating back to *Kismet*, *Man of Fate*, in the 1940s, as well as a brief literature review of the scholarship on the discourse surrounding these depictions.

In Chapter Three the discussion moves away from the general terrain of propaganda and art to an intensive analysis of the representation of Muslim comic book characters in selected pre-9/11 works. Attention is directed to a comparison of Salima Baranizar, of Iranian descent, and The Veil, a member of an Iraqi mercenary group. Baranizar's story unfolds over two DC comic books: *Millennium* no. 2, 1987, written by Steve Englehart, and *Blue Beetle* no. 20, penned by Len Wein. The Veil's three-part "The Killing Stroke" was published in 1991 over three different X-Men Marvel comic book serials, all written by Fabian Nicieza: *New Mutants Annual* vol. 1, no. 7, *The Uncanny X-Men Annual* vol. 1, no. 15, and in *X-Factor Annual* vol. 1, no. 6. These female characters are prominent representative agents of how Muslims and/or Islam were portrayed in the medium during the 1980s and 1990s, respectively, due to their

nationalities, which correlated to geopolitical conflicts with the US at the time of the publication of these texts. This examination informs our understanding of the portrayal of Muslims in superhero comics prior to the events of 9/11, which also contextualizes their representation within a post-9/11 context.

Chapter Four turns attention from pre-9/11 comics to selected post-9/11 graphic novels: *Johnny Jihad*, written by Ryan Inzana, and published by Nantier Beall Minoustchine Publishing in 2003, and Frank Miller's *Holy Terror*, published by Legendary Comics in 2011. Beyond a comparison of themes, characters, and pictorial elements, this analysis places these texts into conversation with one another regarding their explicit approach: *Holy Terror* is designed to function as anti-Muslim propaganda while *Johnny Jihad* operates as counterpropaganda to reductive portrayals of Muslims after 9/11. The issue of causality, particularly in relation to terrorism, is a central concern in both texts, though approached very differently by the two authors. In my analysis, I unpack the subsequent implications and messaging of these varying approaches.

Both chapters three and four strive to foreground the voices of Muslim scholars and stakeholders and their reception of these artifacts. The dissertation concludes with a synthesis of shifts that occurred in the representation of Muslims from pre-9/11 to post-9/11 and suggests areas for future research to add to the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims.

The research focuses primarily on content from the United States for the manageability of materials, given the volume of content available globally. As it is a superpower and the birthplace of the modern-day comic, it is appropriate to focus on the United States, although some works from Canada and the UK will also be considered.

CHAPTER ONE - PROPAGANDA AND THE ART OF PROPAGANDA

Propaganda has been enlisted as a weapon of war for centuries. Two prominent 20th century examples are the German's Third Reich's Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda during WWII (1933-45) and the American Operation Mockingbird, employed during the Cold War. In Germany, the ministry exercised control over the press, radio, film, and theatre through "mandates and instructions," ensuring the omission of any content that could "weaken the strength of the Reich abroad or at home" (Holocaust Encyclopedia). During the Cold War, America launched Operation Mockingbird. It was a "secret campaign [run by] the CIA to influence US and Global media in the interest of US foreign policies" (Rowe 174). Within a contemporary context, Fox News functioned as Donald Trump's unofficial propaganda machine while MSNBC propagated anti-Republican sentiments during Trump's first term between 2017 and 2021. Propaganda is usually associated today with bad actors operating as hate agents, intent on infiltrating hearts and minds to further their objectives, whether economic, social, or political.

Interestingly, propaganda's origin story from an etymological standpoint was vastly different from its current meaning and application. Erwin R. Fellows' study of propaganda provides an excellent, authoritative overview of its history. Up to the 16th century, Fellows notes the word 'propaganda', a Latin term, was only used in "a biological frame of reference, referring to the reproduction of plants and animals" (182). Propaganda subsequently experienced two significant transformations in meaning: religious and political.

The term propaganda was co-opted by the Catholic Church, specifically, by Pope Gregory XIII who “established a commission of three cardinals *de propaganda fide*” in 1572, which was designed to “spread Catholic doctrines in non-Christian lands” thereby functioning as a form of proselytization (Fellows 182). The religious application continued in the next century, in 1622, when Pope Gregory XV “established a more formal organization, the sacred congregation *de propaganda fide*” (Fellows 182). Five years later, in 1627, Urban VIII “set up a *collegium de propaganda* to train missionaries” (Fellows 182). In total, these three instances of situating the word within a religious framework over two centuries operated to solidify propaganda as a religious construct. This application appeared within the English language in 1718 when it was used as a religious frame of reference (Fellows 182). Fellows notes, “the religious use of the terms seems to have persisted through the eighteenth century” (182).

The second mutation of the word occurred at the dawn of the 19th century, taking on a political tone. Fellows notes, “At least one writer has commented that this new meaning of the term in a political frame of reference, may have originated in America” (183). The evidence to substantiate this claim is abundant. In 1800, Fellows notes “a change to a political or military context can be observed” evidenced by the following statement, which appeared in the *Philadelphia Aurora*, “We have thrown some useful light upon the illuminati of Connecticut and Massachusetts, and lately upon a similar propaganda in Delaware State” (182). Twenty-four years later, in 1824, politician Daniel Webster addressing congress regarding a revolution in Greece stated, “It may be easy to call this resolution *Quixotic*, the emanation of a crusading or propagandistic spirit (Fellows 184). Two decades later, in 1843, propaganda was listed as a word in *W. T.*

Brande, A Dictionary of Science, Literature, and Art. The dictionary provided the following definition, situating it within the realm of the political, “Derived from this celebrated society [for propagation of the faith], the name *propaganda* is applied in modern political language as a term of reproach to secret associations for the spread of opinions and principles which are viewed by most governments with horror and aversion” (Brande 997). Throughout the 19th century, and thereafter, the word propaganda maintained its political association.

In terms of propaganda applied within a military-political context, Fellows cites the following quotations, beginning with US President Millard Fillmore, who in 1852, stated that “[patriots of the Revolution knew] that it was not possible for this nation to become a ‘propagandist’ of free principles without arraying against it the combined powers of Europe” (183). Three years later, in 1855, Fellows cites a passage by American historian and Pastor, John SC Abbott from his work *The History of Napoleon Bonaparte* (New York, 1855), as another example of its political application, “The English cabinet was well aware that a propaganda war was impossible as long as Russia should continue allied to France” (Abbott 197). The transformation of propaganda from the realm of the religious to a political connotation was completed. Fellow’s notes that one of the drivers behind the transformation away from a religious usage was its “unfavorable connotation which the word acquired in this period which may have been due to Protestant hostility to Catholicism in Northern Europe and the United States” (184). Conversely, in Catholic-dominated countries in Southern Europe and Latin America, there was “a more favorable attitude toward the use of the term” (Fellows 184).

This chapter is designed to provide foundational knowledge, but it is restricted to epistemology, key instruments, and applications within a North American and, to a lesser extent, European context. It does not represent an exhaustive list or the totality of propaganda history.

Propaganda: Instruments and Applications

Applications and instruments of propaganda demonstrate a pattern of use by the same actors (governments, religious groups, and warring countries), which function to further propagate ideologies of difference and ‘othering’ to establish superiority, which were reproduced in comic books. Propaganda was employed by those who were referred to as the “citizen class,” in Athens in ancient Greece, to further their interests in response to issues “of the city-state to which they belonged” (Casey). This term, propaganda, is being used in a general sense to discuss its instruments and applications—i.e., although the Greeks did not use the term, they were simply manifesting the idea.

Ralph Casey identifies differing views on politics and religion as the root cause behind the “rise of propaganda and counterpropaganda” (historians.org). In the absence of contemporary media (newspapers, TV, radio) as tools to propagate their agenda, Casey notes the Greeks weaponized “games, the theater, the assembly, the law courts, and religious festivals,” as tools for “for propagandizing ideas and beliefs” (historians.org). Additional instruments of propagation included “putting forward points of view” orally, as well as the dissemination of handwritten books which were designed to “shape and control the opinions of men” (Casey). As Casey observes, “From that

time forward, whenever any society had common knowledge and a sense of common interests, it made use of propaganda” (historians.org).

The case of Athens illuminates the role of the arts as a delivery system to propagate ideology related to religion and politics, as evidenced by the instruments utilized for the dissemination of propaganda: theatre, religious festivals, as well as oral discussions and handwritten books among others. These delivery systems persist today. I would argue that comic books and graphic novels are a modern-day form of written communication. Prior to the advent of the printing press and the computer, artists used pencil and paper to illustrate and write their works. Like the handwritten texts of Athens, comic books function as a vessel for disseminating political ideology. For example, the March 1941 front cover of *Captain America* featured Cap slugging Hitler, propagating the importance of intervention in WWII during a period when America’s foreign policy was rooted in isolationism. Soon after, the introduction of the Lend-Lease Act marked a shift to interventionism (Triki 22). In ancient times, art, whether it be theatre or festivals, was a vessel for propagating political and religious ideas, in the same way comics did in their golden age.

The wartime activities of the 16th century Spanish Armada signify a continuation of the forementioned Athenian propaganda that was driven by religion and politics and distributed through written works.⁴ It illuminates how propaganda is employed by both parties in a conflict, signaling the reach of this tactic and a realization that there are no “good guys” (or superheroes) when it comes to propagating lies. Instead, such classifications are assigned based on one’s positionality. While historians like Michael Tarver are part of the consensus that the defeat of the Spanish Armada was due to poor

weather and disease the story or myth of the battle was part of the propaganda battle (121).

In the years preceding the Spanish Armada, Sir Walter Raleigh complained bitterly about Spanish propaganda in the form of pamphlets that were weaponized by the Spaniards to weave a false narrative about a battle that had been waged “between the British ship Revenge and the ships of the Spanish king” (“Spanish Armada”). Raleigh stated that it was “no marvel that the Spaniard should seek by false and slanderous pamphlets... letters, to cover their own loss and to derogate from others their own honours, especially in this fight being performed far off” (“Spanish Armada”). The pamphlets and letters represented a method intended to control the narrative with the intent of transforming the reality of a loss into a perceived victory.

Conversely, Elizabethan propaganda was deployed in the Spanish-English conflict to sway hearts and minds to garner support while avoiding criticism, as evidenced by two examples.⁵ Firstly, the June 1588 draft proclamation was accompanied by a letter dispatched by Chief Minister Lord Burghley to Sir Francis Walsingham, which sought to assign blame for the war on others: “This is necessary to save all her good subjects, from the highest to the lowest, against all attempts of enemies and rebels” (“Elizabethan Propaganda”). It is important to note that the Spanish Armada was, to a degree, a response to Elizabeth’s expansion of her military, perceived as a threat (“Elizabethan Propaganda”). In addition, one of the inciting incidents for this conflict can be traced back to Elizabeth permitting “privateers such as Sir Francis Drake to conduct pirate raids on Spanish fleets carrying treasure from their rich New World colonies” (“Spanish Armada”).

Religious propaganda was disseminated by Elizabeth's ministers, who "accused Catholic English rebels of trying to make her 'honorable actions' look bad," as evidenced in a draft government proclamation ("Elizabethan Propaganda"). This excerpt illuminates their attempt to propagate religious divisions: "Some of her rebels abroad now seek wicked and traitorous lies to persuade and draw forth those they think support their weak attempts...only for relief and comfort of Catholics... being in truth traitors" ("Elizabethan Propaganda"). The editors of the National Archives contend that "the Spanish claims... sound like a 1944 bulletin from the Japanese propaganda office" (Casey). This observation speaks to the continuation of political and, to a lesser degree, religious propaganda throughout centuries, and although the parties, in the context of war, may change, the methods largely remain the same.

Atrocity stories are vital terrain for understanding the dissemination of religious propaganda both historically and contemporaneously. "The purpose of propaganda is to make one set of people forget that other sets of people are human" (Huxley 1). Huxley's contention speaks to the role of atrocity stories, a branch of religious propaganda, that are deeply rooted in historical practices. For Paul Morrow, in his article "A Theory of Atrocity Propaganda," "Atrocity propaganda consists in reports of cruel or shocking acts, circulated widely, and intended to produce an inappropriate martial response" (49). Later in this dissertation, I examine how atrocity propaganda was embedded in pre-9/11 and post-9/11 comic books.

Nicolas Cull's study of religious and political propaganda provides an in-depth and well-researched overview of its history. Cull notes that such stories "are a time-honored technique of propagandists, particularly in war propaganda" (23). Atrocity

propaganda dates back at least to the Crusades in wartime (Cull 23).⁶ Specifically, a sermon by Pope Urban II (1035-1099) in 1095 served to rationalize war against Islam by claiming that the enemy had “ravaged the churches of God in the Eastern provinces, circumcised Christian men, violated women, and carried out the most unspeakable torture before killing them” (Cull 24). Cull notes that “Urban's sermon succeeded in mobilizing popular enthusiasm for the People's Crusade” (24).

In the twenty-first century, religiously framed atrocity stories remain a tool to propagate fear and disdain towards groups perceived as a threat to existing social orders. In the sphere of sequential art, atrocity stories, graphic novels, and anti-Islam propaganda intersect in the case of Frank Miller's graphic novel, *Holy Terror*, published in September 2011 by Legendary Comics. The story operates as an allegory for a real-life atrocity, 9/11. This text is one of the primary objects of study of this dissertation, which is analyzed in detail in chapter 4. This post-traumatic climate of 9/11 and post-9/11, filled with anxiety, fear, and hate, constituted a ripe moment for the messaging of Islamic terrorism as a threat due to its connection to a real-life atrocity story that echoes a long history of anti-Islam propaganda going back to the Catholic Church's messaging during the Crusades. Atrocity stories of a religious nature were not restricted to Catholics versus Muslims; nearly 500 years after the Crusades began, these types of propaganda stories were weaponized by Protestants against Catholics through *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Days, Touching Matters of the Church* (1563), also known as the *Book of Martyrs*, and later in comics such as *Chick Tracts* (1972-1986), where fundamentalist Christians propagated hatred towards Catholics.

Atrocity stories were and continue to drive divisions between faiths and even branches within the same religion, such as Catholicism, which is part of Christianity yet vilified by some Christians. In the 16th century, the *Book of Martyrs*, and subsequent additions, authored by John Foxe, functioned as religious propaganda, expressed visually through “powerful representations of martyrdom,” which “can be found in the sixteenth-century engravings in this publication” (Cull 24). It chronicles atrocities apparently committed by the Catholic Church against Protestants “in graphic detail,” largely within the confines of Scotland and England (Cull 24). Cull notes that the book was legitimized by the Convocation of Canterbury, who “decreed that the book was to be placed, together with the *Bishop's Bible of 1568*, in the house of every bishop, dean, and archdeacon” (24). Cull explains that the “horrifically graphic portrayal of torture can be seen as the forerunner to the type of atrocity propaganda that one finds in the twentieth century” (24). As religious propaganda, the messaging of these engravings produced anti-Catholic sentiments for generations and evoked “bitter reprisals” (Cull 24).

The situating of Catholics as real-life supervillains by some Christians was co-opted by comic book publishers like Jack Chick in the 20th century with his *Chick Tracts*, published between 1972 and 1986. Michael Borer describes *Chick Tracts* as “small twenty-four-page black-and-white comic books that attempt to convert the reader to Chick’s particular brand of ‘Bible-believing’ Protestant Christianity” (96). The distributed model was informal; the tracts were purchased by believers from Chick and circulated to individuals as well as places of worship, usually free of charge (Borer 97). According to Chick, he sold more than half a billion tracts (Borer 97). Chick considered Catholicism to

be satanic and “one of the greatest problems currently facing both the United States and the world as a whole” (Borer 97).

The juxtaposition of Catholicism with Satanism is not hyperbolic; it is ripped from the pages of a *Chick Tract*. Specifically, the tract *Mama’s Girl*, as shown in Fig. 1, claims that Satan, pictured, is the head of the Catholic Church and birthed “four daughters: Islam, Communism, Nazism, and Freemasonry” (Chick). In the context of Christianity, Satan, as a representative agent of the Catholic Church, is a supervillain bent on the destruction of the faith as well as the faithful. These *Chick Tracts* would qualify as modern atrocity stories, propagating fear and hatred for “the other” while reaffirming superiority based on religion. *Mama’s Girl* is among ten tracts categorized under Catholicism, which the Chick website also lists under the banner of “false religions” (Vox). Jack Chick was the forefather of comics as religious propaganda in 20th century in North America.⁷

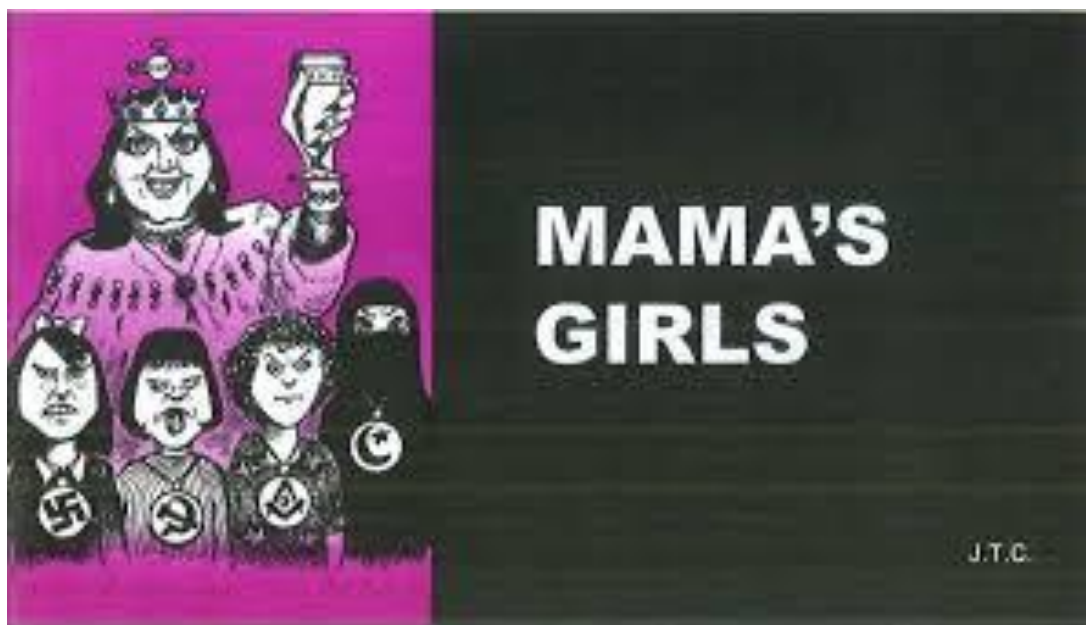


Figure 1. Jack T. Chick, *Mama’s Girls*, 2012.

In totality, the 16th-century pope's sermon proclaiming that Muslims had committed acts of torture and murder against Catholics, Miller's *Holy Terror*, which includes Muslims employing suicide bomb belts and nail bombs targeting civilians, and *Chick Tracts*, which claim that Satan is the head of the Catholic Church and bent on wiping out Christians, are all clear examples of religious-type atrocity stories. These claims and representations conform to and succeed in making "one set of people forget that other sets of people are human" (Huxley 1). These atrocity stories cultivate righteous hatred that permits violence and murder to be seen as a responsible, ethical, and dutiful response.

Regardless of whether religious or political ideology was being propagated, both have been tied to atrocity stories. Atrocities stories are an extremely dangerous and affective tool to indoctrinate people because they are often based on real events, which create the appearance of authenticity while appealing to the receiver's emotions. What's at stake in the broadest context? Atrocities stories function as a transformative agent, turning anxiety and fear into a type of righteous hatred. The juxtaposition of hatred with righteousness serves to cleanse and rehabilitate hate and hater. Hating becomes a responsive act that propagates that it is a righteous act to hate those who have committed atrocities, whether real, imagined, or misrepresented.

Art Propaganda

Historically, art has been enlisted to propagate nationalistic, imperialistic, patriotic, and colonial ideas through architectural works, paintings, sketches, and sculptures by many cultures, including the Romans, Russians, French, British, and Nazis to prop up governments and regimes. These nationalistic examples of

propaganda art are placed in conversation with comic books from Canada, Britain, and Russia, which similarly serve to propagate nationalistic ideology through the othering of opposing governments or peoples. Art as propaganda has been at the forefront of efforts to colonize hearts and minds for centuries. Cull notes “the use of images and symbols as a tool for the dissemination of social, political, or religious ideas is a traditional facet of the visual arts” (21). Art inherently mirrors both its creators and the time in which it is created. Cull contends “it consequently holds some propaganda value” (21).

Art has been utilized as a mechanism for Egyptian, Roman, and medieval rulers to bolster their regimes (Cull 21). Cull documents that “the despots of Renaissance Italian states and the early modern monarchies of Western Europe” viewed “art and architecture” as a method to strengthen their grip on the masses (22). This practice is illuminated by the works of Frenchman Jacques-Louis David. David’s painting *Oath of the Horatii* (1785) “represent intensely dramatic affirmation of patriotism” (Cull 22).⁸ Later works by David, such as *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (Five paintings, 1801-1805) and *The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries* (1812), glorified Napoleon and served as representations of art propaganda “intended to mythologize and glorify a regime” (Cull 22).

Across the English Channel, art produced by the British “glorified imperialism, endorsing Britain’s claim to a God-given right to rule over colonial nations” (Cull 22). British war artists and war correspondents were prominent propagandists confronting Britain’s role and actions, including but not limited to the Anglo-Zulu War in South Africa in 1879, Mahdist War that raged in Sudan between 1881 and 1899, and the Anglo-

Egyptian War of 1882. Noted war artists such as Melton Prior and Frederic Villiers are credited with creating works that “reflected imperialism in politics” (Mackenzie 50).⁹

Writer Peter Harrington explains that “Melton Prior’s Victorian-era war sketches...glorified Britain’s last surge of Imperialism” (93). Later, in the Soviet Union, agitational propaganda took hold as a “political strategy in which the techniques of agitation and propaganda are used to influence and mobilize public opinion” (Encyclopedia Britannica). One celebrated example of agitprop is Vladimir Tatlin’s plan for a *Monument to the Third Communist International* (1920) which was created in “response to Lenin’s call for monumental propaganda” (Cull 23).¹⁰

In the 20th century, regimes continued the practice of employing art to propagate nationalism and, by extension, to position “the other” as a threat to the collective. Cull notes, “The strict regulation of the art world under various totalitarian regimes... represented the high point of the appropriation of art as propaganda” (22). For example, in Nazi Germany, “the state sponsored both high and low art.... Artistic style and subject matter alike had to reflect the idealized values of the *volk* (people)” (Cull 22). Hitler, a failed artist, declared war on modern art, as evidenced by his choice to personally oversee The Exhibition of Degenerate Art in 1937 (Blamires 59). Moreover, the Nazi leader’s art confiscation program, as well as the infamous public burning of art on March 20, 1939, sought to erase modern art from the landscape. The Nazis sought to cleanse German culture of art created by those deemed “the other,” as evidenced by the disposal “of the Bauhaus (German Art School), describing it as a haven for socialists, Bolsheviks, liars, and Jews” (Blamires 59).

Hitler dedicated two chapters to propaganda in his book *Mein Kampf*. In chapter 6 titled “War Propaganda,” he stated that “the art of propaganda lies in understanding the emotional ideas of the great masses and finding, through a psychologically correct form, the way to the attention and thence to the heart of the broad masses” (Hitler 180). Hitler understood the power of art as an agent of influence and “wanted art that idealized the Aryan race and brought their stories to life, strengthening the Nazi mythmaking and propaganda machine” (Blamires 59). Hitler promoted ‘National Realism,’ his perception of true art, which linked “country life, with good health, and with the Aryan Race” (Blamires 59). In a Party Day speech, Hitler stated, “We shall discover and encourage the artists who are able to impress upon the state of the German people the cultural stamp of the Germanic race ... the expressions of the soul and the ideals of the community” (Hitler, Party Day speech, 1935; (Choo 104). Prominent examples of Nazi art include four sculptures: Arno Breker’s *The Guard*, *The Warrior Departs*, *The Party* and *The Army*, *Preparedness*; paintings of Adolph Wissel’s *Farm Family from Kahlenberg*; and Hubert Lanzinger’s *The Flag Bearer* (Blamires 60).

Architecture was reportedly Hitler’s preferred art form (Florida Center for Instructional Technology). The German leader regarded himself as the “master builder of the Third Reich” (Ezzell 2). Hitler utilized “the power of architecture to further the Third Reich, building the Olympic Stadium in Berlin ... to hold the Olympic Games, and was intended to show the world the supremacy of the master race” (Blamires 59). Hitler’s mission was undermined by Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals at the Olympics, besting Hitler’s Aryan athletes on a global stage, leading Hitler to exit the stadium in shame. Examining art propaganda in Nazi Germany reveals similarities to

previous regimes and to religious propaganda. Like the French and the English, Hitler privileged domestic art that propagated nationalism through support of the regime. The Nazi leader, and the Russians both favored art (monuments and architecture) that dominated public spaces. Hitler employed atrocity stories to situate Jewish people as the cause of German suffering. Hitler mastered the use of righteous hatred to propagate the genocide of the Jewish race. Following WWII, the co-opting of art by regimes began to dissipate. According to Cull, “The postmodern period has seen the marginalization of politicized art, although totalitarian art lives on in places like Iraq, China, and North Korea” (23). Collectively, these works—paintings, sketches, and monuments—encapsulate how “art became a central element in nationalism” across Europe and, by extension, legitimized communist and imperialist regimes (Cull 22).

Similar to how artwork like paintings, drawings, monuments, and buildings promoted nationalism and imperialism in the UK, France, Germany, and Russia, comic books also served as patriotic propaganda in the United States, Canada, the UK, and Russia. The most common use of art as a propagandistic tool is “through the manipulation of narrative art” (Cull 21). Comic books and graphic novels represent a form of narrative art and thereby can constitute a form of art propaganda. The role of art in propagating nationalism persisted through the comic book medium, specifically in the UK, the United States, Canada, and Russia. In 1932, the character James Bigglesworth aka Biggles, described as “a Royal Air Force pilot in World War I” debuted in the pages of *The White Fokker*, a UK publication (Dittmer 71). During WW11, Biggles arrested the threat to the kingdom posed by foreign villains such as the Japanese and the Nazis (Dittmer 71). The totality of his vocation, mission, and stated adversaries situates him as

a nationalistic figure. Four decades later, in the 1970s, among the most prominent nationalistic figures in comics were the captains, like Captain Britain, Captain America and Captain Canuck. Although the moniker of captain is associated with sports as well as the military, in these instances, it conjures up the defense of the country, as evidenced by their role as defender of the motherland as well as the ‘otherness’ of the antagonists they battle.

In 1976, Captain Britain (Brain Braddock) emerged on the national stage. Captain Britain was published by Marvel UK between 1976 and 1985. The following analysis of Captain Britain and Captain Canuck is informed by Jason Dittmer’s extensive research. The character was created by Chris Claremont prior to his success in America with the Uncanny X-Men series. The character of Captain Britain would later be featured in the American comics *Excalibur* (1987–2001), *New Excalibur*, *Captain Britain*, *MI: 13* and *Secret Avengers* (2005–2013). Like Biggles, he was a patriotic figure designed to both reaffirm and promote nationalism, as evidenced by his attire, his stated goals, and the featured protagonists. Firstly, Captain Britain’s uniform features icons such as the yellow lion, which is part of the Royal Arms of England, a symbol of nationalism. A later iteration of the uniform featured the Union flag. Secondly, his original costume was red, a prominent color on the national flag. Thirdly, Captain Britain’s explicitly stated mission is to serve as “the champion of the United Kingdom” (Barnett). Lastly, Captain Britain, like Biggles, fought foreign menaces such as the Nazis, although they were eradicated by the 1970s. Captain Britain also arrested the threat posed by domestic villains.

In terms of audience reception, Jason Dittmer notes “Marvel U.K. stirred nationalist thoughts in its readers through the very act of creating the hero, as evidenced by the letters to the editor printed in the comic” (72). However, one of the criticisms of Captain Britain was that it was created through the lens of an American, Chris Claremont (Dittmer 72). Ultimately, Dittmer observes that “the hero was a success, and British fans hailed him as one of their own” (72).

Across the Atlantic Ocean, Canada propagated nationalistic ideas through its own captain, Captain Canuck. In 1975, a year prior to Captain Britain entering the cultural landscape, Canadians were gifted their own home-grown superhero, Captain Canuck, who liberated readers from the saturation of American superheroes. Captain Canuck was created by Richard Comely and Ron Leishman. The series was self-published by Comely Comix between 1975 and 1981. Later iterations aside, one-shots include: *Captain Canuck: Reborn* (1993, Semple Comics); *Captain Canuck: Unholy War* (2005–2007, Hot Hail Comics); *Captain Canuck Legacy* (2011); and *Captain Canuck* (2015, Chapterhouse Comics).¹¹ Dittmer contends Captain Canuck was an “intentional political act intended to contribute to the form and intensity of Canadian nationalism” (735). In the comic, nationalism is located through the inclusion of actual Canadian places, contrasting Canadian values with American values, and letters to the editor (Dittmer 741). Dittmer explains that “Comley, his team, and the readers used the idea of ‘Canadian’ quality to construct a national identity against that of the USA” (741). Comley constructed Canadian nationalism through contrasting values by establishing Cpt. Canuck as “a product of his own hard work and moral steadfastness, not a government-

produced chemical wonder (like Captain America). He possesses, in other words, innate qualities of character” (Dittmer 741).

Stated authorial intent affirms Dittmer’s contention. Comley wrote in the comic’s lettercol section that “Captain Canuck’s tremendous strength and endurance come from a good, wholesome diet and lots of exercise. His alertness and determination come from having a strong, clean mind” (Comley 30). This distinction between Canada’s captain, whose heroism is based on discipline and his mindset, compared to the American captain, whose powers are synthetic functions to propagate Canadian supremacy as an expression of nationalism. Interestingly, the premiere issue of Cpt. Canuck explicitly situates Canada as “the most powerful country in the world,” further entrenching national pride through a sense of superiority (Dittmer 735).

Like concepts of nationalism, Canadian identity is often built by drawing distinctions with their American counterparts. For example, Americans subscribe to the melting pot model, whereas Canadians embrace a mosaic approach to culture. Howard Palmer explains the difference. The Canadian mosaic model is” ...where ethnic groups have maintained their distinctiveness while functioning as a part of the whole...American melting pot...where peoples of diverse origins have allegedly fused to make a new people” (1). These values seem to form binary oppositions: assimilation and multiculturalism. This makes Cpt. Canuck a dichotomy as Comley celebrates our multicultural identity through foregrounding diverse superheroes (French, English, etc.) while simultaneously promoting assimilation. Dittmer echoes this sentiment, proclaiming, “The assimilationist agenda is particularly clear in the 1993 series, *Captain Canuck Reborn*” (746).

In this fourth series, Comley pits two brothers from a wealthy family in Ontario, Darren Oak, the new Cpt. Canuck, and Nathan Oak, against one another. Nathan is assigned the role of villain. Dittmer explains that he “is scheming to incite a civil war between French and English Canadian factions as a means of taking over the country” (746). Inevitably, Cpt. Canuck prevents the plot from succeeding. However, the message pertaining to unity through assimilation is revealed through a series of panels where Darren’s son, who is hearing impaired, reads his school report named “My Country, Canada” (Dittmer 746). In a key panel, Dittmer notes that “a frame reveals a portion of the handwritten paper, which states that it is a beautiful and free country with two nations who live in peace under one flag” (746).

An alternative reading of its messaging might challenge the previous interpretation by this writer and Dittmer. Instead of seeing the support for both multiculturalism and assimilation as contradictory, perhaps they operate in concert, where people are assimilated into a multicultural society. Additionally, in this case, we see the relationship between identity and nationalism. This relationship is a shared experience among the three captains (Canuck, America, and Britain). Their attire, which is central to their identities, features icons-- colors and images--associated with their national flag. There is no greater symbol of nationalism than wrapping yourself in the flag. By the same token, the flag has been appropriated by groups such as the Freedom Convoy to propagate the notion of them as agents of national interest. However, authorial intent in terms of messaging may not be received by the audience as intended.

¹² However, authorial intent in terms of messaging may not be received by the audience as intended. Unless authorial intent is stated, the reader will interpret things based on

their own worldview. Also, Canada is home to many different races and religions, who want to maintain their cultures, and some see the best way to do so is to assimilate into a mosaic society as a means for the survival, acceptance, and practice of their culture.

In this case, metrics for success in terms of gauging audience reception include letters to the editor, sales and/or reach, and the perception of institutions that reproduce nationalism. Dittmer notes, "Through these letters, the process of interpellation can be seen, with readers identifying themselves with geopolitical identities" (741). This claim is substantiated by this letter, which Dittmer states is typical, from a reader in St. John, Newfoundland, published in the comic: "I think you are a great guy to publish a comic against all the US comics, so I close my letter by saying, 'hail, Captain Canuck'" (741). Granted, letters to the editor are vetted and do not provide definitive proof of success, but they are an indicator of audience response. Another measure of success is sales. In 2007, Dittmer reported that "there are currently 2.3 million Captain Canuck comic books in circulation" (736). Independent of whether some of those comics were given away, the reach of this character is beyond dispute. Within a broader societal context, one can draw the conclusion that it became a cultural object that symbolizes nationalism. As Dittmer points out, Captain Canuck "has been featured on a Canadian postal stamp and in several museum exhibits" (736).

Comics as nationalistic propaganda was not the sole domain of Canada, the US, and the UK; Russia also utilized domestic comics as propaganda, operating as a form of art propaganda, encapsulating nationalistic pride while propagating disdain for the foreign menace. Conversely, foreign comic book publishers like Marvel were targeted by Russian officials as a type of violent propaganda. Yuri Lobachev is credited with

introducing comic books to audiences in the former Soviet Union and, in January 1966, began publishing one-page installments of his new series *Hurricane to the Rescue* (Spiegel). This comic was released inside the pages of *Koster*, a monthly children's publication (Spiegel). Like some golden-age American comic books, the intended audience is children, who are a potentially malleable audience primed for indoctrination. The ideas embedded in their childhood may persist throughout their lives. This raises the question of content, and particularly, what ideas were being propagated? Spiegel explains the plot as beginning "with the kidnapping of two Soviet children by foreign spies turning into a globetrotting rescue attempt by the titular Soviet agent...Lobachev introduced the audience to these conniving foreign agents in Europe" (Spiegel). This story situates foreigners as a threat to Soviet society, propagating distrust of "the other" while reinforcing support for the Soviet Union.

In the 21st century, in part due to the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of globalization, and the free market economy, Marvel comics became a part of the popular culture landscape in Russia. However, on July 10, 2014, The Moscow Times reported that "Russia's federal media watchdog is investigating Marvel comic books as "propaganda of violence." This raises the question: Who initiated the investigation? The Kremlin? The Times explains that "a Russian state company that distributes printed publications asked the federal media watchdog to investigate Marvel comic books for denigrating Soviet symbols, which amounted to "propaganda of a cult of violence." It is unclear if the request was due to government pressure or concern over the possible indictment of the distributor as complicit in aiding in American propaganda.

The Marvel comic in question features the Avengers fighting supervillains described as “Servants of the Russian Federation” who perpetuate “violence and cruelty” (The Moscow Times). The article notes that “although the story ends in peace, media watchdog Roskomandzor has agreed to investigate” (The Moscow Times). Potential actions include issuing an official warning to the publisher; two warnings in a year could result in their license being suspended, according to the Ekho Moskvyy news company (The Moscow Times). The Times speculated that the Russian publisher, Egmont, would release the next issue as intended; however, it would most likely omit any Russian symbols (The Moscow Times). Despite extensive research and an email to the Moscow Times and to the Comic Book Legal Fund, who picked up the story, there is no information to update this report.

Art and Counterpropaganda

Apart from its propaganda function, art, especially comics, has a long history of acting as counterpropaganda and subverting power within a country. Throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, artists used art as counterpropaganda to criticize politicians both domestically and abroad.

Spanish and British artists Francisco Goya and James Gillray challenged their nations and their leaders. Goya's *Third of May 1808* (1814) functions as an example of “history painting and narrative art” and signifies “the supreme expression of Spanish nationalism” during a time when the country was under occupation by the French, thereby also serving as a form of resistance to Napoleon's rule while being responsive

to French propaganda created by the forementioned works of Jacques-Louis David (Cull 22).

In England, British printmaker and caricaturist James Gillray was renowned for his use of satire in his socio-political etchings of royalty (e.g., *A Voluntary under the Horrors of Digestions*, 1792, a caricature of George IV) and politicians domestically and abroad, as evidenced by the cartoon *The Plum Pudding in Danger* (1805), which features Prime Minister Pitt and Napoleon (see Fig. 2), symbols of colonization, sitting at a table both carving up a turkey shaped like a globe with text ("Europe") on it (Cull 22). James Gillray's political cartoons belong to a tradition rooted in the works of his predecessor William Hogarth, who is regarded as "the father of modern cartoons" (Aravind 7).¹³ Although political cartoons predated Hogarth's works such as *The Rake's Progress* (8 paintings, 1730), Hogarth is credited with taking the form "to new heights with modern moral tales" (Rowson).¹⁴



Figure 2: James Gillray, *The Plum Pudding in Danger*, 1805.

In terms of political discourse, William Hogarth's *Humours of an Election* (1753, four paintings) documented and confronted corruption within the 18th-century parliamentary elections (Aravind 7). In the 19th century, George Cruikshank, considered by some as the father of modern cartoons, picked up the mantle from Gillray and Hogarth with works such as *New Union Club* (1819), which “satirized a dinner party organized by abolitionists with black guests,” a prominent example of racist cartooning (Aravind 7). Collectively, these artists are “remembered for their political satires and sensuous portrayals of contemporary life” (Aravind 7). These cartoons are the precursor to comic strips, which evolved into comic books. Moreover, these cartoons are historically significant because they established the aesthetic for comic books and, as

previously noted, operate as an earlier iteration of the comic book, a type of single-framed comic. Within this context, political satire is a form of political counterpropaganda that challenges government policies and the ideology they produce.

The use of art as counterpropaganda persisted in the 20th century. Throughout the 20th century, there were notable examples of counterpropaganda in Mexico, Germany, and the US. Mexican painter and caricaturist Jose Clemente Orozco was commissioned by Dartmouth College and created the mural *The Epic of American Civilization* (1932). The mural hung in the Baker Memorial Library's basement reading room at Dartmouth College, and depicted "Western imperialism (of Indigenous Peoples, impact of the Mexican Civil War/WWI) and twentieth-century industrialization" (Cull 23). German visual artist John Heartfield's political photomontages operated as political counterpropaganda. His works, such as *Adolph the Superman* (1932) and *Göring: The Executioner of the Third Reich* (1933), functioned to satirize Nazism (Cull 22). Heartfield is noted for targeting "the deception of the Hitler myth and the threat to civic freedom and social equality in the Third Reich" and "were telling commentaries on the lies of Nazism" (Kay 14).

A couple of decades later, government agencies such as "The CIA and other US organizations subsidized and promoted US abstract expressionist artists overseas as symbols of the creative freedom enjoyed within the U.S. system" (Cull 23). This signals the practice of political counterpropaganda targeting a foreign audience abroad, in this case, the USSR and the countries in its sphere of influence (Cull 23). Back in the US, in the late 1960's, domestic counterpropaganda was encapsulated by the Art Workers Coalition's (NYC artists) poster *And Babies* (1969), which illuminated the horror of the

My Lai incident massacre, thereby functioning as anti-war political counter-propaganda art (Cull 23).

Comic books are part of the long history of visual counterpropaganda, which include paintings, etchings, and posters. In the United States, comic books were agents in propagating ideas and attitudes that challenged government policies and societal values. Sequential art, such as comic books, is a form of popular culture. As Jeffrey K. Johnson noted, “one of the most important attributes of popular culture is that it quickly changes to meet a society’s needs [evidenced by the introduction] of Patriot heroes who were introduced in 1940” (34). During WW2, superheroes were enlisted to propagate nationalism, support for the war effort, and Roosevelt’s New Deal; however, from the 1950s through the 1970s, with the rise of counter-cultural movements such as the beat movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the women’s rights movement, all functioned to challenge cultural norms, government, and authority in general. Comic books reflected this change, encapsulating Johnson’s sentiment that popular culture reacts and adjusts to “society’s needs” (34). In addition to the forementioned case of Captain America during WWII, post-WWII, *Fighting American*, *The Hulk*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *Spider-Man* functioned as counterpropaganda challenging authority figures, America’s use of nuclear energy, racism, and a lack of representation of minorities.

In 1954, *Fighting American*, created by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon, featured a patriotic superhero (Fighting American, aka Johnny Flagg) and his sidekick Speedy. The initial tone was jingoistic, as evidenced by the anti-communist storylines, which conformed to the dominant domestic ideology of the time, which painted the Russians

as the supervillains behind the Cold War. However, in response to the McCarthy hearings, a shift would occur in the tone. Scott notes the title “morphed into a parody of the form of Americanism” (107). This transformation was attributed, in part, to McCarthy’s treatment of Col. Joseph Welch during a televised hearing of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, known as the Senate equivalent of HUAC (Scott 107).¹⁵ Scott contends, “This began a change in the public ‘s attitude toward anti-Communist witch hunts more generally, which indirectly altered the comic book as well” (107). Scott notes, “The overall downturn in the comic book business had placed too great a financial burden on Simon and Kirby. Without the resources to sustain the operation until it could turn a profit, the publisher, Mainline Comics, collapsed.” *Fighting American* lasted only seven issues (109).

Although nearly a decade removed from the end of WWI and the start of the Cold War, *Fighting American*’s truncated run spoke to reception, suggesting a lack of interest among consumers for such content. This raises the question: Why? Was it perceived as undemocratic? Did it force readers to confront the uncomfortable truth that America may not always be a superhero? Was it boring? What does remain clear is that the creators of *Fighting American*, Simon and Kirby, who were the team that created Captain America during WWII to propagate intervention during a period of isolationism, had undergone a metamorphosis. The irony was that they were now weaponizing satire as political discourse that challenged American war activities abroad, as opposed to their inactivity. Although *Captain America* and *Fighting American* both served as counterpropaganda challenging the government’s positionality, *Fighting American* situated America as a villain during the Cold War in need of rehabilitation. 1954’s

Fighting American series speaks to a shift from jingoism to criticizing America's cold war policies in war-themed comics, situating the series as counterpropaganda.

In the 1960s and 1970s, superheroes reemerged as a popular genre and can be seen as objects of counterpropaganda. Comic book creators maintained their role as agents provocateurs propagating distrust of nuclear power, cynicism of authority figures (e.g., the police and the military), and support for social change--all forms of counterpropaganda. The Fantastic Four are regarded as the first family of the nuclear era based on their relationship to one another as well as their exposure to "strange radiation" as the root source of their power (Johnson 60).¹⁶ Johnson notes that "strange energy had changed a normal family into a nuclear family, just as atomic energy had changed society and the American family" (60). This operates as a cautionary tale and allegory for the dangers posed by exposure to the individual, altering them from human to a type of creature, e.g., Johnny Storm would become "engulfed in flames and fly" and Ben would transform into "an orange rock-like monster" (Johnson 60).

The Hulk is a good representative example of Marvel's nuclear superheroes. His superpower was the biproduct of exposure to gamma radiation during a nuclear test (Johnson 60). The duality of the characters is stark: Bruce Banner is contained, a non-threat to himself and others, whereas the Hulk in a nuclear-induced state is out of control, a danger to anyone and everyone. These characters function as an allegory for the difference between a non-nuclear society and a nuclear society and the threat posed to all by the latter. Johnson concludes, "The Incredible Hulk portrayed a character that symbolized nuclear energy and displayed the U.S.'s inability to command it. Many Americans no longer saw nuclear power as safe and controllable, but rather as

a potential monster” (61). The portrayal of the Hulk combined with the Fantastic Four, who are often presented as an “unhappy nuclear family,” were “mirroring society’s growing distrust of nuclear power” (Johnson 61). They were also possibly reflecting challenges to the concept of the ‘nuclear family’ itself, where Dad and Mom are viewed as the ultimate authorities.

By 1969, comic book sales were in decline, and publishers pivoted by directing their efforts towards attracting a new audience comprised of young readers by featuring superheroes adopting an anti-establishment tone.¹⁷ These heroes functioned as counter-cultural objects of identification. Specifically, The Hulk expressed disdain for instruments of authority, mirroring the sentiments of youthful readers. The Incredible Hulk was engaged in an ongoing conflict with the military (Mazur 231). The police, due to their role as government agents who attack civil rights and anti-war protestors, were viewed with suspicion by a younger demographic. Spiderman tapped into this discord with these words in 1969, in a panel as part of the story *Mission: Crush The Kingpin!* because he was being hunted by the media and the police: “No matter what I do...nothing ever changes! The more I try to help the law...the more they hunt me...the more they hate me...I’m through being the fall guy...if they call me a menace...and treat me like a menace...I might as well be a menace” (Lee 21). In this context, the actions of the Hulk and Spider-Man propagated distrust for authority figures and operated as counterpropaganda. In addition to challenging America’s use of nuclear energy, superheroes in the following decade became “woke” way before it became a divisive term in the 21st century. Superheroes propagated wokeness through socially conscious positions in the 1970s.

Superheroes began to address social issues such as racism through identification and storylines. Wright notes that “alienated superheroes like the Hulk and Silver Surfer empathized with African Americans, as evidenced by the Hulk’s friendship with an impoverished black teenager and these comments made to his friend, “The world hates us...both of us!...Because we’re different” (5; *A Titan Stalks the Tenements*). Marvel was at the forefront of introducing black superheroes such as Luke Cage and the Falcon; however, they were imagined and created by non-Black writers. In the absence of Black creators such characters may lack fully layered and nuanced dimensions. Although the aforementioned comic book serials have a storied history of serving as counterpropaganda to social ills, their predecessors, novels, dime novels, and pulps, both challenged prejudicial attitudes and more often than not contributed greatly to propagating racist and reductive portrayals of those deemed “the other” based upon historical conditions.

Novels, Dime Novels and Pulp Magazines and representation

Novels, dime novels, and later pulp magazines all trafficked in racist othering. This practice is evident throughout literary history and is not unique to comics. The connection between these mediums and comics resides in the fact that they fall under the umbrella of sequential art narratives. These popular print mediums illuminate historical portrayals of those deemed “the other.” Not surprisingly, literary precursors of the comic “other” whole races of people like African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, and Asians (often called Orientals) through dehumanization and the exaggeration of differences.

As I discuss below, nativism operates as the root cause behind many of these negative practices. Some early novels and dime novels attempt to humanize and bridge perceptions of difference. Later, most pulps reduce non-whites to racist caricatures but also create the prototype for what will become heroes and superheroes. These portrayals are foundational works behind racist representations examined in the dissertation's case study of comic books pre-9/11, and those created post-911.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, is an anti-slavery narrative that confronts the cruelty and unethical nature of slavery by situating the slave character, Uncle Tom, as the protagonist, where "the reader is submerged into the harsh lives of slaves" (Loterman 27). Stowe describes Tom as having a "face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindness and benevolence. There was something about his whole air of self-respecting and dignified..." (18). Such details function as an act of humanization compared to other stories of that period. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* ranks as the "best-selling novel of the nineteenth century"; to further illustrate its reach, the novel is the "second-best-selling overall book, following the Bible" (Groeling 1).

The success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was paralleled by the rise of anti-Tom literature, which operates as pro-slave fiction. They sought to propagate white supremacy through their justification of slavery. These works were both explicit and implicit in their messaging, which portrayed African Americans as infantile and an inferior species that required white masters (Jordan-Lake). For example, *The Sword and the Distaff*, authored by William Gilmore Simms, encapsulated this approach by propagating the Happy Slave caricature displayed in the scene where Tom declines

Porgy's, his "master," offer to be free. Tom explains his decision: "de man wha' hab sense and good maussa, at de same time, he's a d—n pretickilar great big fool, for let he maussa off from keep 'em and fin' 'em" (Simms 581). This scene reinforces Loterman's contention that Tom "would rather belong to a good master than become a master of his own" (47). Difference, more specifically inferiority, is emphasized between Blacks and whites through speech, as evidenced by Black characters speaking a plantation creole compared to whites who speak "proper" English, and the self's "choice" to remain property demeans their humanity, literally and figuratively rendering them the other.

These prominent pre-Civil War novels were published in 1852, nine years prior to the start of the Civil War, and illuminate the societal division in America, serving as a metaphorical literary civil war, where writers sought to capture the hearts and minds of the public. Religion, as was the case previously with the Crusaders and the Book of Martyrs, was weaponized on this occasion by both parties. Beecher framed Christianity as the antidote to cure "the destructive power of slavery," whereas anti-abolitionist groups like the Southern Woman of Letters positioned slavery as G-d's will (19). In addition to religion and the temporal—pre-civil war—the role of the spatial, according to Loterman, serves as a key determinant (48). Stowe was born in Connecticut and viewed the issue of slavery through a northeastern lens, compared to Simms, a native of Charleston, South Carolina, who saw the issue through the prism of a Southern confederate. Loterman attributes their deviating stances on slavery to this factor. These novels illustrate how art imitates life by embodying diverging social and political views, but *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also elucidates the way life is influenced by art, evidenced by

Stowe's text being credited with helping to "lay the groundwork for the Civil War," epitomizing the power of representation and its ability to counter propaganda, if designed to do so (Kaufman 18).

Like the novels that depicted African Americans as "the other," so did dime novels featuring Indigenous peoples speak to a racist pattern in the portrayal of minorities.¹⁸ Early presentations of the Indigenous peoples in dime novels were set on the colonial frontier and pitted the colonizer against the colonized, positioning the former as the agent of civility and modernity and relegating the latter to "the other." For example, in Malaeska, *The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* (1860), and *The Indian Queen* (1864), two parts of a trilogy penned by Ann Sophia Winterbotham Stephens, Indigenous Peoples are constantly referred to as savages throughout the novels. In part one, which sets the tone, the narrator refers to the Mohawks as "a savage tribe" (7); a Native American is called a "half-naked savage" (16); and Jones kills the "Savage" (18). Moreover, interracial relationships are deemed "unnatural" (Stephens 253). In addition to the "savage" stereotype, dime novels reduce Native Americans to racial stereotypes such as "squaw," "half-breed," and princess" (Adams-Campbell 34). The emphasis on difference dehumanizes, which is one of the facets behind othering.¹⁹

In the 1880s, the pulps emerged as a new literary form, and they continued the practice of trafficking in racist stereotypes and foregrounding the threat of "the other" (Madison 41).^{20 21} In 1912, *All-Story Weekly* introduced the heroes Tarzan and John Carter, and Street and Smith Pulps created *The Shadow* in 1930 and *Doc Savage* in 1933, archetypes for the comic book superheroes John Carter and Tarzan (Madison 42).²² Also, Doc Savage led a team of fighters who are credited with providing the

prototype for the superhero team (Mitchell).

Every hero needs a villain, and the pulps often positioned the “Oriental” as “the other,” a foreign threat to America’s white identity. Principal among them was Shiwan Khan, one of the Shadow’s antagonists. This type of representation was driven by nativism, which inherently creates binary oppositions comprised of us (Anglo-Saxons) versus them immigrants and/or non-Caucasians. The portrayal of Asians is particularly rooted in nativist attitudes.

Nativism was a socio-political construct that was legitimized and disseminated by scholarship and/or scholars in fields such as geography, science, philosophy, and anthropology. For example, nativist texts like *Advanced Geography*, were mandatory reading for students in some school districts.²³ These nativist views positioned Asians as the inhuman other throughout the pulps by emphasizing differences. Differences were apparent through, among other aspects, linguistics, where they either lacked the ability to converse in English or spoke a broken version of it; immorality conveyed by typecasting them as criminals; colorism applied by labeling them yellow; and conferring exaggerated racial features that transformed them into rat-looking creatures. Among the notable examples are *Adventure*’s 1911 debut issue, “*Yellow Man and Gold*,” or *The All-Story*’s “*The Invisible Empire: A Celestial Romance*” (1913) and “*The Yellow Lord*,” published in 1919 (Madison 43).

The effectiveness of these portrayals resides in the fact they tapped into nativist anxiety about “The Oriental” generated by real-life events such as The Bow Kum incident of 1909, which Madison explains began with the sale of a “young Chinese immigrant named Bow Kum (or “Sweet Flower”), who was sold in San Francisco’s

Chinatown to a tong member” (50). Authorities voided the marriage, yet she was eventually legally remarried to a rival Tong member (Madison 50). This resulted in a gang war between the parties, resulting in over fifty deaths (Madison 50). The same year, fourteen-year-old Elsie Sigel was murdered by Leon Lung, to whom she was providing Bible lessons (Madison 50). News coverage of these incidents left an indelible mark on the psyche of Americans, situating Chinese people as criminals, human traffickers, and slave masters.

The othering of minorities such as African Americans, Indigenous Peoples, and the Chinese in novels, dime novels, and pulps were forerunners to the comic book villains such as the Japanese, the Germans during WWII, the Russians and Vietnamese during the Cold War, and the Muslims post-9/11. These texts functioned as both propaganda and counterpropaganda, influencing early representations in comics, thereby grounding and informing our understanding of those ‘othered’ within a pre-9/11 and post-9/11 environment, providing texture and context for the issue of propaganda, representation, and comic books. The next chapter builds upon our understanding of the representation of “the other” by narrowing its focus to Muslim characters in comics and graphic novels between the mid-20th and early 21st centuries. It provides a brief commentary on historical portrayals through a literature review of scholarly works while also providing a clear analytical and theoretical framework for reading and interpreting the dissertation’s primary objects of study.

CHAPTER TWO - PROPAGANDA IN PANELS: READING COMICS

Literature Review

As our analysis moves towards a close examination of the representation of Muslims in the selected case study texts—the comics featuring Salima Baranizar and *The Veil* and the graphic novels by Inzana and Moore published between 1987 and 2011—attention needs to be directed to the history of such representations. Equally important is consideration of the important stylistic aspects of the genres of the comic book and the graphic novel that influence and shape our reading of these representations. This review examines comic book scholarship on the representation of Muslims in superhero narratives by focusing on five discourses: pre-9/11 depictions situating Muslims within the Orientalist stereotype; post-9/11 Muslim superheroes; authorship; comics that function as counterpropaganda; and the role of the temporal and the spatial (geopolitics). These areas of examination are pivotal to the creation of otherness. Prior to conducting said literature review, I commence by outlining the analytical tools and framework used to examine key texts as well as my objects of study, which will be largely derived from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*.

Reading Comics

“The cartoon is a vacuum into which identity and awareness are pulled into an empty shell” (McCloud 36). That empty shell is then inhabited with icons, colours, words, and more in panels that elicit particular understandings and responses to the characters, superheroes and villains, and the actions, heroic or heinous, depicted. My analytical framework for reading the pictorial and textual content is drawn from Scott McCloud's

classic *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. McCloud outlines how to analyze the aforementioned key components that make up form and content and how they operate to construct meaning.

Icons are “image[s] that represent a person, place, thing, or idea,” and symbols are “image[s] we use to represent concepts, ideas, and philosophies” (McCloud 27). In the context of the representation of “the other,” a key theme is the binary within pictorial icons pitting photographic (realistic) v. iconic (cartoon-like) representations that becomes key analytical terrain (McCloud 29). The choice has ideological implications in that cartoon-like icons are seen to democratize representation due to their inclusive nature and embodiment of the many, whereas photo-realism is specific, exclusive, and tribal (McCloud 29). Two of my objects of study, *Holy Terror* and *Johnny Jihad*, are constructed using opposing approaches; the former deploys cartoon-like icons, whereas the latter applies photorealism in the crafting of its characters. Analysis of these contrasting approaches will help inform the investigation by answering if the cartoon image removes identification or expands it and if it humanizes or dehumanizes the characters.

Like symbols and icons, color, or lack thereof, is designed to cultivate certain impressions. McCloud contends that “in black and white, the ideas behind the art are communicated more directly. Meaning transcends form. Art approaches language” (192). Conversely, because “we live in a world of colours, not just black and white,” colour comics inherit a degree of realism (McCloud 192). Within the context of superhero comics, the colours associated with costumes “came to symbolize characters in the mind of the reader” (McCloud 188). The psychology of colours will also be a site

for locating messaging associated with people, places, and things. It must be acknowledged that colour psychology is complicated terrain and that interpretations and applications are subjective and can lend themselves to more than one conclusion, but said conclusions are grounded in expert analysis. In addition to icons and colours, McCloud's scholarship delves into the importance of the form's "structure," particularly the use of panels and gutters, which enriches this dissertation's analysis. Additionally, McCloud outlines what constitutes a comic, providing the dissertation with a working definition, and his interest in the ideas and purpose behind the objects permits a deeper understanding of the intent behind representations of those deemed the other. McCloud's work is an essential analytical tool because it provides the means to help analyze both the pictorial and textual elements.

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* is an integral part of my methodology, but it is not the primary approach undertaken in this investigation. As noted, it serves to strengthen part of the analytical framework by examining components such as colour, icons, and symbols and, to a lesser degree, structural elements such as the gutter and panels, all of which complement a close reading of the pictorial elements. McCloud's work is a seminal text within the field of comic book studies and brings value to any interrogation of the medium. However, the overarching approach to the issues of representation, geopolitics, and propaganda was cultural rather than structural, as the dissertation focused on the processes, construction, and representation of those deemed "the other."

The critical historical method, in concert with the historical context of representation, both of which will be discussed next, constitutes the central

methodology and contextual approach in light of the topic, and this accounts for why McCloud's framework was not uniformly applied. These approaches illuminate the relationship between political and social conditions and representation, which is a vital aspect of a cultural studies approach. This lens included a close reading of themes such as Orientalism and also identified markers of representation such as attire, names, and religiosity, all of which aligned with the approach undertaken by scholars such as Dar, Shaheen, and Stromberg, whose scholarship is highly regarded in the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims.

Building upon the scholarship of McCloud, as well as Jack Shaheen, Jahanzeb Dar, Fredrik Stromberg, and Mercedes Yanora, among others, the next two chapters of the dissertation offer close readings of the selected pre-9/11 and post-9/11 texts—the comics featuring Salima Baranizar and *The Veil*, Inzana's *Johnny Jihad*, and Miller's *Holy Terror*—to conduct a sustained investigation of the ways in which changing socio-political climates and geopolitical stances shaped their representations of Muslim characters. This investigation is informed by critical historical methods to illuminate the relationship between political and social conditions and representation. The close readings focus on important markers related to representation pertaining to the othering of Muslim characters and/or how they are reduced to the terrorist trope as well as the orientalist stereotype and is undertaken by examining a variety of components including: attire, names, the use of colour in clothing, religious identity, framing, weaponry and/or powers, body language, and key dialogue to uncover the complex of meanings within these paradigmatic works. The analysis of the objects, including colour psychology, framing, and body language, is undertaken from a western lens based on

the reasoning that they were constructed and consumed by westerners. In addition, the temporal and spatial environment shaped by “relations between America and the Muslim/Arab world,” which formulates “the political and socioeconomic climate,” is examined (Stromberg 574).

Critical historical methods serve as the theoretical framework used to analyze historical periods. Critical historical method is the rhetorical study of historic events and is invested in how the message was crafted and employed in response to a given situation (Kahan 12). This theory illuminates the geopolitical conditions that operated to contain boundaries surrounding comic book content. The post-9/11 period saw a collapsing of boundaries surrounding who can be a mainstream superhero in the name of equality and expansive representation, creating the conditions for the rise of multiracial/ethnic superheroes. In both cases, the critical historical method informs our understanding of the relationship between political and social conditions and representation.

Primary and secondary research questions guide this examination of Muslim characters in American comic books. The dissertation examines whether the usage of socio-political and religious narratives such as comics as a propagandistic tool changed from the pre-9/11 to the post-9/11 era. In addition, the following areas will be interrogated: deviation of superheroes from the dominant ideology; author identities; and dissemination of ideology through superheroes.

The Muslim Superhero: The Origin Story

In 2013, Kamala Khan, taking on the mantle of Ms. Marvel, debuted to much fanfare and has subsequently been celebrated by mass media outlets, like NBC News, as Marvel's "first Muslim superhero," speaking to her significance (Kaur). But Kamala was not the first Muslim superhero in comics! That distinction belongs to *Kismet*, *Man of Fate*, (see Fig. 3), who first appeared seven decades earlier in Bomber Comics no. 1 (1944). Kismet is considered the "first genuine Muslim superhero"; unlike those that preceded him, this Algerian hero is endowed with superpowers and an expressed mission (Lewis). Although constructed sixty-four and sixty-five years, respectively, prior to comic book scholars Karline McLain's (2009) and Peter Coogan's (2010) definition of the superhero, Kismet conforms to almost all the attributes they outlined, like superpowers and mission affirming both his status and relevance.



Figure 3: Omar Tahan, *Kismet Man of Fate*, 1944

First, in terms of the aforementioned qualities, he possesses a “superpower” that also qualifies as “mental skills,” which McLain refers to as “extraordinary powers,”

evidenced by knowing “what is fated to be,” expressed through his “uncanny ability to see ahead” (Coogan 607; McLain 1; Lewis). Second, Kismet’s mission to battle “Nazi forces in their many forms” complies with being “selfless, pro-social” with pronounced “enemies” (Lewis; Coogan 607; McLain 1).²⁴ This situates him as one of the fighting Allies in the vein of American patriot Captain America, and by extension, makes Muslims part of the Allies (Lewis). Next, Kismet lives by a “strong moral code” shared by Captain America and by contemporary iterations of the Muslim superhero, Kamala Khan, as well as members of The 99; he never kills, acts as “the aggressor,” or serves as “an instrument of punishment” (McLain 1; Lewis).²⁵ His moral constitution is further illuminated by how others—heroes and villains—treat and/or view him; Kismet is accepted by the “Czech Underground,” as evidenced by the Czech’s consent to permit Kismet’s request to lead the mission to rescue and return the imprisoned Allied hostages (Lewis; Tahan 49). Conversely, the Nazis see him as a “terrifying opponent” (Lewis). Lastly, he dons the attire of the superhero: a cape and gloves (Lewis).

David Lewis’s scholarship examines the implications of the absence of traits associated with the prototypical superhero, such as codename and secret identity, while speaking to the role that religious clothing plays in the formation of his identity as the orientalist other. The absence of the former, according to Lewis, does not undermine the reader’s perception of him as a superhero, as “he could not have been born Kismet” and his cape and glove do not represent “his daily wardrobe.” These omissions operate as “markers for concealing an identity that is never explored,” which is framed as progressive because the writer, a non-Muslim, “did not have the background or personal knowledge to flesh out a believable, nuanced Muslim character” (Lewis).²⁶ Lewis

credits said choice with avoiding a type of representation that would have been riddled “with stereotypes and excessive orientalism.” The latter, the inclusion of a religious item—the fez— “a cultural marker” as part of the superhero costume, adds a religious component to his identity that might reduce him to an oriental character (Lewis). But Lewis explains that a religious identity is limited at best to the narrator’s referring to him as a “Muslim superhero” and “superficial signs” like abstaining from alcohol and using exclamations such as “By the beard of the Prophet!” and “By the star and crescent of Islam!” (Lewis). Lewis acknowledges that his avoidance of alcohol and using exclamations may appear as “othering” by contemporary sensibilities, but they are “hallmark catchphrases of the superhero genre and are mild when compared to the highly racialized accents and speech patterns common during the era.”

Lewis’s scholarship fills in a gap within the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims in comic books during the Golden Age. His analysis is both layered and sound, based on the evidence he submits to substantiate his claims. On occasion though, he exhibits a pattern of employing the relative privation fallacy when acknowledging shortcomings in the representation of Kismet, such as his catchphrase, which plays into orientalist tropes, and the absence of a code name/secret identity.²⁷ Lewis makes the choice seem better compared to the alternative, but he misses the opportunity to add more depth to an already excellent analysis. For example, for the former, his catchphrase is an early illustration of the orientalist trope, which actually enhances and equips his contention with currency that avoiding code names was a necessity, because irrespective of intent and how overall progressive a text is, when an outsider is designing a character from another community, this challenge can produce

unintended results. This would also bring into focus and elucidate the need for diverse representation with respect to writers and creators.

Lewis's scholarship would have benefited from including some additional examples of Kismet's religious nature and perhaps by being less definitive about his moral code. His position that Kismet's religious identity is limited to certain exclamations and his abstinence from alcohol excludes examples of dialogue found in two scenes within his debut appearance. First, in the scene where Kismet is attacking the Nazis, he uses a religious term when he states, "Have a barrelful of liquid cement you infidels" (Tahan 52). The other instance occurs when he disguises his appearance and dresses up as a waiter to infiltrate the Nazis while they eat; he comments to himself while looking in the mirror, "Allah be with me" (Tahan 53).

These two cases, which Lewis did not outline heighten Kismet's religious identity. One could argue that a superhero who is explicitly Muslim during the 1940s doesn't diminish his importance but heightens it. However, to suggest this character isn't layered and complicated with respect to his religious identity would be inaccurate. In another scene, shortly after gifting members of the underground dynamite to blow up the restaurant where a Nazi leader and his underlings were eating, he quotes biblical scripture—Matthew 5:5 from the New Testament—declaring, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" ...the Czechs shall be avenged (Tahan 55). Any attempt to conclude what the intent and/or objective behind him citing a Christian text was, would be conjecture at best. Some potential reasons might include the desire to

portray him as someone who is respectful of other faiths or to expand the portrayal of him beyond a Muslim identity. Alternatively, it could signal the author's inability to distinguish between faiths.

In addition, the aforementioned scene where Kismet provides fighters with dynamite that is used to blow up people blurs the lines that Lewis set about Kismet's moral code calling into question the claim that the superhero does not serve as "an instrument of punishment."

Pre-911 Depictions Situating Muslims within the Orientalist Construct

Kismet was among the lone Muslim superheroes within a pre-9/11 context. Jack Shaheen's essay, "Arab images in American comic books," confronts the historical practice of comics in the reduction of Arab characters to "caricatures" over four decades, from the 1950s to the end of the 1980s (123). However, representative examples are mostly limited to the 1980s, whereas data comprised of 215 comics provides an overview of the four decades (Shaheen 123). I place Shaheen's scholarship into conversation with both Jehanzeb Dar's work and Mercedes Yanora's erudition. Having examined the texts addressed by Shaheen (and others), their observations and critiques have ample credibility.

Shaheen's scholarship captures *how* Muslims have been portrayed in a reductive, racist manner in comic books that situate them within the orientalist other stereotype but neglects to answer the *why*. Why are they portrayed in such a fashion? How is it that a medium "meant to embody the values of truth, justice, liberty, and equality" abandoned those values when it comes to representation of Muslims? (Dar

101). Dar builds upon Shaheen's work, as well as Stromberg's later scholarship within a post-9/11 context, by locating the "So What?" (The why) through causality; the cause is foreign policy, and the effect is painting Muslims as caricatures, the most prominent being the "Muslim terrorist stereotype" (101). This approach provides layers to the discourse by identifying the root cause behind these portrayals that extend beyond simplistic stances, such as that these writers hate Muslims and therefore craft narratives embedded with Islamic tropes and stereotypes. Dar also adds to the conversation surrounding authorship in the context of the representation of Muslims by non-Muslims by citing examples of how this practice leads to historical inaccuracies, such as assigning attire from one nation to another or reducing people to a religious concept, which strips them of their cultural and ethnic identity. Meanwhile, Yanora contributes to the discourse by examining how *PSI-Force* no. 32, published in 1989, functions as counterpropaganda by challenging American interventionist foreign policy that led to its support of the Mujahedeen during the Soviet-Afghan War between 1978 and 1980.

Findings from Shaheen's case study illustrate that there were no portrayals of Arabs as the "heroine or hero" (Shaheen 123). Additional findings by Shaheen include "249 characters shown as 'commoners'; '30 Arab types...classified as 'moderates' are, almost without exception, passive and play minor roles," often as "benevolent monarchs who enlist the heroes' help to save his people"; and the most prevalent archetype is the villainous Arab, who appears in one of three categories: "the repulsive terrorist, the sinister sheikh, or the rapacious bandit" (123).²⁸ Shaheen elaborates on the prevalence of Muslims within these groups, noting the terrorist trope is pervasive, counting a minimum "of 50 instances" (124). He also challenges reductive portrayals through "Arab

sex roles” threading through this literature (Shaheen 123). The aforesaid first three categories feature characters that can be generalized based on appearance, philosophy, and behaviour. First, “Their features are frequently bestial, demonized, and dehumanized,” whose “faces drip with hatred and fanaticism” (Shaheen 123). Prominent examples of these practices, outlined by Shaheen, are found in *Tarzan* “The Man and the Mangani,” where Arabs are described as “Fire Desert-Devils...” and “demons” (Thomas, *Tarzan* vol. 1, no. 8, 1977) as well as Walt Disney’s *Uncle Scrooge*’s “The Golden Fleecing” (Banks, 1955), which presents Arabs as dogs.²⁹

In addition, Shaheen contends Muslim characters in US comics are portrayed as “unclean and unkempt; their clothes soiled and too smelly, even for apes” (Shaheen 123). The former is evident in *Batman: A Death in the Family*’s (Starlin 1988) portrayal of Arabs, as they “are sketched with unkempt facial hair,” and the latter is expressed in the aforementioned *Tarzan* issue no. 8 by “the ape leader, referring to their keffiyehs [Arab kidnappers of Jane] who states, “I do not understand, Tarzan. What good is it to put on these EVIL-SMELLING RAGS?” (Shaheen 123).³⁰ Shaheen charges that the resulting messaging is explicitly racist: “These apes are cleaner, more civilized than the Arabs” (128).

Second, they are presented as “anti-American, anti-West, anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, and anti-Christian. Despising freedom and democracy,” who pledge “their allegiance to tyranny and servitude” (Shaheen 123). Two representative examples of these depictions are located in *Mark Hazard: Merc* “*Cestus Dei*” (Morrow and Colleta 1987) and *The Punisher: Nuclear Terrorists Over Times Square* (Baron 1988).³¹ Hatred of the West is articulated by Yassir, a terrorist leader, when he declares, “To the garbage-

eating dogs of the West! We have brought this war to your homes, your cities!” (Baron). This is a representative example of the Anti-West, anti-American rhetoric Shaheen spoke of earlier, which Dar places within a geopolitical framework, explaining that these [expressions of] “anger and hate against Americans and Jew[s]... arguably reflect the way U.S. foreign policy perceives Muslims, i.e., as threats and polar opposites to Western values” (101).

A key scene from *Merc’s “Cestus Dei”* propagates the anti-Christian Muslim trope by picturing Father Capistran, who had been abducted by Lebanese terrorists, “chained...against the church wall, arms outspread, just beneath a giant cross,” resulting in messaging where “the symbolism is” quite pronounced; they want to crucify non-believers (Shaheen 125). Jews and Israelis also qualify as non-believers, and US comic book narratives, especially those that feature conservative characters, propagate hatred of them by the Orientalist villain. One such case is *The Punisher: Nuclear Terrorists Over Times Square* (Baron 1988), which features Rose, “an Israeli Secret Service” operative who was sixteen when her parents were murdered by fervent, most likely Arab, terrorists (Shaheen 125). Rose aided the Punisher in averting a nuclear attack on America orchestrated by Arabs led by Yassir, who is pictured “wearing “sunglasses and a turban”; these three icons situate him as the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Dar 103). Shortly thereafter, an obese Muslim man “in a turban named Ahmed” kills Rose, throwing “her to the streets below” (Dar 103). The Punisher grabs him and responds in kind, hurling “him off the building,” and then takes a moment to lament Rose's passing (Dar 103). The Punisher’s reaction reflects America’s geopolitical stance: the strong bond between allies Israel and the US. It also signals the

value American foreign policy places on Israeli lives and helps to frame the Israeli/Arab conflict in binary terms where Israel is seen as the freedom fighters and the Arabs are the terrorists.

Shaheen contends that calling the Muslim terrorist leader “Yassir” renders “the political message implicit,” positioning Israel and Rose as “the victim” and the Palestinians, and by extension “the Arab World,” as “terrible, brutally violent types” (Shaheen 125).³² Making Judeo-Christian figures the target of attacks by Muslim characters propagates hatred of western faiths, adding a religious layer to geopolitical conflict between the parties. Dar correlates these representations that position Israel as the hero and Palestine as the villain to American foreign policy, contending, “The political message...reflects America's long-standing alliance with the state of Israel but also its relentless vilification of the Palestinians” (103). Dar explains further, “Given [the] unyielding U.S. support for Israel... it is not difficult to see how these cruel presentations of Muslims and Arabs, especially Palestinians,” come to bear (103). Within this geopolitical environment, if a writer, through storylines and the portrayal of Israel, were “to criticize U.S. support for Israel, [it] would only link one's views with Muslim terrorists like Yassir” (Dar 103). To do so would position the writer as Anti-Western and potentially subject them to scrutiny by publishers and government institutions.

As evidenced with the previous example of the Punisher storyline, representations of Muslims’ anti-western, anti-Jewish stance is often expressed through acts of terrorism. As Shaheen noted, said trope is the most prominent when it comes to portrayals of Muslims in pre-9/11 comics (124). The Batman storyline *A Death in the Family* (DC Comics no. 426-429, Jim Starlin, 1988) serves as one of Dar’s examples of

how representation of heroes and villains is determined by foreign policy. In these issues, Batman's arch-nemesis, the Joker, sells Arab militants a nuclear cruise missile that is intended to strike Tel Aviv but is thwarted by Batman, once again saving America's ally from death and destruction (Shaheen (124). Joker next "meets the Ayatollah Khomeini, who" proposes he become the "Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations," which he accepts (Shaheen 124).

While speaking to the UN on behalf of Iran, without further delay, the Joker tears off his Arabian garb and releases deadly laughing gas in the entire room (Shaheen 102). Fortunately, Superman who had joined the mission, disguised as a security guard, saves the day (Shaheen 102). Shaheen notes that "The Joker's insanity is their [Iran's] insanity; his destructiveness is their destructiveness...Arabs are equated with terrorists who are equated with Iranians who are equated with Batman's insane arch-nemesis, the Joker" (102). Shaheen's claim is substantiated by the Joker's declaration, during his address to the assembly, "That country's [Iran] current leaders and I have a lot in common. Insanity and a great love of *fish*" (Starlin 13).

This conflict between America and Muslims and/or Arabs encapsulates "the most prevalent of the themes involving Arabs in comic books, that is—Arabs [Them] vs. the West [Us]" (Shaheen 102). *A Death in the Family* was written in 1988, seven years after the Iran hostage crisis ended, when Americans were released. The Iran hostage crisis had begun in 1979 with the kidnapping of Americans from the US embassy by militants in Tehran ("The Iranian Hostage Crisis"). *A Death in the Family* was published in the final year of the Iran-Iraq war, where America supplied arms to Iraq to aid them in their war against Iran (Harris and Aid). Within this geopolitical and temporal and spatial

environment, representations of Iranians are both inspired by and in line with America's foreign policy that positions Iran and its leaders as terrorists, affirming Dar's contention.

Lastly, Arabs and/or Muslims are pictured as immoral beings juxtaposed with heroic figures, like Superman, whom they are "spitting upon...and deriding" (Shaheen 123). These villains engage in "acts of torture" while sporting a "Mephistophelian glee" (Shaheen 123). They are void of any "social consciousness," evidenced by their hunger to "slay soldier and civilian alike" and "oppress women from all lands" (Shaheen 123). Torture and moral bankruptcy are among features germane to the villain within the hero/villain binary independent of ethnic or religious origins, but the oppression of women brings into focus orientalist stereotypes often reserved for the Muslim antagonist in US comic books.

Arabs in US comics are presented as oppressors of women. This site for the "othering" of Arabs reduces women to two types: "a scantily clad and to-be-salivated-upon belly dancer or a faceless housewife...bundled up in dark robes" (Shaheen 123). Both serve to "other" because such positionings reduce *all* Arabs/Muslim women to either/or, *emphasizing differences* in comparison to western attitudes and freedoms, two of the hallmarks that create/establish othering (Media Smarts, Canada's Centre for Digital Media Literacy). These women lack agency; the belly dancer exists in servitude to her master and is there to "temporarily attract... some virile superhero," like Sgt. Rock in the story "Traitor's Blood!" (Kubert 1959) but she mostly serves as window dressing reduced to "part of the setting" (Shaheen 129).³³ On the other hand, the repressed housewife is a "total non-entity," largely invisible, "voiceless, featureless, and mindless; she is devoid of personality," as demonstrated by the women at the bazaar, set in El

Kuwait, Qurac, appearing in the 1988 story *Checkmate: “Welcome to Qurac!”* (Shaheen 129).^{34 35} Additional examples are provided from *G.I. Combat*, *Moon Knight*, and *Action Comics* to illuminate the oppressive way both Islam and Muslims are presented regarding their treatment of women as sacrificial lambs, lacking agency and subject to abuse.³⁶

In Shaheen’s objects of study, names, setting, religious and/or ethnic attire, and how Arabs are referred to, all function to reduce them to orientalist, racist caricatures that situate them as the other. To begin, the characters all have Arabic and/or Muslim-sounding names like Jamal (*Batman: A Death in the Family* vol. 1 no. 426-29, 1988); Khareemali (Byrne and Kupperberg, *Action Comics* vol. 1 no. 598, 1988); Fasaud (Englehart-Buscema, *Fantastic Four* vol. 1, no. 308-309, 1988); and Achmet Zet the Arab (Thomas, *Tarzan* vol. 1, no. 8, 1978).³⁷ Other villains, such as the aforementioned Yassir and Ayatollah Khomeini (*Batman: A Death in the Family* vol. 1, no. 426-29), are named after real people who are seen by Westerners as terrorists and/or terrorist supporters, adding apparent realism by grounding them within an actual geopolitical framework. Naming the terrorist group “Fist of Allah” in *Action Comics* vol. 1 no. 598 is expansive and reductive at the same time in that it indicts Islam by situating their G-d as the head terrorist and all followers as disciples and/or instruments of terror.³⁸

Next, the physical setting functions to reduce Arabs to the archaic orientalist stereotype based on situating “Arab assassins...in the desert” pictured “on camels...” (Zelenetz, *Fist of Khonshu Moon Knight* vol. 2, no. 1, 1985), while geographical/ethnic location is also weaponized to accentuate their otherness as the oriental with the slur “Fire Desert-Devils...” (Thomas, *Tarzan* vol. 1, no. 8).³⁹ In addition to setting, attire is a

symbol that emphasizes difference for the western reader, cultivating otherness. For example, the “Sinister Sheikh” archetype/trope character documented in *Uncle Scrooge*’s “The Golden Fleecing” (Banks), the Moon Knight story “Fist of Khonshu” (Zelenetz), and *Fantastic Four*’s “Danger From the Air” (Englehart-Buscema) are clothed in robes and headdresses (Shaheen 123).⁴⁰

Finally, Shaheen points to key dialogue from the preceding comics to illuminate the way Arabs, via attire in two of the three cases, are referred to in racist, stereotypical, and orientalist fashion, propagating western supremacy. For example, in *Batman: A Death in the Family* vol. 1, no. 426-429, a member of the Joker’s entourage states, “You get the money from these BANDITS-IN-BEDSHEETS?” (Shaheen 124). The other example cited by Shaheen is when Checkmate’s companion in *Action Comics* vol. 1, no. 598 refers to the defense minister of Quracan as “that towel-headed bozo,” which is both hateful and functions to reduce his identity to attire, removing a degree of his humanity (125).

Dar adds to the discourse surrounding the portrayals of Muslims in comic books during this period, citing the forementioned Batman issues (*A Death in the Family*, vol. 1, no. 426-29). Dar focuses on inaccuracies that collapse nationality and ethnicity and eliminate differences among nations, thereby reducing Muslims and/or Arabs from people to a concept, both erasing their humanity and pretending they are all the same, two of the hallmarks behind othering (Media Smarts). For example, first, The Joker dons “an Arab headdress and robes (even though he is in Iran, a non-Arab country!).” And second, Batman conflates Arabs with Persians by speaking “Farsi in Beirut!” (Dar 102). Dar asserts that these examples illuminate how “The writer’s and publisher’s disregard

for cultural, religious, and political accuracy simply points to a crude and racist generalization: Arabs, Iranians, and Muslims are all the same” (102).

Shaheen’s work is considered foundational scholarship in the discourse surrounding the representation of Arabs and/or Muslims in comic books. But despite its significance, there are some deficiencies. To begin with, Lewis and Lund identify that “a distinct lack of contextualization or recognition of growing American fears and anxieties about Muslims and the Muslim world, which were becoming increasingly pronounced in the period, deeply hampers his work” (9). Also, in Sgt. Rock in the story “Traitor’s Blood!” he fails to identify the scene where “a beautiful belly dancer” informs Rock of the impending double-cross as counterpropaganda because it dismantles one of the key elements behind othering, “acting like a certain group of people are all the same” (Media Smarts). Her actions also undermine Shaheen’s generalization that belly dancers only serve as “window dressing” diminished to “part of the setting” (Shaheen 129). *This* belly dancer possesses and shares vital intelligence.

Last but not least, Shaheen protests a scene in *Action Comics* no. 598, where an Arab’s plane, carrying the defense minister of Quracan, is blown up by Checkmate, concluding, “To the imagemaker, it is perfectly (even praiseworthy) to blow up a plane with Arabs but a heinous act of terror to slay other racial or ethnic groups in a similar fashion. A double standard? You bet” (Shaheen 125). Shaheen’s contention is flawed because it is devoid of context, as the Arab on said plane was neither a civilian nor innocent leader but rather, according to Checkmate, a terrorist supporter who was “responsible for God knows how many deaths” *Action Comics* no. 598 (Byrne and Kupperberg). Not to mention, this act was perpetrated by Checkmate, an anti-hero,

making his actions inherently questionable (Dar 103). The aforementioned context undermines Shaheen's position that a double standard is afoot. He is conflating blowing up an Arab *terrorist* with innocent non-Arab *civilians*. He is attempting to create a moral equivalency where none exists unless he believes that there is no difference between innocent civilians and terrorists.

Counterpropaganda in Pre-9/11 Comic Books

Mercedes Yanora's chapter, "Marked by Foreign Policy: Muslim Superheroes and Their Quest for Authenticity," adds to the discourse surrounding representation of Muslims in superhero comics by foregrounding an object: *PSI-force* no. 32 (1989), which, although it reinforces certain orientalist stereotypes, is also among the very few pre-9/11 comic books that challenges the destructive and hypocritical nature of America's foreign policy of interventionism.⁴¹ Specifically, it confronts their involvement in proxy wars like the Soviet-Afghan War. By criticizing American authority and interrogating its motives, the writers are calling into question America's foreign policy. Among the terrorists, evil sheiks, and bandits previously outlined by Shaheen that dominated the American pre-9/11 comic book landscape were outliers like Serena Bakut, a member of the Mujahideen, who debuted inside the pages of *Psi-Force*. Bakut marks a change from how Muslims had been portrayed because she was the first to be shown in "an explicitly politicized context," and due to her status as one of a few pre-9/11 Muslim superheroes (Yanora 111).⁴²

The reason for her ascension, in 1989, has been attributed/linked to the Soviet Union's involvement in the Middle East, where they squared off with "the US-backed

mujahideen” (Yanora 113). ⁴³ US foreign policy officials viewed “Muslim-majority” nations—and Islam in general—as strategical alliances utilized as a measure to arrest the spread of communism (Yanora 114). This conflict led to “greater visibility [of the Middle East] in the minds of Americans, thus calling for the portrayal of explicitly political Muslim superheroes” (Yanora 113). This shift illuminates and reaffirms the relationship between foreign policy and representation. Yanora echoes this sentiment, proclaiming that “the political climate invariably influences how Muslims and non-Muslims alike view Muslims, both real and fictional” (111).

Marvel Comics published *Psi-Force* under their New Universe label from 1986 to 1989. The original plot centered on five paranormal teens who battled a variety of government agents and renegade superhumans using psionic travel, astral projection, telepathy, and telekinesis (Yanora 117-118). The final issue of the series, no. 32, is deemed “extremely important” because it serves “as an allegory both reflecting and critiquing US foreign policy period” (Yanora 118). In said issue, the story “Fist of Love” begins on “a hill overlooking a Soviet supply camp near Herat, Afghanistan, on May 13th, 1989” (Yanora 118). The date establishes that this story “is situated in an alternative reality where the Soviet Union has won the war and looks to consolidate its power in Iran—a far cry from historical reality” (Yanora 118). This altered reality permits the author to critique American foreign policy in relation to the Mujahedeen and therefore expand the readers’ understanding of how US foreign policy uses even allies as pawns to further its objectives.

The narrative focuses on a joint mission by Psi-Force—US mercenaries—and the Mujahedeen to level “a Soviet supply camp” and to locate the traitor within (Yanora

118). Among the Mujahedeen is Sedara Bakut, whom Yanora describes as “a young female mujahid dressed in army clothing and wearing a red hijab” (118). To the western reader, her hijab accentuates a sense of her otherness and renders her “the orientalist other,” but from a cultural lens, such attire is mandatory in Afghanistan among the mujahid, whose name means “holy warriors,” people who engage in jihad, understood as “holy war,” both of which are religious concepts, by extension making this group consistent with their orthodox belief system (Britannica). Their first attempt to decimate the camp is unsuccessful, and their escape is facilitated by Sedara’s ability to open portals (Yanora 118). In this instance, Sedara’s status as a leader, her role as a savior of American and Muslim men, operates as counterpropaganda to “orientalist stereotypes” assigned to women in hijabs as well as those associated with religious Muslim men.

Sedara regroups and “returns” alone to gather intel to substantiate her suspicion that the “traitor” among them, who had betrayed the “Mujahadeen,” was one of the mercenaries, Lincoln Stryker (Yanora 118). Soon after, she meets up with members of Psi-Force, and together, they succeed in “blowing up the camp” (Yanora 118). Upon returning to their camp, Sedara learns it was her father who betrayed the Mujahadeen; he was the “traitor” working with the Soviets (Yanora 119). Without hesitation, she “shot him in the head” prior to him being able to completely “explain his motives” (Yanora 119). This paints her as very emotional as opposed to cerebral, as she reacts before gathering all the details, almost savage like. It propagates the idea that “these people” will sacrifice anyone or anything for their cause. All of which lessens their humanity, which serves to justify America’s later treatment of them.

On the other hand, as noted earlier, *Psi-Force* disrupts certain practices related to nationalism (support of foreign policy) and othering while reinforcing others (orientalism), making it a unique form of both propaganda and counterpropaganda. The latter is evidenced by exhibiting respect for religious pluralism, challenging the motives behind America's interventionism (foreign policy) into Afghanistan, critical portrayals of American authority, the US's duplicitous "support" for their allies, and how two of the main characters serve as an allegory for the consequences of American foreign policy, destruction, and chaos (Yanora 122). All of this challenges America's moral authority and external policies. First, the team's sole female member, Lindsey, dons a hijab and dresses in attire that "covers [her] entire [body]," which Yanora views as an "attempt to respect the religion of its allies" (121).⁴⁴ Second, perception of America's intentions as altruistic is undermined by the following admission by one of the members of Psi-Force, Wayne Tucker, with regards to another of Lincoln Stryker's actions in Afghanistan: "...Striker's been profiting from the arms and drug trafficking" (*Psi-Force* no. 32, Nicieza et al.). Yanora contends this confession by Tucker "unearths the selfish reasons behind Stryker's [and by extension US's] presence in Afghanistan" (121). Third, Yanora notes, members of PSI-Force, a "representative" agent "of the US," are often censorious "of authority figures, including the US government," and its "questionable causes," which calls into question their foreign policy (Yanora 121). Fourth, Yanora points to Stryker as the embodiment of "the US's disingenuous support of Islamic groups such as the mujahadeen, who in this case are their allies (122). This is evidenced by a scene where he bids farewell to Sedara in a very overtly performative manner reeking of insincerity; he is pictured holding his "fist to heart" while expressing "may Allah be with you" and

referring to her as “child of fury” (Niecieza et al. 26). Yanora proclaims that Stryker’s “invocation of Allah, along with the phrase child of the fury, comes off as farce because he [is] abandon[ing] Sedara for the bountiful Persian Gulf” (122). Any ambiguity surrounding his intentions is nullified by his declaration that there is “lots of money to be made, lots of wrongs to be righted” (Niecieza et al. 26). Within this context, Stryker’s “insincere” proclamations combined with stated motives symbolize America’s “hypocritical and temporary involvement with militant Islam [and the region as a whole] ... as a way to advance their own material interest” (Yanora 122). This interaction speaks to how the US views allies like the mujahedeen; they “did not view these fundamentalists as equal; rather, the mujahedeen were only pawns to be disposed of once they were no longer needed” (Yanora 118).

Lastly, in the afterword, a scene featuring members of Psi-Force and Sedara operates as an “allegory” for the consequences of American interventionism upon lands and the people who inhabit them, casting a shadow over their foreign policies. The scene that communicates said messaging “juxtaposes” death and life and loss with gains, expressed by Sedara “crouch[ing] over her family’s graves,” which is “contrasted” by the image of “Boyd and his adopted son playing football while Tucker and Lindsay get engaged (Yanora 122). In this instance, Psi-Force may be interpreted as a symbol of “the ease with which America intervenes in the affairs of others,” often “suffering only comparatively minor losses and disregarding the long-term consequences of its policies,” while Sedara embodies “Afghanistan, a nation where foreigners have wrought havoc, a nation left for dead” (Yanora 122).

Post-9/11 Depictions

After the 9/11 attack, in the midst of the war on terror, one would expect representation of Muslim characters to be cast in the role of villain, most likely reduced to the terrorist trope. This would be logical to assume in light of the fact 9/11 marked the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 45). However, quite the contrary occurred as depictions of Muslims underwent a seismic transformation in many comic book serials, switching from villains to superheroes. This is evidenced by Fredrik Stromberg's post-9/11 comics research that demonstrated a stark departure from their largely one-dimensional predecessors, contending, "most (portrayals) seem to have been created to resist stereotypical or racist configurations of Arabs and/or Muslims as terrorists, submissive veiled women, and so on" (576).

Despite said intentions, "these representations still partake in the Othering of these ethnic and religious groups by reinforcing stereotypes of 'the Oriental'" (Stromberg 576). The root cause for the disconnect between intent and execution is authorship; the architects behind these representations were non-Muslims.

In spite of these shortcomings, there are progressive characters like Dust, an Afghani, portrayed as a superhero merely one year removed from 9/11, thereby serving as counterpropaganda to the largely one-dimensional representations of Muslims in superhero comic books pre-9/11. Stromberg, like Shaheen, employs a critical discourse analysis grounded in the notion of "the 'Oriental Other'" to examine the portrayal of several Muslim characters in US superhero comics post-9/11 (573).⁴⁵ The inclusion of the racially derogatory slur "raghead" in Strömberg's academic article "Yo, rag-head!":

Arab and Muslim Superheroes in American Comic Books after 9/11” appears to establish his positionality from the outset, but he does choose complicated objects that are simultaneously progressive and problematic, contributing layers to the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims.⁴⁶ Stromberg deepens Shaheen’s approach by acknowledging these representations are responsive to “the political and socioeconomic climate,” shaped and/or determined by “relations between America and the Muslim/Arab world” (574). Stromberg narrows his focus to five objects of study: Dust, The Doctor (Habib Bin Hassan), G.W. Bridge, Excalibur (Faiza Hussain), and Hamza Mansour Al-Rashad.⁴⁷

Their backgrounds, in concert with their superhero status, dismantle orientalist stereotypes that situate Muslims as the villainous “other.” Dust, an Afghani, and Bin Hassan, The Doctor, a Palestinian, represent the nation and/or peoples that America has deemed enemy combatants in their war on terror. Bin Hassan, in particular, is fundamental to the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims as terrorists by collapsing the hero versus villain binary. Hassan initially embodies the Muslim terrorist trope assigned to Pakistani suicide bombers in Dust’s first appearance and to Arabs in Shaheen’s scholarship on representation in 1980s Marvel and DC comics. He is introduced to the reader as a homicide bomber on the brink “of blowing himself up” at a checkpoint in Israel (Stromberg 588). But prior to doing so, he is struck and acquires the power of the Doctor, transforming him from the villainous Muslim archetype into a pacifist who, within “twenty-four hours... engineered a peace in the Middle East” (Stromberg 588). The positioning of a Palestinian terrorist as a superhero in an American mass medium, considering Israel is both an ally and a vital actor in America’s

foreign policy strategy in the region, is an explicit form of counterpropaganda. In addition, presenting such subjects as heroic figures in an American medium consumed by Americans is expansive and progressive by undermining one of the key elements behind othering, “acting like a certain group of people are all the same” (Media Smarts). By painting the enemies of American foreign policy as heroes, these characters are an explicit act of counterpropaganda within a post-9/11 geopolitical context.

Bridge, unlike Dust and Bin Hassan, is an African American who converted to Islam.⁴⁸ Stromberg credits the creators Rob Liefeld and Fabian Nicieza with their choice to design him as a convert, thereby “steering away from stereotypes that pander to the image of Muslims as the foreign Other” (Stromberg 590).⁴⁹ Like Bridge, Excalibur (Faiza Hussain), a doctor, was born in Britain, a non-Muslim majority country, lessening the perception of her as foreign. However, it is Hamza Mansour Al-Rashad, as “a third-generation Arab American,” which is mentioned multiple times in the comic book, who truly dismantles the nativist discourse about what qualifies as a “real American” with his deep roots in the West (Stromberg 593). Another aspect designed to disrupt painting him in the Orientalist tradition is his “intercultural family” background: the son of an “Arab father” and a “clearly non-Arabian mother” makes him a symbol of multiculturalism and more relatable to the western reader (Stromberg 593).

Dust is among these dichotomic characters created in 2002 to “symbolize a foreign/Middle Eastern character type” in a manner that “respect[s]... the culture she is supposed to represent” (Stromberg 583). The creators, however, are not immune to the blind spots many non-Muslims succumb to that result in painting these characters in the orientalist tradition (Stromberg 583). Attire is among this complicated terrain, as it is a

site for othering and sexualization while also challenging the either-or binary positions that Muslims are placed in by suggesting they may be both simultaneously western and Muslim. These different approaches both reproduce/reinforce orientalist stereotypes and challenge them. Stromberg contends Dust's tight-fitting clothing, a black "abaya and niqab" are clear-cut, predictable signifiers" designed to render her as "the sexualized female Oriental Other" (Stromberg 583; 585).^{50 51} In addition, the choice to cover her with a niqab can be seen as a troublesome/regressive act because, as Dar noted, Dust was "the only Muslim character in the X-Men universe so far" (in 2010 when he published his article), which positioned her as a representative agent for "all Muslim women," which thereby "marginalizes many Muslim women, who don't wear either the hijab or the niqab" (108). However, it must be noted that Dust is not always confined to the niqab; three years after she debuted in comics, when she met up with her mother alone in Afghanistan, both removed their head coverings, uncovering their faces (Defilippis and Weir 15). Ironically, Stromberg notes the abaya with a niqab veil is constantly referred to as a burqa "throughout this story," speaking to the inherent struggles that even well-intended writers have when it comes to representation of a group outside of theirs (585).

What makes Dust a beautifully complicated character is that Stromberg also credits authors Morrison and Van Sciver with confronting stereotypical Orientalist portrayals by engaging in the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslim women and clothing, which is a prominent theme in Dust storylines. The aforementioned objective to cultivate respect for cultural differences is evidenced by the following example from *X-Men Hellions* no. 2, where Islam, agency, and clothing

intersect in the scene where Dust visits her mother. In response to her mother, who “is happy to learn that her daughter is still wearing her burqa,” Dust declares, “I never wore it because of the Taliban, Mother. I like the modesty and protection it affords me from the eyes of men,” signaling choice, thus collapsing orientalist stereotypes about women’s rights and serving as counterpropaganda (DeFilippis and Weir 15).⁵²

Stromberg applauds such a scene for attempting to situate Dust as “a positive Muslim superhero character,” which in turn signals “the need to understand Arab and Muslim culture” (Stromberg 585).

One area of Stromberg’s analysis that may lend itself to a different interpretation is that pertaining to Dust’s mother’s assumed “happiness” with the fact that she is wearing the hijab. This conclusion may be derived from the smile on her mother’s face, as her words were neutral and more observatory: “I see you still wear it,” referring to her burqa (DeFilippis and Weir 15). Her smile is carried over from their previous panel, where she first saw her daughter, and more likely speaks to the joy of reconnecting. This deduction is supported by her next comments “...Do you wear it in America?...It is good that you are in a country where you have that choice, Sooraya” (DeFilippis and Weir 15). The full context could be read as a critique and/or criticism of extremist religious laws such as those which mandate women wear it, which is not an indictment on Islam or a nod toward western supremacy, as every religion has orthodox sects and different interpretations of laws. Moreover, there are many Muslim countries which do not have compulsory attire laws such as Turkey, Tunisia, and Lebanon (Poushter). Within the broader context of this expanded reading, her mother’s happiness has less to do with Dust’s hijab than it does with her freedom to choose. This reading brings into

focus choice in a way that actually dismantles generalizations about the garment and illuminates a type of agency that Muslim women have while countering stereotypes.

Dar interprets the scene differently from Stromberg, taking issue with “her reasoning to cover herself [as] somewhat inaccurate and stereotypical” when in actuality it pertains to “modesty for both genders in Islam tend[ing] to be mistaken for the stereotypical notion of “protecting women from men” (108). It is problematic because it reinforces the stereotype that “religion divides” while perpetuating the notion that “Islam in particular” places “harsh restrictions” on Muslim women in general,” legitimizing orientalist stereotypes (Dar 108).

The pattern of attire as a key marker for the formulation of an orientalist and/or religious identity established in the previous scholarship on *Kismet*, pre-9/11 Muslim characters, and *Dust* in a post-9/11 environment persists with *The Doctor*. Hassan originally and very briefly wears Western-style clothing, but that quickly shifts to culturally iconic clothing described by Stromberg as a “traditional Palestinian outfit, with a green and orange checkered turban and a knee-length, one-piece purple dress” (588).⁵³ He maintains this style after joining “the superhero group *The Authority*,” which is a point of contention for Stromberg due to other members, by comparison, donning “conventional (mostly spandex) superhero costumes” (588). The deviation from the others, specifically the inclusion of a turban, “carries much symbolic weight” and is credited for positioning Hassan as “the Oriental Other” (Stromberg 588).⁵⁴ There is a counterargument to be made those two opposite truths may co-exist simultaneously in that it can be viewed as othering while also being interpreted as progressive because it assigns two explicit Muslim characters as heroic figures within this temporal and spatial

climate post-9/11 without having to shed their cultural and religious identity.

On the other end of the spectrum are Hussain, Al-Rashad, and G.W. Bridge, whose attire does not confine them to the reductive construct of the orientalist other. Hussain's attire is a stark departure from reductive portrayals. Her clothing is described as "white, modern clothes and a white hijab, or headscarf," positioning her as "a modern Muslim woman" (*Captain Britain and the MI: 13* no. 1-2). Similarly, Excalibur's superhero costume, which is a "modern version of a knight's armor, with the coat of arms of Essex and a hood," operates as an expansive type of representation. The hood functions similarly to a hijab, respecting her religion, while the armor and coat honor her British nationality, collapsing the forementioned either/or binary many Muslim characters are subject to in comics. (Stromberg 591). Hussain evades one of the trappings that Dust succumbs to, which is the "revealing costumes" assigned to "most female superheroes" and "gratuitous close-ups of female characters' breasts and behinds"; she escapes the male gaze, that of being sexualized (Stromberg 593).

Stromberg points to said choice as signaling the creator's, Cornell's, respect for Islam (Stromberg 593). While it is a largely accurate account and assessment by Stromberg, as she is not subjected to revealing costumes or close-ups that fixate on her breasts and buttocks, there are instances of her in tight-fitting civilian clothing (see Fig. 4), but few pictures draw attention to this or bring it into focus, permitting her to mostly, but not completely, be shielded from the male gaze.



Figure 4: Paul Cornell, *Captain Britain and the MI: 13*, no. 2, 2008.

Al-Rashad's headwear (the kufi) combined with western attire, like Excalibur (Hussain), who similarly mixes headwear (hijab) with shirts and pants, fuses western clothing with cultural and/or religious headwear, propagating compatibility between two oppositional forces. His parents, as well as Excalibur, don western clothing. The two styles work in concert to defy a key aspect in the process that produces the othering of Muslims, acting as if *all* Arabs/Muslims are the same, as they are typically presented in religious wear. G.W. Bridge "does not wear any symbolic clothes," collapsing another area used to foster othering, "*emphasizing differences*" (Stromberg 590).

The discourse surrounding the weaponization of attire and the role clothing plays in the production of the terrorist trope is evidenced in a key scene from one of Al-Rashad's storylines in the issue *Gen 13* vol. 3, no. 4, where he is pictured in the hospital being visited by family, all dressed in western non-religious attire, except for a sister wearing a

hijab (Stromberg 593). Stromberg contends “the rationale behind the introduction of this intercultural family is emphasized when one of the hospital personnel reacts to their presence with animosity, stating that he thinks he should “call the new TIPS hotline” (593; Claremont 4).⁵⁵

It is understandable to conclude that a family perceived as Muslim would be targeted, othered, and viewed as a threat based on and/or related to the events of 9/11, even if described as an “intercultural family” with a white-presenting mother and secularly dressed parents. One could also argue that their clothing and mixed backgrounds could render them less foreign and threatening, thereby humanizing them and making them more relatable to the Western gaze. However, the sister’s attire alone could undermine an expansive perception of the group. A close reading of the scene may suggest it has less to do with the “intercultural family” and is instead based upon/tied to Al-Rashad himself. The full discussion between co-workers unfolds as follows: His female colleague asks, “Something bothering you, Tim” (Claremont 4). To which he responds, “The Kid drove that car into a crowd. It went up like a bomb” (Claremont 4). She counters, “It was an accident” (Claremont 4). Tim retorts, “Tell me, do you know these people? Can you vouch for them?” (Claremont 4). This exchange reveals three things. First, Muslims are seen through the prisms of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, as evidenced by the verbiage “crowd” and “bomb,” both of which correlate to the attacks on the World Trade Centre. Second, when it comes to the perception of Muslims, the parts make up the whole, meaning the fact they are an intercultural, largely secular family pales in importance to the fact the father is Muslim and one sibling wears a religious head covering. Lastly, the writers utilize the female co-worker to cast an

expansive portrayal of Americans as both regressive and progressive, those who stereotype and those who challenge said stereotypes. It functions as a type of intervention into the type of reductive approach applied to groups of people, such as the case often with representations of Muslims.

Regardless of one's reading and/or interpretation, this scene illuminates the dilemma faced by many Muslims in America in a post-9/11 environment: being labeled a terrorist. This modern-day scarlet letter was not based on anything said or done but solely grounded in their religious affiliation. The fact that the majority of his family members are dressed in western-styled clothing speaks to the reality many minorities must navigate, not being seen as truly American, no matter how much they assimilate and/or acclimatize. The response by the staff member's peer, combined with the fact that this was the family of a superhero, who happens to be a third-generation American, is credited with constructing "positive counter-images" to the temporal and spatial conditions—2002—that produced and/or normalized "the many negative representations of Arabs and Muslims that had appeared in American news and in popular culture" (Stromberg 595).⁵⁶ This scene illuminates how some comic books actively engaged in counterpropaganda to confront discriminatory attitudes produced by the war on terror post-9/11.

Not all attempts at representation are successful. Although the main characters are celebrated more often than not by Stromberg for their attempt to situate Muslims as heroic, there are instances of historical inaccuracies pertaining to attire that are stereotypical and reductive. A prime example of the difference between intent and execution is evidenced in one of Bridge's storylines set in Turkey. The villains are

pictured wearing red fezzes,” reducing them to caricatures since Turkey had a “ban on the use of a fez in Turkey since 1925” (Stromberg 590). Another example is that women in the streets are “clad in full burqa” in spite of the fact that Turkey had, “for a long time, various rules and regulations against using veils” (Stromberg 590). These two instances reveal how the representation of Muslims, when created by non-Muslims, is imagined and uninformed, just like the case of the burqa in Dust’s storyline. Stromberg attributes these blunders to three factors: ignorance, disregard for veracity, and reliance on signifiers.⁵⁷ Ironically, Stromberg’s inability to differentiate between hijab or headscarf in his description of Excalibur illustrates that non-Muslim academics can suffer from the same challenges as non-Muslim comic book creators.

The superpowers possessed by these Muslim characters are simultaneously problematic and progressive. First, belonging to the category of progressive in terms of implications and messaging are Hamza Mansour Al-Rashad’s “ability to stop time,” Excalibur’s capacity to “change the molecules of bodies” (and Hassan is a shaman-type figure with magical powers that permit him to “move things...change this thought to that thought,” and to alter reality (Stromberg 593; Stromberg 591; “Habib Bin Hassan Wildstorm Universe”).⁵⁸ None of said powers are based on and/or feed into orientalist stereotypes. Second, Dust’s superpower—the ability “to turn into sand”—is deemed a “clichéd power” because it is baked in the postulation “that all Muslims live in deserts” (Stromberg 583). In addition, she can “shape into violent sandstorms and even tear the skin off of her enemies” (Dar 107). The latter is a point of departure from other characters, as it is ultra-violent and sadistic, stripping her of some of her humanity. Lastly, Bridge is absent of any superpowers, instead relying on his muscular physique

and training in “hand-to-hand combat” (Stromberg 589). This is a point of identification with the reader, as it removes him from the realm of the fantastical, making him authentic, relatable, and accessible.

Historically, pre-9/11, in the case of Muslim characters, religion is a defining marker for their identity in ways not experienced by many other superhero characters like Batman, Wonder Woman, and Iron Man, to name a few. It amplifies the reader's sense of them as the other by *emphasizing differences*. Their religiosity is often presented as the root cause and the motivation for their terrorist activities, as evidenced in Shaheen's scholarship. The relationship between religion and identity among the five post-9/11 objects (characters) that Stromberg analyzes varies. Their religiosity ranges from minimal to extremely pronounced. This examination of the expressed religious nature of the characters will be limited to prayer and mentions of Allah. Those that are defined by their faith often operate to amplify the reader's sense of them as the other by “*emphasizing differences*,” whereas characters whose faith is an aspect but not the totality of their being reduces their otherness. This reflects American values that privilege the melting pot model of assimilation. However, this is not binary, as there can be instances where recognizing difference can be good if it is celebrated without negative judgment.

First, at one end of the spectrum are The Doctor (Habib Bin Hassan) and Excalibur (Faiza Hussain). Stromberg does not cite any instances of Bin Hassan or Hussain praying or invoking the name of Allah.⁵⁹ After adopting the moniker of The Doctor, he is referred to as a “shaman,” which is associated, in the west, with Indigenous Peoples as opposed to Islam (Stromberg 588). As such, his religiosity in the

context of Islam registers as non-existent. Stromberg credits Excalibur's creators with deviating away from tokenism and towards the creation of a "real person and not someone who has to represent the entire... Muslim world all the time" and points to "her [as] an everyday religious person who you won't hear anything religious from until it would naturally come up" (Stromberg 591).

Stromberg's claim is largely substantiated by the findings from a close reading of the first four issues of *Captain Britain and the MI:13*, where there are only two instances of Faiza mentioning religion and/or engaging in a religious activity. The first example in issue no. 2 occurs when Faiza asks Black Knight, in reference to their adversaries, the Skrulls, who she has frozen in time, "You're not gonna kill them. I took the hippocratic oath. "Do not harm." And, erm, religious stuff. And that's the super hero thing too, right? Sorry" (Cornell 10). In this case, the reference is delivered in a broad, non-denominational manner, not specific to Islam, and functions to downplay a specific religious identity. The second occurrence transpires one issue later, when Faiza is confronted with the prospect of death at the hands of one of the Skrulls, leading her to clasp her hands and declare, "Allahu Akbar. Oh Allahu Akbar" (Cornell 21). On one hand, this highlights an omission in Stromberg's analysis of Faiza, as he did not cite any examples of her praying or mentioning Allah. However, although her prayer is specific to Islam, it is circumstantial and relatable, as any person of faith would pray under such conditions. Therefore, collectively they reaffirm Stromberg's stance that "you won't hear anything religious from Faiza until it would naturally come up" (Stromberg 591).

Next, Bridge's religion plays a minor role in his identity, although there are reoccurring scenes of him praying in a mosque during his appearance in "the very first

issue of *Punisher War Journal* vol. 2,” that is the sole signifier of him being Muslim (Stromberg 589). By comparison, Dust “literally wears her religious and cultural affinity on her sleeve... [whereas Bridge’s] personality is not dictated by his religion alone” (Stromberg 589). Dust is frequently pictured praying and seeking “forgiveness from Allah for what she sees or does,” which deviates from “other characters” with pronounced “religious affiliations” (Stromberg 587). This functions to fortify perceptions of her faith as “a demanding and condemning religion” (Stromberg 587). Dar points out that as a woman,” her actions paint Islam as “restrictive” and her as a “religious nut,” the latter evidenced by her own roommate, Surge, who refers to her as such (108). This propagates the image of Islam as an extremist faith by playing into gendered orientalist tropes.

In the middle of these two extremes, non-existent/minimal and orthodox, is Hamza Mansour Al-Rashad. He is a religious person but not defined by his religion like Dust. Examples of his religiosity include him referencing “texts in the Quran” in *Gen 13* vol. 3, no. 4, 2002, during his stay in the hospital and when he is pictured inside the issue of *Gen 13* vol. 3, no. 7, “praying at the Park Slope Islamic Centre” (Claremont 5; Claremont 13). Al-Rashad differs from other post-9/11 characters by directly confronting Islamophobia in an explicitly post-9/11 context. In a key scene, the writers use his religiosity as social commentary to illuminate how Arabs are reduced to the *oriental other* based on the simple act of prayer, which people of all faiths partake in but do not suffer the same consequences, the Muslim practice deemed a threat for doing so. In *Gen 13* vol. 3, no. 9, Al-Rashad is pictured “praying in an empty classroom” when the leader of “a group of male students...calls out, “Yo, rag-head...”[y]ou got a problem with

the way we live here in this country... Maybe you should go back to where you came from!" (Claremont 3). These illustrations "draw attention to the irrational hatred directed at Arab Americans" and "act as reminders of the injustices to which many Arab Americans were subjected after 9/11" (Stromberg 595). By confronting the treatment of a third-generation American by other non-Muslim Americans within this temporal and spatial climate, this scene serves as a type of counterpropaganda towards attitudes that label all Muslims terrorists while also challenging ideas that religious Muslims are extremists.

A common practice within the representation of Muslim women, as noted in Shaheen's work, is to portray them as lacking agency. In the case of these post-9/11 objects, this is achieved through the damsel in distress trope. This trope in comic books is neither new nor reserved exclusively for Muslim women. This tradition, attributed to a "preteen and young adult male" readership, dates to the 1930s, when Lois Lane graced the pages of Superman performing this role (Lavin 1988; Dar 105). But within this context, a religious and/or geopolitical layer is added to the messaging. The white savior narrative is enforced by having Dust, who had passed out, "rescued by a white male character" [Wolverine] from approaching Afghani slave traders, which "carries a lot of postcolonial and sexist symbolic weight" (Stromberg 583). While Wolverine's intervention does conform to the white savior trope, Stromberg notes that Dust had saved herself by "kill[ing] a number of male slave traders who tried to remove her clothes" (Stromberg 583). Her actions equip her with a degree of agency, complicating the portrayal of her as someone completely unable to save herself. This collapses the saved/savior binary and instead illustrates that she is both in need of saving and

capable of defending herself.

In addition to messaging surrounding the white savior trope, the picture of “Wolverine standing over a pile of slaughtered Taliban militants in Afghanistan,” which was published in 2002, propagates the US foreign policy of interventionism; in this case, the “invasion of Afghanistan,” while both justifying and “glorifying” its war on terrorism with the “image of Wolverine butchering Taliban militants” (Dar 103; Dar 104).

The absence of “good Muslim men,” even one in a Muslim country, propagates the notion that Dust, and by extension, Muslim women, can only be saved by “western democracy” (Dar 107). Excalibur, the other female character examined, breaks this mold; Hussain, unlike Dust, doesn’t need to be saved from others. Excalibur is “free of male dependency,” one of the reasons why Stromberg cites her as a “significant character” and credits her creators with deviating away from tokenism (Stromberg 593; Stromberg 591).

Of the characters Stromberg examines, he deems Dust to be “the most prominent of the Arab or Muslim characters [he had] identified” (583). Dar regards the character as “an immense improvement from the stereotypical representations we've seen,” but cautions, “There are still adjustments that need to be made” (108). Two examples of said adjustments that required attention were her limited communication skills and the fact that she was too one-dimensional. The former was evidenced in her first appearance, where she was presented with the ability to utter one word: “Toorab!” which Wolverine explains “means Dust” in Arabic (Dar 107).⁶⁰ The juxtaposition of a “super-powered Muslim girl” with the communication skills of a newborn baby subverts/undermines her power and authority (Dar 107). The latter criticism is based on

her “personality” being “almost non-existent” (Dar 108). Dar poses the following questions to substantiate his claim: What are Dust's hobbies?...What does she do in her free time? Who sits at her table during lunch breaks? (Dar 108). In Dar's view, the absence of these layers renders Dust's character “underdeveloped and incomplete” (108). This stance is accurate, but is it fair? His critique is based upon a very specific metric, and this writer can't answer those same questions in relation to their favorite characters—many superheroes have limited personalities if we follow Dar's criteria. One could argue that there are so many other things we do know about her in relation to her values and character, like the fact she is very independent and strong-willed, as evidenced by her comments about the burqa. She also possesses the ability to defend herself, which equips her with agency compared to the traditional casting of women as sidekicks. Both arguably add more layers to our understanding of her than what she does in her spare time for entertainment could offer.

Dar's scholarship is crucial in our understanding of Dust and how she can be seen to contribute to oriental stereotypes, whether intentional or not. While it is imperative that any writer operating outside of their community respect and not undermine the views of a scholar from that background, who has a lived experience that provides him with an understanding beyond the reach of others, I would offer some observations on some of Dar's other criticisms that were not previously addressed. Specifically, Dar takes exception to one of the reasons she provides for wearing the burqa “protection...from the eyes of men,” which Dar contends propagates the notion that “Islam [puts] harsh restrictions on women” that “legitimizes orientalist stereotypes” (DeFilippis and Weir 15; Dar 108). But Dust lived under the Taliban in Afghanistan,

where it was mandatory for women to cover themselves. The failure to do so would indeed lead to harsh restrictions such as being prevented from working in government positions, the denial of services, and/or imprisonment (Good). In addition, Dar points to Dust's inability to say more than "Toorab," which translates to Dust in Arabic, as problematic and reductive (107). However, this issue is restricted to her first appearance and occurs after she wakes up from an extended period of unconsciousness, where she finds herself in a strange location surrounded by strangers. Dar himself acknowledges by her second appearance she exhibits the means to express herself (107).

The representation of secondary Muslim characters both reaffirms orientalist stereotypes and challenges them. One reductive similarity that binds Dust and Bridge's narratives is that peripheral Muslim characters are portrayed as a threat to women, evidenced by the aforementioned slave traders' pursuit of Dust earlier and a scene from *Punisher War Journal* vol. 2, no. 13, (2008), where a group of Muslim men are chasing a young woman who is saved by Bridge (Stromberg 590). This also situates another Muslim woman (like Dust earlier) in the damsel in distress role where the threat is posed by her own people. In addition to slave traders, the antagonists are reduced to orientalist tropes like terrorists, a continuation of the practice outlined by Shaheen in 1970s and 1980s comic books.^{61 62} The terrorists in this Dust storyline are Pakistani who "hijack an Air India plane" (Dar 103). Mirroring the earlier example of Wolverine, these portrayals were constructed in 2002 and reflect "political tensions between Pakistan and the United States."⁶³ The representation of Indians as "good" and "cooperative" and Pakistanis as "evil" reflected India aligning with American foreign policy post-9/11 and Pakistan being seen as undermining it. In these comics, Muslims

were being cast as the “terrorist” and “U.S.-allied nations, such as Israel and India, [being] rewarded with positive and sympathetic representations” (Dar 104). The irony of perpetuating racist stereotypes of Muslims in the debut issue for a Muslim superhero, Dust, that Stromberg deemed “the most prominent of the Arab or Muslim characters I have identified” is profound (Stromberg 583). It confronts us with the reality that progression is nonlinear and that regression and progression can coexist simultaneously.

Although these objects are riddled with contradictions, which is inevitable when outsiders represent a group other than their own, no matter how well-intended, as discussed, the mere presence of multiple Muslim superheroes within this geopolitical environment —America-post-9/11—signals counterpropagandist acts that, in a time of war, could be viewed as anti-American and traitorous. The writers of *Excalibur* dismantled one of the key propagandist ideas, the notion that Muslims living outside Arab/Muslim-majority countries are neither nationalistic and/or proud of residing in such countries, through two key scenes. First, upon holding the sword, which positions him as righteous, her father proclaims, “I can feel it... It is of this nation... and thus... mine. Ours” (Stromberg 591). Second, aside from Hussain’s relatives, a powerful message is disseminated about love by both secular and religious Muslims for the western Judeo-Christian countries they live in by picturing “three men...intended to be Arabs and/or Muslims, one in a thawb, a long white dress, and the short, rounded taqiyah cap” standing and “mourning the death of Captain Britain” (Stromberg 593).⁶⁴ In totality, these examples signal a concerted effort to show respect for Islam by the writers and by Muslim characters for the West (Stromberg 593), Stromberg’s assertion is absolutely

valid. The scene featuring Muslims mourning the death of a nationalistic hero is particularly striking and meaningful due to three factors: what they represent, an image juxtaposed next to them, and the diversity among them. These men are the first people pictured mourning the loss of Captain Britain, which makes them representative agents for the collective, i.e., British society, as opposed to being reduced to the other. Next, pictured outside the window, just left of the men, is the union flag that further embeds them within the fabric of the country, and lastly, the men represent different types of Muslims in terms of religiosity and ethnicity, as evidenced by two men, one dressed in a thawb and another in a shirt and pants, both of whom don caps, while the third does not have such headwear, signaling that Muslims of all backgrounds feel this loss (Cornell 1).

Independent of effort and/or intent, the inherent problematic danger of representing another group is evident with the character of The Doctor, illuminated by the example of Gene Ha, who, prior to drawing “the character in 2006,” joined a “forum for discussions about all things Palestinian” to solicit feedback on how to approach the character (Stromberg 588). On the one hand, his attempt to portray Hassan respectfully can be applauded, but on the other, it really speaks to how difficult it is to undertake such a responsibility without, at a very minimum, hiring someone from said background to work on the project.⁶⁵ Although no single Muslim writer can fully represent all Muslims or Palestinians, their presence would represent a step in the right direction at a minimum. It is a complicated issue. One doesn’t want to pigeonhole writers, e.g., Black writers are limited to writing Black-only characters and/or stories, while one also wants to limit or avoid reductionist portrayals, which can occur when one is unfamiliar with the

group they are representing. Ultimately, it brings into focus the issue of sensitivity and awareness.

Just like Dar, Stromberg also answers the *why* at stake in these representations. In this instance, why have representations of Muslims in comic books evolved from villains to heroes post-9/11? According to Stromberg, this shift can be attributed to two factors: “the influence of the ‘political correctness’ debates of the 1990s” as well as “the growing presence of Arab and Muslim Americans as a visible and vocal group of citizens, readers, and consumers” (579). Also, another historical factor should be noted: Traditionally, the comic book medium has a long-storied history of producing content that challenges the dominant ideology of the time, evidenced by the forementioned examples of Captain America propagating interventionism during America’s WW11 policy of isolationism and The Hulk and Green Lantern confronting racism during the 1960s civil rights movement, which challenged America’s inequitable voting laws.⁶⁶ Within this context, portraying Muslims as superheroes during America’s war on terror is in the tradition of the type of counterpropaganda it has championed.

This chapter has surveyed depictions of Muslim characters within pre-9/11 and post- 9/11 comics/graphic novels as well as pertinent scholarship to ground our knowledge of historical representations. The following chapter, provides close, in-depth readings of four case studies and builds upon those revelations to enrich critical understandings of Muslim portrayals in pre-9/11 and post-9/11 texts.

CHAPTER THREE – PRE-9/11 REPRESENTATION

In this chapter, the complex identities of Muslims in pre-9/11 texts are explored through the characters of Salima Baranizar of Iranian descent and The Veil, a member of an Iraqi mercenary group. The overall messaging is wonderfully contradictory in that in many ways Islam is presented as a threat to the Westerner, yet the potential hero is the religious Muslim woman, not the more secular one. This situates these texts as simultaneous acts of propaganda and counterpropaganda that both reinforce and challenge orientalist stereotypes, collapse lines surrounding heroes and villains, and both legitimize and delegitimize American interventionist foreign policy. One of the central sources of oppressive force in these narratives is religious beliefs and attitudes and how they foster a sense of difference while dehumanizing both “nonbelievers” and “believers,” rendering them “the other” and less than. This exploration consists of a close reading of key panels in the comics through a textual and visual analysis. The texts are also placed within a geopolitical context to understand the relationships between representation and propaganda and how historical, temporal, and spatial conditions determine how those representing enemy nations are portrayed. This examination informs our understanding of the portrayal of Muslims in superhero comics prior to the events of 9/11, which also contextualizes any differences and similarities in the representations of Muslims and Islam post-911.

The Veil and Salima were chosen due to a myriad of factors that rendered them relevant, reflective, and representative of different types of propaganda—all of which positioned them as ideal subjects for both examining the representation of Muslims in American comics and adding to the discourse surrounding otherness. First, they are

pertinent figures because they were created during the Reagan-Bush era, 1980-1992, which was a very conservative, patriotic, and hyper-nationalistic period, as evidenced by the focus on family values and anti-communism (Meagher). Next, the timing of their publication and/or subject matter correlated to real-life geopolitical conflicts between America and Islam/the Middle East. Therefore, both elements create a socio-political environment that would be very reactive to the portrayal of the inclusion of such characters, contributing to a rich and layered analysis. In addition, *The Veil* and *Salima* are relatively unknown compared to Ms. Marvel, Kamala Khan, or Kismet, Man of Fate, creating the opportunity to add to the conversation by examining lesser-known characters whose academic footprint is smaller. Lastly, they function simultaneously as anti-Muslim propaganda, while *Salima* also serves as counterpropaganda.

The narrative of *Salima Baranizar* takes place in Iran and extends over two DC comic books: the 1987 story "Under," written by Steve Englehart, with visual artists Joe Staton and Ian Gibson, which unfolds in *Millennium* No. 2, and the 1987 story "Iran Scam!" written by Len Wein, with art by Ross Andru and Danny Bulanadi, that appears in *Blue Beetle*, vol. 6, no. 20, 1987. To summarize, Herupa Hando Hu and Nadia Safir of the Guardians of the Universe, whose goal is to "combat evil and create an orderly universe," set out on a journey that crosses five continents —Asia, Africa, South America, Europe, and Australia, to find participants to advance the human race. Their quest is known as the Millennium Project ("Guardians of the Universe"). They have chosen ten individuals (in order of appearance): Betty Clawman, Takeo Yakata, Xiang Po, Nikolai Latikov, Celia Winward, *Salima Baranizar*, Janwillem Kroef, Gregorio De La Vega, and Tom Kaimaku, with one not clearly identified. Said project was classified as

the "next step in human evolution" ("Millennium"). These recruits would be given immortality and metahuman abilities after receiving training from the Guardians. The diversity of the recruits privileges a globalist approach over a nationalistic one, which propagates the idea that heroes come from all backgrounds.

Set in Kuwait City, The Veil's three-part "The Killing Stroke" takes place in 1991 over three different X-Men Marvel comic book serials, all written by Fabian Nicieza: "The First Cut: The Killing Stroke PT. 1," in *The New Mutants Annual* vol.1, no.7, "The Razor's Edge: The Killing Stroke Pt. 2," in *The Uncanny X-Men Annual* vol. 1, no. 15, and "Sacrificial Lamb: The Killing Stroke PT. 3," in *X-Factor Annual* vol. 1, no. 6. In Part 1, the stated mission directive of the protagonists, Freedom Force, consisting of Blob, Crimson Commando, Avalanche, and Super Sabre, is to "transfer German physicist Reinhold Kurtzmann from current Kuwaiti Resistance safe house to allied forces" (Nicieza 35). The Desert Sword, who are holding Kurtzmann and serve as the antagonists, are comprised of The Veil, Sirocco, Aminedi, Arabian Knight, and Black Raazer.

These synopses reveal two forward-looking aspects of the comics' approach, which counter traditional representation of the Orientalist other outlined in the scholarship of Shaheen, Dar, and Stromberg. In Salima's narrative, the notion of human evolution is tied to racial and ethnic figures foregrounding diversity, inclusion, and equality. This is a progressive act, and a departure from reductive Western views of those deemed "the other," which were rooted in nativist attitudes that populated Golden Age and Silver Age comics as well as their predecessors, dime novels and pulp magazines. Those objects presented "the other" as less than, inferior, and/or

untrustworthy, in essence, trafficking in reductionist approaches that portray non-white Anglo-Saxon people as caricatures. In addition, the positioning of a Muslim woman, The Veil, fighting in a resistance group dominated by males marks a shift from stereotypical roles assigned to female Muslim characters in comics, such as the damsel in distress, the exotic other, and the faceless housewife (Dar 103; Karunakaran 4; Shaheen 129). This facet of her character provides her with a degree of agency, undermining the orientalist stereotype of Muslim women in American comics as submissive.

This chapter, building on the proceeding one, foregrounds the research of Muslim scholars as part of the analytical framework. Their findings are placed into conversation with the content, expanding the discourse with the inclusion of key stakeholders, which permits a more nuanced and layered interrogation of representation. It is imperative that any analysis of a race of people or religious group conducted by someone outside of said community amplifies the voice of stakeholders connected to the people being represented. This approach is essential for any ethical scholar; however, I propose a slight disclaimer that acknowledges that any religion as dynamic, diverse, and large as Islam can't be represented in totality by a couple of voices.

Ideas and Purpose

Historical representations of “the other” in the two superhero groups, X-Men and Green Lantern, inform our understanding of the ideas and purpose behind the series that created Salima and The Veil. This is due to the fact that both characters are bound

to said groups and titles; Salima is recruited by the Guardians of the Universe, who govern the Green Lantern Corps, and *The Veil*'s narrative is part of the X-Men universe. They were progressive titles, as evidenced by *Green Lantern* tackling prejudice and the *X-Men* being an allegory for "the other" as a superhero.

The medium of comics, as Scott McCloud notes, "is a vessel that can hold any number of ideas and images, and the content of those images and ideas are up to creators" (9). While stated authorial intent is not always accessible, the historical approach to representation undertaken by the two series to which these characters belong—*Green Lantern* and the *X-Men*—illuminates attitudes and approaches to how "the other" has been represented and informs the values behind the portrayal of Salima Baranizar and *The Veil*. Both *Green Lantern* and *the X-Men* have operated as counterpropaganda, challenging societal norms pertaining to who can be designated a superhero. This tradition of mainstream superhero comic books as counterpropaganda dates to December of 1940, when *Captain America* no. 1 was published within a socio-political climate of isolationism and sought to dismantle said policy, as evidenced by the front cover that featured a jingoistic-clad superhero (in stars and stripes attire) delivering an uppercut to Adolph Hitler in a control centre.⁶⁷ Jim Steranko notes, "It was an important propaganda device, especially that first cover" (Kantor 34:38). The image of Cpt. America entering the war effort and the subsequent messaging it produced were propagating interventionism, which was a subversive act, thereby a form of counterpropaganda, as it challenged isolationism, the dominant ideology of the time.

The *Veil* storyline belongs to the X-men series, so the X-men become a necessary object of study to illuminate the ideas and purpose behind *The Veil* story arc.

From the 1960s through the present, the X-Men (Mutants) and the Guardians propagated equality as an act of defiance towards policies and perceptions surrounding those deemed “the other.” Chris Claremont, writer of *Uncanny X-Men* comics from 1975–1991, discussed the X-men as an allegory for otherness:

I think that's one of the elements that makes it unique among mainstream comic book series. It is the only one whose foundation is grounded in the concepts of others to a degree. The desire of people who, by an accident of birth, are considered outside the mainstream of comic/common society. It's been titled as an allegory of the last 40+ years for racial discrimination, for gender discrimination, for political discrimination, for social discrimination, for age discrimination... That's why, of all comic book series, it needs to be inclusive of every existing race on the planet, both biological genders, of all ages, kids as much as adults. I prefer mostly kids because they are the most mutable and capable of learning. Grownups tend to be set in their ways. That's essentially what it is (Claremont).

On the surface, Claremont's comments appear to affirm the X-Men's writers as intentional in their approach to situating "the other" as a superhero. A closer examination raises questions about the implication of the language used in relation to the phrase "both biological genders," and the omission of religious discrimination as a category. Framing gender as binary is an outdated concept that does not carve out a space for gender diversity. Does this represent a blind spot or signify limits to the type of

discrimination it confronts? From a historical point of view for context, Claremont made this statement in 2018, prior to the cultural war surrounding diverse definitions of gender taking hold within mainstream society and manifestations in popular culture notably in film, books, and comics. Any suggestion and/or assumption that Claremont's statement implies that members of the LGBTQ2S+ community do not belong in his X-Men universe is undermined by the reality that Claremont is credited with co-writing the story that introduced Marvel's first gay character in comic books. Northstar in 1979, did not officially come out until 1992 (*Alpha Flight* no. 106) due to Marvel's adherence to the comic code (1941- 1989) which forbade LGBTQ2S+ characters from openly "appearing in mainstream American comic books" (Kistler). This raises the question of whether Northstar was designed from his debut in 1979, to be homosexual, or did Marvel pivot to reflect changing times in the 1990s? According to creator John Byrne, "Northstar was planned to be gay from his inception in 1979" (Briscoe). Said act was defiant in nature and works to instantiate the role of the X-Men as an allegory for difference and a vehicle for counterpropaganda.

The X-Men continued to break down barriers, as evidenced by *Astonishing X-Men* No. 51, which was the site of the first same-sex marriage between Northstar and his longstanding partner, Kyle Jinadu. This operates as counterpropaganda because the marriage between Northstar and Kyle predated the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges US Supreme Court decision by three years, which legally guaranteed the right (to all, including same-sex couples) to marry as a fundamental right (Moreau). Within this framework, the X-Men series does not simply propagate tolerance or acceptance but rather the exceptionalism of those on society's margins; they are superheroes.

The X-Men as an allegory for otherness includes homosexuality, but do the X-Men enter the discourse regarding religious discrimination explicitly, implicitly, or at all? The X-Men confront religious discrimination through the character of Magneto, a Holocaust survivor, in the comic books. Magneto's Holocaust origin story appeared inside the pages of *Uncanny X-Men* no. 150 in 1981 ("Using X-Men: Magneto Testament to Teach the Holocaust"). Speaking with Storm, Magneto confides or explains, "I remember my own childhood—the gas chambers at **Auschwitz**, the guards joking as they herded my family to their death. As our lives were nothing to them, so human lives become nothing to me" (Claremont 37).

Magneto's experiences during the Holocaust became a thread in the 1987 X-Men publications. For example, in the story "A Fire in the Night," Magneto (Erik Magnus Lehnsherr), through a flashback, is pictured escaping the Auschwitz camp in the issue *Classic X-Men* no. 12, 1987. Dressed in a striped prison uniform, walking across a red-coloured ground (blood-soaked) his skeletal appearance and the grounds he walks on force the reader to confront the inhuman conditions endured (Claremont 21).

The success of the X-Men is partly attributed to the fact that "the super-powered mutants allegorically represent real-world people" (DiPalo 219). In this instance, "real-world people" is a codeword for inclusion and diversity. This is illuminated by the following diverse characters that provide an entry point for readers of different backgrounds and identities, including but not limited to: Jewish (Magneto/Scarlet Witch); African American (Bishop/Storm); Hispanic (Darwin); Female (Rogue/Mystique); LGBTQ2S+ (Northstar/Jubilee); Differently-abled (Professor X); and Emotionally Unwell (Wolverine/ Toad); (DiPalo 220). By comparison, how did the Green Lantern and his

corps, to which the Guardians of the Universe belong, historically portray those considered “the other?” The Green Lantern series encapsulated the socially conscious movement---the civil rights movement---of the 1960s and 1970s, albeit a little late, as the civil rights movement in the US is usually understood as beginning in the 1950s. Comics do respond to social concerns; but as in most forms of popular culture, they usually do so later, when the ‘counter-propaganda’ has gone at least a little bit mainstream.

The issue “No Evil Shall Escape My Sight!” *Green Lantern*, vol. 2, No. 76 (Adams, DC, 1970), entered the discourse surrounding racism. Tom Bondurant contends *Green Lantern* no.76 “set the standard for socially conscious superhero comics” (line 6). In the story, Green Lantern faces off with a slumlord, confronting the reality of poverty. Later, racism is highlighted through a famous set of panels where an African American man challenges his inactions: “I’ve been reading about you, how you worked for the blue-skins...Only there’s skins you never bothered with—the black skins. I want to know, how come? Answer me that, Mr. Green Lantern!” Green Lantern responds, “I can’t” (O’Neil 6). This anti-racist narrative forced Americans (readers) to confront racial inequality, but African American superheroes were nonexistent in DC comics, and by extension, African Americans were not permitted to be exceptional, super, and/or heroic. This demonstrates how comics can be simultaneously both progressive and stagnated; they are willing to confront social issues but sometimes illustrate a hesitation, at first, in completely countering them. This could be attributed in part to the existence of the comic code, which was implemented based on the discourse

surrounding the influence of comics on their readers. Within this context, publishers and writers have seen firsthand the consequences of upsetting authorities.

However, one year later and eleven issues after the publication of *Green Lantern* No. 76, in December 1971, *Green Lantern* No. 87 introduced the first African American superhero in the DC universe: John Stewart, who picked up the mantle of Green Lantern from Hal Jordan, a Caucasian. The arrival of Jessica Cruz in 2012, who also became a Green Lantern, marked the first female and Hispanic (of Honduran and Mexican descent) Green Lantern. John Stewart and Jessica Cruz share a similar story arc: they both overcame childhood issues and trauma, excelled due to merit, and achieved a position of power and leadership.⁶⁸ These series promoted exceptionality of “the other,” clashing with existing domestic policies and practices pertaining to the treatment of African-Americans and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

But what about Muslim superheroes? Within a Western lens, Muslims qualify as “the other.” Although there were no early examples of Muslims as superheroes in these serials, the counter-propagandistic history of the *Green Lantern* and the *X-Men*, as evidenced by their historical approach to the representation of those deemed “the other,” would position these series to portray Muslims in my objects of study in a positive and expansive way.

Temporal and Spatial Conditions

Temporal and spatial conditions were the connective tissue binding real-life events in the Middle East between America, Iran, and Iraq with occurrences in comic

books. Art is imitating life, as the comics featuring Salima Baranizar and *The Veil* are set in the Middle East during a war and/or conflict between America and a Middle Eastern adversary, creating a degree of realism, authenticity, and emotion for the reader. Popular cultural artifacts like 1980s wrestling, as we will see and movies between the 1980s and 1990s “othered” Muslims by characterizing them as terrorists, validating and normalizing nationalistic constructs of heroism and villainy.

The historical temporal and spatial conditions that helped shape this unflattering representation of Muslim characters between 1987 and 1991 are accessed through surveying the socio-political and historical conditions produced by war and conflict between American and Middle Eastern nations. In addition, the American hero/Muslim villain construct in comics was influenced by prominent popular cultural figures like Hulk Hogan, who embodied American nationalism and patriotism by disposing of the Muslim foreign menace inside the squared circle. Pro wrestling serves as a good metric for Western societal attitudes due to its popularity and the way the sport is designed around gladiatorial politics, where opponents battle against each other in a kind of small-scale theatrical struggle that you see mirroring the dynamics of larger geopolitical conflicts, of wars. The temporal and spatial conditions speak to the complexity of how these objects of study are dealing with religion and belief in relation to other value systems connected to nationalism and missions of terrorism and violence.

Salima Baranizar, an Iranian character, entered the comic book landscape in 1987, making relations between America and Iran leading up to her debut key terrain to contextualize how Iranians were perceived by and portrayed for the American populace. The Shah is a central figure in the narrative as well as a pivotal figure in Iran-America

relations, as Salima casts him as a villain. Understanding the Shah's rule and the aftermath that followed his exile provides the socio-political and historical context for how these two nations transitioned from allies to enemies, illuminating why the Iranian government might be cast as the villain in many US comics. Iran was ruled by Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi a secular and authoritarian leader also known as "the Shah," from 1953 until 1979. After his father was forced to resign, the Shah ascended to power, and over time, his ties to the United States grew stronger. His administration became more pro-Western as it worked to modernize the nation and improve its standing abroad. But as the Shah's ties to the United States deepened and his standing abroad increased, many of his own people lost faith in his ability to lead ("Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs").

One of the root causes that stoked division among Iranians in the late 1970s was, as Salima charged, a moral decline created by the Shah's perceived decadence expressed through the presence of casinos, the availability of alcohol, and the prevalence of western attire that created clashes between secular and religious forces, bringing into focus competing interests and ideologies: modernity and tradition, Christianity and Islam (Englehart 17; "Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs"). By late 1979, the Shah had lost a lot of his influence as the nation's unrest and pressure on him intensified and US backing for him decreased. The Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Shah's exiled rival, quickly proclaimed Iran an Islamic Republic after the monarch fled the nation in January 1979 ("Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs"). As the country's religious leader, the Ayatollah consolidated power in Iran. Iran instantly shifted or

transitioned from a secular to a religious nation and from a friend to a foe of the United States (“Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs”).

Ten months later, on November 4, 1979, the US embassy was seized by a fundamentalist religious group, the Muslim Followers of the Line of the Iman, who took fifty-three American hostages. Approximately fourteen months later, on January 20, 1981, the hostages were released, coinciding with newly elected President Reagan's inauguration ceremony (“Understanding the Iran-Contra Affairs”). Two years later, in 1983, according to an investigation by foreignpolicy.com, which was informed by CIA-declassified documents and interviews with former intelligence officials, during the Iran-Iraq War, the "United States provided tactical intelligence to Iraq at the same time that officials suspected Iraqi President Hussein would use chemical weapons" (Harris and Aid). The hostilities between these two nations would persist for decades through proxy wars such as the Iraq Insurgency, 2011-2014 (Arnago); Syrian Civil War, 2011-2024 (Cockburn); and the Yemeni Conflict, 2011-Present (Whitlock). These real-life events served to situate Muslims, especially Iranians, as terrorists in the minds of many Americans, which made any portrayal of them as heroes not only unrealistic but un-American. It also created a sense of them as savages, which encouraged their dehumanization. In contrast, Americans were righteous, the good guys. This cemented how these nations should and would be portrayed in comic books.

As noted, Salima's first appearance was published in 1987, just six years after the Iran hostage crisis and a year before the Iran-Iraq war ended. Casting Iran as a villain conformed to socio-geo-political attitudes. Interestingly, Iran's transition from a secularist-type nation to an “Islamic Republic” changed how the two nations—The

United States and Iran—viewed each other. Each was casting the other as villainous in their national narratives based on religious differences and geopolitical relations. From an agnostic view, perhaps religion (plural, all) through the believers vs. non-believer's binary and its relationship to absolutism is the true villain in the story of humanity that functioned and continues to divide, conquer, and kill.

Mass media, like religion, is a delivery system for propagating ideas of “the other.” Whoever controls mass media has access to the hearts and minds of a generation. Mass media births popular culture, which is the canal for indoctrinating people into certain ideas. Martin Barker notes that “any discussion of mass media influence must involve ideas about ideology... It is just that some people don't want to admit it” (3). This begs the question: What ideas are being propagated? In America, one of the central devices to unite, inspire, and lead the people to co-sign on foreign conflicts is nationalism. Within comic book narratives, nationalism has been a uniting force linking the reader to a collective identity embodied by patriot captains such as America, Britain, and Canuck. The dissemination of nationalism to the masses is essential for grooming the public, especially children who can be malleable, for war, conflict, and messaging promoting othering.

In the early to mid-1980s, the years preceding Salima's arrival were ripe with examples of how American nationalism, mass media, and popular culture intersected to propagate American super heroism through sports and movies. Hulk Hogan donned a huge cross around his neck and enters the popular cultural zeitgeist in 1984. He was a representative of Americana, as evidenced by his theme song “Real American, his blond hair and blue eyes, his opponents, many of whom belonged to the foreign

menace trope, his mantra “say your prayers and eat your vitamins,” and his tendency to wrap himself in the American flag (Dilbert).⁶⁹ Hogan, a larger-than-life pro wrestler resembled a superhero based on these components: costume, alternate identity, and superhuman strength. He becomes the quintessential and living symbol of Christianity and nationalism, and his ascent was the direct result of his victory over a nemesis from the Islamic republic.

Hogan’s meteoric rise began on January 23, 1984, in Madison Square Garden, when he wrestled the world championship away from The Iron Sheik, renowned for his hatred of America (“This day in history”). Engulfing himself in nationalistic pride through his waving of the Iranian flag and expressing disdain for America and Americans, The Iron Sheik established himself as a supervillain by routinely grabbing the microphone and addressing the American crowd prior to battle by declaring that “IRAN #1 USA HACK TOFF,” spitting on the floor ([@the_ironsheik]). By extension of this act, he was spitting on the country and its people.

The attire worn by both men reinforced their status as nationalistic figures; Hogan wore a red t-shirt with “AMERICAN MADE” splashed across his chest in white letters, two of the three colours symbolizing America. Conversely, The Iron Sheik wore a keffiyeh (traditional Middle Eastern headdress) around his head, a kurta-styled robe, and red and green boots (two of the three colours that make up the Iranian flag) with curled toes, which were a similar curve to that of the shamshir Iranian sword. Fans across the arena were waving mini-American flags as expressions of nationalism.

It is important to note that this rivalry occurred in an era when many believed wrestling was real, resulting in a frenzied response from crowds who displayed their

nationalistic pride, contempt, and fury by issuing threats, throwing objects at The Iron Sheik, and even attempting to attack the Iranian grappler physically. The squared circle was the setting for a proxy war between the nations and, at the same time, a military proxy war between Iran and Iraq in their War (from 1980 to 1988). American nationalism was also a central component in the Sheik's subsequent battles with American patriots, as evidenced by the insertion of military-inspired characters such as Sgt. Slaughter and Cpl. Kirshner and the types of bouts that injected a militaristic component: flag matches and boot camp matches. In addition to wrestling, movies were central to propagating the image of the Muslim villain.

The cinematic universe was a central stakeholder in the discourse that propagated the image of Muslims and/or Arabs as a type of supervillain who was a perpetual threat to the West. During said period, David Sirota explains, "Hollywood's go-to villain in the 1980s became the Muslim terrorist, whether it was 'Iron Eagle's' unnamed Middle Eastern country or 'Back to the Future's' bazooka-wielding Libyans" (Salon). Collectively, the temporal and spatial conditions produced by the geo, socio-political climate, which mirrored popular cultural imagery of Muslims, situated them as the supervillain.

The temporal conditions in terms of the publication date, when the story is set, the spatial component of where the story transpires, and the names of the two opposing forces make *The Veil's* narrative explicitly geopolitical propaganda. *The Veil's* three-part story was released over the span of 21 days: May 21, 1991, June 4, 1991, and June 11, 1991, respectively. *New Mutants Annual* Vol. 1 and subsequent stories were published less than three months after the U.S.-led coalition forced Iraq to evacuate from Kuwait

on February 28, 1991 (“The Gulf War, 1991”). According to the textbox in the opening panel of each story, this three-part narrative is set in Kuwait City, the site of the Gulf War, on January 13th and 14th and transpires over nearly three hours: story no. 1 at 11:22 p.m. (“The First Cut” 35); story no. 2 at 12:21 a.m. (“The Razors Edge” 42); and story no. 3 at 2:17 a.m. (“Sacrificial Lamb” 42). The choice to set the story on January 14th, 1991, was not coincidental; it was a day before the real-world UN deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, or they would be forcibly removed (Goldman). This comic book timeline and the hero’s mission to remove a German physicist on January 14th create a direct connection to the war, equipping it with a degree of authenticity. This collapses the boundaries that separate fiction from non-fiction, creating a degree of realism where these imagined villains become an extension of those real-life Muslims seeking America’s destruction. It creates an emotional investment in the reader while permitting the good guys—the Americans—to engage in questionable actions for the greater good, lessening their ethical and/or moral responsibilities.

The relationship between the names of the two forces in the comics serves as a connective tissue binding the fantastical with the actual, making them somewhat interchangeable. The Veil is a member of the Iraqi team of mercenaries, Desert Sword, who battle Freedom Force, made up of Americans. The names given to these adversaries’ functions to link said groups--temporarily and spatially--directly to the Persian Gulf War. In response to Iraq’s assault and occupation of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, Operation Desert Shield was launched by the US and its coalition forces with the objective to “deter further Iraqi aggression and to set the stage for offensive actions” (Keaney 1). Five months later, on January 17, 1991, Operation Desert Storm marked

“the combined attack on Iraq,” which led to the ouster of Iraqi forces nearly six weeks later, on February 28, 1991 (Keaney 1).

The names of these two operations serve multiple functions. Firstly, as literal descriptions of the approach undertaken by the U.S. and coalition forces, initially, coalition forces “shielded” Kuwait from falling to invaders, and then they “stormed” Iraqi forces, evicting them from the land. Secondly, the inclusion of the word “desert” situates the war geographically in combat and within the narrative. Lastly, the comic naming the Iraqi mercenary group “Desert Sword” is a variation of the two operations, which links the supervillain group to the real-life event while adding a negative connotation to the group by switching shield or storm to “sword.” The connective tissue that binds the name sword to the group is that two members—Arabian Knight and Black Raazer—brandish scimitars, “a saber having a curved blade with the edge on the convex side and used chiefly by Arabs and Turks” (“Scimitar”). The connotation is pre-modern, with the archaic weapon, the sword. Lynn speaks to the reductive and prejudicial nature of the groups’ name and members of “Desert Sword,” stating they were “a cadre of orientalist stereotypes, including Arabian Knight, a Bedouin prince whom—we *kid you not*—rode a flying carpet with a magical scimitar; Black Raazer, a Canadian soldier possessed by evil djinn due to a *different* magical scimitar.”

The orientalist stereotype is explicit in the names—Arabian Knight and Black Raazer—both of which are “exotic,” a key feature in the process of establishing difference (Abouesh). The names also belong to the realm of the fantastical, further dehumanizing them by transforming them into an object rather than a subject. It could be counterargued that the very idea of the hero is a fantastical—imagined, exaggerated,

magical, and fictional person like Superman, Batman, Iron Man, and Hulk--but the superheroes all had alter egos, people with real names--maintaining their humanity. It also served as a point of identification, e.g., teenagers could relate to the trials and tribulations of Peter Parker. Those who experience loss and trauma might see themselves in Bruce Wayne.

In addition to the relationship between the representation of Iraqi and American characters and the historic temporal and spatial conditions that pitted America at war with Iraq, how were Iraqis or Muslims portrayed in popular culture during this period of 1990-1992 and how did that impact perception of them by the general public? In 1990, coinciding with the Gulf War, The Iron Sheik wrestler was repackaged as Colonel Mustafa, an Iraqi sympathizer (Bartlett). That summer, the main event of the Summer Slam pay-per-view featured Mustafa teaming with his former rival, Sgt. Slaughter, now considered a “turncoat,” and General Adnan in a three-on-two match versus the Ultimate Warrior and American patriot Hulk Hogan (Bartlett). Also, Hollywood cast a “Middle Eastern terrorist” as the villain in the 1990 movie *Navy Seals*. The synopsis for the film on IMDB and Apple TV both uses this broad, all-encompassing description, “Middle Eastern Terrorist,” which, combined with Iron Sheik’s character transitioning from Iranian to Iraqi, speaks to the practice of “othering” evidenced by, first, the lack of diversity and differentiation in the representation of Muslims from the Middle East, presenting them as all the same.⁷⁰ Second, the exaggeration of differences, whether exhibited through attire, religion, or language, and lastly, their terroristic ways or support of terrorism, makes them appear as if they “aren’t really human” (“Break the Fake: Spotting hate propaganda”).

The central difference between Salima's narrative and that of *The Veil* is that the names of the two fighting forces in Salima's storyline—Freedom Force and Desert Sword—are a direct reflection of wartime temporal and spatial conditions. But there are more similarities between the two objects. In terms of spatial and temporal conditions, both comic book stories are set in countries, Iran and Kuwait, where Americans have conflicts with governments represented by the villains: Iran and Iraq. Also, these stories transpired near the time when those real-life conflicts, such as the Iran Hostage Crisis and the Gulf War, occurred. This serves as connective tissue, binding the fantastical with the real, resulting in equipping these Muslim villains with a degree of realism and authenticity, which gives the audience a reason to hate them. The world events create the conditions for the righteous hatred of those portrayed as evil, resulting in hate propaganda directed at Muslims through the aforementioned popular cultural artifacts and in the comics featuring Salima and *The Veil*.

Like pro wrestling and movies, the comic books that serve as my objects of study contribute to popular cultural attitudes by propagating American super heroism as the defense against the foreign menace, which is the lens through which this analysis is constructed. The ideas and purpose behind the works, the messaging produced by what is on the front cover as well as what is omitted, and the temporal and spatial environment in which these texts were created provide insight into the conditions related to their production and why Muslim characters portrayed in this American artform were typecast as villains.

Front Cover

Considering how the X-Men and Green Lantern champion diversity, the oppressed, and all types of difference (including religious: Jewish), the front covers for these superhero groups would appear to be the ideal place for a Muslim character to be embraced and celebrated, but they are not, at least not explicitly in Salima's case. The cover belonging to Salima propagates non-white, non-American characters as budding heroes and pivotal to the future of humanity—based on the fact, as noted earlier, that said characters were chosen to help usher in the future of humanity. This illuminates how non-whites could be heroes, so long as they were not Muslim, which illuminates the extent to which Muslims were othered in these texts. Conversely, The Veil's cover propagates non-Americans as monstrous, speaking to how pre-9/11 comic book narratives both reaffirm and challenge American foreign policy and white supremacy. An alternative interpretation could attribute their absence to the fact they play relatively minor roles within the series as a whole, making their exclusion from the covers understandable and/or expected.

As mentioned earlier, the story of Salima Baranizar is told over two issues: the 1987 story "Under," written by Steve Englehart, which appears in *Millennium* No. 2, and the 1987 story "Iran Scam!" written by Len Wein, which unfolds in *Blue Beetle* No. 20. The examination of the front cover is narrowed to one of the two issues: *Millennium* No. 2, since the other issue, *Blue Beetle*, has none of the recruits nor the leaders of the Guardians, Herupa, or Nadia on its cover.

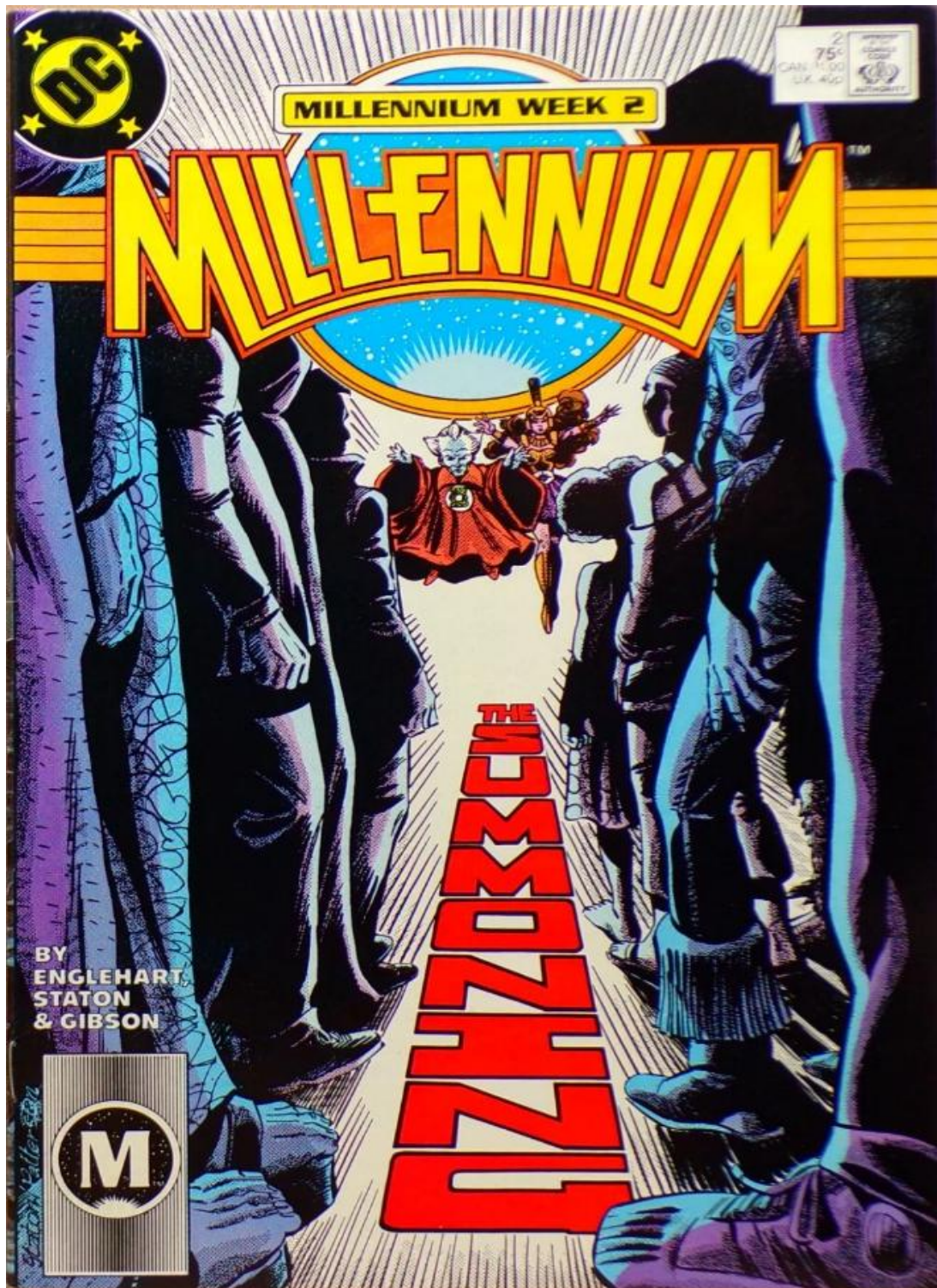


Figure 5: Steve Englehart, *Millennium* No. 2, 1998.

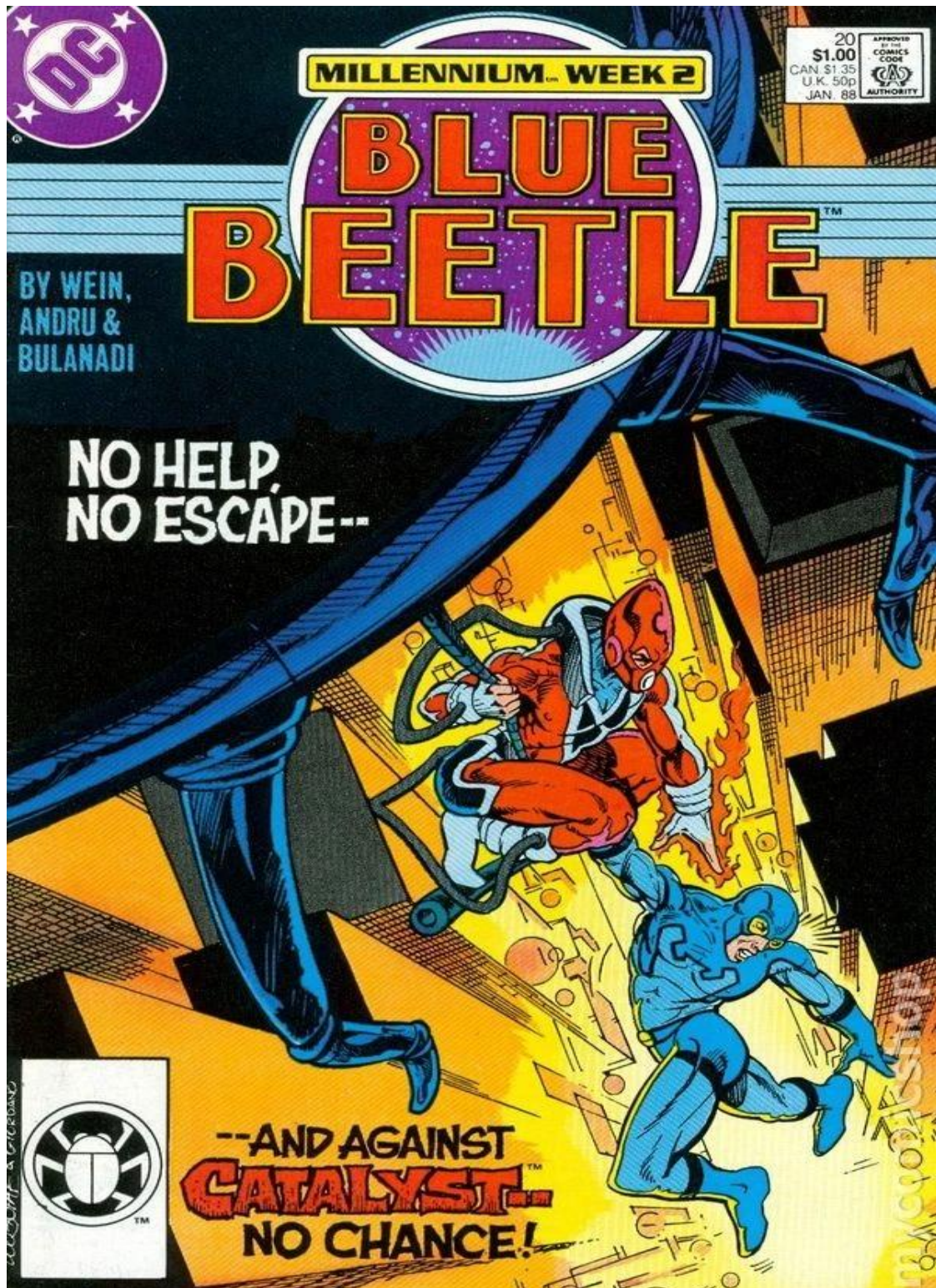


Figure 6: Len Wein, *Blue Beetle* No. 20, 1986.

The story pitting The Veil's Desert Sword against Freedom Force over the control of German physicist Reinhold Kurtzmann during the Gulf War unfolds over three issues: "The First Cut: The Killing Stroke PT. 1," inside *The New Mutants Annual* vol.1, no.7; "The Razor's Edge: The Killing Stroke Pt. 2," which appears in *The Uncanny X-Men Annual* vol. 1, no. 15; and "Sacrificial Lamb: The Killing Stroke PT. 3," which is featured in *X-Factor Annual* vol. 1, no. 6.

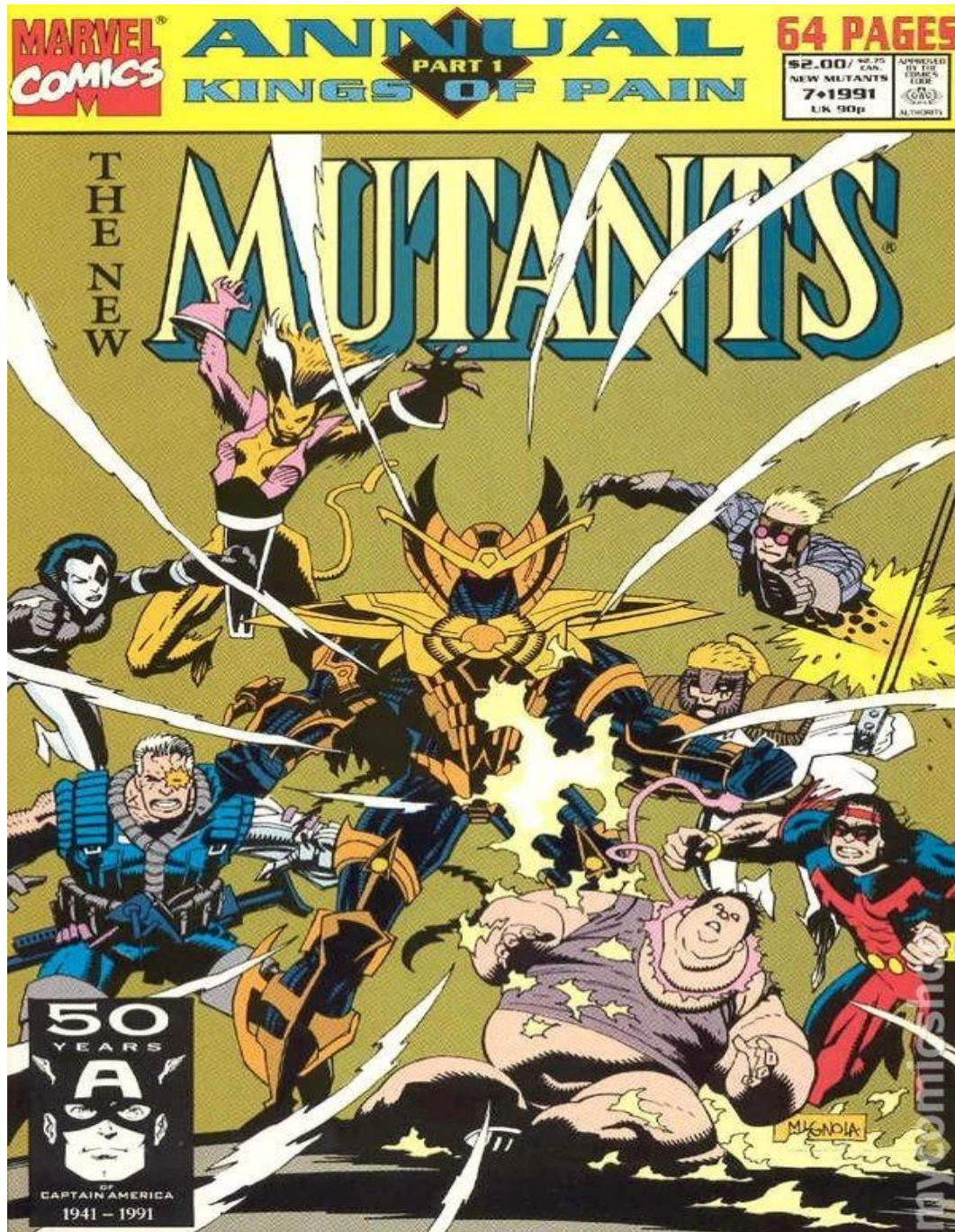


Figure 7: Fabian Nicieza, *The New Mutants Annual* vol. 1, no. 7, 1991.



Figure 8: Fabian Nicieza, *The Uncanny X-Men Annual* vol. 1, no. 15, 1991.

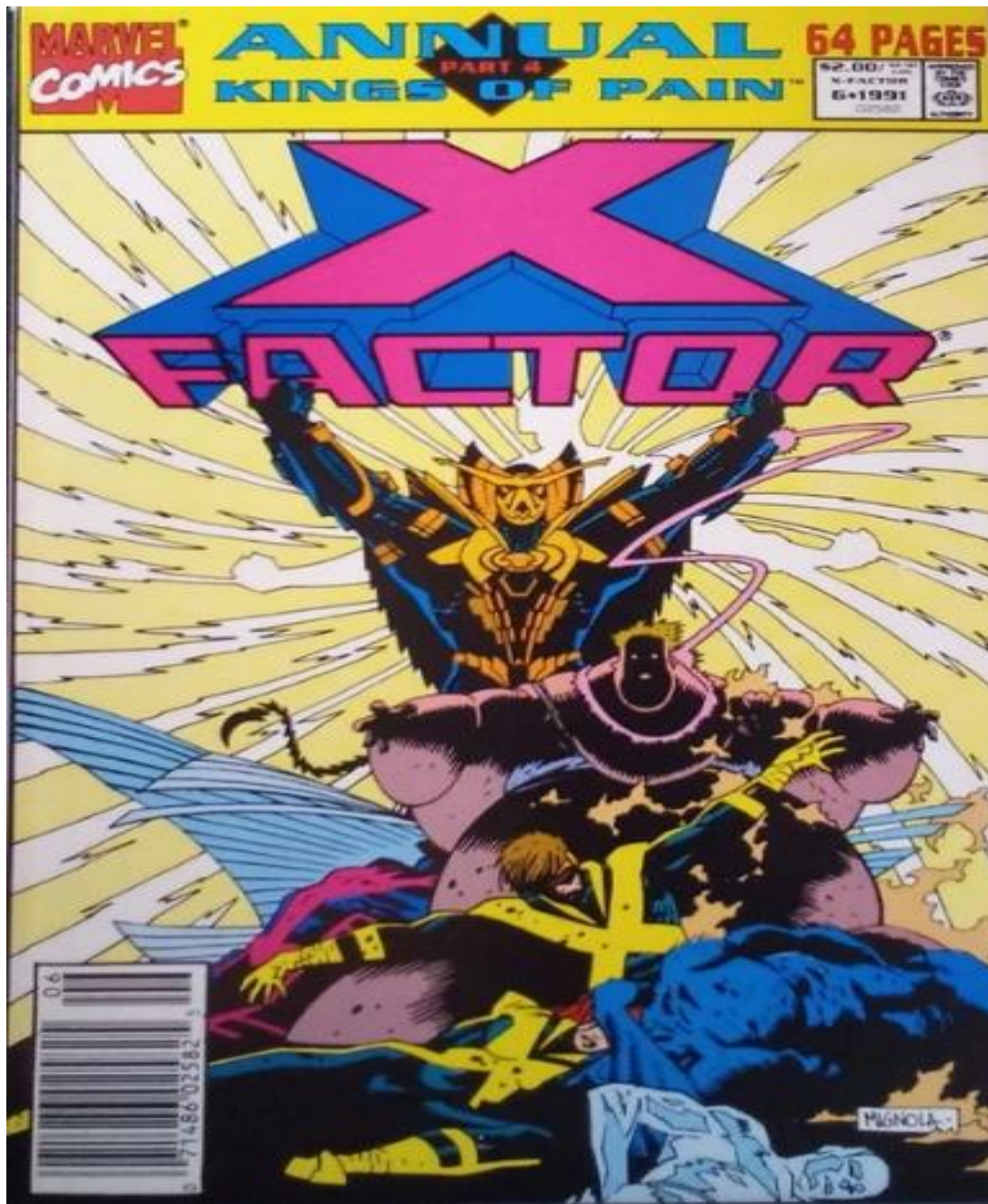


Figure 9: Fabian Nicieza, *X-Factor* Annual vol. 1, no. 6, 1991.

The analysis of these covers is limited due to the fact that The Veil and Salima are neither present nor identifiable. Despite their omissions, an analysis of the covers still serves as important terrain. It informs our understanding of the overall comic book

milieu (social rules, themes, visual style, and setting) in which *Salima and The Veil* make their appearances. Specifically, the ideological context is revealed through the portrayal of non-Americans and the foregrounding of non-Muslim leadership, and the visual language is conveyed by means of framing, body language, colour choice, and attire. The front covers provide layers and context to the examination of Muslims in these comics by critiquing non-Muslim leaders while being wonderfully contradictory by exhibiting an ability and/or willingness to challenge reductive views of those deemed as ‘the other’ while also engaging in the practice of othering.

On the issue cover for *Salima’s* narrative, the recruits, the driving force behind Herupa and Nadia’s missions, are the focal point of the story and become a site for meaning, as it pertains to social rules. They represent a variety of different nationalities and ethnicities, and those that are identifiable are portrayed in what may read as a very reductive fashion that lessens their identity to stereotypical icons. In the foreground, facing Herupa and Nadia, yet with their backs to the reader, the recruits are divided into two rows. On the left side of the page are five bodies, and there are four people lined up on the right side. Both groups exhibit body language reminiscent of the soldier stance: lined up face to back in rows, all members have their arms at their sides, backs straight, looking directly at the Guardians, reflecting the power dynamic between the parties (Van Edwards).

All nine recruits are present, yet only three are identifiable based on cultural markers—clothes and hair—Betty Clawman, sporting an afro; Celia Winward, with braids; and Gregorio De La Vega, recognized based on his unique footwear—moccasin—styled boots with fringed tops (see fig. 5). This foregrounding of cultural

and/or ethnic icons—clothes and hair—as identity seems reductive, but all are minorities—two Indigenous—propagating the message that diversity is crucial to the future of humanity, which challenges colonial and nativist attitudes embedded within the medium’s literary predecessors, dime novels and pulps, as well as war and superhero comics that historically positioned minorities and Indigenous peoples as inferior. The recruits are largely shadowy figures, but you can detect shaded colours consisting of purple (burgundy), blue, or both. McCloud contends that colour “could communicate a dominant mood” (190). The inclusion of these colors cultivates certain feelings. Blue can symbolize “trustworthiness, peace, and stability,” which “evokes feelings of calm and serenity,” which relaxes the readers and positions the Guardians in a positive light (Gheorghe). The uniformity of colour strips them of their individuality, making them part of someone’s collective: The Guardians. This choice may appear to be reductive due to the removal of their singularity, but by the same token, they should not be defined by icons but instead based upon their character, which led to them becoming part of this group based upon their perceived moral constitution, thereby foregrounding similarities instead of differences, acceptance as opposed to intolerance.

These depictions of non-Whites as part of the future leadership of humanity conform to the historical approach to representation in terms of social rules undertaken by writers of the Guardians that presented those traditionally othered as exceptional and in leadership positions, as evidenced by the aforementioned Jessica Cruz and John Stewart. In addition, situating them in outer space aligns with the physical background associated with the series, which is set in part in space and within the fantastical realm.

The covers belonging to The Veil's story arc omit all members of Freedom Force except for Blob, while including a villain not embedded within The Veil's narrative, establishing the universe and reinforcing the central themes of good versus evil as well as the terrorist menace. The addition of Blob may be attributed to being the most well-known member of Freedom Force: he appears in both storylines and, unlike his contemporaries, is the most recognized due to being a member of a well-known and popular group, the X-Men, dating back to X-Men no. 3 in 1964, enhancing the appeal and marketability of the issue. Blob is pictured, on all three covers (see fig. 7-9), being strangled with a rope by Piecemeal.⁷¹ Piecemeal was created by scientists under the command of Red Skull, a Nazi agent ("Piecemeal"). He is a member of the Alliance of Evil, a supervillain group guilty of committing "acts of mutant terrorism" ("Alliance of Evil"). Although the 'Islamic threat' is excluded from the covers, the presence of Piecemeal permits for the transmission of key themes and for conveying the message: the threat of terrorism, and good versus evil, "us versus them."

When interrogating framing, attire, body language, and colour choice, tension develops in the representation of authority pertaining to the Guardians and Salima based on conflicting imagery, complicating perceptions surrounding Western leadership. The Guardians are hovering in the air, demonstrating that they possess superpowers, which equip their leadership with currency and authority, establishing a hierarchy that places them above the recruits (see fig. 5). Herupa and Nadia were presented from a full-face angle, which can make the subjects appear confrontational (Boilard).⁷² In this case, the two may confront the recruits with the gravity of their mission while establishing them as confrontational authority figures.

Similarly, in all three covers for the comics which feature The Veil's storyline in addition to others inside, Piecemeal and Blob are facing the reader, confronting them with the threat terrorism poses to Blob, who is a Western superhero, and, by extension, extending the threat to the West, to readers posed by terrorists, and, by extension, to the West and its readers, embodying the threat. This creates the need for self-preservation in the face of foreign terroristic threats inside and outside the comic book realm, reflecting, through superheroes, how civilians in this scenario are forced to surrender their autonomy in exchange for survival, just like humans in the real world defer to government institutions for protection from foreign threats. In both cases, this empowers and legitimizes authority, real and/or imagined, both in reality and fantasy.

The visual vocabulary expressed by Herupa and Nadia's arms, legs, and facial expressions reaffirm their authority, equip them with a degree of honesty, establishes them as fighters, and conveys a type of ethical leadership. Their arms are expansive, signaling, "Look at me," commanding attention (Van Edwards). They are outstretched up and forward with open palms, creating the impression of authority and honesty (Buffalmano). This is also reminiscent of someone in a position of power, like a preacher, cult leader, or snake oil salesman, casting a spell, literally or psychologically, by mesmerizing the audience. Herupa's legs are spread out, like a battle stance, functioning to take up space in a dominating fashion (Van Edwards). Conversely, Nadia is displaying the soldier stance with legs together and a straightened back, which is employed in "very formal situations" (Van Edwards). Their feet and legs are positioned in an authoritative and confrontational manner, once again reinforcing their authority.

Similarly, to Herupa, Piecemeal's arms and legs are spread out, signaling a

battle stance that correlates to his action, attacking Blob, while also establishing a power position (Van Edwards). His arms, akin to both Nadia's and Herupa's, are outstretched, drawing attention to himself as a force to be reckoned with (Van Edwards). All three are authority figures who lead fighting forces, yet there are three key differentiators that illuminate how their authority differs: Piecemeal is the aggressor, whereas Herupa and Nadia are poised and prepared. Next, the Guardians lead others, like teachers, versus taking the lead to act. Finally, the type of authority they wield is expressed through one area of body language where they diverge: hands. Herupa's and Nadia's palms are open, giving the impression of being "honest" (Van Edwards). In contrast, Piecemeal's hands are clenched in a fist in all three covers, which is often a sign of "anger" and associated with violence (Cambridge Dictionary). Collectively, this draws clear moral distinctions between those representing Western civilization and the people who seek their destruction, propagating the righteousness and heroism of the West and the villainy of "the other."

Herupa's and Nadia's attire and the colours chosen for their clothing both complement and complicate one another. The former's outfit epitomizes a type of authority that is peaceful, whereas the latter's garb signals an aggressive form of leadership. This colour type—rust—which is prominent in both Guardian's attire (see fig. 5) "symbolizes earthiness and stability" and is associated with "nature, strength, and reliability" (Gheorghe). Herupa is dressed in a rust-colored robe with the Guardians emblem on his chest, like that of a monk. McCloud notes that clothing is a transformative agent that impacts how we perceive others (38). In the case of Herupa, the monk-inspired robe situates him as a wise, even holy individual. It provides Herupa

with a moral compass, making him appear cerebral (not reactionary), grounded, and ready to lead. In contrast, Nadia's costume fails to generate the same peaceful attributes, complicating perceptions of the Guardians' type of leadership and authority.

Nadia, who is dressed like a Roman warrior/soldier based on her imperial-styled helmet, the Roman chest plate shaped like a bustier she dons, covering a portion of her arm plates, her necklace and cuff bracelets, and her skirt, which falls above her knee. The contrasting attire creates a perceived monk vs. warrior binary, producing a tension between peaceful and aggressive leadership, yet their stances show they are ready for battle. The secondary colour, yellow, in her costume inherits these attributes, among others: "optimism," "happiness," and "energy" (Gheorghe). The traits affiliated with the colour yellow possess qualities that humanize her and add a non-aggressive layer to our sense of the character. These characteristics also have the effect of inspiring trust and comfort among the recruits. Moreover, Nadia's Roman warrior-style attire provides her with currency as a protector and fighter, a shift from the sidekick or damsel in distress trope traditionally assigned to many females in comics. These two opposing styles reflect a sort of ying-yang authority, revealing two sides to heroism: one rooted in peace and one grounded in war, depending on the circumstance. The power dynamic between the two, with Herupa as the leader, does render the group first and foremost peaceful.

Much like body language, the lines separating heroism and villainy in the two different narratives, in terms of attire, are also blurred, speaking to how little can separate what appear to be binary oppositions. To illustrate, Nadia is pictured with a warrior-style helmet; Piecemeal also dons Viking or medieval-looking headwear with

wings on the side, as well as a chest plate, both of which, like Nadia, are primarily yellow (see fig. 7-9). As a villain, the yellow inherits negative attributes such as “cowardice” and/or “fear[ful]” (Bruna). These qualities are applicable to Piecemeal, evidenced by the fact that on the cover for *New Mutants Annual 7* (see fig. 7), he does not fight one-on-one, choosing instead to outnumber his opponents seven to one or battle as a gang four on four, as seen on the cover page of *X-Men Annual 15* (see fig. 8). Also, he keeps his opponents at a distance by employing his powers—lightning strikes—never engaging in hand-to-hand combat, both of which situate him as cowardly and/or fearful. The secondary colours of Piecemeal’s attire are black, and interestingly-rust. Black connotes “power,” “intelligence,” “evil,” and “bad,” situating him as a formidable villain, whereas rust—which is present in both Guardian’s costumes—is affiliated with “strength” and “reliability,” both of which correlate to leadership, whether heroic or villainous (Gheorghe).⁷³ Such concepts are based on who is perceived as the oppressor and the oppressed.

With respect to the Guardians, the messaging produced by these elements—framing, body language, attire, and color—is somewhat contradictory. The choice of colour evokes a sense of holiness, peacefulness, reliability, and stability—qualities that both situate and validate the Guardians position as trustworthy leaders. The association with monks grounds Herupa’s leadership as disciplined, humble, and cerebral, resulting in an authority that is trustworthy and heroic. The way they are framed and much of their body language, if analyzed in isolation, creates the impression that they are aggressive, but when viewed in combination with color, it expands perceptions of their authority by layering it with positive traits like being responsible and thoughtful. The heroes and

villains from these two narratives share many similarities, and the line that divides them is thin. They are two sides of the same coin. Both are fighting for their people and see themselves as confronting wrongdoers. After all, right and wrong and good or bad are constructed based on one's positionality, in this case rooted in geopolitically driven foreign policy speaking to how such concepts are subjective.

Reading Salima and The Veil

Having established the socio-political and historical contexts in which Salima Baranizar and The Veil made their appearances in print and the contours of the comic book universes in which they are situated, attention now turns to the construction of their particular identities and representations as Muslim women.

The representation of these two Muslim women in comic books, Salima Baranizar and The Veil, was created through the male Western gaze during a period that pitted nation-states Iran and Iraq against America in geopolitical conflicts. These representations were created within temporal and spatial conditions that situate representative agents of foreign governments at war with America, whether directly or indirectly, as "the other," "the enemy" stripping them of their humanity and individuality. They encapsulate the complexities of Muslim women in Western comics. They are imagined and constructed through an American foreign policy lens stripping them of their humanity by situating them within the realm of the conceptual: the orientalist stereotype based on names, attire, dialogue and literary tropes.

The names assigned to the two characters establish them both as the orientalist other. But one name is a humanizing agent while the other is dehumanizing, speaking to one aspect behind how heroes and villains are configured. Naming the female antagonist, The Veil, an Iraqi mercenary, strips her of humanity, rendering her a thing (an impersonal noun)—thus thingifying her.⁷⁴ Madia Mahida Lynn cites the choice to present her as a “nameless woman” as conforming to the “Orientalist stereotype.” This reductive practice was also applied to Dust earlier, which illustrates how *Muslim* women, both heroes and/or villains, are dehumanized in the same fashion. Additionally, the name, The Veil, also diminishes her to a religious object, which the West sees as oppressive but, from a Muslim lens, is accepted as part of the culture as an act of modesty as opposed to a symbol of oppression. These stereotypes emphasize difference, which is one of three methods that creates “othering.”

Salima, in contrast to The Veil, is provided with the name of a person rather than an item or an idea.⁷⁵ Both names attach the characters to Islam. However, the choice to assign her the name of a person illuminates the different approach undertaken by the two authors. The decision to name her Salima humanizes her and is expansive as opposed to reductive. The etymology behind the name Salima reveals it “is an indirect Quranic name for girls that means “pure,” “flawless,” “safe and sound,” and “virtuous” (“Salima, A Quranic Name for Girls”). These characteristics associated with the character correspond to the person. Her name aligns with her actions. Salima is religious; her intent is “pure” and her actions “virtuous,” as evidenced by her faithfulness to Allah, her commitment to help her countrymen, and her selflessness. Ironically, Salima’s altruistic and faithful nature places her in danger, as opposed to rendering her

“safe and sound,” bringing into focus a possible villain in her narrative, religious extremism, as an agent of oppression.

The irony is that The Veil’s name is reductive, yet she may have more agency than Salima in terms of *attire*. She is wearing what closely resembles a hijab amira (white), but with a separate black mask covering her nose and mouth. The skin above her chest, a portion of her right shoulder, and her midsection are bare. Her tight-fitting outfit is green and consists of a bustier-type top, arm coverings that start from below the shoulder and extend to her wrist, and minty green spandex-styled pants that begin below her navel and cover her legs down to her feet. Her bare skin and parts of her attire do sexualize her, which situates her within the tradition of how numerous westernized female heroes and villains in the medium were represented, namely Supergirl, Power Girl, and Batwoman, as well as Muslim heroes like Dust (see fig. 10). The way The Veil, Dust, and other women have traditionally been portrayed in comics suggests that American writers are just as prejudicial, sexist, and stereotypical as the religious Muslims they admonish. The implications of the sexualized nature of The Veil’s hybrid attire are layered, as it embodies this tension between binary concepts: conservatism and liberalism, religiousness and secularism, and cultural-religious nationalism, where culture related to a nation’s social norms based on their interpretation of faith dictates what women can and cannot wear. In the context of the orientalist stereotype, her clothing can be read as an act of liberation, a progressive exercise in representation, because she does not adhere to a type of binary portrayal of Muslim women, reducing them to either secular or conservative.



Figure 10: Fabian Nicieza, *The New Mutants Annual* vol. 1, no .7, 1991.

Like The Veil, Salima's hijab, niqab, and burqa combo set is a marker for an orientalist identity (see fig.11). Shamila Karunakaran explains that religious clothing situates her as a "conservative, religious woman," bringing into focus a key distinction with The Veil's hybrid attire that is both secular and religious. Attire as religious identity serves as a reductive act because it heightens the western reader's sense of them as

“the other” by amplifying difference, as it deviates from Judeo-Christian and western norms. The difference in clothing is an expansive and progressive act, as The Veil’s attire serves to dismantle another element used to “other,” which is “presenting a certain group,” in this case Muslims, as “all the same” (“Othering”).



Figure 11: Steve Englehart, *Millennium* No. 2, 1998.

The difference in attire is grounded in nationalism. Salima is an Iranian character, and the story is set in Iran. Within this culture and nation, there has been a compulsory hijab law for women dating back to 1979 (Pirnia). Conversely, Iraq, where The Veil’s story takes place, is considered a “socially conservative yet officially secular country”

and has no mandatory hijab laws, permitting The Veil's ability to dress in such a fashion (Abdo). This illuminates the role that nationalism plays in the religious identity of a Muslim character.

The color scheme used in the design of their costumes operates to further bind The Veil to her religion and nation while positioning both as protectors. Foregrounding green within The Veil's costume, similar to her name and attire, is a connective tissue that binds her to both Islam and Iraq due to the colour's association with Islam by many Westerners because of its presence on 20 national flags belonging to the Muslim and/or Arab world, one of which is Iraq.⁷⁶ Karunakaran notes The Veil's colour combination (attire) of black, green, and white renders her an embodiment of nationalism as she is "blatantly dressed in the colours of the Iraqi flag" (4). Two of the key colours used in Salima's clothing—black, white—are the same two colours also assigned to The Veil and share the same meaning.⁷⁷ Black symbolizes "protection" and "strength" (Van Braam). However, they differ in application. Salima is the defender of her people, whereas for The Veil, it correlates to her defense of the region. White, when juxtaposed with Black, propagates and symbolizes a binary way of seeing good and bad, which, in the case of superheroes and villains within a geopolitical framework, is "simplistic," leaving little room for nuance in the portrayal of Muslim women in American comic books (Gheorghe). But by placing these characters into conversation with one another, such generalizations about Muslim women are disrupted by Salima's role as a budding hero. Although, through Salima, to some extent Muslim women may be vindicated, there is a type of transference that occurs where the antagonist in both narratives, becomes Islam, which is painted as violent and dangerous. The transference

results from the fact that both women end up being victimized by their own faith based on their gender, which plays into stereotypical tropes about Islam that result in it being cast as the ultimate villain. This will be outlined in detail later in the analysis.

Muslim women in these comics differ greatly, which expands, not reduces, representation of a group. These portrayals, as they pertain to attire, also signal how progress is not always linear, and that progression and regression can co-exist simultaneously. The fact these depictions correctly reflect the rules governing headwear in said countries is a respectful act that illustrates the writers' regard "for cultural, religious...accuracy" unlike the example of *Batman: A Death in the Family* outlined earlier by Dar where he charged "Muslims [were presented as] all the same" (102). Conversely, scholars Shamila Karunakaran and Madia Mahida Lynn's responses to The Veil's attire speak to how said clothing is stereotypical. Karunakaran contends she "resemble[s] Jasmine's character design from Disney's Aladdin" and that it reduces her to an oriental stereotype and "an exotic other not worthy of respect" (Karunakaran 4). She is a costume caricature of the 'imagined Muslim,' whether intentional or not. For example, Lynn points out that The Veil "didn't appear to understand basic hijab etiquette" while never specifying what The Veil had misunderstood.

In terms of potential reception, Salima is equipped with a degree of authenticity based on name and attire, unlike The Veil, who may be perceived as a fantastical or an imagined portrayal of a Muslim woman based on the same components, attire, and name. Salima is humanized as a result, making her more relatable and accessible, both of which function to position her as a potential superhero in the eyes of the reader.

Powers

Superpowers are one of the components that transform a person into a superhero or a villain. The Veil's superpower reduces her to an orientalist stereotype, whereas Salima's power is based on her moral constitution, making her more relatable and aspirational. The former reaffirms American foreign policy pertaining to "the Muslim other," while the latter undermines it.

The Veil's powers are vital to grounding her identity as an Iraqi supervillain. The Veil's power is chemical secretion—of a mist—which emanates from her body, filling the whole page and surrounding everyone present, situating her as the literal embodiment of a chemical weapon. In the context of a war narrative, Karunakaran notes, "The Veil is essentially the embodiment of the Iraqi military's use of "chemical weaponry" against civilian targets during the Iran-Iraq war and in the ethnic cleansing of Iraqi Kurds...[and] was a focal point of media coverage when the United States got involved in the First Gulf War a few years later" (Lynn). In totality, this renders her a representative agent of Iraq during the Gulf War. This makes her a candidate for righteous hatred based on her association with the nation that invaded Kuwait, an invasion that qualified as an atrocity, and a larger perceived threat to the West and the "free world." This type of supernatural power also lessens her humanity in the eyes of the western reader, which is one of the key devices used to "other" her.

Within this context, her villainous status speaks to how representation of "the other" is dictated by and/or at least in line with American foreign policy driven by geopolitical conflicts. Assigning this type of power to The Veil, like her name and attire, further strips of her humanity, which exaggerates differences between Muslims and the

west, representing two of the three methods used in the process of “othering.” In addition, her power propagates the notion that Iraqi people themselves are weapons of mass destruction. The mist is purple and green, the latter providing another link to her religion (Islam) and country (Iraqi flag), painting them both as poisonous. The former, purple, is associated with power, magic, and mysticism (Heller 179-184), operating to situate her as a powerful mystical being. While there are other superheroes who are mystical, The Veil is a villain, and therefore mysticism undermines her humanity. The continued use of green (from attire to mist now) functions on a micro level to situate her as an Iraqi foreign menace, as noted, due to the presence of said colour in the Iraqi flag and further entrenches her as an archetype for the Muslim terrorist. On a macro level, green, due its presence within Islamic nations and the faith itself, associates the threat of terrorism with an entire religion, Islam, while mobilizing the threat anywhere she appears.

Salima, by comparison, does not possess any superpowers. In contrast to The Veil, Salima’s “power” is rooted in her strength of character, loyalty to her people, and faith (in Allah), which are examined in detail later in this chapter. Ironically, character and faith are also hallmarks of Steve Rogers, who is the alter-ego behind one of America’s great Judeo-Christian superheroes, Captain America. Cap was a symbol of American heroism and nationalism during wartime, and Steve Rogers, the man behind the superhero, was chosen as the ideal candidate to become a super soldier not because of his physical prowess, as he was extremely skinny, but due to his humility, loyalty, and faith in the nation and its people, which mirrors the motives behind Salima. Both Salima and Steve Rogers are physically weak but morally strong, chosen based

on character, and driven by serving their countrymen and women. Aside from her attire, Salima's name represents a person as opposed to a thing, and her lack of powers may function as counterpropaganda to the practice of "othering" Muslim characters like The Veil in that she is being humanized, minimizing perceived differences with Americans.

Body language, framing and messaging

The Veil's body language and the way she is framed reinforce the perception of her as a threat and animalistic, whereas Salima is presented as vulnerable and non-threatening, mirroring their respective roles as villain and budding superhero. It also aligns with their relationship to American authority: The Veil is the enemy—a member of an Islamic fighting force—and Salima a potential ally, once again illuminating how Muslims are defined based on their willingness to serve American interests. The following analysis will be restricted to the first time they appear in their respective issues.

Our introduction to Salima occurs on page 16 of *Millennium* no. 2 in the story "Iran Scam!" through a wide shot where she appears in the background walking towards an open room where an older man, framed with a head and shoulders shot, appears in the foreground, almost twice her size. The wide shot functions to make her appear small, less significant, and vulnerable, as opposed to threatening, perhaps functioning to mitigate the reader's perception of her based on her religious attire (Wein 16). Also, the size differential between her and the unnamed man propagates western ideas about gender inequalities between men and women in the Muslim world.

This is in stark contrast to The Veil in the story "The First Cut," who appears as a

sizable figure situated in the middle of the page, looking ahead, demanding attention, and confronting both Blob at eye level, a member of Freedom Force, and the reader (Nicieza 45). Such direct and prolonged eye contact can be interpreted as threatening, making people uncomfortable. By comparison, Salima is pictured walking with her head down, which signals “low confidence, depression,” or someone “being defensive” (Van Edwards). Her shoulders are forward, demonstrating “vulnerability,” and “depression.” and being representative of “someone trying to hide something” (Van Edwards). Salima comes across as meek and unthreatening, fostering empathy due to her perceived low confidence and depression, which permits the audience to see her in a more sympathetic fashion, which bodes well for a character that is not portrayed as villainous.

On the contrary, The Veil has a firm soldier stance with her shoulders back, chest out, and arms fixed to the side (Nicieza 45). Unlike Salima, this situates The Veil as a member of a fighting force. Two other points of departure are the positions of their hands and eyebrows. The Veil’s hands are open, and her fingers are separated in a claw-like position, like an animal ready to pounce and kill its prey, compared to Salima’s in *Millenium no.2*, whose are not visible due to wearing the burqa (Englehart 16). In addition, The Veil’s frowning eyebrows create a partial scowl, expressing anger and reinforcing her threatening nature (“Scowl”), whereas Salima’s are not visible based on the wide shot angle (Englehart 16). Collectively, The Veil’s claw-like fingers combined with her frowning eyebrows lessen her humanity, situating her as animalistic and threatening compared to Salima, who is mysterious and non-threatening. Interestingly, this is propagating the notion that a more secular woman is a greater threat and less human than her religious counterpart, which dismantles orientalist stereotypes based

upon religiosity—that the more faithful they are, the more danger they pose to outsiders.

Salima's framing, body language, and facial expression position her as a sympathetic, largely non-threatening figure compared to *The Veil*, where the same areas of analysis result in the reader's perception of her as a threat. Also, *The Veil*'s claw-like fingers lessen her humanity once again, positioning her as "the other." These claws, like her name, attire, and superpowers, foreground a difference compared to the heroes while reducing her humanity, two elements behind the process of "othering," which is now a thread in the representation of *The Veil*.

It must be noted that cultural norms play a role in reception. From a Muslim, Arabic, or Middle Eastern perspective, Salima's body language could be viewed as an expression of humility and therefore is not understood in the same way, nor does it carry the same meaning, as it might in other cultures. This speaks to the issue of confirmation bias, which impacts creators and readers independent of their background, as confirmation bias is "people's tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with their existing beliefs" ("Confirmation Bias"). It illuminates "how humans sometimes process information in an illogical, biased manner" ("Confirmation Bias"). No one is immune to its effect, which illustrates how information, in terms of reception, is filtered through a subjective, not objective, interpretation; truth and representation are neither black and white nor universal but ultimately grey, as they are beholden to one's bias. We see this pattern of Muslim women being othered based on the magnifying of differences and the lessening of their humanity, which has occurred more often, thus far, with *The Veil* than with *Salima*. However, *The Veil*'s body language and the fact she was the first member of Desert

Sword to address Freedom Force hint at her having agency and maybe even currency as a leader of her group, complicating perceptions of her as solely reinforcing orientalist stereotypes and suggesting how propaganda and counterpropaganda are not always binary but sometimes interconnected.

Muslim women as Leaders: Gender Roles and Equality

A Muslim female leader would challenge reductive portrayals created through a western lens that paint Islam as sexist based on perceived gender roles and their implications. This raises the question of whether *The Veil* or *Salima* are presented as leaders. *Salima* and *The Veil* both attempt to assume leadership positions and are dismissed—the former by her people (fellow citizens) as well as a mullah and the latter by her super villainous group, *Desert Sword*. In the case of *The Veil*, dismissal is based on her gender within a male-dominated group, and for *Salima*, it is due to the relationship between gender and certain Islamic religious norms. This speaks to the role religious and cultural limitations play in Muslim female leadership, reaffirming the Western discourse surrounding Muslim women and a lack of agency that propagates American superiority.

The Veil is not positioned as the leader within the narrative framework, as evidenced by fifteen panels where male members of *Desert Sword* assume a leadership position. In ten out of the fifteen panels, *Sirocco* is leading, whereas *Black Raazer* takes the helm in the remaining five panels.⁷⁸ This situates leadership as exclusively male, which is reductive by North American standards. However, *The Veil*'s attempt to assert herself as leader disrupts the reductive and prejudicial notions, by Westerners, that

Muslim women do not have agency.

The Veil assumed a leadership role by being the first to address Freedom Force, specifically Blob: “I believe this is the man [referring to Dr. German physicist Reinhold Kurtzmann] you are after? Now you must ask yourself, American... is he *really* worth dying for? And should your answer be yes, then *Desert Sword* is ready to comply” (Niecieza 38). Her leadership is accentuated by the size of the panel, speech balloons, and the use of bold for the words. She is featured in a splash page/full-page panel where the panel consumes the whole page (see fig. 12). McCloud notes that the panel acts “as a sort of general indicator of time or space” (99). First, the size of the panel gives the character prominence and the scene the appearance of importance. In addition, although the other members of Desert Sword as well as Blob are present, the green and purple mist she exudes consumes the whole page and everyone in it. The size of the panel also slows down time, providing the reader with the opportunity to process and focus on her leadership. Second, the speech balloon is one continuous balloon comprised of five parts, all of which capture her comments and hers only, affirming her significance. Lastly, eighteen out of thirty-four of her words are bolded, which creates emphasis and emotion, also connoting importance. All of which establish her, at least in this scene, as a leader.



Figure 12: Fabian Nicieza, *The New Mutants Annual* vol. 1, no. 7, 1991.

In terms of geopolitics, The Veil's reference to Blob as "American" speaks to how she defines him through a nationalistic and geopolitical lens and considering the confrontational nature of their interaction based on her kidnapping and taking a foreigner hostage encapsulates some of the orientalist stereotypes applied to Muslim female characters in a pre-9/11 context: anti-Western and terroristic (Shaheen 124). It epitomizes the manner in which "American foreign policy" positions "[female Muslim [leadership], i.e., as threats and polar opposites to Western values" and epitomizes one

of the “most” ubiquitous “themes involving Arabs...[them] vs. the West [us]” binary (Dar 101; Shaheen 102).

The issuing of an ultimatum backed by a threat of death positions female Muslim leadership as threatening, and aggressive, disrupting the narrative and stereotype that they are controlled and fearful of their male counterparts, making such a representation an act of counterpropaganda. The Veil’s leadership is restricted to what she initiates, such as the aforementioned ultimatum, and when she leads the offense by releasing her toxic mist and states, “I HAVE CREATED A *MASKING FOG*, *AMINEDI*—STRIKE QUICKLY!” (Nicieza 44). These excerpts establish that The Veil has a degree of agency by taking on a leadership role and executing a game plan. Moreover, in the panel, she is holding Aminedi back, which denotes physical equality, and her instruction to strike positions her as decisive, both of which situate Muslim female leadership as formidable and capable. This approach to representation challenges perceived gender roles in the Middle East and within Islam. It complicates generalizations surrounding “oppressive” gender roles propagated about the Middle East and Islam.

Based on the previous examples, The Veil possesses the ability and willingness to lead but is not permitted to do so, as evidenced by Aminedi’s response to her command: “TWO THINGS, VEIL—I DO NOT NEED A *WOMAN* ORDERING ME ABOUT—AND QUICKLY IS THE ONLY WAY I KNOW TO STRIKE” (Nicieza 44-45). Aminedi’s reference to The Veil as “woman” instead of her name strips her of her individuality and leadership by reducing her to her gender, which serves to propagate that “they” (Muslim men) see women as less than based on a social hierarchy built on religious norms. This illuminates the tension between how Muslim women see

themselves versus how Muslim men see them and how Westerners—through the writers—see Muslims in a way that propagates gender inequality.

Salima differs from *The Veil* in that she did not originally exhibit the interest, willingness, or confidence to lead anybody. Her metamorphosis is a result of what she perceived as divine intervention that propelled her to seek such a role. She did it out of service to g-d, whereas *The Veil* did it for the nation and in support of her group. Ultimately, Salima's attempts at leadership, just like *The Veil's*, are dismissed, but in her situation, by religious authorities, fellow citizens, and peers. The exception is *The Guardians*, who recruit Salima to join a group of people chosen to lead the future of humanity. The writer's choice to have the Guardians, who are not Muslims, as the ones to see a Muslim woman as a leader further propagates orientalist stereotypes about gender inequality associated with Islam. This is because, as outlined later, she is not allowed to lead by Muslim clerics or accepted as a leader by her own people. It is non-Muslims who see her as a leader. This reinforces the idea that women are treated as the inferior gender and have little agency in Islam, as evidenced by the discourse surrounding women and hijabs, where women are forced to cover themselves up.

Salima's body language and verbal response to being chosen by *The Guardians* to lead express discomfort, distrust, and disbelief. Her reaction is based upon who is asking, not what is being asked of her. In response to being chosen by foreigners, Salima's body and head are turned away from Nadia and Herupa, suggesting "disinterest" in serving as one of their leaders (Van Edwards). One arm, under her burqa, is up and stretched out, creating space between the parties and communicating discomfort. Salima's eyes are looking sideways towards Herupa and Nadia, indicating

“doubt, reluctance to commit, suspicion, or contempt” (Van Edwards). Salima responded to their proposal, saying, ““NO! STAY **AWAY** FROM ME, BLASPHEMERS!” (Englehart 16). Salima’s response speaks to how she views the Guardians as “the other” based on religious differences. The implication is that every group partakes in othering and binary thinking, there are no superheroes in this regard, especially during times of geopolitical conflict.

The exchange between The Guardians and Salima persists, with both framing leadership through a religious construct to expand or contract the role of women. Herupa declares, “THE PROPHET **MOHAMMED** SPOKE OF **MULLAHS PAST** AND **MULLAHS TO COME...**” (Englehart 17). Salima retorts, “MULLAHS **CANNOT** BE **WOMEN!** EVEN **IN** THE DECEDENT DAYS BENEATH THE HEEL OF THE **SHAH,** WOMEN—” (Englehart 17). The passage epitomizes how Western leadership and knowledge operate as a form of white supremacy because it implies that his western lens is inherently more informed about Islam and its history. This illuminates western leadership as all-knowing and possessing a sense of superiority to everyone and everything. These comments also reveal that initially Salima privileges religious authority (Mullahs) over faith-based authority (G-d) and secular authority (The Shah) in determining female leadership. She is conflating faith with religious institutions like the Mullah with G-d. The distinction between the two is that faith is a belief system that is open to the individual’s interpretation of the meaning of text and scriptures and where one is accountable to G-d. On the other hand, religious authority is a closed system where religious (holy) men dictate the meaning of G-d’s will—based on said text and scriptures—and impose limitations, roles, and punishment based on their specific lens.

The former is spiritual and layered; open and flexible, where faith can be practiced in a reformed or conservative manner. However, the latter is orthodox, absolute, almost legalistic, and definitely punitive.

Soon after, Salima begins to question the limitations imposed on her agency and yearns to "live her life as more than a mere woman?" realizing "*THERE ARE SO MANY NEW POSSIBILITIES SO MUCH TO CONSIDER...*" (Wein 5). She begins to contemplate the possibility that the Guardians were messengers from G-d, and this is her G-dly duty to serve in a leadership position as his vessel (Englehart 5). She seeks religious counsel from the local Mullah. Salima appears in the prayer tent (side shot of her), mere feet away from a bearded man, facing her, dressed in an ivy-green type of military jacket and a light green shirt and pants (Wein 5). He is looking at her sternly, holding a gun, tilted down but facing her direction. Behind the man are congregants on three levels, all of whom are wearing colorless attire; but based on clothing, the first level appears to be citizens; the second level has men wearing military fatigues standing with their arms in the air, and above them, on the third level, are men dressed in religious garb—turbans and long gowns (aba)—which suggest they are mullahs—sitting cross-legged (Wein 5). None of these are women.

The panel creates the impression of a social and religious hierarchy. The positioning of the worshippers and militants below the religious figures connotes reverence for the mullahs. The colorless nature of the people in the three levels creates a sense of uniformity, and the three parts are sums of a whole, a collective based on religion. In essence, they are different branches of the same tree. Also, the presence of arms and what appears to be soldiers inside a religious Muslim space propagates the

notion of Islam as a violent faith. In regard to messaging pertaining to Salima, the choice of a side shot for her is an example of how framing conveys emotion and complexity because it opens her up to the gaze of the reader and her people simultaneously. It is a representation of her being emotionally split between two worlds: a religious one (represented by being in a prayer tent with other believers) and a secular one (represented by the departure from religious expectations of gender roles), where she is equipped with greater autonomy and agency. This side-shot may also be voyeuristic due to making the reader feel like an “unseen observer” (Boilard). This creates the experience of being a witness as opposed to an active participant, thereby permitting the reader to be less visceral and more cerebral, allowing them to process instead of reacting immediately since no one is addressing them, which would have been created by an alternative angle such as the head-on shot (Wein 5).

Salima’s interaction with the Mullah over the next seven panels signals her evolution from perceiving/understanding female leadership from a religious/legalistic lens to a faithful one, creating a distinction between religion and g-d, where the latter emancipates her from the chains of inequality imposed by the former. This serves as counterpropaganda to the idea that “Allah” is the cause of inequality, instead assigning blame to the interpretation of religious laws and the men, like mullahs, who govern them, as evidenced by the following scenes.

Salima explains, to the Mullah, being visited by the Guardians who claimed, “*THAT I AM SUCH A ONE,*” a Mullah “CHOSEN TO **ADVANCE** HUMANITY INTO THE **MILLENNIUM!**” (Wein 7). In the following panel no. 2, Salima is pictured with her hand over her heart, denoting honesty, sincerity, and transparency, while awaiting his

guidance. The Mullah responds, "FOOLISH WOMAN! YOU SPEAK **MADNESS!** NO **MESSENGERS OF ALLAH** WOULD COME TO SUCH AS **YOU!**" The Mullah continues, "THOSE WHO **SPOKE** TO YOU COULD ONLY BE AGENTS OF **SATAN!**" (Wein 7). Salima retorts, "I KNOW THEY SPOKE **TRUE!**" (Wein 7). To which, the Mullah responds, "THEY SPOKE LIES, WOMAN! IF THEY WERE TRULY MESSENGERS OF ALLAH, THEY WOULD HAVE APPEARED TO THE AYATOLLAH-- ! YOU MUST **RECAANT** THIS INSANITY-- OR **SUFFER** FOR YOUR BLASPHEMY!" (Wein7). In response, Salima states, "WISE ONE, I...CANNOT" (Englehart 7). Salima continues "I KNOW I HAVE BEEN **CHOSEN** FOR SOME GREAT **PURPOSE--** AND I MUST REMAIN **TRUE** TO THAT TRUST!" (Wein 7). The final two panels reveal the consequences of a Muslim woman's defiance of the clergy when the Mullah decries: "THEN YOU WILL SUFFER THE FATE OF **ALL BLASPHEMERS!** BASEEJ, TAKE HER **AWAY!!**" SALIMA: "WISE ONE, **NO!**" (Wein 7). She is taken away by soldiers as the Mullah concludes, "IT IS FOR YOUR OWN **GOOD**, WOMAN! PERHAPS YOU CAN YET BE **PERSUADED** TO SEE THE **ERROR** OF YOUR WAYS!" (Wein 7). This scene exchange brings into focus the tension between binaries such as obedience and independence and clergy (leaders) and the laity (followers), both of which are driven by perceived gender rules.

By challenging the mullah's view of female leadership, Salima is challenging his authority, that of a holy man—which positions her as an infidel. She is asserting her own agency and putting her intuition about G-d's will above rules associated with her religion. Salima's refusal to recant signifies her complete transformation from a person defined by obedience to religious authorities to one defined by faith. The mullah's

rejection of Salima's contention appears to be rooted in gender, as evidenced by his claiming that the messengers of Allah would have appeared to a male—the Ayatollah suggesting a woman can't be eligible to be one of the leaders of the future of humanity. Also, the mullah refers to Salima by her gender, "woman," as opposed to her name, which was also how The Veil was treated, thereby functioning to lessen their individuality and humanity by reducing them to a biological construct, which makes them ineligible to lead. This speaks of "othering" people based on differences within the same religious or ethnic community. The writer, Len Wein, could be read as painting a reductive view of religious figures—Iman—but an expansive view of women and Allah, which reinforces Western ideals of equality, as evidenced by the forthcoming denouement.

The Veil and Salima were gendered, not trusted to lead, and neither were accepted as leaders by peers and religious authorities, respectively. They were different types of leaders: The Veil was more secular compared to Salima's faithful approach. Salima, a more religious figure, chose a peaceful approach compared to the more secular person, The Veil, who embodied death and destruction. This challenges the stereotype of religious Muslims as extremist. Both were eventually killed in part due to their ambition, desire, and/or calling to lead.

The Death of Salima and The Veil

Death is not the final chapter; instead, it is the revelation. In the case of Salima and The Veil, it exposes Western messaging about Islam that frames the religion and its followers as the villain, the oppressor, and its victims—fellow Muslims and westerners—

as the oppressed. However, at times, it also complicates notions surrounding the good-versus-bad binary through exploration of American savagery within a vengeance narrative. These opposing narratives, simultaneously, serve as propaganda and counterpropaganda. The deaths of The Veil and Salima are both a result of American interventionism into foreign lands. The former was killed by Pyro, a member of Freedom Force, a type of American military unit, while fighting on Iraqi soil, for being an enemy combatant during wartime.⁷⁹ The latter died in Iran, running away from the Blue Beetle, who had tried to rescue her from the mullahs, from jail, from her people, and from herself.

Salima and The Veil's deaths expose the limitations placed on Muslim women's leadership, whether they are heroes or villains, fighting with or against non-Muslims. They see themselves as leaders: Salima as a prophet and/or mullah and The Veil as head of Desert Sword, where she adopts a more masculine wartime combat posture and demeanor, taking on a hyper-masculine identity. But their leadership is threatening to both Muslims as well as western superheroes, and they are reduced to damsels in distress, disposable bodies, and were killed off before any of their peers. They are hunted down by their enemies, who are both domestic, like the Iranian people and the mullah, and foreign, like Pyro. Salima is hunted down for attempting to lead whereas The Veil was for exhibiting leadership qualities. When contrasted with other female leaders like Nadia and female recruits, all of the aforementioned either led or were positioned to, and none of them were killed in the issues. Females could live, even lead, so long as they were not Muslims, illuminating how female leadership is unattainable for The Veil and Salima.

The Veil's death exposes American military barbarism, collapses the hero vs. villain binary based upon nationalism, and indicts the reader as an accessory. The Veil is murdered by Pyro, who earlier had witnessed his team member, Super Sabre, decapitated by Aminedi, who propagates the Muslim terrorist trope. Pyro's trauma response, which speaks to the intersection of PTSD, war, and service, is vengeance, which is apparent based on the anger, joy, and taunting he expresses while slowly burning her alive. Pyro is pictured with one fist on his hip, signaling "aggression," and the other fist points down at her, threatening violence (Van Edwards). Pyro appears to be sporting a half smile, which is associated with someone about to "get away with something" or a person who "outwits someone" (Van Edwards). Pyro says "PEEKABOO, DARLIN'" to which The Veil responds "N—No—" (Nicieza 47). Pyro follows her; his mouth is wide open, and he sports a devious smile, revealing a sense of pleasure and excitement as he watches her die slowly. He is reminiscent of a boogie man or a serial killer who has cornered their prey, both of which are immoral beings (Nicieza 47). Karunakaran labels her murder "at the hands of Freedom Force" as "inhumane at best" and proclaims that the aforementioned panel "establishes how the heroes see her as sub-human, sexualizing her even as she suffers an excruciating death" (4).

The messaging produced by Pyro's behaviour and dialogue renders him, and by extension, America, as a bloodthirsty sadist, a type of savage who receives immense joy from inflicting pain on others, as opposed to a heroic soldier or fighting force completing their righteous mission. These panels collapse the hero-villain construct based on objective measures and thus blur the line between the savage and the

civilized. All of which undermines America's moral compass, their authority to lead, and the ethics of their military and foreign missions. This functions as a type of counterpropaganda to westernized concepts of heroes and villains using nationality as the primary metric. Philosophically, it complicates the notion of a singular savage; perhaps the question is: who isn't a savage? This suggests that within a war setting, everyone is a savage. Conversely, maybe the savage is not a subject but an object: war. Alternatively, savagery might be contextualized and justified by the western, Judeo-Christian reader when juxtaposed with Sirocco's enjoyment in watching Super Sabre slowly die after beheading him, both of which preceded The Veil's death, making her demise and Pyro's related behaviour justified under the eye-for-an-eye passage from Leviticus 24:19-21 (Jura). The religious justification of barbarism, savagery and murder extends beyond The Veil to Salima, who is killed by her own people based on their interpretation of religious laws. This speaks to the subjective nature of savagery, and evilness and how it is negotiated through one's positionality rooted in religion and nationality during or post-war time, which are the temporal and spatial conditions behind the production of these works.

In the panels where he kills The Veil (Sacrificial Lamb 47, 3 and 4), Pyro is framed facing the audience, as does The Veil in the preliminary stages of her death, demanding their attention while positioning them as witnesses to her impending demise (Niecieza 47). Does the framing make the audience an accessory? A witness? Both? By turning the pages, they are active participants and witnesses. They are both spectators to violence as a form of entertainment. What does it mean to watch a woman die brutally at the hands of representative agents of America? If said person belongs to a

country and faith that your nation has been at war with, it can be viewed as collateral damage, especially if she has been objectified up to this point. The Veil has been dehumanized up to now—her attire, power, and name embody an idea—a stereotype, a symbol of Islam and Iraq, as opposed to a person.

The humanization of The Veil occurs by adding layers like, first, vulnerability to a one-dimensional coded, imagined Muslim. The Veil yelled out “N—No—” in response to being set ablaze (Nicieza 47). Her plea marks the first time she is presented as defenseless and scared, humanistic emotions that are relatable and accessible for the reader. Second, The Veil is further humanized by the inhumanity of her killer, Pyro, whose cruelty undermines any perceived ethical duty. His sadistic behaviour—mocking her, setting her on fire—makes him monstrous and, by extension, America, and thus functions to rehabilitate our sense of her humanity. Lastly, The Veil’s pleas to fellow members of Desert Sword fall on deaf ears, leaving her abandoned: **“BLACK RAAZER? ARABIAN KNIGHT? SOMEONE?”** (Nicieza 47). How does the humanization of The Veil impact what it now means to watch a woman die brutally at the hands of American superheroes? The discourse surrounding her death transitions from eye-for-eye to circumstantial; summed up as unfortunately, she chose the wrong group and ideals. To some degree, she shifts from villain to victim, but never to hero. Her death removes heroism from both teams’ grasp as well as the nations they serve. Ironically, her death humanized her in a way her life couldn’t.

The Veil and Salima both largely conform to the damsel in distress trope, where a young woman (is) in danger” and “rescued by a man.” Both women find themselves facing death, and although confident and capable, The Veil cries out for two male

members to save her. Salima was saved previously by The Blue Beetle, who was attempting to rescue her once again. The two women were also the only members of their respective groups to die. The need to be saved combined with their short life turn them into sites for the heroism of others while rendering the women superfluous.

Salima's death, like The Veil's before her, also signifies a form of propaganda, but it reaffirms American superiority instead of subverting it. The resolution to her story begins after she is jailed by the mullah for claiming to be a messenger, saved by American interventionism in the form of Blue Beetle, flees from the protective net, and finds herself alone with her fellow citizens. They eventually stone her to death for blasphemy, the same charge levied by the mullah, all due to her being a woman, which was a disqualifier from being accepted as a messenger and/or Mullah.

Three major points of departure between the deaths of Salima and The Veil are who kills them, the role gender played in their deaths, and how Salima's death is imagined as opposed to presented vividly and graphically. Salima is killed by her countrymen for attempting to lead while female, as evidenced by their reaction to her claim of being chosen to lead people into the future: A woman (over 40) in a brown hijab with frowning eyebrows says, "*SHE SPEAKS **BLASPHEMY!***" (Wein 20); a man (over 40) with a moustache and dark hair, dressed in blue with frowning eyebrows and clenched teeth, says, "*AYE—**BLASPHEMY!!!***" (Wein 20); and in front of him is an older woman (over 50 based on wrinkles) in a brown niqab with frowning eyebrows who declares, "***BLASPHEMY!!!!***" (Wein 20). Salima's fate is sealed; she has been found guilty of blasphemy, and the comments and subsequent actions of her countrymen represented by this excerpt speak to how she was condemned to death; a woman, in a

brown hijab, bending down, reaching for a large rock, states, “*AND SUCH SIN CANNOT GO UNPUNISHED!*” (Wein 20).

The story of Salima’s death concludes on Panel No. 6. This panel takes up over half of the page. It is a picture of the front page of a newspaper called “...NAL TRIBUNE.” The headline reads, “WOMAN STONED TO DEATH” (Wein 20). There are three titles for articles on this page. To the right of the photo “UNARMED WOMAN MURDERED BY ANGRY MOB,” to the left of the photo “MYSTERIOUS COSTUMED FIGURE DISAPPEARS IN CLOUD OF SMOKE,” below the photo “GORBACHEV SUBMITS NEW TREATY PLAN” (Wein 20). The English writing suggests it is a western news outlet. The titles are listed in order of how large or thick the font appears, suggesting a hierarchy of importance, with “Woman Murdered” being the most significant. The writing in the article has a shattered style or appears like how something prints when ink is low or unreadable (Wein 20).

Salima’s dead body is pictured with a purple tint, which symbolizes nobility, power, ambition, dignity, devotion, peace, and independence (“Colour Column: Violet”). These qualities are embodied by Salima, and although seemingly positive to many, they were a liability to a Muslim woman seeking a new path. Her legs are crossed, and her arms are outstretched, one to the side and the other up, near her head, palms open, head tilted down to the side, and eyes closed. The position of her body is reminiscent of Jesus on the cross. Based upon Christian iconography, this situates her as a sacrificial lamb, much like Jesus, both of whom sacrificed themselves for their people, transforming her into a g-d-like figure. This also underscores the lens through which the makers construct these Muslim characters. Surrounding her are shadowy figures. This

operates as a site of meaning because the shadow, which represents the evil aspect of human nature, derives from the conventional representations of light and darkness (Harnsberger). In this instance, the shadowy figures are Iranians, her fellow country people who she was devoted to but killed her. The association of evil with Iranians in this newspaper illuminates the role that mass media plays in propagating hatred by framing things without context—their own involvement in her death—to serve their narrative of the cruelty of the Iranian regime and the violent nature of Islam, both of which, by comparison give credence to American supremacy and righteousness.

Salima and The Veil's deaths illuminate how they face domestic and foreign threats and that those who adhere to specific religious and/or nationalistic beliefs are willing to kill Muslim women to support these beliefs. On the other hand, their deaths operate as counterpropaganda to orientalist stereotypes that Muslim women are timid or controlled by men, as evidenced by the strength, conviction, courage, and determination they possess and/or exhibit to fight for what they believe in regardless of the consequences and the limitations others—male counterparts—attempt to place on them.

In the case of The Veil and Salima, America is both the perpetrator and accessory to murder, literally as evidenced by Pyro's killing of The Veil, and figuratively regarding Salima based on The Blue Beetle's comments after finding her dead: "OH, SALIMA... WHAT HAVE I ***DONE*** TO YOU?" (Wein 20). Beetle's admission functions as an allegory for American interventionism abroad; it symbolizes the consequences of American foreign policy, whether intended to free others or an attempt to dominate them. Independent of intent, these approaches result in the deaths of citizens from other countries. Beetle's words echo the sentiment that his actions (foreign interference)

resulted in her demise. These comments propagate the idea that America has blood on its hands and complicate assumptions about superheroes and supervillains in times of war and/or geopolitical conflict, suggesting that ultimately there are no good guys!

The panels, also referred to as “frames” (McCloud 99), leading to Salima’s death and those featuring Beetle’s reaction differ in shape and volume; the former is portrait (vertical) style and consists of four panels, whereas the latter is landscape (horizontal) and is comprised of two panels, which produces different effects on the reader (see fig.13). McCloud contends that “the panel...[is] comics most important *icon!*,” marking it vital terrain for analysis (98). Neil Cohn notes that portrait-shaped panels disrupt the standard “horizontal reading path, forcing the reader’s eye to move top-to-bottom, which slows down the pace and draws attention, increasing tension and dramatic effect” (97). It has this effect because we are accustomed to processing time “on a line moving “left-to-right” (McCloud 97). This pace is further slowed by the additional panels in this section (McHenry), which would also contribute to and heighten the intensity.



Figure 13: Len Wein, *The Blue Beetle* no. 20, 1986.

Conversely, Beetle's reaction to her murder is visually expressed through fewer panels—two—and by using landscape (horizontal)-shaped frames. The fewer the number of frames, the more it operates to “[quicken] the pace” (McHenry), as does the layout—portrait—because “our field of vision opens up to capture everything that is in front of us” (Descours), resulting in less processing time. The impact of these different panels extends beyond the aesthetic; it has consequences for the audience emotionally and intellectually. The varying time and the experience processing these panels—slow vs. fast and unnatural vs. natural—results in different reactions: The portrait requires a cerebral approach based upon, as noted earlier, the fact that the reader is

unaccustomed to such a reading path and thereby requires processing time, whereas the landscape is visceral, because it is how we are accustomed to reading (McCloud 97; Cohn 97). Consequently, the reader is forced to take more time and engage in a more layered analysis to digest Salima's murder at the hands of her own people than the Beetle's responsibility in said event. It forces the reader to contemplate the impact of Islamic extremism while being asked to gloss over the impact of America's interventionist policies embodied by the Beetle's role in her demise. This renders the panels outlining the death of Salima as propaganda that propagates orientalist stereotypes. In contrast, the speed and length of the frames capturing the Beetle's reaction and expression of responsibility is quicker, lessening the time the reader has to meditate on his role, thereby reducing these landscape panels as counterpropaganda to criticism of America's geopolitical stance and/or actions.

In totality, on the surface, the death of Salima is the result of her faithfulness to G-d, whereas The Veil is murdered due to terrorist activities in support of her nation. The fact that both die despite their differences—budding hero vs. villain, secular vs. religious speaks to the fact that Muslim women are destined for the same fate at the hands of western writers regardless of their constitution or actions. To a degree, it affirms that western comic book publishers paint them all with the same brush. It also propagates the idea that Muslim women are not destined for super heroism, fortifying their position as “the other.” Salima and The Veil are oppressed by both religious and secular figures who “other” them based on their gender. However, the ultimate oppressor is two-fold: orthodox attitudes produced by religious and cultural norms as well as western interference in Muslim lives.

Salima's death both reaffirms and challenges Islamic stereotypes and tropes. As previously noted, the former is enacted by having her stoned to death—a practice attributed to, and weaponized against, Muslims in Western media—whereas the latter, demonstrated her resolve, fearlessness, and independence in the face of impending death, dismantling such tropes as “the repressed Muslim woman.” Karunakaran's lens, context, and analysis expand and inform our understanding of the representation of Muslims by non-Muslims in the West during times of geopolitical conflicts, but she failed to take into account Salima's acts of leadership and defiance when declaring that she embodies “the stereotype of the submissive veiled woman” (3). Submissive to whom? She reinforces her statement by saying, “Her character was riddled with misogynistic and Islamophobic tropes in those two appearances alone.” The latter is true, but the former is too reductive and doesn't acknowledge that defying religious authorities and challenging perceptions of women as neither leaders nor messengers are behaviours not compatible with a submissive religious woman. Salima can believe in and submit to G-d's will while dismissing religious figures and challenging social norms such as gender roles. People are not so binary, they are this and that, not this or that. Salima can follow G-d's will (faith) yet reject the Mullah's interpretation of Islam (religion).

Given the shortcomings and limits to the representations of Salima and *The Veil*, the issue of alternate approaches to how Muslims, women in particular, could be depicted comes to the forefront. Lynn identifies the root problem behind the representation of Muslims by declaring “The Crux of The Problem: Writing about Us, Without Us.’ Lynn's proposed approach could reorient the reader's lens, mitigating the effects of two components: temporal and spatial conditions and bias as well as

unconscious bias. Muslim writers are not immune to either. The temporal and spatial conditions would impact them, but differently, providing readers with insight from a Muslim perspective. Also, as human beings, we all have our biases. They tend to be linked to racial, nationalistic, or religious identity. Muslim writers would not be immune, but they would be expanding the representation of their community and would answer Lynn's call to have the people represent themselves. Pre-9/11 depictions of Muslim characters were shaped by long-standing Orientalist tropes, as well as geopolitical conflicts between the United States and the Arab and Muslim world. The events of the 9/11 terrorist attacks ushered in an era of representation that both reproduced existing stereotypes and, interestingly, began to challenge them. This chapter informs our understanding of the portrayal of Muslims in superhero comics prior to the events of 9/11, which will contextualize any differences and similarities in the representations of Muslims and Islam post-9/11 investigated in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR – AFTER 9/11

The post-9/11 climate united America as a country in that it collapsed identity based on geography, like state and/or region, north and south, as well as party affiliations initially. The attack on New York and Washington was viewed as an attack on the whole nation. Conversely, the climate eventually divided the country along party lines when it came to who and/or what was to blame; Republicans tended to situate religion, Islam to be specific, as well as democratic principles such as freedom of speech and press and multiculturalism, as the root cause for “their” hatred of America, whereas many liberals pointed to said attacks as reactionary to American foreign policy, the US’s intervention into Muslim and/or Arab lands, and its alliance/support of Israel in their war with the Palestinians. The country had three war fronts: the foreign menace represented by Muslim countries as well as the enemy within, Muslim-Americans and/or Muslims in America, while simultaneously trying to protect some members of that community domestically. These divisions extended to popular culture. It was within this climate that *Holy Terror* (2011) and *Johnny Jihad* (2003) were published.

On Tuesday, September 11, just prior to 8:30 am on a beautiful fall day, nineteen members of Al Qaeda seized four commercial airplanes on United States soil (Imperial War Museums). Two aircraft were deliberately crashed into New York’s World Trade Center’s Twin Towers resulting in the collapse of both structures (Imperial War Museums). A third plane struck the Pentagon, which sits near Washington, DC (Imperial War Museums). The fourth plane went down in the countryside of Pennsylvania, following the actions of the crew and passengers, who confronted the hijackers onboard, stopping it from reaching an additional target thought to be 1600

Pennsylvania Avenue (Imperial War Museums). In total, over 3000 men, women, and children were murdered. This fractured the psyche of the populace, as they felt vulnerable, afraid, and ill-prepared. It was seen through a nationalist lens, as an attack against all citizens as well as a strike against their way of life—freedom and democracy—by “the other,” amounting to a clash of civilizations: Western vs. Middle Eastern, Judeo-Christianity vs. Islam.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks created the conditions for the righteous hatred of Muslims by Americans. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, “the DOJ [had] investigated more than 350 backlash-related criminal complaints, resulting in more than 70 state and local criminal prosecutions and 12 federal prosecutions” (United States Department of Justice 7). Once violence-based incidents subsided, expressions of hatred appeared in the sphere of education and employment (United States Department of Justice 4). Specifically, in the school system, the report outlined incidents of harassment targeting Muslim students, whereas in the employment sector, issues pertained to the prohibition of religious head coverings, denial of unpaid time off for religious pilgrimage, and the refusal to accommodate work schedules for religious observation (United States Department of Justice 9-11).

In addition to a legalistic response, the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice formulated a plan to confront “the new wave of violence and discrimination” (United States Department of Justice 4). First, leaders issued statements designed to “remind Americans that Muslims and Arabs and Sikhs and South Asians . . . were also victims of the September 11th attacks, and they were also first responders. “Leaders, then, proceeded to issue a warning that illegal acts would be prosecuted” (United States

Department of Justice 5). Second, they actively engaged in “outreach to vulnerable people in communities...to identify issues and concerns” (United States Department of Justice 5). Lastly, they coordinated efforts and communication between “law enforcement and civil rights agencies across the federal government and at all levels of state and local government” (United States Department of Justice 6). Collectively, the Justice Department’s actions sought to protect American Muslims and mend divisions.

These attacks also reshaped American foreign policy, driven by two objectives: to hold those responsible accountable and to prevent further attacks in the future from transpiring. This led to the invasion of Afghanistan, a previous ally—the nation they held responsible for the attacks—and the subsequent change in its regime. Merely nine days after the terrorists struck the homeland, on September 20, then President George Walker Bush proclaimed a “War on Terror,” pronouncing that the mission to eradicate terrorism was the responsibility of all nations (Imperial War Museums). On October 7, less than 30 days after the 9/11 attacks, a trio consisting of the “American, British, and Afghan United Front,” known as the “Northern Alliance,” joined forces “to destroy Al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime that had harboured the terrorist group in Afghanistan” (Imperial War Museums). Before the end of the following month, they succeeded in toppling the Taliban leading to “a new transitional Afghan government” backed by a “UN-mandated multinational force” (Imperial War Museums). Said force was responsible for “help[ing] to secure Kabul and assist the new administration” (Imperial War Museums). As is the case with any war, this conflict was divisive both domestically and abroad. In the US, the war on terror produced two competing narratives within the larger discourse: safety versus freedom. The internal threat to

freedom represented by the US government's surveillance is contrasted by the external threat posed by Islamic terrorism. Internationally, the war on terror expanded into Iraq in 2003 for the stated objective of removing Saddam and destroying the Iraqi cache of Weapons of Mass Destruction (BBC). American boots on Muslim lands combined with the release of the images of abused Iraqi prisoners held at Abu Ghraib in May 2004 and the government's admission of the torture tactics like waterboarding used on accused Al Qaeda figure Abu Zubaydah during his stay at the Guantanamo Bay prison served to inflame Muslims across the globe. It fed [into] Al-Qaeda's narrative that the West is at war with Islam (CBS News; ABC News; Pandith). America's actions were driven by their foreign policy, and the controversy surrounding them was weaponized by "Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden "as 'proof' of American hostility toward Muslims" (Pandith). America sought to counter-propagate this messaging "through global outreach to Muslims, both via governments and at the community level" (Pandith).

The temporal and spatial conditions produced by 9/11 cultivated a sense of us vs. them. This sentiment was explicitly stated by Democratic senator Hillary Clinton twelve days after 9/11 when she declared, "Every nation has to either be with us or against us" (Garfinkle). One week later, on September 20, President George Bush echoed this position when he uttered, "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Address to Congress and American people). Dr. Samantha Bhandari believes this binary mentality "is dangerous...[and] it often causes you to make decisions based on subconscious discrimination instead of leaving room for understanding and growth" (WebMD). It places people in an emotional, reactionary state where critical and analytical thinking

can't breathe, can't take hold.

Although American officials sought to differentiate between Muslims and Islamic terrorists, the post-9/11 climate was a hostile one for many Muslims in the West because they represented “them,” “the other” in this equation. The othering of Muslims, combined with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the image of Muslim prisoners being tortured and dehumanized, painted America as villains in the eyes of many Muslims, and many Muslims were seen in the same light by America.

This chapter examines the issue of comics as a propagandistic tool in post-9/11 America by placing two graphic novels, *Holy Terror* (2011) and *Johnny Jihad* (2003), into conversation with one another based on their shared subject matter, terrorism.^{80 81} Both novels are explicit in their approach; one is designed to function as anti-Muslim propaganda, while the other narrative operates largely but not exclusively as counterpropaganda to reductive portrayals. The role of causality is a central theme in both works; however, it is a significant point of departure, evidenced by differing focuses on the cause of terrorism. *Holy Terror* frames American foreign policy, such as the war against terrorism, as reactive to the threat posed by Islamists, whereas *Johnny Jihad* assigns blame for Islamic terrorism and radicalization to America's foreign policy and culture of violence. These oppositional stances reflect the two primary arguments within the discourse surrounding the root cause behind Islamic terrorism in relation to America. The issue of righteous hatred is at the forefront of both texts. *Holy Terror* propagates it, while *Johnny Jihad* seeks to confront this practice and discredit it. As such, they embody propaganda and counter-propaganda, signaling how both operate as propaganda, just each in a different form

Holy Terror was published by Legendary Comics, in 2011. It was written and illustrated by Frank Miller, renowned for creating *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* in 1985. *Holy Terror* tells the story of a vigilante, The Fixer, and his sidekick, Natalie Stack's, war on Islamic terrorism. The two met when The Fixer caught Natalie committing a burglary, leading to a battle between the two. Shortly thereafter, they are interrupted by a terrorist attack. They join forces to try to prevent future attacks from being launched and to kill all Islamic terrorists.

Johnny Jihad was released in 2003 by NBM Publishing, two years after 9/11 and eight years prior to *Holy Terror*. It was written and illustrated by Ryan Inzana. It focuses on how people are indoctrinated and the root causes behind terrorism. *Johnny Jihad* tells the story of John Sendel, a Caucasian American teenager from Trenton, New Jersey, who feels disconnected, isolated, and alienated due to his dysfunctional environment and incidents of bullying. He finds community and belonging with another outcast, Salim. This relationship eventually transforms John from a typical American youth into Abdullah Akbar, an Islamic terrorist. This text was published first, but it is sometimes examined second in this analysis because *Holy Terror* entered the popular cultural zeitgeist as part of the discourse surrounding the representation of Islam post-9/11, whereas *Johnny Jihad* was critically acclaimed but not widely read or known. This arrangement permits *Johnny Jihad* to be used as a means to interrogate Miller's *Holy Terror*.

Johnny Jihad and *Holy Terror* are exemplary graphic novels to examine post-9/11 portrayals of Muslims because they encapsulate the geopolitical temperature in America at the time. They mirror and/or co-opt two of the most prominent and vastly

opposing views within the discourse surrounding one of the root causes behind the war on terror: 9/11 is a response to American foreign policy versus it reflects Islamic extremists' hatred of the West. Both operate as explicit forms of propaganda: *Holy Terror* by co-opting the latter and *Johnny Jihad* through perpetuating the former. These standpoints are vital terrain for investigating propaganda and the representation of Muslims within a post-9/11 context.

Also, the medium itself—the graphic novel—inherits greater currency than its comic book relative due to the privilege of words over pictures, which is seen as more literary in nature. Some may argue that there are graphic novels that do not contain words, citing such works as *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan or Chris Raschka's *Ball by Daisy*. However, this fails to acknowledge that most graphic novels house words, especially those popular examples most synonymous with the medium, like *Watchmen* (Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons); *V for Vendetta* (Alan Moore and David Lloyd); *Fun House* (Alison Bechdel); *The Dark Knight* (Frank Miller); *Dragon Ball* (Akira Toriyama); *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo); and *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi). Another factor behind the medium's elevated status in relation to the comic book is that graphic novels have received greater critical acclaim, and some view it as the domain for tackling more complex issues such as the Holocaust and LGBTQ2S+ rights, as evidenced by *Maus* winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 and *Fun House* being recognized with major literary awards, including the Eisner for Best Reality-Based Work.

Ideas and Purpose

The ideas and purpose behind comics are located through the emotional and philosophical state of the creators (McCloud 170). McCloud's contention is in reference to comic books but applies to and informs our understanding of the contrasting mindsets behind creators Frank Miller, writer of *Holy Terror*, and Ryan Inzana, author of *Johnny Jihad*. These two diverging narratives belong to the domain, in the case of Miller, of the visceral, producing an emotional response to the events of 9/11, which propagates righteous hatred of "the oriental." Alternatively, Inzana viewed said event through a philosophical lens that sought to have readers meditate on the root causes behind the attacks, especially America's role and responsibility. Miller's approach reaffirms American foreign policy pertaining to their post-9/11 war on terror while Inzana challenges it. Their positionality is reflected in their respective works. The ideas and purpose behind these objects are exposed through two mechanisms, one explicit and the other implicit: stated authorial intent (interviews with or comments by the creator) and a content analysis, later, of the textual elements with respect to their meaning.

Frank Miller's ideas are shaped by his view that comics are propaganda, Muslims are monstrous and a threat to America's existence, and he confesses that his purpose was to anger his readers and indoctrinate them into the us vs. them binary. Inzana's lens is cultivated through a cultural perspective, one that sees America's normalization of violence and use of it to resolve issues as root causes behind why American converts to Islam engage in and/or are attracted to extremism. He also contends Islam is misrepresented and draws comparisons between jihadist and American leadership.

Frank Miller situates comics as propaganda and can be seen to celebrate said role: "Superman punched out Hitler. So did Captain America. That's one of the things they're there for ... It is, not to put too fine a point on it, a piece of propaganda" (Flood). Miller also described his narrative, where The Fixer, "a hero...[like] Dirty Harry, fights with Al Qaeda," as a "piece of propaganda" based on the idea "they want us to die" and that [he] "hoped...accomplished its purpose in angering people" (Boucher; NPR; NPR; Flood).

This speaks to how comics are enlisted to propagate a binary between good and evil during times of conflict, which is driven by geopolitical conditions: then—WWII—and now the war on Islamic terror. In an interview with NPR in 2007, Dar notes that one of the ideas Miller propagates is that Islam, not just Al Qaeda, is uncivilized and barbaric, using orientalist stereotypes and references to 9/11 to legitimize his claims:

Let's finally talk about the enemy. For some reason, nobody seems to be talking about who we're up against, and the sixth century barbarism that they actually represent. These people saw people's heads off. They enslave women, they genitally mutilate their daughters, they do not behave by any cultural norms that are sensible to us. I'm speaking into a microphone that never could have been a product of their culture, and I'm living in a city where three thousand of my neighbors were killed by thieves of airplanes, they never could have built...They want us to die" (Miller 104-105).

Miller's view of Muslims is baked into his work, evidenced by Ijaz, Awais, and Ali Nadeem's claim that *Holy Terror* is "presenting [a] western] perspective and ignore[ing] the input of the East. So, it endorses the Orientalism concept... and the book constructed the messages according to a specific mindset to frame Muslims as negative" (795). If Miller had narrowed his commentary to Al Qaeda and similar such terrorist groups, he could have substantiated his claims with clear evidence. Instead, he reduces all Muslims to an orientalist stereotype, which gives credence to Ijaz', Awais', and Ali Nadeem's objections that Miller's work is Islamophobic. Their critique of Miller's work is shared by Spencer Ackerman, who, writing for *Wired*, decried Miller's work as "one of the most appalling, offensive, and vindictive comics of all time." He refers to the novel as a "screed against Islam" (Ackerman). Ackerman takes exception to Miller's reductive approach charging that the author is "completely uninterested in any nuance or empathy toward 1.2 billion people he conflates with a few murderous conspiracy theorists."

Inzana, like the aforementioned scholars, challenges Miller's reductive view of Muslims; he objects to their portrayal as adhering to a one-dimensional religion of violence and the root cause behind terror. Inzana counters Miller's characterization of Islam by shifting blame for extremism from the religion to the West based on its normalization of violence, which he contends creates both the appeal and the conditions for indoctrination into extremist violent groups. In his preface titled "The Basis of Inspiration," he contends that "the peaceful aspects of Islam are underplayed while extremist indoctrination becomes the selling point to these youths," like the character Johnny Jihad in the novel. Inzana assigns blame for the appeal of extremism on

American cultural norms and leadership. First, proclaiming it to be a “cultural phenomenon (embracing violence -video games etc.) which is directly linked to a society that has teenagers engaging in shooting sprees in their high schools. It is a generation of children that sees violence as an acceptable alternative” which “not only desensitizes people but promotes it [violence] as a form of conflict resolution” (*Johnny Jihad* Preface). Hueso Taveras of *The Independent* credits Inzana’s work for succeeding in many areas but labels Inzana’s argument that “media violence begets real violence...simplistic.” ⁸²

Second, he directly points at American foreign policy and leadership, as opposed to “Islam’s terroristic nature,” as expressions and/or purveyors of violence and conflict. Inzana then creates a moral equivalency between the US government and those that seek its destruction, stating, “President Bush believes that only through war can peace be achieved in Iraq, thus setting an example that war is the answer. Ironically, many young jihadists, in the United States and abroad, believe in that exact same thing” (Inzana Preface).

According to Inzana, it is these two factors—American culture and leadership that embrace extreme violence—that make “organizations like Al Qaeda and Jamaat UI Fuqra... very enticing to young, disenfranchised youth in Middle Eastern countries as well as in the United States” (Preface). The Us (Americans, heroes) vs. Them (Muslims/Arabs, villains) binary perpetuated by Miller is collapsed by Inzana’s contention that President Bush and the young jihadist are two sides of the same coin. This dismantles impressions of right and wrong while undermining American foreign policy pertaining to its war on terror. Miller’s work aims to propagate the “otherness” of

Muslims compared to *Johnny Jihad*, perhaps a move towards serving as counterpropaganda to the dehumanization of Muslims. The restoration of their humanity is a direct intervention into a key component in the practice of “othering,” specifically portraying a group like theirs as inhuman.

Temporal and Spatial Conditions

Holy Terror was published three days after the 10th anniversary of 9/11. The timing, in concert with designating Al Qaeda terrorists as the antagonist, the same entity behind the real-life attack, functioned as connective tissues that bind the text to the terrorist strikes. Despite being a decade removed from the event, there was a lot of press and ceremonies as this anniversary arrived, which functioned to create a ‘real’ post-traumatic climate filled with anxiety, fear, and hate. The timing of the release preyed upon people’s emotions, rendering them malleable (to indoctrination) to the messaging of the Islamic terrorist. On the other hand, *Johnny Jihad* was printed in June 2003, just twenty-one months after 9/11 and eight years prior to *Holy Terror*. Like Miller’s graphic novel, it reflects the temporal and spatial climate, and its connection to 9/11 is explicit based on Inzana’s admission that John Walker Lindh, known as “The American Taliban,” was the inspiration behind *Johnny Jihad* (Preface).⁸³

In addition to its critique of American culture, *Johnny Jihad* has been described by Caitlin Forbes, a scholar in Muslim American literature, as “fram[ing] Islamic extremism as a reaction to orientalist attitudes. By tying the prevalence of historically orientalist attitudes in US foreign policy to Islamic extremism” (129). Proposing such a relationship collapsed the “us vs. them” binary and could be seen to victim blame, but the timing created enough distance from the event to avoid extreme, raw emotions for

some but not all.

Johnny Jihad was the exception to the unwritten rule that a country and its citizens, including those in the media, need to rally behind their nation during times of war. One way of achieving said goal was to propagate notions of heroes and villains, right and wrong, and good and bad based on nationalism and vilifying those seen as a threat to the American homeland. Post-9/11 comic books, like graphic novels such as *Holy Terror*, conformed to this practice by portraying Muslims in a reductive manner. Keith Booker, author of *Comics through Time: A History of Icons, Idols, and Ideas* notes that within this period, the artform routinely cast Islamic fundamentalists as the new “stock enemy” (149). Stromberg outlined many instances of Arab and/or Muslim characters presented in such a fashion. Specifically citing examples of them portrayed as suicide bombers in X-Men no. 133 (Morrison 2002) and slave traders Dar 108; Stromberg 583). Even so, the medium was credited for the creation of numerous characters like Dust, The Doctor, G.W. Bridge, Excalibur, and Hamza Rashad, who “resist stereotypical or racist configurations of Arabs and/or Muslims as terrorists, submissive veiled women, and so on” (Stromberg 576). This speaks to how representation is responsive and reactive to the temporal and spatial conditions in which it is constructed, permitting very different texts like *Holy Terror* and *Johnny Jihad* to co-exist.

Within the broader popular cultural landscape, do pre-9/11 representations of Muslims in the orientalist tradition endure? Dar claims they do, noting that “Sinister, violent, and stereotypical depictions of Muslims and Arabs...continue to sustain today with films like *United 93* and hit television shows like *24* (Shaheen, 2003; Faber, 2007).

While it is true that both the film and the show portray Muslims in a reductive fashion, there is a difference between the representation of fictional characters and actual people that Dar's analysis does not address. *United 93* is reflecting the actions of real people that have been documented as opposed to constructing fictional characters. While the effect may be the same, the cause is vastly different. Causality is the context that gets lost in the grouping of these two objects. It is a false equivalency based on this factor. Perpetuating stereotypes based on fictional characters is not the same as portraying real events.

In *24*, Muslims are portrayed as terrorists, but Dar once again fails to provide a broader context. Brigitte Gerogi-Findlay explains that "viewers are coopted into producing 'connections between Middle Easterners, Arabs, Islam, and terrorism' (Takacs 91), only to learn that these suspects are merely pawns or a front for Euro-American or European terrorists" (20). Moreover, the series employs two methods to challenge reductive portrayals. First, by ensuring that for every "foreign" enemy there is a "domestic" one" (Gerogi-Findlay 21). Second, the show foregrounds "a "good" Arab or Muslim American character ready to fight for the U.S." to balance out "bad Arab or Muslim characters" (Gerogi-Findlay 21).

Post-9/11 films also seem to have undergone a transformation in how they position Muslim characters. Jack Shaheen, a prominent figure in the discourse surrounding representations of Muslim characters, stated in reference to pre-9/11 portrayals, "that almost all Hollywood depictions of Arabs are bad ones (Reel Bad Arabs 182).⁸⁴ However, in *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11* (2008), Shaheen contends that a significant number of post-9/11 Hollywood films depict Arabs in a less

prejudiced manner (Elouardaoui 5). Shaheen reports that “refreshingly, about a third of the post-9/11 films [...] a total of 29, projected worthy Arabs and decent Arab Americans: Arab champions—men and women—are displayed in 19 movies; Arab Americans appear as decent folk in 10 of 11 films” (Shaheen XV).⁸⁵ Brigitte Gerogi-Findlay and Shaheen’s stance is not intended to dismiss the fact that there are still reductive and orientalist stereotypes of Muslims in mass media. For instance, “Innocence of Muslims,” a short film produced in 2012, “mocks Islam’s Prophet Muhammad” (Socolovsky). This issue is complicated, nuanced, and not binary. In totality, the representation of Muslims in television and film is not good or bad, but both. What is clear is that there appears to be an evolution from the one-dimensional portrayals in pre-9/11 popular culture.

Aside from film and television, pro wrestling also experienced a transfiguration. Famous for cultivating characters like The Iron Sheik that embodied the foreign menace trope, this popular cultural staple was also both reductive and progressive in its representation. The primary factor that determined which category a wrestler fell into was identity: were they a wrestler who happened to be Muslim or a Muslim wrestler riddled with stereotypes, and were they a hero or a villain? The Muslim wrestler was personified by Muhammad Hassan, whereas the latter is encapsulated by Sami Zayn and Mustafa Ali.

On December 13, 2004, Hassan appeared on *RAW*, World Wrestling Entertainment’s weekly program, accompanied by his manager, Daivari. He entered the world stage, interrupting the recently retired WWE legend ‘Mick Foley’s patriotic in-ring promo, where he is filmed holding up a military dog tag declaring how:

It was a great honor for me to be invited to the Pentagon to serve as a spokesman for the Department of Defense and their America Supports You campaign. Because I know that supporting the troops goes way beyond any kind of political affiliation, and so, I look at it as it will be one of the great privileges of my life to travel overseas and entertain the brave men and women who put their lives on the line for us every single day. because it is our brave men and women (WWE 2:21).

That's when Arabic music hits (Vocals + instrument) against a backdrop of a video screen showing their names in English and then Arabic. Uninvited and interrupting a patriotic pro-military speech with said music immediately situates them as villains based on post-9/11 sentiments and American foreign policy. This is evidenced by the fans greeting them with chants, in unison, of USA (WWE 3:30). Daivari responds with some comments in Arabic (WWE 3:42). After which he throws to Muhammad Hassan who addresses the audience stating:

I used to blindly support these troops, and I used to blindly support this country. Right up until 9/11. After 9/11, I was forced to open my eyes to the truth. And the truth is, it's people like us that are the real victims of this war. And the truth is that none of you people are real patriots because if you were, you would not support a war that promotes the unfair treatment of Arab-Americans. (WWE 3:58).

In response, Mick Foley begins his retort saying:

Alright, Okay, listen. I, I, I appreciate your passion, and I did listen, and I can see the sense in a couple of the things you say. Although by and large, I disagree strongly with almost every word. But isn't it wonderful that you live in a great country like the United States of America, where you are free to express your views, no matter how stupid they sound? (WWE 5:37).

Muhammad Hassan responds:

Good. Good. I'm glad I interrupted you because I am sick of hearing you express your admiration for these troops. These gutless cowards. These heartless infidels (WWE 6:30).

Mick Foley:

Now. Now, now, now you are pissing me off. You understand one thing. You got that right because brave men and women have bled, fought and died to give you the right to shoot your mouth off (WWE 6:44).

The confrontation persists with Foley citing service people who sacrificed themselves, to which Davari spews out Arabic. Till eventually Hassan grabs the mic and states, "How dare you lecture me on morality? You support an evil and unjust war" (WWE 7:26). Foley replies, "I support America, the home of the brave, the land of the free" (WWE 7:33). The situation descends into a near fight in the ring. Soon thereafter, once Hassan commences his in-ring career, he dons the keffiyeh, an icon of Arabic identity.

This exchange encapsulates two viewpoints within the discourse surrounding the post-9/11 war on terror: supporting the troops and the prejudicial treatment of Muslims in America during this period. However, Mick Foley, who advocates for the troops, does not treat these views completely as opposing and/or binary oppositions. This is evidenced by his acknowledgment that he can see “sense in a couple of things” Hassan mentioned; presumably, Foley is recognizing that it is unjust for Muslim-American citizens to be the target of hate and/or discrimination. However, in his next line, Foley quickly reaffirms his pro-America stance by declaring, “Although... I disagree strongly with almost every word.” These comments permit him to maintain his moral compass by supporting equal rights and the just treatment of all citizens—also a core American value—while simultaneously entrenching himself as a patriot. Foley also attempts to bridge the domestic divide among Americans by drawing a distinction between supporting the troops and party politics by stating, “I know that supporting the troops goes way beyond any kind of political affiliation.” Similarly, he never explicitly declares support for the war. For example, in response to Hassan’s claim that Foley supports an “unjust war,” he retorts, “I support America, the home of the brave, the land of the free.” Foley skillfully positions himself as a defender of the troops without defending America’s war on terror domestically and abroad. The need to walk this line speaks to a fractured and divided society where proud Americans of all stripes differ on their country’s approach to the events of 9/11, but many support their troops, who act out of duty.

The character of Muhammad Hassan was short-lived. Nearly seven months after his debut, Hassan disappeared from the squared circle after an extremely controversial segment that was broadcast right after a major terrorist attack, leading to the WWE

being castigated by mainstream media. The infamous segment began when Daivari and The Undertaker faced off in a bout aired on Smackdown that was recorded on July 4, 2005, as a harbinger to Hassan and The Undertaker's matchup at the forthcoming Great American Bash (Hunter). After The Undertaker effortlessly disposed of Daivari, "Hassan "prayed" at the ringside" to call forth five men in camouflage fatigues and ski masks (Hunter). These men strangled the Undertaker "with piano wire," enabling Hassan to "apply the camel clutch" (Hunter). Although pre-recorded, this segment "aired the following Friday — just hours after the terrorist bombings in London, England" (Hunter). The response was immediate and filled with disdain, as evidenced "by commentators in the *New York Post*, *Variety*" contending that the wrestling league "had sunk to an all-time low in search of ratings" (Hunter). This event and the subsequent response to it led to the demise of the character known as Muhammad Hassan.

This caricature had embodied many of the attributes associated with the orientalist stereotype: a Muslim and/or Arabic name and attire, terrorist activities, and anti-American expressions. All of which also served to position him as the other. Most troubling is that the person behind the character was Marc Copani, an Italian American from New York (Hunter). This speaks to how Hassan was imagined as a villain and designed based on geopolitics and American foreign policy. At the opposite end of the spectrum were wrestlers who happened to be Muslim, like Canadian wrestler Sami Zayn, of Lebanese descent, and Mustafa Ali, born in Illinois and of Pakistani Indian descent. Neither are billed from the Middle East, enter to ethnic and/or religious music, are typecast as orientalist villains, or dress in religious and/or ethnic attire —except for Ali who very briefly wore a keffiyeh. They are both larger stars with their respective

brands, WWE and TNA, and have enjoyed much more longevity than Hassan.

Holy Terror and *Johnny Jihad* were created in the same space that gave birth to characters like Muhammad Hassan. These objects are responsive to the spatial and temporal conditions produced by 9/11, as evidenced by setting their stories in a world where America is at war with Islamic terrorists. First, in *Holy Terror*, the western heroes appear in a fantastical place inspired by Gotham City which is a stand-in for New York, whereas *Johnny Jihad* is set in America and Afghanistan, all of which are sites related to the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent military response to said event. Second, the release date for *Holy Terror* combined with the inspiration behind *Johnny Jihad* are direct links to the temporal—9/11 and the aftermath. Lastly, representation of “the Muslim other” in mass media encapsulates the debates and discussions transpiring within this period.

Front Cover

Despite Miller and Inzana’s significantly different approaches to the issue and cause behind the events of 9/11, the front covers both heighten the threat posed by Islamic terrorism by positioning them with or next to weaponry, which legitimizes American foreign policy: the war on terror. The cover for *Holy Terror* features a mummy-styled figure jostling with and attempting to stab a man dressed in a superhero-like costume, whereas *Johnny Jihad*’s front cover is comprised of a polaroid picture of a man, next to a passport and a gun.

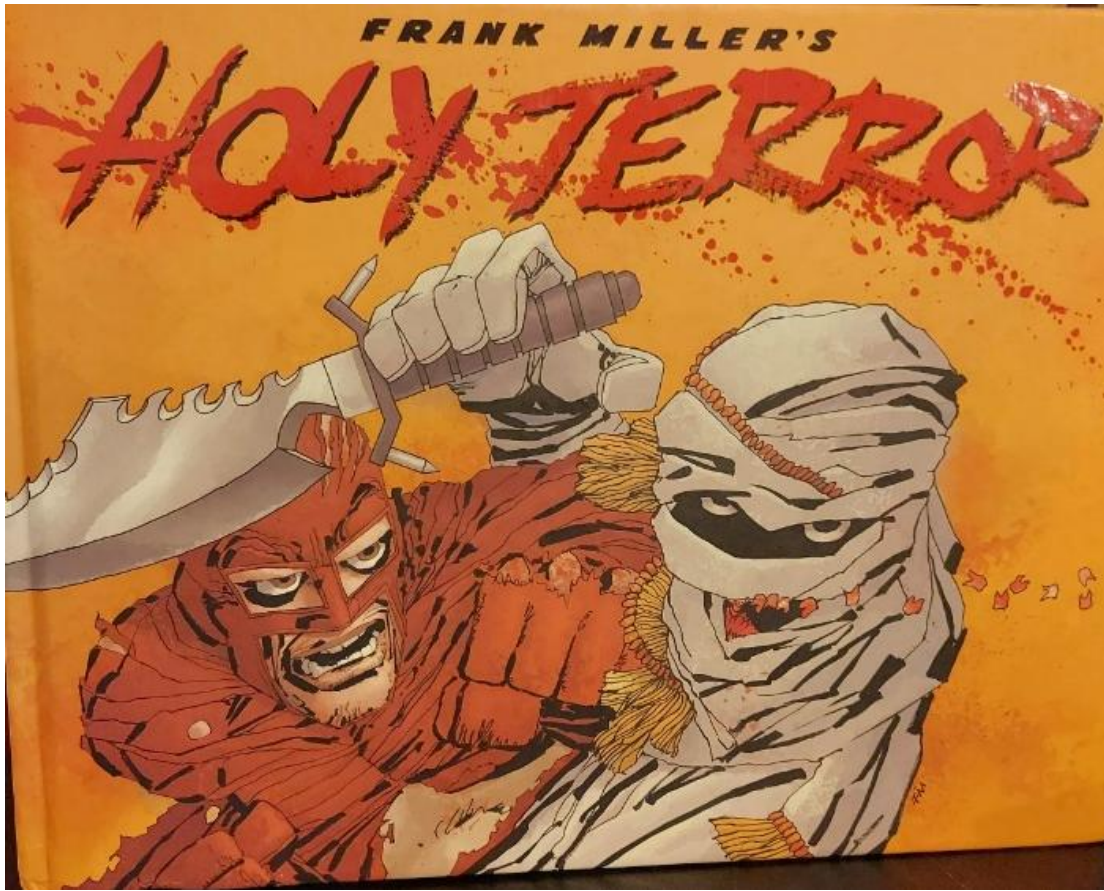


Figure 14: Frank Miller, *Holy Terror*, 2011.

The image of the antagonist's face in *Holy Terror*, reduced to eyes and broken and scattered teeth (see fig. 14), places it within McCloud's concept of the cartoon. This icon of the cartoon exists through abstraction when an image of the face (in this case) is removed from notions of the real (photo-realism) and situated within the conceptual (any and everyone). The most extreme example of iconic abstraction of the face is a circle, two dots, and a line (McCloud 30). Although the image has not been simplified to its maximum degree of abstraction, it does represent a form of cartooning. The antagonist's eyes emerge from darkness, as evidenced by the black background that fills the shape of the face. The blackness that connotes darkness may also be a

metaphor for a temporal state (dark ages) or as the embodiment of evil. The lack of human facial features, except for the eyes, situates him as inhuman, even monstrous. Miller attempts to “amplify meaning” by focusing the reader’s attention on a specific idea: in this instance, simplifying the face to that of a monster (McCloud 30).

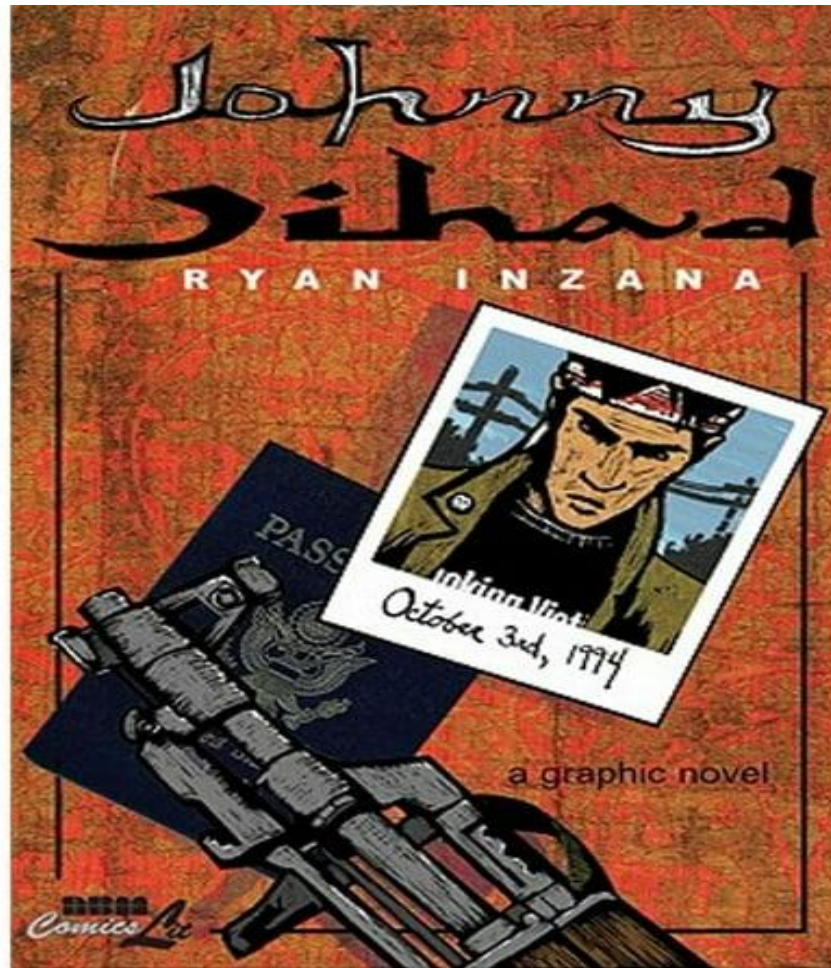


Figure 15: Ryan Inzana , *Johnny Jihad*, 2008.

On the front cover of *Johnny Jihad*, the picture of John appears inside a Polaroid photo (see fig. 15). This is not abstract; it is closer to realism than the cartoon-type image of The Fixer vs. the Mummy cover for *Holy Terror*. Technically, it is close to

photorealism. This humanizes John compared to the villain in *Holy Terror*. John's black, straight hair hangs over what appears to be a bandana. His face is uncovered, revealing certain facial features defined by shape and size that give him a unique identity and human qualities, such as small lips and a larger nose; his ears are pinned close to the side of his head. His clean-shaven face amplifies our view of his features.

Like the antagonist in *Holy Terror*, John's black eyes lessen the reader's sense of his humanity, making him "the other," something other than human. The colour situates him as an agent of death. Also, his upper lip and eyebrows both appear to be frowning, signaling anger. Together, these details, along with the weapon placed next to him, portray him as an angry monster that brings death.

Attire is one of the key components that fosters "othering" by amplifying difference. McCloud notes that clothing is a transformative agent that impacts how we perceive others (38). In many superhero narratives, clothing functions to situate Muslim characters within the orientalist stereotype. *Holy Terror* co-opts this tactic, while *Johnny Jihad* largely departs from it. Instead, Johnny's attire signifies the enemy within as opposed to the foreign menace. These contrasting approaches, in concert with how they are framed and body language, operate to propagate that, independent of attire, all Muslims are a threat, regardless of how religious or traditional they appear.

At first glance, it appears the 'monster' on the front cover of *Holy Terror* is presented wearing an item resembling a white keffiyeh, which is popular in some Arab countries. This appears to be where the monster assumes a religious identity. However, upon closer inspection, the length of the scarf, which extends to the lower half of the body, evokes images of the Egyptian Mummy, portrayed in popular culture as a living

monster. The mummy is a site of both folklore and fact where the identity of ancient Egyptian mummies is associated with present-day Egypt, which is home to a large Muslim population. The mummy's attire and the terrorist's face, juxtaposed with Miller's comments, serve to deepen the overall abstraction of the character to that of an inhuman being, but with a religious identity-Islam. The cultural attire—Egyptian—assigned to the protagonist, who is supposed to be a representative agent of Al Qaeda, which was based in Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan, not Egypt, speaks to Dar's contention that these objects exhibit a "disregard for cultural, religious, and political accuracy" and traffic in "crude and racist generalization[s]" that paint all "Muslims...[as] the same" (United Nations Security Council; Dar 102). Inversely, Johnny's attire can be seen to both humanize and dehumanize the subject. Johnny is wearing a brownish jacket with the collar up and a button of a skull-type image pinned to his left collar. The jacket is western-styled, fostering the sense he is one of us, while the skull button reaffirms the danger he embodies. He also has a white headband in black and red colours with Arabic writing on it. This foreign script is a feature that establishes difference compared to his other garments, creating a sense of him as "the other." The combination of Western clothing with Arabic writing creates a hybrid identity as a Western-Muslim and belongs to the realm of realism versus the mummy-type clothing that is fantastical, legitimizing the threat.,

Both characters, who also possess weaponry, have their head directed at the reader, which in the case of "The Mummy" represents a shift from the singular target (superhero) to the collective (readers). This act situates the threat within the broadest dimension of the discourse on terrorism by tapping into the "Us versus Them" binary,

which becomes a thread in the narrative.

Within the “Us versus Them” binary, we are left to identify, examine, and determine who represents ‘us’ in this equation. In *Holy Terror*, The Fixer’s attire, body language, and the way he is framed render him as the answer to the terrorist threat. The story’s protagonist, The Fixer, is a vigilante-styled anti-hero in the mold of Batman or the Punisher, which is not surprising in light of the fact that Batman was Miller’s first choice to take on Al Qaeda.⁸⁶

The Fixer stands between the threat that ‘us’, the public embodied through the reader, face from ‘them’ (the Islamic monster) and therefore is a representative agent of “US”. The Fixer is pictured from the waist up. His all-rustic red costume top resembles some type of robe, but what is evident is that the shape of the headgear was inspired by Batman’s cowl-type mask. The Fixer is constructed with colour, unlike the Mummy, who belongs to the realm of black and white, which are not colors but shades. The choice of red corresponds to conventions surrounding superhero protagonists; as McCloud notes, primary colors-red, blue, and yellow-have been historically assigned to superheroes such as Superman, Thor, and Spiderman (192). However, the rusty red may serve as a sign of his mood and role (McCloud 192). In this case, it is an indicator that The Fixer is not intended to be a traditional superhero, whereas the black and white colours (shades) chosen for the terrorist are typical, straightforward, and one-dimensional.

The Fixer is facing the terrorist threat head-on. The positioning of his body indicates his focus is limited to and fixated on fighting the terrorists. The Fixer’s punch to the terrorist’s face is an homage to Miller’s earlier stated admiration for wartime propaganda, such as the front cover of Captain America, where Cap. punches out

Hitler. Although 'The Fixer' is an example of cartooning where the image can represent anyone, the inclusion of features such as his nose, lips, skin, and gleaming white teeth adds a layer of detail that enhances our perception of his humanity compared with the inhuman way in which the terrorist is presented. He represents all of us versus the inhuman, orientalist enemy.

Both titles, *Holy Terror* and *Johnny Jihad*, embody the concept of Islamic terrorism and propagate the orientalist threat domestically and abroad. Titles are "symbols used to represent concepts, ideas, and philosophies" (McCloud 27). *Holy Terror* is written in blood-red letters with a black outline and spans across the top of the page, like a newspaper headline, as if capturing a historic event such as 9/11. Splatters of blood surround the title and appear carved out from the title itself, as evidenced by their proximity and the size of the splatters, which correlate to the sections missing from the title. It could symbolize the blood spilled and lives lost during 9/11. The style in concert with the words used can be read as Miller's philosophical take on Islam, as 'holy' is associated with religion and 'terror' can represent the terrorists behind 9/11.

Alternatively, *Johnny Jihad* conjured up associations with and/or memories of the American Taliban, John Walker Lindh. Walker was a symbol of indoctrination; as such, the title proposes that inculcation is based in part as a response to American foreign policy, as opposed to religious doctrine, that can transform Johnny America into Johnny Jihad. Moreover, the use of the term jihad, understood as "holy war," speaks to what's at stake, but the title's association with John Walker Lindh calls into question whether America is the victim, the perpetrator, or the embodiment of jihad (Britannica). Like *Holy Terror*, *Johnny Jihad* used the title juxtaposed with icons like a machine gun to establish

the threat as Islamic. Inzana employs Arabic-type font for the title combined with Arabic/Persian-styled patterns in the background, both of which situate *Johnny Jihad* in a specific location, the Arab world. The passport represents a key component required for a person, in this case Johnny Jihad, to travel to the Middle East, while the gun reveals the violent nature of his mission, serving as a connective tissue that binds the Middle East with terrorism. In addition, the date on the polaroid, October 3, 1994 reinforces his connection to extremist groups and/or terrorists in the Muslim world, as Afghanistan, his eventual destination, at this juncture, was controlled by competing Mujahadeen forces, who took over control of the government one year earlier, and would officially become the Taliban in 1995 (“A historical timeline of Afghanistan”).

Front covers privilege images, which permit and/or transmit an “instantaneous message,” which, unlike words, requires “no formal education to get the message” (McCloud 49). Pictures appeal to the visceral, the emotional, whereas words require the cerebral, more processing by the brain. Placing the reader in an emotional state is ideal for indoctrination into a propagandistic narrative. Both texts, through their visual vocabulary, communicate the idea of the orientalist terrorist, despite the two stories assigning blame to vastly different actors and factors. One of the most significant points of departure between the front covers for these texts is that Inzana shifts away from Miller’s superhero ‘good versus evil’ trope/ hero vs. villain binary. It is dismissive of such notions. Dismissive of such a simplistic interpretation of conflict. Instead, Inzana focuses upon two halves of a whole figure (Johnny): Johnny America and Johnny Jihad. By doing so, Inzana is shifting away from the notion of an external conflict between nations and/or religions and focusing on the internal struggle of both the person and the nation

(America) in terms of who they are and who they want to be. By asking the reader to look inwards, he is proposing the root causes behind terrorism are America and Americans, not the result of external factors or peoples. This operates to not only counter propagate Miller's stance but American foreign policy as well.

Representation

The portrayal of Muslims and Islam in *Holy Terror* and *Johnny Jihad* was manufactured during America's war on terror when US forces waged armed conflict with Iraq and Afghanistan. These representations were produced within a temporal and spatial environment that was navigating the repercussions of 9/11 on its populace and that determined its foreign policy. Both narratives are responsive to the attacks, with *Holy Terror* reducing Muslims to a singular concept: terrorist. Miller employs all three components used to 'other' a group. First, "acting like a certain group of people are all the same," as evidenced by attire, names, and degree of religiosity; second, "exaggerating the ways that the "Other" members in a group are different from us," that is expressed through their treatment of women and hatred of the West; and lastly, "acting like they aren't really human," which is achieved by their acts of terrorism and how they are presented as monstrous. Inzana's approach to representation differs greatly from Miller's. He dismantles the practice of 'othering' by diversifying his representation of Muslims and restores their humanity through the critique of America's foreign policy and cultural practices. It is an American, Johnny, who murders an Iman, and US weaponry that terrorizes foreign lands.

The names assigned to these characters illuminate the contrasting approaches

to representation of Muslims undertaken by the authors: Miller propagates their inhumanity, whereas Inzana propagates their humanity. The names provided to the main protagonists in *Holy Terror* are a point of identification and a site of heroism. With respect to the antagonists, Muslims are commonly referred to as Moe or Mohammad, reducing people to a concept — a Muslim terrorist —while the lack of individual identities strips them of their humanity. Inzana inverts this approach by providing all the Muslim characters with names, restoring a degree of their humanity. The central domestic characters in *Holy Terror* are The Fixer and Natalie Stack. The name, The Fixer, functions to abstract his identity from realism (a person) to the conceptual (eradicating Islamic terrorism, the problem to be “fixed”). The removal of his humanity, a function of his namelessness, equips him with the currency to engage in evil acts, as the ends justify the means. Although foregrounding difference and lessening the humanity of a character are tools used “to other” someone, The Fixer is the embodiment of the post-9/11 avenger. This could permit the western reader, to live vicariously through him in this ‘comic book world,’ equipping the public with the ability to confront and dismantle the threat of terrorism that they have no power to manage or control in the ‘real world,’ as evidenced by recent and continuous terrorist attacks.

Natalie's name has a very long history; it originated in the early ages of Christianity and was derived from the Latin "Natalis Domini," which means "birth" or "Christmas" (“Natalie”). The name means "born on Christmas" in modern translation (“Natalie”). There are several ways to translate the name Natalie, but they are all related to the idea of "birth" (“Natalie”). The historical background behind the name illuminates two aspects: it is connected to the religion of Christianity and to the concept of birth.

This equips the character with a Judeo-Christian identity and makes her a symbol of life itself. These are two contrasting traits compared to villains who are Muslim and strive to extinguish life. Her last name, Stack, can be read as a juvenile reference to the size of her breasts, thereby operating to sexualize her, reducing her identity to that of a body part, which in turn transforms her from a subject into an object. This interpretation correlates to her attire, which emphasizes her breasts. This speaks to how women have been “othered” in many Western superhero comics and graphic novels by casting them as sidekicks. This suggests they are unworthy and/or incapable of superhero status; they are less than. The name Natalie humanizes the heroes, while The Fixer illuminates their roles.

Muslim characters outside of Amina, discussed next, are not provided with individual names. This type of abstraction—transforming subjects into representatives of a generalized idea or view—is further entrenched by The Fixer’s and Natalie’s reference to almost all the Muslims that they encounter as Mohammad or Moe.⁸⁷ While Moe or Muhammad is a person’s name, it is unlikely to be the name of every Muslim person in the story. Instead, it encapsulates an idea, “the other,” the foreign menace. The reduction of all men to the name of Mohammad or Moe is one of the methods to “other someone by acting, like “a certain group of people are all the same.” Spencer Ackerman proclaims it is this type of practice/approach that is “completely uninterested in any nuance or empathy toward 1.2 billion people he conflates with a few murderous conspiracy theorists.”

The lone Muslim in *Holy Terror* provided with a name is Amina, described as “An exchange student, a humanities major” (Miller 31). Among a sea of abstraction, Amina

is the lone Muslim in *Holy Terror* provided with her real name which emphasizes her humanity compared to other Muslim characters. In Arabic, Amina stands for loyalty, faith, and honesty (Aliakbarova 8). For many, the name Amina may sound “foreign,” especially compared to Natalie. However, it is not explicitly Muslim to the western ear, but foreign enough of a distinction to see her as “the other.” Also, the traits associated with her name “loyalty” and “faith” raise the question: Who is she loyal to and who is she willing to betray? These questions are addressed through analysis later in the discussion of representation.

Unlike *Holy Terror*, whose main character sarcastically refers to all Muslims as Mohammad or Moe, the primary characters in *Johnny Jihad* are assigned names, humanizing them, as evidenced by how the lead character introduced himself: “My name is John Sendel of Trenton, New Jersey, United States of America. Also known as Abdullah Akbar” (Inzana 2). In this sentence, he establishes himself as connected to two worlds: the Western one he was born into and the Muslim one he chooses. His subsequent terrorist activities reaffirm a McCarthy-style “threat from within” trope that propagates distrust of hyphenated Americans, like Muslim Americans. This distrust of a hyphenated identity seemed to extend to those he wished to be fully accepted by, as well as other Americans. John is referred to by his birth name or a variation of it by both Muslims and non-Muslims, as evidenced by the following: during his interrogation, the CIA calls him Johnny (Inzana 54); in Afghanistan, Bashir, who works for the CIA, notes that Kazeem “wrote me a letter about a dedicated recruit named John Sendel” (Inzana 65); Bashir routinely calls him “Amriki” (Inzana 73), which translates to American (Department of Justice 7); Aziz, an associate of Usama Bin-Laden, refers to him as

John (Inzana 76). These examples are void of any mention of the name Abdullah Akbar, which illuminates how he is viewed as a “westerner” or “foreigner” by all parties, and the name “Amriki” illustrates how some ground his identity through a nationalistic lens. This speaks to how he is perceived as “the other” by those he considers his brethren. A name is not just about identity; it is also about belonging. In the eyes of those inhabiting these two worlds, John has not crossed over and/or been granted the ability to define himself.

The lone person to refer to John as Abdullah Akbar was himself. This adopted name is rich with meaning that renders him faithful to G-d but also inherits a troubling and nefarious association. Abdullallah means “servant of Allah” (Ahmed 4). There is debate surrounding the actual meaning of Akbar, but many, especially Westerners, interpret it to mean “great,” as do some Muslim historians (Mishra 670). His chosen Muslim name translates to “servant of Allah, great,” which could be interpreted as being a servant of G-d is great, speaking to his identity as a religious one, a dutiful one, with a focus on serving G-d, making him malleable to acts that he may believe honor or are part of G-d’s will. Based on the western gaze, instantiated by the reader, it is quite similar to Allahu Akbar, which means “God is the greatest,” which “is often used as a call to prayer” (Dwight). However, this phrase has been co-opted by extremists and expressed while committing acts of terrorism, such as the 9/11 hijackers; Nidal Hasan, who was condemned to death for murdering 13 soldiers; the army psychiatrist who killed thirteen soldiers at Fort Hood in 2009 and Mohammad Merah, a French jihadist who murdered seven people in March of 2012 (Arkin; “Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan”; Smith-Spark). This makes John’s adopted name a reflection of both terrorism and the

novel's theme of indoctrination. But John refers to himself as such on only one occasion, when he documented his journey in a diary. Subsequent to that entry, John never introduces himself or is introduced as Abdullah Akbar. John eventually sees himself as neither John Sendel nor Abdullah Akbar but morphs into a third identity, which is revealed after he commits murder. Upon killing the Iman, at the behest of Kazeem and his fellow terrorists, John remarks to himself that "I killed a man because they told me to, Private Johnny of the jihadi army" (Inzana 53). This name symbolizes what he had become: an orientalist stereotype—the Muslim terrorist—as opposed to who he was or desired to be. He conforms to said trope because he is motivated to murder the Iman based upon political and/or religious goals. Also, the term "jihadi" is used within the context of murdering those perceived as enemies of Islam. Both of which situate him within the aforementioned stereotype.

Inzana maintains this practice of giving Muslim characters the actual names of people, which humanizes them, including two other main characters who would qualify as supervillains in any superhero narrative: Salim Muhammad, who befriended John and brought him into the terrorist training camp, even has a last name, as does Kazeem (Fazil), who runs the camp and turned him into Johnny Jihad through indoctrination. The methodology used to indoctrinate John included repeated viewings of videos comprised of non-Muslim governments murdering Muslims, such as footage of an Israeli shooting a boy in the head and other religious propaganda (Inzana 19). These videos function as a form of propaganda designed to foment righteous hatred. Interestingly, aside from John, Bin Laden, Salim, and Kazeem, all terrorists or terrorist sympathizers, the only other person assigned a last name was an Iman in Colorado, Shaheed Khalifa, who

reported a local terrorist group, Jamaat, to authorities, resulting in John being sent to assassinate him. Bin Laden is a historical figure, and that explains the purpose behind the choice as opposed to some intent to humanize. Inzana designed John as a sympathetic figure, as evidenced by emphasizing his backstory of child abuse, abandonment, and bullying, as well as his reluctance to participate in terrorist activities. This adds a layer to a complicated figure intended to paint him as neither black nor white, but gray, a victim of circumstance. This does not account for the humanization of a terrorist sympathizer like Salim.

Why would any American author seek to humanize these terrorists? One reason is that the definition of “terrorist” has become increasingly more subjective. What constitutes terrorism to one person is perceived as freedom fighting to others. Inzana’s approach taps into this larger discourse. John, in addition to some readers, would view Salim as a supporter of freedom fighters as opposed to terrorists-the oppressed fighting back against the oppressor. This is not the sentiment of a few radical or morally bankrupt individuals, but a pervasive view embraced by a generation of young people, as evidenced by the TikTok post #lettertoamerica, which went viral, receiving 13.7 million views during the conflict between Hamas and Israel in November 2023 (Chasan). This post featured a letter written by Bin Laden in 2002 in which he “attempted to justify the terror attacks against the U.S. that killed nearly 3,000 people.”

⁸⁸ While some viewed this post as anti-American pro-terrorism propaganda, many others saw Bin Laden as a champion of the oppressed. What is beyond dispute is that the oppressed vs. oppressor binary has been, is, and will continue to be used to propagate violence and righteous hatred.

In addition to the reader's positionality, which could paint Salim as a freedom fighter, his role in John's life humanizes him. Upon learning of Salim's death, John stated, "Salim, the only friend I had left" (Inzana 58). Although one could question if a real friend would introduce someone to a terrorist to be used and exploited, to John, Salim was like family. Inzana's humanization of Salim is conveyed through the eyes of John. He is asking us to adopt John's lens. To understand that to someone like John, who feels oppressed, isolated, and abandoned, his perception of Salim as a true friend trumps the reality of the type of trouble, pain, and misery that being recruited into a terrorist organization by his friend would subject him to in the future. This speaks to how acceptance is a powerful drug to those feeling discarded.

Inzana's humanization of Muslims is not restricted to terrorists or as some would suggest, freedom fighters. The choice to include a character like Shaheed Khalifa, the Iman, and to humanize him by providing him with a first and last name is a direct intervention into the orientalist stereotype while also dismantling the notions behind othering. Khalifa's decision, without contemplation and/or hesitation, to alert the authorities about the local terrorist organization Jamaat is an act of counterpropaganda to popular tropes about Muslims, such as the terrorist and/or religious extremist. Khalifa's humanity is further amplified by the fact that those he reported are void of first or last names. Khalifa's humanity is augmented by comparison because his identity is fleshed out by assigning him with a full name, whereas the others are referred to as the "driver" (Inzana 36) or "members of the Colorado Jamaat" (*Johnny Jihad* 36) and one "of the members" (Inzana 37). The nameless are reduced to symbols representing an idea and/or philosophy: the terrorist (McCloud 27). Their dehumanization enhances his

humanization, which by extension propagates the humanity of religious Muslims and of the faith itself. The presence of Shaheed Khalifa also functions to challenge the readers' sense of Muslims as "the other" by undermining the following components that cultivate othering, such as assigning all members of a particular group, racial, national, religious, identical features and beliefs, a process that amplifies difference between them and us.

Attire

Attire, like names, is one of the primary tools that create difference, pitting the Western superhero against the Orientalist other. *Holy Terror* employs attire, except for Amina, to paint a portrait of its Muslim characters as religious extremists and/or terrorists co-opting and propagating ideas aligned with America's post-9/11 foreign policy. Miller's Western characters' clothing conforms to superhero tropes like the heroic lead and damsel in distress/sidekick. *Johnny Jihad* defies such characterizations and binary portrayals by drawing a collage where attire both conforms to and deviates from such representational norms. This serves to challenge orientalist stereotypes.

Miller presents 91% of Muslims as monsters and/or terrorists. Of the 114 pictures of Muslim people between pages 57 and 109, the majority of Muslims, 63 out of the 114, are dressed in religious and or cultural clothing. Of said group, 48 males are terrorists dressed in mummy-Egyptian-styled robes and head and face coverings. 20 out of the 48 of these mummy-esque creatures are equipped with suicide belts. Their robes in concert with their explosives undermine their humanity by situating them and

by extension Muslims as inhuman and artifacts of the past; backwards, as well as positioning them as agents of death.

Ijaz, Awais, and Ali Nadeem noted that this type of attire:

Looked like hideous warrior[s] which [is] mostly cited in ancient history books to represent Arabian natives with head and face completely covered in Arabian style turban. This picture and all the pictures that are illustrated in *Holy Terror* proved the symbolically attaching negative image with Muslim characters and [was] fitted in the unfavorable category (790).

The aforementioned attire illuminates Miller's reductive approach that operates to "other" Muslims by presenting them as a single uniform group, emphasizing differences that separate "others" from "ourselves," and stripping away their humanity by presenting them as inhuman figures. The remaining 15 people clothed in religious or cultural attire consist of seven women, three real-life Muslim leaders, four men wearing skullcaps, and one Iman.^{89 90 91 92} Out of the 15 people dressed in religious clothing: two out of the five women possess weapons; all three leaders either engage in terrorist activities, finance terrorism or lead countries with a strong presence of terrorists; and the Iman wears both a turban and a suicide belt. The messaging produced is that religious Muslim women are as tribal and terroristic as men, religious figures support and glorify terrorism, and Muslim leaders are a threat to the free world. All of which produce and affirm orientalist stereotypes like the terrorist, the faceless woman, and Islam as an extremist and inherently violent faith (Shaheen 125; 129; 125).

The second largest group is comprised of 40 men dressed in all-black military fatigues, 12 of whom are wearing suicide belts. Many of which are pictured inside a mosque which propagates the notion that religious institutions both condone and conceal and support terrorism. These two groups establish a clear relationship between Islam, attire, and terrorism. The vast majority of these Muslims dressed in religious and/or military fatigues were terrorists, which raises the question of whom they were terrorizing? Within the context of a narrative inspired by the events of 9/11, one could deduce they are terrorizing the free world, and specifically America, as evidenced by the events of 9/11 and the role of Afghanistan in said attacks.

Not all Muslims wear religious garb. There are 10 Muslim characters who do not wear overtly Muslim attire, e.g., the niqab or a taqiyah. Instead, they don shirts, t-shirts, or hoodies. The most prominent of the Muslim characters dressed in non-religious clothing is Amina, who first appears in a head shot from a full-face angle (Miller 31). You can't see what she is wearing, but her lips are bright pink. This is one of the few instances where Miller uses a splash of colour, the other being Natalie. This is notable and functions to grab the reader's attention because the vast majority of the pictures are in black and white. In the next page, Amina is presented from a side angle, through a distorted image, and is wearing a pink type of robe and hoodie (Miller 32). Her name in concert with this western-styled attire initially humanizes her for the western reader. Most panels featuring her are from the chin up, but there is one panel where you can see she is wearing a white jacket and tassels around the shoulder. Interestingly, tassels are associated with orientalist attire, which now could create the sense of her as "the

other,” but her attire might also be associated with western (cowboy-like) apparel by many North American readers mitigating negative impressions of her.

The splash of pink persists in the following panels and expands to streaks of pink in her hair, clothes, and pink shoelaces (Miller 34). McCloud contends that colour “could communicate a dominant mood” (192). Pink is associated with “kindness,” “gentleness,” “nurturing,” femininity, “softness,” and peacefulness (Van Braam). These traits create a peaceful mood and cultivate the impression of a kind, non-threatening individual. Peaceful operates in stark contrast to Miller’s representation of observant Muslims. Up to now, the sole Muslim, pictured on the front cover, was portrayed as a terrorist, which is one of the means behind “othering” a group. Amina appears to be confronting the reader with the stereotypes that some have accepted about all Muslims and, worse, sanctioned through the act of closure— “observing the parts but perceiving the whole”— performed by turning the pages. The act of flipping the page is participatory; it is where the reader becomes a “silent accomplice” to that which has occurred in the previous pages (McCloud 68). In this case, they are accepting, if not, sanctioning Miller’s portrayal of Islam (whole) as terroristic based upon the pictures and words that featured blood-soaked pages with nails flying in every direction, the quote about killing infidels attributed to Mohammed, and the terrorist attack unleashed right before Amina is introduced (McCloud 63).⁹³

Those pictures equated Islam with terrorism, but as the reader turns the page between page 30, which features the aftermath of the attack, and the following page (31), which introduces Amina, closure operates as the agent of change [and] time...” where the audience fills in the space (McCloud 65). In this instance, readers must

reconcile contrasting imagery pertaining to Muslims: one that had rendered them as anti-Western terrorists, with a picture, now, of a secular Muslim girl, who is described as an “exchange student. Humanities major” (Miller 31). The portrayal of Amina disrupts the othering of Muslims, which is achieved by amplifying difference and presenting them as homogeneous; she does not conform to orientalist stereotypes based on appearance and her vocation. These changes might function to confront the reader with their stereotypes about Muslims. This illuminates the power of pictures in that they can either fortify perceptions of those deemed “the other” or dismantle them. In the case of Amina, *thus far*, they serve as counterpropaganda, an intervention into Miller’s Muslim terrorist trope by simultaneously functioning as both an icon, representing a person, and a symbol, depicting an idea that not all Muslims are terrorists (McCloud 27).

We next see Amina in the context of personal relationships that further challenges stereotypes. She is on a date with Jaye, who appears to be American. The choice to go out with an American who also happens to be a woman, combined with the fact Amina is dressed in non-mummy-esque attire, minimizes the reader’s sense of her as the other. This is achieved by disrupting the idea that all [Muslims] are the same and by presenting them as inhuman-monstrous.

The appearance of the collapsing of difference is a tactic, not an intervention, as evidenced by the following scene. Amina ends up blowing herself up, her date, Jaye, as well as tons of patrons inside, and people outside. Just seconds before, Amina had just been asked by Jaye, “WHAT IS IT?” in reference to what she was concealing under her coat (Miller 35). In response, Amina, through an extreme close-up of her pink lips less than an inch away from Jaye’s, whispers, “*PARADISE*,” just prior to unleashing a holy

terror of chaos by setting off a mail bomb (Miller 35). Amina could have served to counterbalance Miller's representation of Muslims as reductive stereotypes that situate over a billion people as terrorists in his novel; instead, this scene, coupled with the image of Muslim women with guns mentioned earlier, affirms Ijaz, Awais, and Ali Nadeem's contention that even Muslim women were portrayed as villains (794-795). Despite initial impressions of Amina based on the messaging produced by the colour pink and her attire, she fails as a site of redemption by reaffirming stereotypes instead of diversifying the representation of Muslims. The emphasis on pink in the panel, which is normally associated with calmness (Van Braam), juxtaposed with Amina's actions, is designed to propagate the idea that 'secular'-appearing Muslim women pose as much danger as do nameless male terrorists.

Nine of the remaining 10 Muslims clothed in non-religious attire sport a beard, goatee, or mustache. While facial hair, especially beards, is not by any means an exclusively Muslim feature, they quite often are associated with Muslim men. Are these secularly dressed Muslims humanized as a means to communicate that it is one's religiosity as opposed to their faith that breeds extremism? No! Among this group is President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a sponsor of proxy terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah (Miller 83). The remaining members of this group are portrayed as women beaters, women killers, terrorist supporters, and terrorists. The inclusion of Ahmadinejad as well as a wife beater both perpetuate orientalist stereotypes. The former bolsters the anti-Western Muslim trope (Shaheen 123), whereas the latter substantiates Mohammad Amin's claim that Miller's work propagates the message that Islam is "misogynistic" (21).

Another one of the many problematic aspects with Miller's representation of Muslims in *Holy Terror* is that he has framed the protagonist as Al Qaeda, yet many of the terrorist's attire—Mummy like clothing—is representative of Egypt, not Afghanistan nor Saudi Arabia, where Al Qaeda was formed and/or operates. This speaks to Dar's assertion that "writers and publishers {have a] disregard for cultural, religious, and political accuracy [and] simply points to a crude and racist generalization" where "Muslims are [presented as] all the same" (102). In totality, the resulting message generated by attire in *Holy Terror* is that regardless of their nationality, whether Muslims are secular or religious, male or female, citizen or leader, they are all terrorists, rendering them the "other." This justifies and propagates righteous hatred of 'them,' the latter of which perpetuates the us (the West) against them (Muslims) binary.

At the other end of the hero/villain binary are The Fixer and Natalie Stacks. Prior to examining Natalie's attire, here is a brief recap as to what was previously examined in relation to how the Fixer was dressed on the cover as well as some additional analysis. His cowl and gloves are co-opted from Batman. In this sense, attire operates as an expression of nationalism and nativism. The Fixer's Batman-inspired costume positioned him as the anti-hero American vigilante. By comparison, the terrorist's Mummy-inspired robe, pictured on the front cover, rendered him a 'foreign' Islamic menace.

The colour of the Fixer's attire, red, is a prominent color on the American flag, tying him to the United States. It also could symbolize super heroism, as it was one of the three primary colors historically assigned to superheroes (McCloud 192), reinforcing the notion of the superhero as a nationalistic icon of dominance and defense. His attire

reduces him to a caricature, a symbol of nationalism-a collective identity-as opposed to an identity based on the individual defined by unique and distinct features. In a broader psychological context, red signals aggression, danger, a warning, and dominance (Cherry). These traits result in messaging that speaks to what the Fixer represents: a warning to evildoers, aggression, and dominance over his adversaries, as well as his role in arresting the danger posed to the west.

The Fixer's sidekick, Natalie Stack, is a sexual object first and foremost; she represents an idea: the sidekick as eye candy. She is dressed in a tight black tank top accentuating her breasts, black spandex pants with fishnet-style cutouts near the thigh, long black arm gloves, red shoes, and a Catwoman-inspired mask with goggle-style cut-out eye sockets, but minus the devil ears. Her costume was co-opted from the Catwoman character, a nemesis and sometimes partner of Batman. When you add her vocation into the equation, a cat burglar who later becomes the Fixer's sidekick, combined with Miller's initial intent to create *Holy Terror* as a Batman-focused story, it is clear that she is derivative, an idea, a Fixer accessory instead of a fully developed character. The inclusion of red clothing cements her role as a vixen because red, classically, creates the impression of being "sexually receptive and have more sexual intent than women in white, green, or blue clothing" (Guéguen, 2012b; Pazda, Elliot, & Greitemeyer, 2012). This type of portrayal conforms to the practice of presenting wannabe superheroines "as alluring objects of desire, wearing the scantiest of costumes" (Lavin). In totality, her tight-fitting garments, who she was based upon, and the connotation associated with red within this context establish her as the sexualized

superhero sidekick. This illuminates how American publishers are just as reductive in the representation of women as those Muslims they admonish.

The splash of colour (where one item in the picture has color) injects shading into a world of black and white. In the case of Amina, the splash of pink functions to deepen the anti-Muslim propaganda by emphasizing the threat of Muslim femininity.

Conversely, Natalie's red coloured soles are consistently facing the reader. They are at the forefront of her superhero identity, as Natalie's fighting arsenal is restricted to the use of her feet in the act of kicking, as evidenced by her fight with the Fixer (Miller 21). Within this framework, red represents "aggression," "pain," and "blood," all of which conform to violence, reinforcing her role as an agent of war (Gheorghe). This restores some of the agency she lost based on her name and attire.

By comparison, in *Johnny Jihad*, John's attire also situates him as a terrorist and "the oriental other." But this portrait is complicated by flashbacks to his youth, where he is clothed like any other American kid, and later as a typical teenager, which, when juxtaposed with environmental trauma and alienation, creates layers of humanization that partially paint him as a victim of circumstances. He is both "the other" and one of us. This fractured identity plays into Inzana's indoctrination narrative. As noted earlier, during the examination of the front cover, Johnny is dressed in a brownish jacket and a black t-shirt. His left collar has a button with an image of a skull fastened to it. He also wears a white headband with red and black colouring. While there are Muslim terrorist groups such as ISIS, Hamas, and the Taliban who are pictured wearing headbands, those contain distinct Arabic writing and different colour schemes.⁹⁴ These details negate a direct connection between the item and the Taliban. Although John's brown

jacket and white shirt are western in comparison to thawbs (ankle-length robe), keffiyehs and headwear, perception is reality. The appearance of the headband may create the impression of a terrorist and/or terrorist supporter to the Western reader, especially juxtaposed with Arabic writing surrounding him, a passport and a gun.

In addition, within the context of terrorism, the colours red and black take on a negative connotation: as previously noted red symbolizes “aggression,” “pain,” and “blood,” and black represents “power,” “evil,” and “bad” (Cherry). When you combine these traits with his button of a skull, all conform to violence, reinforcing his role as an agent of war (Gheorghe). The aforementioned components, just like the Mummy-styled attire, situate both John and the Mummy as the orientalist other. Also, the contrast in attire between the two Muslim characters on the covers functions to establish that *Johnny Jihad* is not a superhero narrative but rather a coming-of-age story focusing on a personal journey.

My analysis of attire as identity in *Johnny Jihad* narrows to focus on four main characters: John, Salim, Kazeem, and Iman Shaheed Khalifa, in contrast to the collective approach (aside from Amina) to the analysis of Muslim characters I undertook for *Holy Terror*. This is based on the rationale that unlike *Holy Terror*, *Johnny Jihad* features unique Muslim characters in primary roles. The representation of other Muslims in terms of attire is addressed in a general manner. In the scenes discussed below, John’s clothing is standard/appropriate for the event and/or period. His clothing permits him to assimilate within the populace. This provides him with the means to move around without detection, which becomes a thread throughout his journey. First, while at the terrorist camp, he is pictured in Western-styled clothing like a white t-shirt, sneakers,

light-coloured pants and a jacket. A practical choice in order not to stand out when outside, since the camp is located in the US, and for training purposes, e.g., sneakers for exercising. Similarly, while on an airplane en route to Colorado, on a mission to kill the Iman, as well as during his stay in the state, he once again wears typical garments: a jacket and pants to integrate, while adding a bucket hat. This outfit is typical for an American, with the added benefit of allowing him to blend in, whereas if he wore religious clothing, he might stand out. The choice of hat provides him with means to partially conceal his identity. Lastly, during his stay in Afghanistan, John is dressed in attire that is associated with different regions. Initially, while working closely with the Taliban, John dons a black vest and a Kurta—a knee-length shirt with pants, both commonly worn in the country (Inzana 73). Later, at the end of the story, when infiltrating the Taliban on behalf of the CIA, he is decked in a black thawb with a mandarin collar, clothing worn in Arab and South Asian countries, respectively. John's clothing functions as a transformative agent symbolizing his shift from both identifying with the locals and attempting to assimilate to dressing as a foreigner, but not an American—a man without a home and/or a people.

Further examination of John's attire is narrowed to his origin/backstory revealed through flashbacks, including key dialogue to provide additional context for his transformation, significant articles of clothing based on repeated use, and the symbolism of colours. The flashbacks ground his youth in a western identity, making him relatable; they reveal abusive events that cultivate both empathy and sympathy while humanizing him by revealing the relationship between attire and his fractured psyche. All of this is essential if you are casting the circumstances as the antagonist as

opposed to the individual, suggesting his transformation into a terrorist was a reaction to traumatic events as opposed to a reflection of his constitution.

Prior to morphing into Johnny Jihad, John Sendel was one of us. First, he is pictured hunting with his abusive father, wearing a wool beanie hat and winter jacket. This activity was intended “to toughen” him up (Inzana 5). His clothing is standard for such an occasion and can symbolize the hunter; it is part of some American kids’ initiation into killing for sport, as opposed to nourishment, which desensitizes one from taking life in their formative years. Second, John is seen listening to his mother explain how his “Dad wasn’t always abusive...something happened to Dad in N’am” (Inzana 7). He is dressed in a striped long-sleeve top and overalls. His top could represent the toll that nationalism takes on the family based on the stripes also present on the US flag, which his father pledged allegiance to, and psychologically, it can symbolize a person “wearing many hats” (Adhav). The juxtaposition of his attire with the discussion transpiring between child and parent speaks to his mother metaphorically placing multiple hats on him by exposing him to adult issues, as well as propagating the dangers of American interventionism on the American family. In addition, in the above-mentioned panels, Inzana utilizes cross-hatching in some of the clothing but primarily in the background, a method of layering lines that adds depth and range. While he uses this technique throughout the novel, it is particularly powerful in the aforementioned scenes, as the art mirrors the dialogue, in that the mother is providing insight into her husband and John’s father that adds layers to both John and his father, while exposing and indicting the damage inflicted upon families whose members serve in the military.

The next event featured in this sequence of flashbacks consists of panels of John attending his dad's funeral. His father has committed suicide. John is pictured standing in front of his gravestone. He is dressed in a black jacket, a white shirt, and a black tie. The attire is formal and is associated with someone in mourning. Aside from the physical loss, John is mourning the loss of a relationship that could have been, should have been, and would have been if not for the American military, as evidenced by John stating, "I felt cheated...I never knew the man my mom married. The army changed that" (Inzana 8). He is also mourning the loss of country, of a national identity, of a sense of belonging, and of belief in his country, as evidenced by the following comment: "The flag given to me that day symbolized everything that ruined my father" (*Johnny Jihad* 8). This was the day his identity was fractured and his vulnerability to indoctrination took root. The dialogue within the preceding flashbacks of John's childhood, as well as the proceeding flashbacks of him as a teenager, are expressed through text boxes as opposed to speech balloons. Text boxes create the impression of inner dialogue that reveal one's unedited thoughts as opposed to their spoken words. This creates a degree of intimacy and trust between John and the reader because his emotions are naked, unfiltered, and the audience is being granted full access.

In another scene, John is depicted through split lighting—where half of his face and body is lit and the other half dark—in a long black trench coat, smoking a cigarette, referring to himself as "a social misfit" (Inzana 9). This lighting technique adds a degree of "[intensity]" to the subject (DeGuzman). The black trench coat, especially when worn by youth, personifies the outcast, the disenfranchised, and the dangerous based on its association with school shooters such as mass murderers Eric Harris and Dylan

Klebold, the architects behind the Columbine Massacre in 1999, who belonged to a group known as “The Trench Coat Mafia” (Jefferson County, Colorado Sheriff). This nickname connotes crime and death. The coat’s association with danger is further enhanced by its design, which conceals all the inside pockets, even the belt to one’s pants, which could have a gun tucked into it. The lack of visibility raises suspicion.

The next flashback consists of John in a jacket and backpack being bullied and beaten by African Americans because “I wasn’t black” and by whites “because I wasn’t rich and I wasn’t a jock” (Inzana 10). The backpack represents a student and schooling, and the abuse he endures is another example of how foundational spaces like home and school are unsafe spaces for him. This undermines his prospects for future success, as school provides one of the keys to upward mobility, and when a young person is unable to fully commit themselves, they place their future in peril. It also deprives him of a much-needed sense of community in lieu of his dysfunctional home life. This treatment by his peers further entrenches his otherness, both of which situate him as an outcast on the outskirts, on the margins of society, which collectively disenfranchises him, making him susceptible to any community or group that welcomes him.

The final flashback of John, prior to him joining the terrorist camp, shows him on the platform, having exited a subway (Inzana 13). He is heading to the mosque with his co-worker and new-found friend, Salim. John is dressed in pants and a dark hoodie, with it zipped up, covering his head. The hoodie is a frequent article of clothing worn by John. Within this context, it reflects a person who may have anxiety regarding how he will be treated by Muslims at the mosque, wondering whether he will be accepted or

rejected once again. In general, the hoodie serves as a comfort item for John. In part because it functions as a defense mechanism by providing him with the ability to “avoid attention” and appear “standoffish,” which serves to shield him from a world that abuses and discards him (“Is Wearing A Hoodie A Sign Of Depression?”). Such attire can also be a sign of depression, which could be applicable in light of John’s backstory, including his dysfunctional upbringing, experiences with bullying at school, which led to alienation and isolation, and abuse of alcohol, all of which contributed to a lack of self-esteem, direction and belonging.

In all the aforementioned locations and scenes, the colours for John’s clothing are almost exclusively black and white. This combination evokes a certain type of rigid thinking that doesn’t permit one “to find middle ground,” and this type of thinking can be construed as a cognitive distortion (Black and White Thinking”). This distortion sees life through the prism of absolutism, where there is only right or wrong, good or bad, heroes or villains, a mindset adopted by many religions, e.g., if you don’t believe this, you are going to hell or you are an infidel. It appeals to the emotional aspect of our being, the part of us that is much more malleable to indoctrination into the us vs. them construct based on religion that John had embraced.

Salim, Kazeem, and Iman Shaheed Khalifa’s attire both humanizes and dehumanizes them and, by extension, Muslims.⁹⁵ Their clothing both reinforces orientalist tropes and collapses them. On the one hand, these men are dressed in both secular and religious clothing, dismantling one of the aspects behind othering, presenting a group as uniform. On the other hand, these representations are problematic because a secularly dressed Muslim—Salim—in a baseball cap and a long

black jacket, as well as one donning religious and non-descript clothing—Kazeem—in a black top and a black headdress resembling a kufi topi, are both terrorists. The former is a recruiter and terrorist member, and the latter a terrorist leader. This propagates distrust of Muslims, independent of whether they appear religious or not.

However, the Imam, Shaheed Khalifa, challenges this reductive notion of Muslims based on his attire, the correlation between colours and action, and his status. First, Khalifa is dressed in a rounded-collar undershirt and a jacket that is both light and dark. Shaheed's clothing is generic, not overtly Western, but Western by comparison to Islamic religious dress. His lack of religious clothing juxtaposed with his position as an Imam serves as counterpropaganda by adding a layer to the generally reductive representation of Muslim religious figures as orthodox, lessening our sense of him as "the other" based on perceived differences. Second, the black and white combo speaks to the mindset of the wearer as someone who doesn't see the gray and can't "find middle ground," which contradicts our view of him as layered (Black and White Thinking). However, in this instance, it represents moral clarity pertaining to right and wrong, as evidenced by his decision to report the terrorists to the authorities. This moral act truly disrupts the one-dimensional representation of Muslims as terrorists throughout the novel. Lastly, as an Imam, he is both a religious and moral authority who not only fails to support terrorism but condemns it and seeks to extinguish it.

Collectively, attire, the correlation between colours and action, and his status serves to humanize some Muslims, places him with the "us" in the us vs. them binary and lessens our sense of difference between Muslims and non-Muslims, which is important since such difference is one of the key tools behind othering a group. This

rehabilitates the image of the faith and its teaching, which renders the actions of Salim and Kazeem as those of hateful and misguided individuals as opposed to sanctioned by scripture and inherent to Islam. The framing of Shaheed Khalifa, a “frontal shot,” is viewed as confrontational (Suter). In this case, Inzana, through Shaheed, is confronting the audience with their stereotypes of Muslims by propagating their humanity while pointing out the western reader’s inhumanity by reducing all of them to the same trope.

In addition to the primary characters of Muslim descent, there are approximately 130 other Muslim characters that play a lesser role in this narrative.⁹⁶ A brief examination of the secondary figures provides context for the thematic analysis of attire and its messaging. 49% of the people are wearing clothing that equips them with a religious identity. This creates the appearance that Inzana’s work adopts an expansive approach to representation that operates as an intervention into the reductive portrayals of Muslims as “all the same” by using attire to communicate that there are secular and religious people and different ethnicities with their own styles and traditions. This choice undermines a key facet behind othering, reducing a group to a single identity.

However, when you add additional layers and context to the analysis, some troubling issues emerge. First, the percentage, 49%, is a conservative account. It is based off a strict metric: counting people dressed in overtly and/or explicitly religious attire associated with Islam. The calculation omitted an additional 16 people as black shadow figures, and a panel was excluded that featured at least 300 people in Kabul Stadium attending sharia law-based executions. These people were ruled out of the count due to being unable to confidently say they are wearing turbans because the people are minuscule and portrayed as black shadow figures (Inzana 67). It is more

likely than not that they are wearing religious headwear based on how people are outlined in the picture and the fact that the shape above their heads resembles turbans.

If you add the aforementioned 300 people to the previous equation, you now have 430 total Muslim people, with 363 dressed in religious clothing, which amounts to 84% of secondary characters. The juxtaposition of religious attire and event—sharia law-based executions —serves to position 70% of secondary Muslim characters as zealots and/or religious extremists, and similar to Miller’s work, operates to paint the majority of Muslims as deadly and murderous. This portrayal conforms to orientalist stereotypes while othering Muslims by “exaggerating the ways that the “Other” members in a group are different from us,” and “even acting like they aren’t really human.”

Second, Inzana, once again just like Miller’s *Holy Terror*, framed the majority of secondary characters dressed in religious attire as terrorists: 39 out of 62, amounting to 64% of all men donning religious headdress, were associated with terrorism. While some may argue this is not surprising considering the subject matter and that it would be difficult to depict the majority of Muslims as non-terrorists in a narrative about terrorists, it does nonetheless reaffirm the Muslim terrorist trope. If Inzana was interested in diminishing the fear and misunderstanding that foster hate between Muslims and the rest of the world, there are aspects of his work that undercut this effort. Inzana could have simply depicted more than one religious Muslim as explicitly non-terrorist, which would have undermined the orientalist stereotype amplified by writers like Miller instead of reinforcing it. 64% translates to a clear majority of all Muslim men, which propagates the idea that while there are good Muslims, most are terrorists.

Now in terms of the women portrayed in Inzana's text, all three of them qualify as part of the oppressed, with their religion and American interventionism (politics) positioned as the oppressors. Two of the three female characters also perpetuated Muslim tropes and the orientalist construct of the abused woman and the faceless housewife, while a third subject forces the reader to confront the impact of American foreign policy and interventionism on those lands they invade. The first picture of a Muslim woman shows her being whipped by a man in the street (Inzana 65). Ironically, this is the type of reductive portrayal of Muslim men admonished by Dar and prevalent in comic books published in the 1980s, such as *Action Comics* vol. 1 no.598 (103; Shaheen 131). The second woman pictured shows her carrying a basket filled with food next to a man also transporting something, which corresponds to the faceless housewife orientalist stereotype (Inzana 66; Shaheen 123).

Both of these women are wearing white burqas with a niqab veil that shows their eyes only. The choice of white for the women's burqas with a niqab veil humanizes them among Western readers due to characteristics associated with the shade, such as "purity," "cleanliness," and "innocence" (Van Braam). These women do not partake in any terrorist activities, providing them with a degree of "purity," which cleanses their hands of any responsibility for such events, positioning them as "innocent." This does mark a significant departure from Miller's representation of Muslims, where both men and women are exclusively portrayed as terrorists.

The third picture is of a dead woman, dressed in a black top, killed by an American airstrike (Inzana 84). The use of black creates a feeling of mourning and

sadness, cultivating empathy in the reader. The absence of a veil and her role as a victim both operate to humanize her as we see her facial features—a point of identification—and the dried blood seeping from her mouth emphasizes her as the victim of a horrible crime. This woman is another key point of departure between texts, as her death challenges American foreign policy because the murderer of this seemingly innocent woman was the American military, which is an extension of the American government that serves and represents the American people. Thus, undermining the humanity of Americans, which positions them as “the other” from a moral standpoint. This illuminates the consequences of interventionism, whereas Frank Miller is seen as solely affirming and substantiating the validity of US foreign policy. Despite taking a vastly different approach to the issue of terrorism than Miller by inserting righteous Muslims like the Iman into his narrative and taking a geopolitical view of the root cause behind the conflict instead of simply reducing all Muslims to the terrorist trope, there may be limitations to Inzana’s attempts to avoid stereotypical portrayals of Muslims. One instance is this section on attire, where he can be seen to perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes, illuminating the importance of having Muslim writers serve as consultants when tackling such topics. The positionality that only Muslims should write these types of stories begets a slippery slope that ends with confining people to a narrow role, but it would be ethically sound to have at least one writer from the community being written about participate in the process to help mitigate even unconscious forms of bias.

Superpowers

In traditional superhero comics, heroes, villains, or both often possess some type of superpower. However, the protagonists and antagonists in these two graphic novels do not exhibit conventional superpowers, but their identities provide them with access to other forms of power.

In *Johnny Jihad*, Kazeem indoctrinates John through the power of persuasion. John sees himself as “the outsider” and “the oppressed” by American society and institutions like school, where he is bullied, and the military, whom he blames for his dad’s suicide that consequently led to his mother’s addiction. He is persuaded through atrocity videos and sermons to see himself in them, identification through a shared feeling of victimization, being “outsiders” who are oppressed by a common enemy: America. These two graphic novels are driven by the power of conviction—both antagonists and protagonists—fueled by their sense of right and wrong, good and bad, rooted in a moral compass defined by nationalism, anti-nationalism, and religion.

The Fixer, like Batman, does not possess any superpowers, although in the case of the caped crusader, I have heard people over the years remark sarcastically that “his power is his wealth.” There is credence to such a sentiment, as his power to combat evil is a gadget-based approach that utilizes technology created for him that requires significant financial resources. The Fixer is not presented as wealthy, nor does he deploy any advanced technology in his attack; instead, he uses guns to kill and ropes to transport from one location to another, which are tools accessible to the average Joe. This not only humanizes The Fixer but also provides a point of identification between the hero and the audience and empowers the reader by producing the message that

you don't need superpowers to fight terrorism; you need conviction.

Religiosity

In the post-9/11 context, religion was a primary marker for the identity of “the other,” casting Muslims as terrorists, and nationalism was the ideology foregrounded by American creators as the motive behind the defense of the homeland, whether undertaken by the military or superheroes. The religious nature of characters within a post-9/11 narrative position them as heroes or villains. This approach was co-opted by many comic books and graphic novels. In the case of *Holy Terror* and *Johnny Jihad*, there was a correlation between the more religious or observant a Muslim character was and their propensity for terrorism, aside from the Imam. This propagates fear and hatred not of the individual but of Islam as a religion and functions to justify America's war on terror. The religiosity of characters in *Johnny Jihad* and *Holy Terror* is assessed through three areas: references to G-d, rituals such as engagement in prayer and/or mentioning prayer, attending mosques, and the use of terms that appear in the Quran to illuminate how religiosity and terrorism are interconnected when it comes to Islam. This propagates the notion that the practicing of Islam breeds terrorism. No other religion is presented in such light in either novel.

References To G-D

The references to G-d by Muslim characters in *Holy Terror* all occur within the same context: conducting or threatening to commit acts of terrorism upon Westerners like The Fixer, Natalie, and bystanders, which legitimizes the notion of Muslims as the

oppressors and the need for American foreign policy targeting its followers and leaders.

In Islam, Allah refers to G-d, and within Miller's work, this word is tied to acts of Holy Terror committed by Muslims. In the first instance, a jihadi suicide bomber inside a saloon yells, "Allahu Akbar!" as he attempts to detonate a suicide belt (Miller 68). The declaration translates to "God is the greatest" (Dwight). The implication from a Western lens, within this context, is that the killings of everyday Americans are both a cause for celebration and "their" G-d's will. The second illustration occurs when a terrorist wearing a suicide belt who had just shot down a helicopter in a fictional location meant to represent America declares, "Praise Allah" (Miller 70). The third reference to G-d uttered by a Muslim is done so by a terrorist leader directed towards Natalie, who has been captured, saying, "YOUR BEHEADING WILL MAKE A BITCH OF A VIDEO. MAYBE WE'LL DO YOU NUDE. "THAT'D PUT THE FEAR OF ALLAH IN YOU" (Miller 99).

These three scenes illuminate how Miller situates Islamic terrorism as a religiously inspired act and/or one sanctioned by Islam that targets Westerners, much like the events of 9/11, the inspiration for his novel. Before outlining examples, I would like to note that Islamic terrorism is not automatically connected to Islam in a literal sense, but within this examination they are connected based on Miller's positionality and his conflation of the two. In the latter example, G-d is represented as a fearful force that brings harm to non-believers. However, this eternal being performs a similar role in Judeo-Christian religions, illuminating a shared quality among faiths ⁹⁷. This context is important to ensure Islam is not unfairly judged nor treated in a reductive fashion. After all, as noted earlier, Christian Crusades were early examples of atrocity propaganda that legitimized righteous hatred. But this reality is superseded by the perception rooted

in willful ignorance by many Westerners that Islam is unique in this regard. These acts serve to propagate the terrorist trope and the sense that Islam is engaged in a religious war against the West, cementing and legitimizing the “us vs. them” binary and the righteous hatred of those oppressing America’s freedoms and security. In addition, the threat against Natalie encapsulates and substantiates Mohammad Amin’s claim that *Holy Terror* paints Muslims as “bloodthirsty” and “misogynistic” (21).

The name of G-d is also evoked by protagonists such as Natalie, who references G-d or his only child, Jesus, on six occasions. However, this does not contribute to a religious binary (Christian versus Muslim), within the hero/villain construct, as all mentions operate as expressions of angst, specifically pain generated by wounds resulting from a terrorist attack.⁹⁸ In *Holy Terror*, both villains and heroes use G-d’s name in vain, whether as perpetrators or victims, when committing or suffering from a terrorist attack, making terrorism the connective tissue. A clear distinction emerges where Muslims in *Holy Terror* employ it in either a celebratory manner or to give the glory for their attacks to G-d, whereas westerners use it colloquially. This positions Natalie and others as secular and driven more by nationalism compared to Muslims, who are portrayed as religious and inspired by their religiosity, creating a clear division that further adds to the sense of “us vs. them.”

References to G-d in *Johnny Jihad* are as problematic as Miller’s by painting him as a merchant of inequality, extremism, death, and destruction, but also more layered and nuanced, as evidenced by Johnny’s transformation from adherence to his dismissal of G-d. The preceding propagates the idea that either it is man’s will as opposed to G-d’s that allows evil to flourish and/or that the concept of G-d, independent of faith, is

fantastical and dangerous. Kazeem, a radical imam, and the Taliban employ G-d's name to justify Sharia law and the need for global jihad.⁹⁹ These passages propagate the idea that sharia is G-d's will, which frames both Muslims and their interpretations of G-d as extreme, sexist, and orthodox. This heightens some reader's sense of Muslims as "the other" based on amplifying difference compared to American values and norms embodied through some readers. Also, as in *Holy Terror*, Inzana frames this conflict as a holy war (jihad) and perpetuating the dangers of Muslims wherever they reside by having an Imam call for a global jihad. While the author did portray the Imam as anti-terrorism, the inclusion of this type of figure spewing such a call to action makes the previous (Imam) an exception based on the subsequent conforming to the orientalist stereotype assigned to most of the characters in *Johnny Jihad*.

The many stages of John's religious journey are reflected in his references to G-d. They portray G-d as an accessory to the killing of the imam, a potential site of salvation and protection from the law, and finally as both an empty vessel and a destroyer of one's world. Initially, John's actions, in a similar fashion to Kazeem, the Taliban, and the imam, incriminate G-d through the following passage where he states through his inner monologue that "I added a little something for Allah to give me strength" during prayer the day before he was to murder someone (Inzana 39). This excerpt situates G-d as an accomplice to murder by implying that G-d gave him the strength to take a life.

Next, while in the air, on a plane returning from his mission, John is reflective, revealing:

I came to the realization that I couldn't continue to be a part of the Jamaat. I should have been studying for the SATS, working up the nerve to ask a girl out. I was only 17 years old and the only thing I had to show for my life was one dead Muslim cleric ... I was no better than mindless grunts in the army ..., No better than my father. ... I made a deal with Allah. If I got through this ordeal, I would continue to be a good Muslim (Inzana 53).

This quotation is complicated; on one hand, John expresses regret and yearns to live the life of an average American teenager, which humanizes him. Yet, on the other hand, he speaks of making a deal with Allah that if he got through this, he would "continue to be a good Muslim." This dehumanizes Muslims by suggesting "their" G-d would justify the murder of the other by helping someone get away with extinguishing a life (Inzana 53).¹⁰⁰ Also, the word "continue" implies that he had been a good Muslim up to this point. This propagates the notion that a good Muslim is one who trains at a terrorist camp and kills people. However, on a personal level, his changing tone, one of reflection and responsibility, opens the door for potential redemption. These two excerpts juxtapose G-d with the killing of an imam, initially positioning G-d as an accomplice before the fact, and in the latter passage, G-d is framed as a potential accomplice after the fact. This type of representation gives oxygen to the righteous hatred of Muslims and continues the thread of situating them as "the other." However, G-d is vindicated from any justification and/or assistance in the killing, evidenced by the fact that John's pleas go unanswered when he is captured by the authorities.

The final two references to G-d bring into focus how John distances himself from

his concept of Islam and G-d. John has transitioned from seeing G-d as a savior, a shelter, to viewing him as a destroyer by assigning blame to G-d for failing to rescue him from the consequences of his own actions. First, John paints G-d as the antagonist in his life's narrative when he comments to himself, "Allah had really Fucked me. Cops escorted me off the plane like Hannibal Lecter" (Inzana 54). This passage is a site of redemption for the representation of Muslims through G-d's inactions. Ironically, John, blaming his Islamic interpretation of G-d for failing to save him or intervene as requested, acquitted said G-d from crimes against humanity. "Their" (G-d's) inaction is a verdict on John's behaviour that makes clear that the G-d he serves—a Muslim one—does not condone and/or enable, removing him from any culpability. It also prevents the Western reader from using Allah as a scapegoat for acts of terror committed by an individual.

The final case of John mentioning G-d takes place near the end of his life. Feeling abandoned, and used and abused by both, America, represented by the CIA, and by agents of Islam, embodied by Jamaat and the Taliban, he has an epiphany revealed through his inner thoughts, "The fact is, I don't believe in anything anymore...not Allah, not Uncle Sam, not justice or freedom." (Inzana 84). The sentiments expressed by John are that G-d and/or nation, whether interpreted through a Muslim or Christian lens, is the same, deaf to man's pleas. Also, it suggests, based on his predicament, that people and groups operate out of self-interest and based on tribal affiliations. John serves as a representative example of how people succumb to despair when the value systems they use to cleanse themselves of disillusionment, pain, and suffering fail to replace those feelings with purpose and meaning. It is not the value

systems that are faulty, but far too often it is some of the people associated with said systems as well as the expectations and/or interpretations of those who subscribe to them.

Praying, the mention of prayer, and attending mosque as expressions of religiosity

Prayer, mention of prayer, and/or attending mosque speak to a character's religiosity: how that religion impacts one's identity and how their actions operate to situate that faith in a positive or negative light. In both *Johnny Jihad* and *Holy Terror*, praying to Allah in four out of five instances—three in the former and one in the latter—is associated with terrorism based upon location, attire, the subject doing so, and the context of what is being prayed for. This could function among Western readers to fold Muslims into the terrorist trope, thereby perpetuating orientalist stereotypes. However, in the other case, within the pages of *Johnny Jihad*, prayer operates as a habitual act. This one example somewhat distances the act from the confines of extremism and violence. Ultimately, incorporating at least one scene where prayer is conducted for the purpose of peace and/or in the name of family would have served as an intervention into a largely one-dimensional representation of prayer as an act connected to violence and/or terrorism.

In *Johnny Jihad*, initially for John, prayer signifies faithfulness, but later it becomes an empty vessel that is nothing but a ritual that ironically highlights his lack of faith. In the first instance, John is pictured in the sujood position: “kneeling... having the forehead, nose, both hands, knees, and all toes touching the ground together” (Bhat 3).

His inner thoughts reveal that prayer makes “all problems slip[ped] away...” (Inzana 14). Emanating from his heart is a stream of fog that is attached to three pictures: a naked woman whose breasts and vagina are visible and two heads, one that wears a hat and resembles Salim, and another, a bearded man with some type of headdress. Both of their mouths are open, as if speaking to him. The image of the woman could be seen as blasphemous but may also be attributed to the fact this scene transpires early in his newfound religious journey, suggesting he is still acclimatizing to his faith. An alternative interpretation is that sex is a common thing that would pop into a young person’s thoughts, i.e., it’s natural, and that said image is a humanizing agent because it symbolizes John is still a typical young American male.

The two faces are rich in meaning, as one represents Salim, who introduced John to Islam and was fundamental in his conversion. He is tantamount to an angelic figure metaphorically taking his hand, a protector and guide in his religious journey. The other is unknown, but his headdress partly resembles a suicide belt, suggesting he is an agent of terrorism. In terms of the second individual, the juxtaposition of Islam, G-d, and prayer with explosives plays into racist tropes of Muslim people as terrorists that were so prevalent in *Holy Terror*, as outlined earlier. Equally problematic is that both men are without eyes; Salim’s are covered by a large black spot, whereas the other man’s eyes are hidden by his headwear. While dreams are subjective and open to interpretation, the absence of his eyes could mean several things. One reading that could be applicable would be informed by Carl Jung’s contention that “the dream is a spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious” (74). In this instance, it may reflect John’s own lack of vision, a type of blindness

reflecting his state as someone learning and acclimatizing to a new faith about which he has much to learn

The second example of prayer in *Johnny Jihad* occurs when John, while in the terrorist camp, is pictured standing, facing the audience, with his hands raised in the air and fingers pointing upward, with palms together forming the triangle, a prayer stance this writer has observed practiced by people in some churches and synagogues. The stance and the setting are rich in messaging. Facing the reader comes across as confrontational (Boilard), and when juxtaposed with being set in a terrorist camp, propagates the dangers of Islam in America and confronts the audience with the consequences of American foreign policy. It was America's foreign policy of interventionism that contributed to his father's suicide and images of the suffering of Muslims based on American military and/or its allies, both of which were key components in his indoctrination process. On the other end of the spectrum, the representation of prayer in this case serves as an ideological device that bridges the gap between the perception and reality of perceived tribal differences instead of widening them. It could be read as an attempt to collapse boundaries that separate these faiths, perhaps suggesting we are more similar than different, closing the gap between a sense of difference that contributes to the "othering" of those deemed different.

The third illustration of prayer features John on a prayer rug in the sujood position, which is unique to Islam compared to the previous example of the triangle, emphasizing his Muslimness. His inner thoughts are documented as follows: "I added a little something for Allah to give me strength" (Inzana 39). Strength for what? The spatial

and temporal conditions situate him in Colorado the night before he plans to assassinate the Imam, contextualizing the purpose behind his prayer: he seeks strength from G-d to fulfill his mission to kill. It may illuminate how many understand Muslim terrorists as desecrating G-d and distorting his role,

It is illogical and intellectually dishonest to label Muslims, over one billion people, a diverse group comprised of different sects, races, ethnicities, and various degrees of religiosity, as terrorists and/or supporters of terrorism based on the actions of a minute group of extremists. But that's how representation can work, especially in the United States after 9/11 or any country after a terrorist attack, for that matter. The events of 9/11 were the basis for atrocity propaganda, which made it an especially virulent type of propaganda due to the fact it was based on real-life events, providing it with credibility and legitimizing the kind of righteous hatred of Muslims on display in Miller's work and that which Inzana attempts to counter. It is a reductive exercise that often mirrors the domestic socio-geopolitical views of a nation towards those framed as "the other," especially during times of war and conflict.

The fourth and final example of John and prayer occurs near the end of his life, when he is alone and ill in Afghanistan. His thoughts are documented through a diary entry. It includes a picture of a smiling John facing a falcon, which he manages as part of his role with the Taliban. Falcons are used as communication between "ground troops" (Inzana 80). John writes, "My only friends are the falcons. I named one Salim. I pray to a God that I don't believe in that Salim isn't shot by some yahoo Talib every time..." (Inzana 80). This passage illuminates two things. First, the power of acceptance among the disenfranchised, and second, it marks a loss of faith.

John's choice to pray for Salim once again illustrates the power of friendship and acceptance and how those feelings bind a lonely and isolated individual—which John was when he met Salim—to a person, even a terrorist, reinforcing Inzana's hypothesis that "disenfranchised youth" would find such relationships offered by terrorist organizations "very enticing," making them prime for indoctrination (*Johnny Jihad* Preface). As noted by Professor DDS Dobson-Smith, "Humans are social creatures. We have a deep-seated need to be liked, respected, and accepted by our peers. Sometimes that need is so strong, it drives us to alter our behaviors in exchange for approval." Acceptance and approval are not a desire; they are a fundamental human need, and Inzana is asking us to understand causality in that if our youth feel isolated and unaccepted by "US," they will find a sense of family and community with "THEM." By "THEM," Inzana is referring to extremists as opposed to Muslims as a whole.

In terms of religiosity, John's declaration, "I pray to a God that I don't believe in," reveals that his conversion to Islam did not solve his problems and that he has lost faith in G-d due to G-d's failure to intervene and rescue him from his self-imposed circumstances. Belief in G-d is no longer a marker for his identity, yet he still prays. Why? Out of habit, perhaps? Maybe. But in his state of loneliness, it most likely provides a form of interaction and engagement with someone and/or something else, even if it is a celestial being or one imagined by mankind. It might also mark an evolution in his religious journey where he can retain a connection to the said community without the expectation of divine intervention. But maybe nothing has changed; prayer was and continues to be used to fill a void by both John and sometimes by others across the globe. This is not to suggest all people use it in such a

fashion, but some do.

The role of prayer or mentions of praying in *Holy Terror* are limited to a single instance. The protagonists, The Fixer and Natalie, do not engage in prayer, reinforcing a secular identity. Just as in *Johnny Jihad*, praying in *Holy Terror* is the domain of terrorists. For example, a terrorist is pictured praying in a mosque in an overhead shot (Miller 94). He is sitting on the ground, legs crossed, reading an open book. The man is dressed in all black clothing, covering him from head to ankle and hiding his face. Behind him, sprawled out on the floor, is his gun. The absence of any facial features serves to position him as “the other” by making him seem “like he isn’t human,” in a similar fashion as Inzana’s did earlier. Both authors are united in branding terrorists as inhuman, yet Inzana, just like Miller, does not provide an example of prayer as positivity, as a peaceful exercise, leading both authors to propagate a negative image of observant Muslims.

The examination of religiosity through references to God and prayer and/or mention of it as a metric for religiosity reveals a theme of secularism versus religion, with the former being the Westerner and the latter being “the Muslim.” It must be noted that although not all Westerners are secular, many qualify as such, as evidenced by data suggesting approximately thirty to forty percent of Westerners explicitly identify as secular (Pew Research Centre). While this may not qualify as a binary, it does represent a distinction. Interestingly, in *Holy Terror*, the hero is secular, which erases the Judeo-Christian-Islam binary in which heroes and villains are constructed post-9/11, but within a 9/11 context. By making the heroes secular, Miller could be read as casting religions as the antagonist, the villain. As outlined earlier, these heroes —Natalie and

the Fixer—use the Lord’s name, which is sacrilegious to Christians and Catholics, undermining any reverence for G-d.¹⁰¹ This could be viewed as applying a critical lens to religion because no religion in either text, for that matter, is presented as possessing positive or redeeming qualities. The problem is that Miller does not represent any zealotry by any other religions aside from Islam, which undermines a fair and accurate criticism of Islam.

In addition to prayer, Mosques are also a metric for approaching the representation of religiosity. They facilitate the practice of one’s faith and house individuals engaged in religious acts or “actions” such as prayer and sermons (Stoltz 347). In both *Holy Terror* and *Johnny Jihad*, the congregates as well as the activities inside reduce a sacred place to an unholy site of terrorism and/or anti-western hatred. Both perpetuate Muslim archetypes outlined by Shaheen that have been embedded within comics historically, especially during the 1980s such as the “repulsive terrorist” and the portrayal of Muslims as “anti-west” (123). However, nuance and context, such as the shared theme of terrorism as the driver for such portrayals in Inzana’s work, are paramount. Unlike Miller, Inzana has no stated bias that situates, groups, or reduces Muslims to reductive stereotypes.

In *Holy Terror*, the mosque plays an important role in the story. The Fixer establishes that it was funded by foreigners: “The Saudis spent a fortune on this place. It’s the oldest mosque in Empire City” (Miller 88). What was Saudi Arabia’s objective? According to our superhero, it “is where Al-Qaeda set up shop” (Miller 93). The Fixer’s claims are substantiated by panels showing the people and activities inside the mosque, revealing dozens of terrorists with guns and/or suicide belts (Miller 93). It is also the

place where the terrorists hold Natalie as a hostage and threaten her with a beheading. Most troubling it taps into the paranoia that these places of worship operate as safe houses and launch pads for attacks. It also propagates the idea that foreign (Muslim) governments like Saudi Arabia are funding these operations, which then validates foreign policy that births operations like the war on terror. This situates Muslims as both “the foreign menace” as well as “the enemy within.” The people and the activities inside reduce a sacred place to an unholy site of terrorism.

Johnny Jihad paints a similar portrait of the Mosque, in terms of its association with terrorism. The difference is that Inzana constructs it as an indoctrination centre that breeds anti-American attitudes. This is evidenced by the following scene. Salim is pictured taking John to a mosque on Fulton Street in Brooklyn. On the way, he says “it’s as close to a real mosque as we can get around here” (Inzana 13). Unlike panels of the mosque in *Holy Terror*, which show the inside and outside of it, this mosque is not really shown, except for two panels: one a close-up of the Imam in front of a pulpit, and the other a picture of John and Salim, backs to the reader, with arms up in the air with one holding a book, standing on some part of a balcony looking out (Inzana 13). Inzana’s approach to the representation of a mosque in a nondescript manner, omitting unique features, design, and layout, creates the impression that it could be any mosque in America. By providing few details, the mosque is an idea—a place of worship—which makes it more accessible to Western readers. This may seem like an expansive approach to representation, but this could be equally problematic because, as the only mosque represented, it will create an impression of them all, or a typical one. In this case as a potential terrorist cell.

The first panel shows John inside the mosque, listening to a sermon by an imam. John reveals the sentiment expressed by the holy man: “The Imam would occasionally let some anti-western rhetoric fly” (Inzana 13). John writes that Salim “didn’t think he (Imam) was doing enough. He constantly criticized him” (Inzana 13). The second panel shows John and Salim inside the mosque, backs towards us, holding up a holy book in the air. He says to John, “I mean how many Muslims have to die before someone says something? One day, I’ll show you some “true Muslims” (Inzana 13). The reference to “true Muslims,” combined with Salim’s comment earlier, in route to the mosque, “it’s as close to a real mosque as we can get around here,” creates the impression that the mosque doesn’t speak to his idea of Islam and the congregants aren’t true Muslims” (Inzana 13). What Salim meant by “true Muslims” is evident three pages later, when he brings Johnny to a terrorist camp propagating the idea that real Muslims are terrorists, or from his lens, freedom fighters (Inzana 16). Both narratives frame mosques as centres for terrorism. But Salim’s criticism of the mosque shows that there is a grey scale of moderate and extreme Muslim belief. One could counterargue that it is simply one mosque, and as such, it should not reflect on all Muslims. However, since it is the only mosque presented in these stories, it paints all Muslims with the same brush. Far too often that’s how representation works! When it comes to the representation of those deemed “the other,” it is based on deduction; one or the few represents the many, generalizations are then made based on that representative example. While Inzana is under no obligation and/or bears no responsibility to collapse some Western stereotypes of Islam and/or Muslims, if there were even two mosques featured in Johnny Jihad, with one housing terrorists and the other a site of peace, it would be an

expansive type of representation by showing that Muslims, like all faiths, have extreme and non-extreme elements within their communities. They would not be able to be reduced to a trope, but as the sole representative, it embodies the whole faith to certain Western readers instead of a part.

Religious Terms

Along with mentioning prayer and/or attending a mosque, the use of religious terms by a character speaks to their religiosity, whether perceived or real, and casts certain impressions upon their faith based on the religious terms used and their effects on others, as well as any affiliations with terror.

The use of religious terms such as sharia, infidel, and jihad aren't just indicators of one's religiosity; they operate to legitimize orientalist stereotypes such as Islam's oppression of women, anti-Western views/hatred of the West, and the Islamic terrorist trope. All of which propagate Western supremacy, the othering of Muslims, and the validation of US foreign policy like proactivism and/or interventionism as a reactionary step against Islam's holy war against America. In addition, the omission of certain terms by both Miller and Inzana both reflects and reaffirms their approach and messaging. For instance, *Holy Terror* contains no mention of jihad or sharia because, unlike Inzana, Miller draws no distinctions between extremist and non-extremist Muslims; according to his worldview, they all are terrorists, whether committing such acts on foreign soil or targeting their own women. Conversely, Inzana's graphic novel is void of the term "infidel" because he does not view the conflict through the lens of a religious war, nor does he focus on the othering of non-Muslims by Muslims. Instead, he privileges

America's foreign policies, glorification of violence, and indoctrination as key components behind the conflict. In both *Johnny Jihad* and *Holy Terror*, five out of six instances where jihad is expressed transpire within the context of acts and/or as a call to action to conduct terrorist attacks. In the sixth case, Inzana uses John's journey to dismantle romanticized notions associated with jihad by amplifying the impact that such a desire has on the beholder, which undermines and challenges those who attempt to legitimize or glorify the use of jihad as a weapon to wield against non-believers. As noted earlier, jihad is a contested term and encompasses more than the idea of holy war. For example, it is understood by Muslims to represent many things, including the struggle for self-perfection and "to strive in the cause of God with sincerity and discipline" ("IN: Meaning of 'Jihad' Misunderstood by Many"; Quran 22:78). In this examination, it is being analyzed with respect to terrorism and war based upon the objects of study and their respective narratives.

The first example of jihad's being mentioned is when John notes that "Visiting Imams would lecture on the growing need for global jihad" (Inzana 29). The plural imams speak to many, which overshadows the righteousness of the imam earlier on, who condemned such behavior. It renders him the exception. Said imam is central to the second example of the term being used. John is in Colorado preparing to murder the Imam, who reported Jamaat to the authorities, and John states, "The paper I had grabbed would hide the knife until it was time. A trick I had picked up from the good old Encyclopedia of Jihad" (Inzana 45).

Later in the story, after agreeing to work for the CIA, John is pictured throwing a book with Sharia written on it in the garbage, as he comments, "My life had gone all

topsy-turvy. I no longer gave a fuck about Islam, jihad, or anything else. Look where it had gotten me” (Inzana 58). The final instance of the term being expressed in the novel involves Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks, who John explains “was sending soldiers all over the place to wage a global Jihad” (Inzana 78).

The aforementioned passages are rich in meaning. The imam uses jihad as a call to action for Muslims to engage in a physical struggle against the West, which isn’t explicitly stated but is implicit based on members of the camp having used videos and speeches to situate America as the enemy. The call to action was answered by Osama Bin Laden. This positions jihad as a term that represents terrorism and anti-Western views, which, based on the panel, is endorsed by holy men and the leader of a terrorist organization. The former gives the impression that it is sanctioned by Islam itself, and the latter illuminates how Muslim leaders are using it in the context of a holy war by engaging in physical struggle. This propagates the message that Islam is engaged in a holy war with America and mosques are recruitment centres, both of which tap into fears and paranoia surrounding Muslims domestically and abroad. Here, Inzana is representing some of the reasons behind America’s foreign policy. Alternatively, the excerpt where he trashes the book titled *Sharia* functions as counterpropaganda to orientalist stereotypes and signals a shift in John’s religiosity. He has transitioned from committing jihad to dismissing it completely, speaking of such a concept as one that brings misery, as evidenced by his life going “all topsy-turvy” because of Jihad in this case (Inzana 58).

Holy Terror, like *Johnny Jihad*, conflates jihad with terrorism; they become two sides of the same coin, which is reductive of other interpretations and/or applications of

jihad. The first case of such a relationship is evidenced by comments made by Captain Dan Donegal while talking to The Fixer about a recent terrorist attack: “One of our Jihadi friends hit a saloon” (Miller 68). The other mention of jihad is by a terrorist, wearing a suicide belt, who yells “Jihad” as he clicks a detonator (Miller 74). “Infidel,” similar to “jihad,” is a term that generates significant disquietude among Westerners. Miller taps into this anxiety shared among like-minded people. He is neither subtle nor implicit but quite explicit in assigning the label “infidel” to Westerners, which positions those in the US—represented by readers who share his lens—as “the other,” who must be extinguished as part of one’s religious duty. This is expressed across two all-black pages, located right before the story “officially” begins, through the following large words:

“IF YOU MEET THE INFIDEL, KILL THE INFIDEL”

-MOHAMMED

The words and colours intersect to reinforce the same message about relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. McCloud, as noted earlier, contends that “in black and white, the ideas behind the art are communicated more directly. Meaning transcends form. Art approaches language” (192). The idea being conveyed in this instance is “US versus THEM,” a continuation of the practice Shaheen documented in the 1980s comic books (102). This binary is embedded throughout this section on representation and religiosity, speaking to it as a vital weapon and an essential step in the process of indoctrination.

Also, black and white represents a “rigid” way of thinking that leaves “no room to find middle ground,” further cementing one’s view of the other as absolute. Ijaz, Awais,

and Ali Nadeem describe such quotes as “abusive towards Islam...used to destroy the image of Islam” (793). This illuminates why Mohammad Amin labels Miller’s work as “anti-Muslim propaganda of the worst type...displaying total hatred of Muslims.”

Spencer Ackerman concurs, declaring Miller’s work “one of the most appalling, offensive, and vindictive comics of all time.” This portrayal of Islam gives oxygen to righteous hatred, which in this environment becomes a logical response to people you believe want to kill you, your brothers, sisters, mothers, grandfathers, and new-born children.

The colour red reinforces this binary of US versus THEM by serving as a symbol of blood and death, which speaks to the aftermath of a radical Islamic terrorist attack conducted in the West, as pictured in the first two pages you see upon opening the book, preceding these and featuring pictures of nails sprawled across the pages against a blood-soaked red background. The word “INFIDEL” is written twice, giving emphasis to the message: non-believers need to be killed by believers. This quote, erroneously attributed to Mohammad, sets the stage for the role of words as a propagandistic tool that continues to indoctrinate the reader into the idea of Muslims as terrorists, enemies of Western civilization, and a force that must be eradicated.

The second illustration of “infidel” being used in *Holy Terror* is expressed by three men who appear as all-black shadowy figures shouting, “Infidel! Slut! Whore!” as they whip rocks both large and small at a woman’s head sticking out of the ground, as if she had been buried alive up to her neck (Miller 77). One of her eyes appears dislodged, and her face resembles a skeleton due to the damage inflicted by the projectiles, leaving much of her skin hanging off her face. She exclaims “Ghannn,” as she can no

longer speak coherently (Miller 77). This picture propagates two points of departure between Islam and Judeo-Christianity as well as America and Middle Eastern countries by situating Muslims, their religion, and their nations in a manner that Shaheen contends are staples of the representation of Muslims in comics: oppressors of women and an inherently violent faith (123; 125).

As noted earlier, Inzana excludes this term from this story, highlighting how his novel is based on the process of indoctrination into the US versus THEM mindset, whereas *Holy Terror* features a battle between two groups who see one another as “the other” and where Muslims cast non-Muslims as the infidels based on religious difference. The non-believer vs. believer binary related to infidels is not prevalent as the motivation or cause for conflict in *Johnny Jihad*; instead, Inzana looks at how social issues such as bullying, abuse, and neglect produce a sense of being “the other” that creates identification with disenfranchised groups, making people like John malleable for indoctrination.

Equally important to jihad and infidel within the context of this discourse and the issue of religiosity is sharia. Inside the pages of *Johnny Jihad*, this term is used solely by extremists, which distances the concept from being associated with all Muslims, thereby functioning as counterpropaganda to orientalist stereotypes. Inzana further dismisses its value and legitimacy in a key scene where said practice is disposed of literally and figuratively. “Sharia” is mentioned two times, and on one occasion it appears as a word written on a book. In the first instance, the term is uttered by Kazeem in conversation with John, stating, “All we wish is for the freedom to live under the sharia as Allah intended” (Inzana 21). The use of “all” by Kazeem suggests that

every Muslim, independent of location, class, ethnicity, and sex, among other things, wants to practice an extreme and violent form of Islam. This is problematic due to its reductive portrayal of Muslims that functions to position them as “the other” by “acting like a certain group of people are all the same,” amplifying differences to western norms, and the inclusion of punishments such as stoning and amputation that make the people, and by extension, the faith, who subscribe to this degree of religiosity appear “like they aren’t really human.” This interpretation of Sharia is rooted in the character of Kazeem, who is an extremist. *Johnny Jihad* does not suggest that all Muslims follow this!

The second reference to sharia is not spoken but written. It appears written on the front of a book that John throws in the garbage right after being caught for committing murder, interrogated, and recruited by the CIA to spy on the Taliban (Inzana 58). John writes, “My life had gone all topsy-turvy. I no longer gave a fuck about Islam, jihad, or anything else. Look where it had gotten me” (Inzana 58). The garbage is a symbol for an idea; in this case, Sharia is worthless and disposable, as are the other things he dismisses in the passage related to Sharia, such as religion, specifically Islam, and jihad, the physical struggle to “repel evil” (“IN: Meaning of ‘Jihad’ Misunderstood by Many”). The dismissal of Sharia, jihad, and Islam restores a degree of humanity to him in the eyes of many Western readers by lessening a sense of him as “the other.” It is the first step in his redemption story, but not that of Judeo-Christianity, as he does not turn to a new religion.

The final mention of Sharia in *Johnny Jihad* reveals in practice whether it provides freedom or is something that should be discarded. This last example of sharia

(law) situates it as a violent, horrific spectacle, observed by thousands in a stadium.

John describes the setting, and the practice of Sharia as follows:

Kabul stadium was like something out of a Mad Max movie. Violators of Sharia would be punished in front of a huge audience. It was the Thunderdome... A council of mullahs would always be there to observe the judgment. But it was the victim who decided the sentence... Sometimes the accused would just have to repay the victim, give him some goats or whatnot... But more often, someone died. It was Hamurabi's Code, an eye for an eye and all that. You could be hanged, shot, or have your hands or feet lopped off (Inzana 67).

This excerpt frames Sharia and the type of religiosity attached to it as barbaric, where punishment is doled out in public spaces and other Muslims celebrate the acts of depravity, reducing the extinguishing of human life to some type of spectator sport. Since followers of sharia tend to be orthodox, these panels are read as an indictment of a subset of believers as opposed to the religion as a whole. This was achieved by presenting other Muslims, as evidenced by their religious attire, as the victims of sharia themselves (Inzana 67). But confirmation bias does not permit such nuance among people who perceive these panels through the lens of their tribe, dependent on one's positionality determined by their religion, religiosity, and/or socio-political stance. For others, Inzana is complicating the simplistic notion of "us versus them" based on religious differences, as well as disrupting the idea that all Muslims are the same.

From a historical view and by casting a wider religious and cultural lens, it may reveal that these forms of justice/punishment are found in many other religions and ancient societies. For example, both Judaism and Christianity have passages endorsing

the eye-for-an-eye philosophy, evidenced by the following: Exodus 21:22–25, Leviticus 24:17–21, and Deuteronomy 19:16–21(Akin).¹⁰² In addition, Sharia is neither a new phenomenon nor an indictment of Islam; instead, it is a contemporary example of an old punishment known as *Damnatio ad bestias*, sanctioned under Roman law, which similarly “served as a form of public entertainment and was often used to symbolize the destruction of Rome's enemies... criminals and prisoners of war,” as well as Christians to be “thrown to wild beasts” (Gershon).¹⁰³ Sharia and *Damnatio ad bestias* use differences based on binaries, including the moral versus the immoral, to frame “the other” as less than. On one hand, as discussed earlier, *Holy Terror*, unlike *Johnny Jihad*, omits any mention of the term sharia, because it aligns with Miller’s positionality, which is an indicator that he groups all Muslims into one category: extremists. On the other hand, Inzana interrogates the issue of a particular interpretation and/or understanding of sharia as a means of distinguishing between extremism and the whole Muslim community.

The ending and messaging about Islam and the west

The endings of these graphic novels are both ironic and reaffirming the different approaches to representation. John, a CIA asset, is killed by American weaponry in Afghanistan launched because of their foreign policy, whereas *The Fixer* is almost killed trying to protect America and enforce their counterterrorism campaign. The message within the context of America’s war on terror positions the former, American interventionism and its external affairs strategy, as the antagonist. Meanwhile, the latter frames Islam, in its totality, as the villain. In the framework of the discourse surrounding

Islamophobia, these approaches render *Holy Terror* as anti-Muslim propaganda, while *Johnny Jihad* functions as counterpropaganda. The endings do not provide a resolution to the issue of terrorism, speaking to the reality that it is an ongoing matter and illuminating the fact that neither approach has nor could resolve the problem.

In *Johnny Jihad*, the ending occurs with John in Afghanistan; he had been sent there by the CIA to spy on the Taliban as part of the deal made after they arrested him for killing the Imam. The latter had sold him to Bin Laden to be used to commit jihad against Americans as a human bomb. He is slowly dying as gangrene has set in from his self-inflicted gunshot to the leg that he carried out as a means to prevent him from being sent overseas and used in such a manner (Inzana 77-78). John's final days in Afghanistan are spent reflecting on the damage and terror inflicted on innocents by US foreign interventionism, attacking his father's misguided patriotism, and acknowledging the similarities between the Taliban and the US government, as evidenced by the following panels. First, in the aftermath of 9/11, a side angle of a jet is pictured dropping a bomb (Inzana 85). A textbox expresses John's thoughts: "Do Americans feel vindicated? It's all a war of retribution. When will enough blood be shed? The Afghans got caught in the middle of this mess..." (Inzana 85). He continues his thoughts in the next panel, saying, "... They are paying for it with their lives," against the backdrop of a picture of a man with eyes closed, curled up, lying dead on the ground (Inzana 85).

The passage is another example of Inzana foregrounding the consequences of America's foreign policy—the death of innocents—that gave birth to the righteous hatred against the USA, driving people to commit acts of terror and giving credence to the impression of America as the oppressor and Muslims as "the oppressed." This

frames the American government and military as the villains and the Afghans as the victims. John is expressing his thoughts to someone, but who? Since there is no one else in these panels, Inzana, through John, is confronting the Western reader, of course. They are being challenged with the ramifications of their interventionist policies: the death of innocents and the hatred of America. This challenges nationalistic and jingoistic objects like *Holy Terror* that place the root cause of terrorism on religious differences. This distinction speaks to how Inzana's *Johnny Jihad* operates as counterpropaganda by assigning blame for terrorism to many factors, while *Holy Terror* propagates religious differences as the cause of terrorism and hatred of America.

Additionally, John challenges his father's patriotism, support of the military, and overall view of America in the following panels that switch between the present and the past, communicated through flashbacks: John, pictured speaking into a tape recorder as a jet flies above him, ponders, "I wonder what my father would have thought of all this?" (Inzana 85). In the next panel, a flashback of John's dad, with beer in hand, is pictured looking down at a child-aged John, whose own head is tilted towards the floor, when he states, "You gonna be a military man one day, boy?" (Inzana 85). The size discrepancy between father and son speaks to the power dynamic where the father has domain over him, while his lowered head is an expression of shame (Van Edwards). His father's control over him, combined with his body language, emphasizes his vulnerability and reminds the reader that he grew up in a harmful and dysfunctional environment that was illustrated earlier by his father's abuse of him and his mother. This makes him a sympathetic figure by restoring the reader's sense of his humanity.

Switching back to the present, the next panel features a wide-angle shot of John.

His back to the reader, one hand holding up the tape recorder to his mouth, while the other hand is pressed against the butt of the gun to stabilize him. John is surrounded by debris resulting from the war, speaking of the destruction and despair caused by the US military. Amidst the ruination, John records his thoughts: "It looks like I will die for the country his [father] loves so much... by their hand no less." (Inzana 85). The wide shot makes him appear small, and the need to use the butt of the gun, like a cane, to stand heightens the reader's impression of him as non-threatening, vulnerable, and a victim of circumstance. John's words confront his father's view of America as a righteous and honorable nation by positioning himself as a sacrificial lamb who will die at the hands of the killing machine his dad once served. The reality of his circumstances leads John to question his dad, asking what can no longer be answered. He seeks to reconcile his dad's perception of America with the reality of their actions.

Later, John wonders, "Did you know, Dad?" (Inzana 86). He continues this query, asking, "Did you know that war is just a big game?" (Inzana 86). John then turns his attack towards patriotism and sees himself and his father both as victims, marking a moment of identification by stating, "I'm just like you were, Dad. I did what my country told me to. I was a good boy" (Inzana 86). His state of reflection creates a wealth of meaning. John begins to understand that they have been oppressed by the same oppressor: American foreign policy. The message propagates the idea that American nationalism through blind devotion to a country through military or government service is a disease that infects families, leading to intergenerational death and destruction. A distinction is being established between the people that serve versus those they serve. Military men and women are humanized, whereas the institution is being dehumanized.

This is a very thoughtful and effective propagandistic tool because it paints the people as victims, nullifying the reader's developing a defensive posture based on support for those tasked with defending the nation.

The ending of the novel *Johnny Jihad*, as well as John's death, unfolds over the final two pages through seven consecutive panels. By this point, he has discarded his tape recorder. First, John is pictured in an extreme close-up against a black backdrop, facing the audience, eyes closed, mouth open. He says, "They are finally coming to rescue me..." (Inzana 87). The combination of words and pictures creates a tapestry of meaning; the black background represents "evil" and "bad," situating his mindset as bad and his environment—Afghanistan—as evil (Cherry). The full-face angle combined with John's open mouth establishes that he is speaking to the reader, forging a connection between the two and continuing the process of his humanization.

The next seven panels reveal "who is coming" and "what John is being rescued from." First, panel no. 2, on the third-to-last page of the graphic novel has a picture of a white jet ascending in a darkened sky, releasing white condensation trails. John remarks, "I can hear them coming..." (Inzana 87). This suggests, so far, that the "who" might be the American military, which his father served. This perception is based on the word "coming," which implies they may be arriving from abroad. It is unclear if he is being saved from Afghanistan, the Taliban, and/or Islam—all of which he has denigrated since arriving in Afghanistan—or whether he needs to be saved from himself.

The following panel, no. 3, on the page, has a picture of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre among many smaller buildings. John continues his comments from the last panel, adding, "... just like they promised me years ago..." (*Johnny Jihad* 87).

The Twin Towers are an icon of New York City, and “they” could be a reference to his terrorist associates and a pending attack on the US on 9/11. The next panel, no. 4 reaffirms this perception, as it features John’s back to the reader, watching three jets ascend. He comments, “The plane is on its way” (Inzana 87). The words and pictures do not correspond to one another, as he is using the singular “plane” instead of the plural to describe three jets. Interestingly, the appearance of three planes mirrors the amount successfully hijacked and flown into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, respectively, while the mention of a plane corresponds to what he sees occurring in the skies above Afghanistan.

The proceeding panel, no. 5, returns to a picture of the Twin Towers, but with one plane heading right towards one of them. These preceding panels are somewhat contradictory, as John’s words and the corresponding pictures earlier gave the impression the Americans were coming “to rescue him.” But now, when he said he could hear them coming,” he might have meant they were heading past him, out of the country. What does appear clear is that a plane was going into a building in America. The next three panels seem to indicate that a jet was also entering Afghan airspace. The final panel on page, no. 6, has a picture of a jet up in a white sky, releasing a bomb (Inzana 87). This panel does not indicate where it is being dropped. On the following page, it becomes clear where that bomb is landing.

The second-to-last page has four panels—three small ones that exist inside of a much larger one. The first tiny panel contains a picture of the tip of a missile descending, accompanied by these words from John: “I can finally be...” (Inzana 88). Followed by a slightly larger panel with a close-up of the whole missile, the third and

final of the small panels features a wide shot of the missile about to hit the ground (*Johnny Jihad* 88). The larger panel has a wide shot, against a black background, of John as the missile heads towards him, generating a huge explosion around him. He proclaims “free,” indicating what he can finally be. Prior to examining the last page of *Johnny Jihad*, it is important to pause and reflect on how form affects the pictures and words. Specifically, the impact of borderless panels, which McCloud notes takes on a “timeless quality” (102). In this case, war between America and Muslim extremists takes on a timeless quality because it is seemingly conflict without end, unless you frame death as the end, as was the case with Johnny, who was caught in between both parties.

On the last page are the words “FIN” against a white background (Inzana 89). Below these letters is a picture reminiscent of the famous 9/11 photo by Alexandre Fuchs that depicts the skeletal remains of three bent beams from the World Trade Centre. The difference is that the photo features three bent beams, whereas the panel has one. This photo has been named by an Associated Press article as one of the “20 pictures that documented the enormity of 9/11” (Peltz). The similarity between the picture in the novel and the photo by Fuchs creates a connective tissue that binds *Johnny Jihad* to the discourse surrounding 9/11. However, the war did not end. Terrorism did not cease. Therefore, the texts consisting of FIN, which can be read as the short form for FINISH, as FIN is French for ending and is often used as the last title card in French films do not refer to an ending of the military conflict. Because in Inzana’s worldview, this war on terror can’t end until his perception of the root causes like extremism, US foreign policies, and environmental factors like abuse, alienation,

societal glorification and normalization of violence and bullying that make one malleable to indoctrination, have been neutralized and/or addressed.

Instead, FIN, when placed into his declaration of being “free” as death approaches, speaks to his journey being finished. John is not freed from the country or the people, but from himself. He is now free of the pain and suffering caused by his childhood. Free from being used as a pawn in the war games between extremist Islam and America. Free from loneliness and a sense of abandonment. Freed from the reality that there is no good versus bad, as evidenced by these comments by John: “It didn't matter to me. My country abandoned me to die in some far-off land... Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the CIA—it didn't matter. After a while, all these names are interchangeable” (Inzana 77).

John's epiphany speaks to the wider stakes of Inzana's graphic novel: there are no heroes—just villains looking to indoctrinate people in their war machine. Also rich in meaning is that both John's and his father's deaths were a result of service to the country. John was murdered—directly—by a US bomb while working for the CIA, whereas the US killed John's dad, but indirectly; he took his own life due to the trauma inflicted by his service. This messaging propagates the idea that its foreign policy leads to collateral damage on Americans themselves.

In addition, the events surrounding his death are significant. The aforementioned panels reveal that there were parallel events transpiring abroad and domestically. A terrorist attack was launched against the Twin Towers in America, as well as a strike administered by the US targeting the Taliban. By blurring the lines between the two acts, it removes one's ability to assign one group as heroic and the other as villainous.

Since the consequences remain the same for both parties, war itself becomes the ultimate antagonist. The fusion of these two attacks is symbolic, as opposed to historical, to create the sense that they are one and the same: terrorism that kills innocent civilians.

The ending of Frank Miller's *Holy Terror* unfolds over three pages. The first page includes five consecutive squared panels of Natalie facing the reader from a full-face angle, as if talking to them. She is describing The Fixer's vulnerable state as he nears death:

He drops his gun. His knees hit the floor. They dragged the rest of him down with them. The sound is soggy, all wrong. He vomits blood. He gurgles out what should be a scream. He starts scratching himself all over, like he's covered with beetles.... His nose and ears and eyes start bleeding... he wrenches his right eye from its socket. He digs into his doughy flesh; his skin comes off in sheets. His stomach splits open. His guts spill out.... He goes limp (107).

The description of his condition and his reaction to it suggest these are not just wounds from conventional weapons like guns; they also seem to be chemical, which is affirmed by Natalie (Miller 107). The Fixer, protector of the West and the first line of defense against terrorism, is nearing death. His vulnerable state elicits sympathy and concern. In this circumstance, he is less "super" and more ordinary—just a guy trying to fight his version of "the good fight," which makes him more identifiable and relatable. All the backgrounds in these three pages are the same colour: cadmium red. As discussed earlier, McCloud contends that colour "could communicate a dominant mood, resulting

in, among many things, color as environment.” In this case, the colour red, associated with “aggression,” “pain,” and “blood,” represents the poisonous gas. The associations with the colour correlate to the environment and the mood created, as it causes “pain” and can leave people in a pool of their own “blood.” Ijaz, Awais, and Ali Nadeem concur with McCloud’s contention about the power of colour, proclaiming that Miller’s use of red “induced fear” (792-794).

The next panel shows Natalie turning away from the reader, addressing the Fixer: “This is what they planned for us. Let’s get the hell out of here” (Miller 107). The final panel from this page takes up three-quarters of the total space and shows Natalie helping The Fixer walk up some stairs into a black building, escaping the red background representing the poisonous gas. They are presented as all-black, shadowy figures. Five textboxes appear on the side of the building where she seems to be talking directly to the reader: “The Fixer’s wounds finally catch up to him. He’s losing blood by the bucket. His wounds--I pray they don’t expose him to the poison. Come on, big man. Let’s get you up to where the air is clear. Come on. You can make it. You have to make it” (Miller 107).

The Fixer’s condition amplifies the threat of terrorism because if The Fixer can barely, or possibly not, survive, it does not bode well for the prospects of survival for the average Joe. It places the reader in greater jeopardy. The threat is further personalized by portraying them as all-black shadowy figures, which obscures their identity, rendering them more abstract. This means they could be anyone and everyone, propagating the message that we are all in danger from Islamic terrorism.

The next page, the second-to-last one, is borderless and is comprised of a

picture of nails flying all around in every direction. One giant nail, much thicker and larger than the others, is in the foreground (Miller 108). This picture simulates a 3D film experience where it seems to be leaping off the screen, but in this case, the page. In giant letters, “SIX WEEKS LATER” is written in uppercase letters across the top of the page.

The final page has three panels, all of which feature Captain Dan Donegal. The first panel pictures the captain hiding under the covers with his eyes bugged out. A series of textboxes read “

DAN DONEGAL. A HARD MAN. A TOUGH COP. SHIVERING IN HIS SHEETS LIKE A SCARED LITTLE BOY, ALL ON ACCOUNT OF A BAD DREAM. NO. NOT A DREAM. A MEMORY FROM SIX WEEKS AGO. Six weeks since the bombs and the blood and the screams. Six weeks since the air went soggy—ash thick. Since warplanes pinned the city down, flying solo, they rattled the windows and cracked the ceiling plaster (Miller 109).

Just like the previously discussed example of crosshatching used by Inzana, in the aforementioned panel Miller’s line work communicates emotion (see fig.16). It provides a visual representation of Donegal’s mental state that corresponds to the feelings expressed in the picture and words inside the panel. His bugged-out eyes, the act of hiding beneath the covers, and the words “shivering in his sheets” are all encapsulated by this style of line work (see fig.17). McCloud cites these lines as conveying “madness” primarily and, to a much lesser degree, “anxiety” (119). This is a duo-specific combo “panel in which both words and pictures send essentially the same

message” (McCloud 153). Aside from the components complementing one another—words and pictures—it illuminates the power of art as a universal language where words are not required to communicate; art has a voice. Far too often, we privilege words as a reflection of true literature, and comics are perceived as infantile due to their dependence on pictures as well as words, but people neglect to appreciate the power of elements such as line work to make one feel and understand.



Figure 16: Frank Miller, *Holy Terror*, 2011.

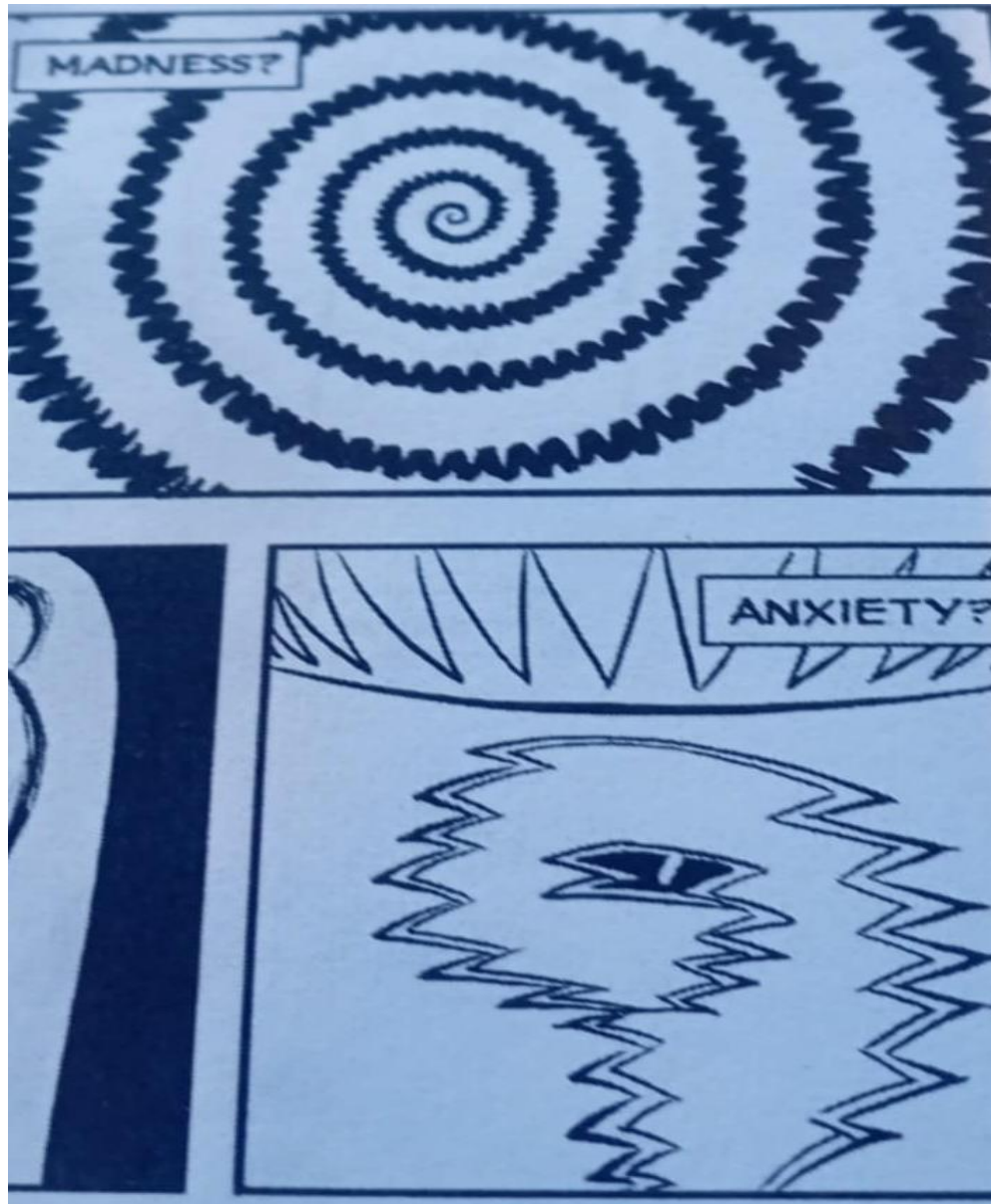


Figure 17: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 2011.

The following panel shows Dan sitting on the edge of his bed, hand on head, cigarette pack in his other hand. Textboxes read:

SIX WEEKS--AND WHAT DOES CAPTAIN DAN DONEGAL HAVE TO
SHOW FOR IT? A NOISY, BUSY, CRANKY CITY TURNED ALL QUIET

AND SCARY-POLITE. A COUGH THAT COMES FROM OUT OF NOWHERE, NO TELLING WHEN, MAKING THE MOST BODY-PROUD HEALTH NUT SOUND LIKE A CHAIN SMOKER. A BED GONE LONELY. CHILDREN'S TOYS, TURNING UP IN STRANGE, FORGOTTEN PLACES. AND THE SAME SOUNDS, THE SAME SMELLS. EVERY DAMN NIGHT (Miller 109).

The final panel shows a full-face shot of Dan, eyes up at the sky, as smoke rises from the cigarette in his other hand. His forehead wrinkles and the presence of a cigarette are both markers of stress. A textbox proclaims, “NO WONDER WE CALL IT TERROR” (Miller 109). The words and pictures in the final two pages convey what survived and will continue to survive: terrorism, and the fact that a giant nail is heading directly towards the reader personalizes the threat and suggests that nobody can arrest the terrorism inside and/or outside of these pages. It is coming for us, the reader, and no one is coming to and/or can save us, including the authorities here represented by the police.

The final two pages, just like the first two, which appear after the story, are also coloured red and feature a myriad of nails flying out at the reader, which are examples of what Ijaz, Awais, and Nadeem label as “fear elements” and “fear mongering” that create a heightened sense of tension between Islam and the West, placing these representations in their “unfavorable category” (792). In addition, these “fear elements” are accentuated by the comic book form itself. Miller, like Inzana, employs borderless panels as a device. The aforementioned four pages are borderless pages, and when they are juxtaposed with such imagery—nails—it is propagating the idea that there is no

beginning nor an end to Islamic terrorism; it is an omnipresent threat that is not confined by the temporal and spatial related to geopolitical events or wars; it is endless. This speaks to the role that the form can take in contributing to the messaging and perpetuating stereotypes.

Isro'iyah and Herminingsih's contention that "the story's conclusion marks the point at which the initially unstable situation stabilizes" is being placed by this author in conversation with these two novels to assess if it applies and, if not, what the implication is (142). The "initial unstable situation" in both graphic novels is related to terrorism: a terrorist attack on America in *Holy Terror* and the war on terror in *Johnny Jihad*. Neither are stabilized, as evidenced by the continuation of terrorist attacks on the US six weeks after the Fixer's mission in the former, and with respect to the latter, the war on terror was never completed and/or arrested. It speaks to how neither superheroes nor military might alone can resolve the issue of terrorism. It is complicated terrain to navigate and should be represented as complex, as opposed to inserting some type of happy ending that wraps up loose ends that, in reality, can't be wrapped up. Terrorist acts will cease to exist when difference no longer leads to the oppression and/or alienation of those deemed "the other."

CONCLUSION

This dissertation contributes to the discourse surrounding the representation of Muslims in comic books by grounding the issue within a historical context.

This investigation has amplified the voices of Muslim scholars to ensure that the most important stakeholders are foregrounded in the discussion. This must become standard

academic practice for any scholarship undertaken by a member outside of the group they are discussing. Also, the approach of placing objects from pre-9/11 into conversation with post-9/11 narratives has allowed for an assessment of what, if any, shifts and/or changes have occurred within the medium.

The comparative analysis of pre-9/11 and post-9/11 objects reveals both changes and the continuation of stereotypical practices in the representation of Muslim characters in sequential art. However, the progressive shifts are much more profound and abundant and signal a rise in counterpropaganda that challenges the reductive, orientalist stereotypes so prominent in the pre-9/11 comic book works.

The representation of Muslim characters in the discourse surrounding orientalist stereotypes and sequential art, specifically comic books and graphic novels, has been determined by three factors: temporal and spatial conditions, popular cultural portrayals, and authorship. Within a pre-9/11 and a post-9/11 context, the geopolitical relationship between the West and the Muslim world was largely determined by conflicts such as the Iran Hostage Crisis, the Gulf War, and the War on Terror. First, the time and space in which pre-9/11 comic book narratives were crafted—in America during war with Muslim nations, after its citizens were taken hostage, and its allies were targeted—functioned to situate Muslims as “the other.” Muslims were cast as the supervillains, and these events fostered a sense of “us versus them” within this American medium—comics— as illustrated by the portrayals of Muslims as the antagonists in the pre-9/11 objects of study featuring *The Veil* and *Salima Baranizar*.

The temporal and spatial conditions shaping the representation of Muslims in popular culture, specifically based on the conflict between America and the Muslim

world, persisted in the 21st century. However, this time stakeholders in the US engaged in counterpropaganda designed to arrest Islamophobia. On September 11, 2001, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, respectively, by revolutionary Islamists marked one of the worst assaults on American soil since WWII, giving birth to the war on terror. This horrific event created the environment for the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists and the righteous hatred of said group and primed a population to accept and embrace Islamophobia as a legitimate and justifiable reaction and/or response. Yet, something vastly different transpired. The type of propaganda so prevalent pre-9/11 in response to geopolitical conflicts with Muslim nations gave way to counter-propagandistic measures, the type that Miller's work tries to dismantle.

US domestic policy set the tone for this shift, as evidenced by "the DOJ['s] investigat[ion]" and prosecut[ion of] "350 backlash-related criminal complaints" (United States Department of Justice 7). The Civil Rights Division devised a plan of action to address "the new wave of violence and discrimination" (United States Department of Justice 5). It was comprised of outreach, the threat of prosecuting any parties guilty of hate crimes, coordination between "law enforcement and civil rights agencies," and an educational campaign to "remind [the populace] that Muslims and Arabs and Sikhs and South Asians were also victims...and were also first responders" (United States Department of Justice 6).

Pre-9/11 popular cultural artifacts such as comic books, movies, and sports co-opted American foreign policy with their portrayals of Muslims as terrorists. This is evidenced by Jack Shaheen's scholarship that failed to locate any depictions of Arabs in American comic books prior to 1994 as the "heroine or hero" (123). Instead, Shaheen's

case study found the most pervasive characterization of said people was the terrorist trope (123). These constructs were also reflective of and/or parroted American foreign and domestic policy in part due to the existence of the comic code, which dictated that “policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority” (Comic Code Authority). In addition, within a climate of geopolitical strife between the West and the Muslim world, no publisher would want to appear unpatriotic, anti-American, and/or jeopardize their business by breaching the comic code.

This orientalist stereotype was reproduced and disseminated in other forms of popular culture like 1980s films and professional wrestling, both of which were transmitted by way of mass media and consumed by large segments of the population. David Sirotta noted that “Hollywood's go-to villain in the 1980s became the Muslim terrorist,” citing both “*Iron Eagle's* unnamed Middle Eastern country” and “*Back to the Future's* bazooka-wielding Libyans” (Salon). Inside the squared circle, Hulk Hogan became a symbol of American nationalism and might when he dethroned the Iron Sheik, three years after the Iran Hostage Crisis ended. These pre-9/11 examples illuminate the positioning of Muslims as villains juxtaposed against American heroism.

The aforementioned instruments of popular culture, such as movies, sports, and comic books, underwent a metamorphosis post-9/11. Many works, aside from Miller’s *Holy Terror*, were now operating as counterpropaganda to the narrative of the Islamic enemy and/or terrorist. Shaheen’s research found that a “significant number of post-9/11 Hollywood films depict[ed] Arabs in a less prejudiced manner” compared to pre-9/11 movies where “almost all Hollywood depictions of Arabs [were] bad ones”

(Elouardaoui 5; Reel Bad Arabs 182).

Like movies, professional wrestling experienced a transformation. The sport evolved from carving out characters from a mould based on American foreign policy and orientalist caricatures. Post-9/11 Muslim grapplers were not defined by their religion. International stars like Mustafa Ali and Sami Zayn, both of whom were born in North America, unlike their predecessors, were not assigned Middle Eastern identities, provided with ethnic or religious entrance themes, reduced to the foreign menace, and draped in religious and/or ethnic clothing.

Similar to movies and sports, comic books experienced a transfiguration. Pre-9/11 comics propagated the threatening nature of Muslims and reduced them to “villainous Arab” tropes (Shaheen 123). However, post-9/11, aside from narratives like Miller’s *Holy Terror*, there were a sizable number of comics now operating as counterpropaganda to the narrative of the Islamic enemy and/or terrorist. Stromberg concurs, observing that post-9/11 many comic books actively “resisted [such] stereotypical or racist configurations of Arabs and/or Muslims as terrorists, submissive veiled women, and so on” (Stromberg 576).¹⁰⁴ Examples of comics that presented Muslims as the heroes included Dust, The Doctor, G.W. Bridge, Excalibur, and Hamza Rashad. One of the measures employed was outreach to members of said community, illustrated by the case of Gene Ha, who reached out to a Palestinian-based forum to ask for direction on how to approach illustrating a character of said background (Stromberg 588). In addition, although the comic book code was in place until 2011, its influence and enforcement were severely limited. By 2001, Marvel Comics had abandoned the code and DC’s Vertigo label had ignored its rules dating back to 1993 (Klock 157;

Duncan and Smith 214). This emancipated the writers and publishers from its constraints. Ultimately, the comic book medium's evolution extended beyond films and sports in terms of representation. Comics presented Muslims as the heroes, as evidenced by Dust, The Doctor, G.W. Bridge, Excalibur, and Hamza Rashad. Despite these progressions, post-9/11 comic book representation suffered in part from the same issue even when "created to resist stereotypes" they "still partake[d]" in "reinforcing stereotypes" (Stromberg 576). This reality brings into focus the role of authorship. Authorship is the third key component behind an alteration in the representation of Muslims in post-9/11 comic books. Prior to 9/11, Muslim characters were constructed through the lens of non-Muslims, which is inherently imagined and thus riddled with historical inaccuracies pertaining to attire and ethnicity (Dar 101). The rise of Muslim writers such as G. Willow Wilson and Naif Al-Mutawa, authors of *Ms. Marvel* and *The 99*, ushered in a more layered, authentic, thoughtful, realistic, and ethical portrayals. While it must be acknowledged that no group of individuals can fully and completely accurately represent a community of over one billion people, these authors bring lived experience and cultural sensitivity to their work. In totality, post-9/11 comic books and graphic novels mark the rise of counterpropaganda that challenges the ideas produced by American foreign policy regarding Muslims and the war on terror.

Progress is not completely linear. My analysis exposes the continuation of problematic practices that perpetuate orientalist stereotypes that give legitimacy and oxygen to Islamophobic attitudes. Noticeable examples are the association of prayer, religious figures (imams), and the holy sites (mosques and prayer tents) with terrorism. In Salima's storyline, a large segment of those praying in the tent appear to be

extremists, many of whom have weapons. This relationship between prayer and terrorism persists in both *Johnny Jihad* and *Holy Terror*, as evidenced by four out of five cases where praying is either performed by terrorists, transpires in a terrorist camp, and/or is used to solicit g-d's strength to kill someone successfully and without detection.

A revelation from this study was the affirmation of the notion that an event—such as 9/11—can be analyzed or better understood years after it has taken place. This claim is substantiated by Miller, as evidenced by his comments to *The Guardian's* Sam Thielman seven years after he penned his infamous graphic novel:

My stuff always represents what I'm going through... Whenever I look at any of my work I can feel what my mindset was and I remember who I was with at the time. When I look at *Holy Terror*, which I really don't do all that often, I can really feel the anger ripple out of the pages. There are places where it is bloodthirsty beyond belief.

Thielman digs deeper, asking Miller, "Does he have any regrets?" Miller responds, "I don't want to go back and start erasing books I did. I don't want to wipe out chapters of my own biography. But I'm not capable of that book again." Miller's mea culpa illuminates how the temporal and spatial environment contributes to the ideas and purpose behind one's work, especially during geopolitical conflicts. Time is a rehabilitative agent as it can alter one's initial perception, which is reactionary, by creating distance—through time and space—that allows a person to process things with additional context and/or clarity that informs their perspective.

Moving forward, there are numerous areas for future comic book research that will enrich the discussion. First, the impact of the Trump and post-Trump era and the widening of the radical left and the radical right on representation of those deemed “the other.” Specifically, does this result in a rise in propaganda, counterpropaganda, or both? Second, assessing how the events of October 7th, 2023 affect the representation of Middle Easterners when Hamas and other terror operatives aided by residents of Gaza slaughtered Israeli women and men—citizens of an ally of America—at the Nova festival as well as residents, including babies, of multiple kibbutzim. Second, what impact, if any, does America’s attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities have on the portrayal of Palestinians, Jews, and Iranians in the comic book medium? Third, the role that technology and social media play in the democratization of the medium in terms of access to and/or for Muslim voices. Fourth, how righteous hatred of the other legitimized by the oppressor/oppressed binary has expanded, evolved, and/or changed. Lastly, a comparative analysis of the representation of the West and its war on terror in Middle Eastern comic books and/or comic strips.

This future research would enable scholars to better understand the way the medium serves as a space for understanding domestic political divisions and geopolitical conflicts. It would also illuminate the effect of contemporary conflicts between the west, its allies and the Muslim and Arab world on portrayals of Muslims and/or Arabs in future comics produced in the West, as well as whether media access functions to democratize representation of marginalized groups. This research would also assess whether righteous hatred of “the other” continues to be normalized and legitimized based on its relationship to atrocity propaganda and to what extent, if any,

do comics and graphic novels produced in the Arab and/or Muslim world engage in similar reductive portrayals of those that qualify as “The other.” All of which expand our comprehension of conflict, social and political identity, and the influence of these texts within both a Western and Middle Eastern setting.

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END NOTES

¹ The significance of Ms. Marvel is multi-layered. In a social and historical context, she broke barriers as one of the first Muslim superheroes in mainstream comics juxtaposed with the typical practice of situating Muslims and/or Arabs as terrorists. She was also created by G. Willow Wilson, a Muslim, which signals one of the few instances where people from said community created a Muslim character in comics.

² Edward Peters explains the crusades as “devotional military pilgrimages from Western Europe designed to regain and control the Holy Land” (“Islam and The West”).

³ Isolationism was America’s foreign policy during WWII, until the War Dictatorship Bill also known as Lend-lease became law on March 4, 1941 (“Isolationism after WWI”).

⁴ The Spanish Armada was comprised of a “130-ship fleet dispatched by Spain in 1588 as part of a planned invasion of England” (Maingi 66). The attack was thwarted when the eight fireships from England confronted and repelled the Spanish ships. They were forced out of the harbor after being momentarily scattered and losing priceless hawsers and anchors because of this action (Hearn 128). These fireships led “the captain-general of the Armada, the duke of Medina Sidonia...to order his fleet to escape northwards, towards Scotland, and round to Ireland” (Hearn 128). Ultimately, the defeat of the Spanish Armada has been attributed to poor weather and disease (Tarver 121).

⁵ The excerpts used are sourced from the “simplified transcript” as opposed to the literal transcript provided by this source (History.com).

⁶ Paul Morrow, in his article “A Theory of Atrocity Propaganda,” explains it as follows: “Atrocity propaganda consists in reports of cruel or shocking acts, circulated widely, and intended to produce an inappropriate martial response” (Morrow 49).

⁷ *Chick Tracts* did not only criticize Catholicism and Islam but also Judaism, Hinduism, and other religions.

⁸ David's *Oath of the Horatii* “was undoubtedly one of his most famous and prized works, quickly becoming the face of the French Revolution and the symbol of patriotism ... The moral of the story is that one should be guided by patriotic feelings, not personal feelings about family. Personal concern is seen as secondary” (UMass).

⁹ Prior works propagating imperialism include *The War in the Soudan*, *The Battle of Tamasi* (or Tamanieb), *13 march* (1884 lithograph), and *The Royal Colonial Tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall in Canada* (1901 lithograph). Villiers's works propagating imperialism include *The Vickers Mayin, at Paardeberg* (1899, drawing), and *The Crown Royal Hotel* (1899, sketch).

¹⁰ Robert Legvold notes that the Third Communist International “was an international organization that advocated world communism” (48).

¹¹ In total, there have been six Captain Canuck series: *Captain Canuck*, 1975, three issues; *Captain Canuck*, 1979-80, twelve issues; *Captain Canuck Reborn*, 1993-1996, four issues; *Captain Canuck Reborn* 2004, three issues; and *Captain Canuck*, 2015 (Dittmer 741). In addition, there were specials and two-shots.

¹² The Freedom Convoy was a group of Canadian citizens who, in 2022 during the Covid lockdown in Canada, protested government shutdowns and vaccine mandates for cross-border truckers. Their tactics included but were not limited to shutting down streets in Ottawa as well as transportation routes. Some viewed them as right-wing zealots, while others perceived them as people exercising their right to protest perceived government overreach.

¹³ Political cartoons are defined as “mocking allegorical pictorial representations of public events have been part of the politics scene since printing” (Rowson).

¹⁴ Aravind provides additional information about the forefathers of caricatures and the evolution of the artform. “Earliest known instances of caricature were the humorous pen portraits by the famous Carracci brothers. Later, they came to stand for comic and grotesque exaggerations of physical features to make loaded intellectual or emotional statements...towards the middle of the nineteenth century that the modern form of cartoon came into being, borrowing heavily from caricature and expressing the viewpoint of the artist” (2).

¹⁵ Scott notes “Therefore, starting in its second issue, *Fighting American* evolved into a satire of American society, including the most absurd kind of red baiting. Thereafter, the superhero is ranged against overtly silly villains, such as Poison Ivan, Hotski Trotsky, Count Uscha Liffso, and Rhode Island Red. These evil, communist characters are always shown as very ugly. In “The League of the Handsome Devils” in *Fighting American* no. 2, a gang of well mannered, polished, and handsome gentlemen are involved in various crimes. It is only revealed later that they wore masks to disguise their ugliness. Their goal: to bring down society so that the ugly may rule (an amusing, if preposterous example of the façade of normality adopted by communist spies like Alger Hiss, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg” (108).

¹⁶ Johnson notes, “Sue and Johnny were siblings, Sue and Reed were dating, and Reed and Ben were former college roommates” (60).

¹⁷ Mazur speaks to changes with the Big Two companies as well as sales figures for comics “... in late 60s. Both Marvel and DC became corporate properties. Martin Goodman sold Marvel to the Perfect Film and Chemical Corporation, later renamed Cadence Industries, and DC became the property of Warner Communications. By 1968, Marvel’s annual comic book sales of 55 million were enough to challenge DC for the industry’s lead” (230).

¹⁸ Melissa Adams-Campbell notes that dime novels, a precursor to the comic book, were “inexpensive fiction” consumed by the masses in the United States between the 1860s and 1915” (25). During said period, over 50,000 dime novels were published (Adams-Campbell 25). Millions were sold “through subscriptions, newsstands, train stations, and dry good stores” (Adams-Campbell 25). Beadle dime novels soon after referred to as Beadle and Adams, were the most prolific publishers. Their success led to the rise of imitators, but few competitors rivaled their success (Adams-Campbell 25). Three factors are responsible for their success: Firstly, its rise in popularity coincided with the public education movement, which encouraged readership (Mott 202); secondly, industrialization “provided the means for mass-production and distribution” of dime novels (Lee 114-116); and lastly, they were affordable compared to cloth-bound books, making them accessible to low-income people and children (Adams-Campbell 25). The term dime novel was a misnomer. In actuality, the cost ranged between 5 and 25 cents. (Adams-Campbell 25).

¹⁹ *Malaeska, Indian Wife of the White Hunter* (1860), authored by Ann Sophia Winterbotham Stephens, is the first in a trilogy about a “mixed-raced woman who returns to the Seneca nation to assume leadership after the Chief (her father) dies” (Wingo 121). The story revolves around Malaeska, a princess who, after falling in love, weds a white man (a hunter), and their union eventually produces a mixed-race child. The Chief, her father, murders her husband, which she bears witness to. The messaging positions interracial love as forbidden and doomed while situating Indigenous leaders as “savages,” hateful of whites. In the story *The Indian Queen*, a mixed-race woman returns to the Seneca Nation to take over as leader following the death of the Chief, her father. The third and final dime novel in the trilogy, *The Indian Queen* (1864), mirrors and thereby encapsulates “cultural and social shifts that occurred in mid-nineteenth-century America” regarding racial theories that dictated how Native Americans were perceived and subsequently treated (Wingo 121).

²⁰ Pulp magazines were low-cost fiction publications “popular from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century,” recognized “for their sensational stories” and vibrant covers. They significantly contributed to the “development of various genres,” particularly “science fiction and futurism” (“American literature – 1860 to present review”).

²¹ Pulp magazines entrenched themselves within the literary landscape in the late 19th century. By the mid-1890s, this new media was competing for market share with its predecessor, the dime novel (Madison 41). Pulp magazines, specifically the term pulp, reflected “the cheaply produced pulpwood paper on which they were printed” (Madison 41). *The Golden Argosy*, published by Andrew Munsey in 1882, is credited with launching this literary form (Madison 41). George Britt speaks to the timing: “As yet there was no popular literature for them. [The average American], no middle ground of periodicals between the Acosta [or penny] dreadful and the ponderous reviews dealing in subject matter the average man cared nothing about at a price he couldn’t afford to pay... And the country’s non-magazine buying millions were ripe for anyone who could interest them in reading” (82).

²² *All-Story Weekly* is historically significant because it marked the starting point for many science fiction writers, including Edgar Rice Burroughs, a celebrated science fiction writer who created heroes in 1912, a precursor to the superhero, such as John Carter (Madison 42). In 1920, Munsey amalgamated *Argosy* and ASW into one magazine, *Argosy All-Story Weekly* (Madison 42). Success attracts competition, and other publishers took note of Munsey’s profits; chief among them was Street and Smith Publications. Like Munsey, Street and Smith began publishing story papers, later shifting to pulps, in response to changing tastes (Madison 42).

²³ Science, or more accurately, pseudo-science, like geography, played a vital role in perpetuating and legitimizing nativism. Scientific racism established the inherent inferiority of the “yellow race.” In the 1920s, pseudo-science gave birth to disorders such as “Mongoloid imbecility” which presently is referred to as Down’s Syndrome (Madison 63). *The Mongol in our Midst*, written in 1924 by English physician Francis Graham Crookshank, sought to substantiate the claim “that the reason Down’s syndrome occurred in particular individuals was due to the presence of Asiatic, particularly Mongolian, ancestry within their bloodline” (Madison 63). Crookshank’s positionality was rooted in his belief in eugenics, a theory which took hold in the early 20th century. It is defined as “the practice or advocacy of controlled selective breeding of human populations to improve the population’s genetic composition” (“Eugenics”).

²⁴ Lewis provides two instances of him fighting Nazis, citing how “he thwarts a savage Gestapo revenge scheme” and, in other panels “he opposes supernatural emissaries from Hades – yes, literally from Hades – in their alliance with Adolph Hitler.”

²⁵ *The 99* is a comic book serial authored by Naif Al-Mutawa, a Muslim, and self-published through his company, Teshkeel Comics. This series features a diverse team of superheroes, many of whom are Muslims, who possess unique powers based on the 99 qualities of Allah (Curry and Soffel).

²⁶ There is much debate surrounding his creator. Omar Tahan is listed as the writer and illustrator, which, based on the name, suggests *Kismet* was constructed through a

Muslim lens (Lewis). However, said "person" has "no other publication history," leading many, including Lewis, to conclude said creator "was a pseudonym for one or more of the creators" (Lewis). Many online comic book websites, including *Bleeding Cool*, have reported that it is more likely than not that editor Ruth Roche wrote it using that pen name. Such a practice was not usual at the time, and Lewis reasons it may have been one of many reasons: First, "the medium was regarded as "too trashy for both self-trained and formal artists to attach their names" (Lewis). Second, due to an era rife with antisemitism, many Jewish writers feared being blacklisted (Lewis). Lastly, the "name that may have lent the character an additional air of authenticity" (Lewis).

²⁷ This fallacy is defined as "trying to make a scenario appear better or worse by comparing it to the best or worst case scenario" ("Relative Privation").

²⁸ In this case, Shaheen notes, "We see the Arab in a few opening frames explaining his troubles to Westerners. Then, he disappears, surfacing again in the final frames" (123).

²⁹ In this story, "The Ape Man and the Mangani," Tarzan rescues Jane from the clutches of her Arab kidnappers, aided by apes, one of whom later double-crosses him (Shaheen 128). The story "The Golden Fleecing" focuses on Scrooge's pursuit of an article of apparel made completely of gold (Shaheen 127). McDuck heading back home, from visiting a tailor, with "moneybag in hand" when he notices a "creature" following him. He is eventually persuaded to board the Sheikh's ship to "conduct a business deal," that will land him his golden fleece (Shaheen 127).

³⁰ In *Batman: A Death in the Family* (DC Comics no. 426-429, Jim Starlin, 1988), Batman's arch-nemesis, the Joker sells Arab militants a nuclear cruise missile that is intended to strike Tel Aviv but is thwarted by Batman (Shaheen (124). Joker next "meets the Ayatollah Khomeini, who" proposes he become the "Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations," which he accepts (Shaheen (124).

³¹ Mark Hazard: *Merc "Cestus Dei"* (Morrow and Colleta) features "terrorists in Northern Lebanon" who abduct Father Capistran, a priest searching for the "Ring of the Fisherman" (Shaheen (124). The Father is eventually rescued by "an American mercenary," Mark Hazzard, hired by the Church (Shaheen (125). Conversely, *The Punisher: Nuclear Terrorists Over Times Square* (Baron) tells a tale of "anti-West" Arab terrorists, who pilfer "a kilo of plutonium" intended "to blow a hole in the American dream" (Shaheen 125).

³² This is punctuated by presenting Rose as "young, beautiful, and spirited," which, based on her name, metaphorically represents Israel, as "she is a rose, just beginning to bloom, but full of thorns for those who threaten her" (Shaheen 125). Shaheen argues that she is a point of identification who "fights the good fight-she is one of us" (Shaheen 125). As an ally of America, anti-Israel sentiments, in particular, displayed by Muslims are an affront to American interests, policies, and stability, functioning to situate/render those who communicate them as the other.

³³ The Arab bandit outlined is featured in *Sgt. Rock's* "Traitor's Blood!" (Kubert). Set during World War II "in the North African desert," Sgt. Rock leads "an American tank battalion...towards a nomadic community whose sheikh" who has intel on Rommel's camp's whereabouts, a Nazi leader and his troops (Shaheen 128).

³⁴ The faceless housewife appears in the opening scene of the issue *Checkmate*: "Welcome to Qurac!" (Shaheen 129). The Veiled woman appears "in the foreground," carrying a fruit basket atop "her head" (Shaheen 129). She is "featureless" and fully covered from head to toe, void of even "eye slits, "akin to "a piece of furniture" (Shaheen 129). A second person dressed in near-identical attire appears in the background. (Shaheen 129). The aforementioned absence of eye slits renders such a representation "fantastical" and demeaning of the community they represent, unless they "possess X-ray vision" (Shaheen 130). Her dialogue reaffirms the animal-like status of a married Muslim woman: "I've gathered my groceries like a good little Quaracin housewife... Women aren't treated much better than cattle here" (Kupperberg 1). Shaheen concludes, "Her presence in the storyline is indeed like cattle in fields (Shaheen 130).

³⁵ *Action Comics* no. 598 (Byrne and Kupperberg) sees Superman and Checkmate join forces to prevent "Arab terrorists" who seajacked "an American nuclear aircraft carrier in Metropolis harbor" from unleashing a nuclear attack on American soil (Shaheen 126).

³⁶ First, *G.I. Combat* vol. 1, no. 139, "Stop at the Corner of Hades" (1970), presents women as subjected to forced suicide-type ritual, death by fire, when the leader of an Arab tribe declares, "Princess Azeela ... You must join your dead husband—Prince Akmed—as is our people's custom. LIGHT THE FUNERAL FIRE!" (Kanigher 5). The G.I. intervenes, but she is shot dead by the mufti, propagating the portrayal of religious Muslims as unholy and the religion as barbaric (*G.I. Combat*, vol. 1, no. 139). The aforementioned issue also propagates the idea that women's lives, even those of a princess, in Islam have no value outside of being the property of their husbands. Shaheen notes that "it has never been an Arab tradition to encourage a widow to immolate herself upon the death of her husband" (Shaheen 130). In actuality, such a practice called the "sati" is performed by some Hindu widows, illuminating the ignorance at best and malintent at worst of the writers (Kumar 31). The lack of women's agency in Islam, as well as the abusive Muslim man trope, is perpetuated in *Action Comics* vol. 1, no. 598, "Checkmate." The former is evidenced by Sheikh Khareemali, the Quracan minister of Defense, retorting to Lois Lane's declaration, "You have a problem dealing with women? He responds, "Indeed, NOT...in their PROPER place. The females of Qurac know that place. *Unlike* their American cousins" (Byrne-Kupperberg). Khareemali then raises his cane, ready to hit Lois with it while his soldiers pin her to the wall, stating, "It is time you learned that lesson! Hold her steady!" (Byrne-Kupperberg 7). The resulting messaging is, "Quracan women are treated as slaves in their homeland, routinely ordered about and beaten if they question a man's statement (Shaheen 131). Although the aforementioned treatment of women is administered by fictional people,

they are presented as Muslim, which operates to associate/transfer such actions with/to a very real group of people.

³⁷ The Fantastic Four saves a CBS correspondent Gregory Dunbar from “being impaled by a dagger at the hands of supervillain Sheikh Farouk Al- Fasaud” (Shaheen 126). This storyline “Danger From the Air” (1963) features an evil Sheikh, who upon missing his target, “electrocutes himself” transforming from mere human villain to “half TV image, half lunatic, but at all times 100 percent Arab-his white headdress inseparable from his hideous face” (Shaheen 127). His attempted murder of an American civilian combined with his physical metamorphosis strips him of his humanity. The team “split up,” with half staying behind in NY to guard Dunbar while the others depart “to Fasaud’s home kingdom of Aquiria” in pursuit of him (Shaheen 127).

³⁸ Calling the nation responsible for the attack Quracan, which is very similar to the Quran, renders the faith villainous and unholy.

³⁹ In The Moon Knight story “Fist of Khonshu” (Zelenetz), Sheikh Ahmed Azis, seeks world domination (Shaheen 126). Described as a “Kuwaiti megalomaniac” who seeks to transform, through the power of “the magical statue of Khonshu, the ancient Egyptian god of the moon, into “ANUBIS THE JACKAL.... pharaoh supreme” (Shaheen 126).

⁴⁰ Although the following does not qualify as attire worn by an Arab character, at one point, Marc Spector is mummified, which is an example of the orientalist stereotype.

⁴¹ Yanora contends that presenting Sedara, at times, “through an orientalist lens” functions to reduce her to an “inferior” being (119). This is evidenced by the following examples that illustrate how the way she is referred to and treated by members of Psi-Force reduces her to the inferior other. First, Boyd, refers to her as “**little girl**” (Nicieza 13). Next, Tucker, prior to “set[ting] up a bomb...turns to Sedara, leers” and states, “We do more than just *blow things up*, and we do more than *fight for revenge*” (Nicieza 15). These excerpts situate her and the Mujahadeen “as an incompetent and overly emotional Other” (Yanora 119).

⁴² Yanora notes that almost a decade earlier, Arabian Knight, also a superhero, entered the comic book landscape, but she proclaims the character was not as relevant as Bakut in the context of US foreign policy (110).

⁴³ Yanora explains that “the ideological clash between the US and the Soviet Union from the mid-1940s until the late 1980s” accounts for “the absence of politically significant Muslim superheroes” prior to the arrival of Bakut (111). This is not to suggest that prior to 1989, the Middle East did not factor into America’s foreign policy,” as evidenced by the Suez crisis of 1956, the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967 and 1973, and the OPEC oil embargo of 1973-1974” (111). However, these events were overshadowed by “the

battle of ideologies between the USA and the USSR,” which “was the primary referent for the era’s comics” (111).

⁴⁴ Yanora credits the writers with said choice, pointing to the fact she “could have easily been depicted without the hijab, yet she wears it throughout the entire story [except when swimming], and by not “commenting on its presence or her reason for wearing [it makes] it a non issue” (121).

⁴⁵ The following list of characters mirrors their order in the analysis, which Stromberg notes is because of the “prominence” and/or frequency of their use: Dust, The Doctor, G.W. Bridge, Excalibur, and Hamza Rashad in US superhero comic books during said period (583; 587).

⁴⁶ Stromberg explains that his objects represent a departure from the stereotypical villainous depictions of Arabs “in American comic strips” during the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Brenda Starr*, *Broom Hilda*, *Lolly*, *Short Ribs*, *Berry’s World*, *The Wizard of Id*, and *Funky Winterbean*; post-9/11 comics marked a stark departure (Stromberg 578).

⁴⁷ The following is some background on the characters. The Doctor is “a sixteen-year-old Palestinian boy,” also known as Habib Bin Hassan, and is a shaman-type character who first appeared in 2005. The Doctor debuted inside the pages of *The Authority Revolution* no. 9, as part of the Wildstorm Universe (Stromberg 587). Dust debuted inside the pages of *New X-Men* no. 133 in 2002. She was the creation of Grant Morrison, of Scottish nationality, and Ethan Van Sciver, an American. (Stromberg 583). G.W. Bridge, who first appeared in *X-Force* no. 1 as a member of S.H.I.E.L.D. (1992), is another site of Muslim heroism (Stromberg (589). Stromberg notes Bridge “has the highest number of noted appearances” among the characters he examines but was not identified as Muslim until 2007” (589). The character of Excalibur was “created by British writer Paul Cornell and American artist Brandon Peterson” (Stromberg 590). She first appeared inside the pages of *Captain Britain and the MI:13* in 2008 (Stromberg 590). Al-Rashad was created by Brit Chris Claremont and American Alé Garza and debuted in *Gen 13* vol. 3, no. 1, 2002 (Stromberg 593).

⁴⁸ Stromberg acknowledges some may frame the portrayal of a “black man as an American convert to Islam” as “a cliché” but points to “demographic research” conducted by Jocelyne Cesari, which indicates many Muslim converts in the US are African American (11).

⁴⁹ Although he isn’t othered by being Muslim-born or portrayed as an overtly Muslim character, Stromberg notes that as a “Black man who believes in a non-Christian religion, Bridge already constitutes the Other in the eyes of the majority of those who read American superhero comics” (590).

⁵⁰ The following definitions of Abaya, Niqab and Burqa are provided by Stromberg: Abaya translates to "cloak." Women, particularly in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, wear this "traditional long overgarment," which is essentially a robe-like outfit, frequently in black (583). The word "niqab," which means "mask," describes a veil that covers the face and can be worn with a variety of modest garments, such as an abaya (583). "Burqa" means "to sew up" or "to patch up." It refers to a completely concealing outer garment "worn by Muslim women," which may be a single item of clothing or "a combination of an abaya, niqab, and headscarf" (583).

⁵¹ By the same token, the sexualization of "strong and powerful" superheroines is conventional/customary evidenced by characters such as Wonder Woman and She-Hulk who were "depicted as alluring objects of desire, wearing the scantiest of costumes" (Lavin, 1998).

⁵² Attire is further addressed in a later issue when, in response to someone questioning why Dust still dons the burqa, another person intervenes, educating said person that it is actually "an abaya with a niqab veil" and requests that they "respect Dust by learning more about her culture" (Yost and Kyle, *X-Men* vol. 2, no. 42). This interposition by someone other than Dust speaks to the need for allyship while it "highlights the cultural problems surrounding the traditional dress" (Stromberg 585).

⁵³ This western attire consists of a "white T-shirt, blue trousers (jeans?), and blue jacket" (588).

⁵⁴ Interestingly, over time Hassan discards his traditional attire, and his Palestinian background is largely erased, and he returns to "more conventional, Western-looking attire" but retains the colour purple and a scarf resembling a keffiyeh as the only reflection of his background (Stromberg 588). While removing attire as a symbol of identity may be seen as progressive by people like Stromberg, the removal of his background is extremely problematic.

⁵⁵ Stromberg describes their clothing: "an Arab father in Western clothes, a red-haired (clearly non-Arabian) mother, and several siblings, of whom one sister is shown in a *hijab*" (593).

⁵⁶ The creators were also very sensitive to the events of 9/11 and how promoting Muslim superheroism, within this time and space, might be perceived as anti-American by some, evidenced by the inclusion of this note on the front cover of issue no. 1 declaring, "We remember 9/11 / Sept 11 2001" (Stromberg 595).

⁵⁷ First, lacking knowledge "about the history and politics of the country he writes about/draws" (Stromberg 590). Second, creators are making "a statement without regard for accuracy about Muslim countries and their treatment of women" and, lastly, they "simply uses the iconic image of the burqa as a short-hand sign for signifying a Muslim woman" (Stromberg 590). In terms of intent, Matt Fritchman declared, "I love the idea of there

being a respectable African-American Muslim and that he's a good guy" (589). Regardless of the objective, these representations are "lodged in the Orientalist tradition challenged by Said, and perpetuate, in one way or another, stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims" (590).

⁵⁸ Excalibur acquired her powers while in a "battle zone...after getting zapped by alien technology" (591). He also possesses enlightened senses and racial memory ("Habib Bin Hassan Wildstorm Universe").

⁵⁹ The following dialogue by her father also points to her family not being religious, suggesting she was not raised in a very religious household: "I'm not a particularly religious man," dismantling the collective portrayal of Muslims as a singular hyper-religious entity (Cornell 15; Stromberg 591).

⁶⁰ It should be noted that in her second appearance (*New X-Men: Academy X* no. 2, 2005), Dust, under new writers, evolves which includes gaining membership in the X-Men and she displays the ability to speak more than one word (Dar 107).

⁶¹ In Dust's appearance in *New X-Men* vol. 2 no. 133, Stromberg describes the slave traders as "stereotypical Afghans with long beards and wearing presumably traditional clothes" (583). Once again, in the same issue's "supporting storyline... three Pakistani men try to hijack a plane in order to use it as a "weapon in a righteous cause," embodying the terrorist trope (Stromberg 583).

⁶² The slave owner trope was evidenced in *Tarzan's "The Man and the Mangani, Tarzan* (1977) when Arabs kidnap Jane and plan to sell her.

⁶³ Dar notes that this story was constructed "during a time when U.S. deputy secretary of state, Richard Armitage threatened to "bomb Pakistan back to the stone age" if it did not commit fully to "the war on terror" (Ali, 2008, p. 145). Conversely, "Indian authorities reflect India's cooperation and strong alliance with the United States" (Dar 104)

⁶⁴ *Captain Britain and the MI: 13* no. 2.

⁶⁵ Among the questions posed by Ha was: "Does he sound like a Sufi?" "Is he still a mainstream Muslim?" (Stromberg 588). To Ha's credit, Stromberg contends his "reconfiguration of Habib Bin Hassan does feel more in tune with the background and cultural history with which we are supposed to associate this character" while pointing to Ha's exercise as an indication of "the ambivalence and lack of knowledge with which the creators behind the Doctor have approached the character" (589).

⁶⁶ Although African-Americans had the "right" to vote, they were still prevented from doing so. In order to guarantee that no federal, state, or local authority may in any manner prevent people from exercising their right to vote on the basis of their race or

ethnicity, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared his intention to enact a federal Voting Rights Act ("Voting Rights Act of 1965"). Later that year, he signed the Voting Rights Act into law, which outlawed literacy tests and other forms of racial discrimination in voting ("Voting Rights Act of 1965").

⁶⁷ Kirby, Jack. *Captain America*, Volume 1, no.1. Art by Simon, Joe and Kirby, Jack, Manhattan: Timely Comics, 1941. Print.

⁶⁸ *Green Lantern Corps* no. 25 (2014) provided much of his childhood backstory; John was raised in an impoverished area in Detroit, Michigan, enduring poverty, and the loss of his sister, Elanor, in his childhood, which motivated him to become a change-maker (Jensen). As a young lady, Cruz and her friends were on a hunting trip when they came across men burying a body, who then murdered her friends and attempted to kill her, but she fled. This left Jessica suffering from PTSD (Davison). In addition to rising above their childhood circumstances, these two BIPOC characters earned their rank, nothing was handed to them. In the comic book *Secret Origins* no. 9 (2015) Stewart exhibited enormous bravery when he leaped into action, without hesitation, to battle supervillain, The Manhunter, deeming/making him worthy of the ring (Jensen). Similarly, to Stewart, in the graphic novel *Green Lantern Rage Planet* Cruz displayed determination and bravery to fight through her fear and self-doubt, when all odds were against her, and saved the world.

⁶⁹ "I am a real American. Fight for the rights of every man. When it comes crashing down, and it hurts inside. You gotta take a stand; it don't help to hide. Well, I stand strong about right and wrong. And I don't take trouble for very long. 'Cause I got something deep inside of me. A courage is the thing that keeps me free" ("Lyrics translate.") These lyrics belong to the theme song, by Rick Derringer, for Hulk Hogan.

⁷⁰ These are the two web addresses for IMDB and Apple TV that use the aforementioned description of the villains: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100232/> and <https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/navy-seals/umc.cmc.7anpwjpxdffb2fjk8nf5kk12d>.

⁷¹ The image belongs to another storyline, "Kings of Pain," which pits the Alliance of Evil against members of the X-Men, including Blob, which has no connection to "The Killing Stroke" storyline.

⁷² The terms "shot" and "angle" are used interchangeably.

⁷³ This author recognizes that Black is technically a shade and not a colour, but it will be analyzed as part of the psychology of colours and referred to as both a shade and a colour for the purpose of this paper.

⁷⁴ The Veil first appears in the last panel of page 45, in "The First Cut: The Killing Stroke, PT. 1." She is hovering in the air, establishing her supernatural powers, which serve to situate her as a supernatural being, making her inhuman.

⁷⁵ Salima debuted on panel 5 of page 16 of the story "Under" in *Millennium* no. 2. She is in the background, dressed in a blackish or dark blue hijab and burqa with a niqab exposing her eyes and nasal bone, walking down a gravel-type road inside a cave-like complex.

⁷⁶ The 20 flags belonging to Muslim countries include: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somaliland, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Western Sahara, and the United Arab Emirates.

⁷⁷ Black represents "protection" and "strength" whereas white "simplicity" which speaks to how Muslim women are represented (Gheorghe; Van Braam).

⁷⁸ The 15 panels consist of 9 from *X-Men Annual* no. 15: Page 42, Panel 1; Page 47, Panel 3; Page 47, Panel 5; Page 47, Panel 6; Page 47, Panel 7; Page 48, Panel 3; Page 48, Panel 5; Page 49, Panel 1; Page 49, Panel 2; Page 52, Panel 2; Page 52, Panel 3; Page 53, Panel 3; and Page 53, Panel 4. The 1 panel from *X-Factor Annual* no. 6 was Page 48, Panel 2. The 5 panels consist of 4 from *X-Men Annual* no. 15: Page 48, Panel 3; Page 48, Panel 5; Page 49, Panel 1; and Page 49, Panel 2. The 1 panel from *X-Factor Annual* no. 6 was Page 48, Panel 4.

⁷⁹ Salima is killed inside the pages of *Blue Beetle* no. 20, "Iran Sam!" and The Veil dies in *X-FACTOR ANNUAL VOL. 1* No. 6, "Sacrificial Lamb: The Killing Stroke, PT. 3.

⁸⁰ Although not classified as traditional comic books, they do conform to McCloud's definition of comics as "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9).

⁸¹ Both graphic novels in chapter are lacking page numbers, and they are required for citations; therefore, the writer added his own, and they are as follows: Page 1 for *Johnny Jihad* is assigned to the first page to appear inside the novel, the title page, whereas Page 1 for *Holy Terror* is considered the first page to contain a picture on the tenth page of the novel. The term "shot" in media generally refers to a film or video angle, but in this dissertation, both shot and angle are used to describe how an image in a panel is framed.

⁸² Taveras commends Inzana for doing "an excellent job of capturing a claustrophobic world of political paranoia and rabid ideals." He also applauds Inzana's stylistic approach by stating, "Inzana etches out a rugged expressionist world that revels in the stifled New Jersey suburbs and the desperate terrain of Afghanistan... carves out light

and sense from a dark and grave subject. Each panel is intense and richly textured, making the flow substantial and engrossing.”

⁸³ In an interview with CNN, John Walker-Lindh said that he was “a student in Pakistan, studying Islam,” and one day he “came into contact with many people who were connected with the Taliban... I started to read some of the literature of the scholars, and my heart became attached to it. I wanted to help them one way or another” (“The Case of the American Taliban”). He eventually became a Taliban soldier; fighting American forces, until he was captured and taken prisoner. Walker-Lindh was returned to the US and “sentenced to 20 years in prison as part of an agreement” (“The Case of the American Taliban”).

⁸⁴ Shaheen cites *The Mummy* (Sommers, 1999) and *Gladiator* (Scott, 2000) as two examples (Elouardaoui 4).

⁸⁵ Shaheen lists *Babel* (dir. González Iñárritu, 2006), *The Kingdom* (dir. Peter Berg, 2007) and *Rendition* (dir. Gavin Hood, 2007) as progressive films (Elouardaoui 5).

⁸⁶ Initially Miller envisioned a narrative where Batman battled terrorists. By 2010, Miller had abandoned the Batman character in favor of The Fixer, who Miller explained is a hero “much closer to Dirty Harry than Batman. It’s a new hero that I’ve made up who fights with Al Qaeda” (Boucher).

⁸⁷ This practice is illustrated by the following instances: Standing over a terrorist, the Fixer says, “So Muhammad, pardon me for guessing your name, but you’ve got to admit the odds are pretty good it’s Mohammed” (Miller 75); Natalie instructs a captured terrorist that, “You’d better listen to him, Moe!” (Miller 75); and The Fixer instructs Natalie to “aim the device at Moe” (Miller 76).

⁸⁸ Bin Laden framed his actions as a response to “American military bases in the Middle East and the U.S.’s support for Israel” (Chasan). Tik Tok, owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, soon removed the content, stating, “Content promoting this letter clearly violates our rules on supporting any form of terrorism” (Chasan).

⁸⁹ The five women are dressed as follows: in a black nose-string niqab (Miller 57), a black hijab with face exposed (Miller 58), a niqab with eyes visible (Miller 58), a black hijab with face exposed (Miller 58), and the last woman is wearing a black niqab with eyes covered with mesh, and after she is beaten, she is shown covering her eyes with exposed black hair and a white top (Miller 88), one in a niqab holding a gun (Miller 57), and the last dressed in a hijab, clutching a weapon resembling a machine gun (*Holy* Miller 58).

⁹⁰ The three leaders are Shi’ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr”). He is wearing a white robe known as a thawb[1] and a black turban called a sayyid, which is worn by “someone

recognized as a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad" ("Who is the Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr?"). Pictured second is Hamid Karzai (Miller 77). He served as president of Afghanistan between 2004 and 2014 ("Hamid Karzai"). He is wearing a tie, shirt, vest, and cap called a karakul, which is worn "by Muslim men in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia" ("Men's Headdress in Muslim Cultures"). The third Muslim leader featured is Muammar al-Qaddafi (Miller 83). He was the ruler of Libya between 1969 and 2011, dressed in an open white shirt and a hat, which is a "traditional Libyan variant of the North African fez called a checheya (Britannica; Palmer).

⁹¹ Four men are wearing skullcaps (Miller 72). Two are wearing "a short, rounded skullcap" called a Taqiyah ("Men's Headdress in Muslim Cultures"). It is frequently used for religious or cultural reasons. Some Muslims think that Prophet Muhammad wore a head covering in the past ("Men's Headdress in Muslim Cultures"). The other two men don kummas, which are "typically worn by Muslim men in Oman"; one man is wearing a pagri-styled turban, which is worn by men in Central Asia and Turkey; a bearded man, looking ahead with one hand in the air, reminiscent of giving a sermon, is wearing a white turban and a bracelet shaped like a suicide belt on his arm; and lastly, a man in a white turban, white robe, and chain mail covering his face and arms ("Men's Headdress in Muslim Cultures"; Miller 59). This attire is associated with the armed forces. These forces involved in the Rashidun Caliphate during the early Muslim conquests in the 7th century were the Rashidun army (Khan).

⁹² The man who appears to be an Iman delivering a sermon, wearing a turban and a suicide belt-styled bracelet (Miller 59).

⁹³ One might argue that assuming readers, as a whole, would subscribe to such stereotypes is too presumptuous. However, due to the enormous amount of publicity this novel garnered, it is reasonable and/or more likely than not to conclude that the majority of people knew what Miller was propagating prior to purchasing *Holy Terror*. While some may have bought it out of curiosity, most on the other end of the political spectrum would view buying this novel as tantamount to supporting its message. Therefore, most consumers reading it would agree with its messaging and affirm his approach in the gutter.

⁹⁴ Johnny's headband is black and white, whereas the ones worn by Hamas are green, and ISIS, as well as the Taliban, tend wear black headbands (BBC; Dent).

⁹⁵ Salim befriends John at work and later introduces John to Kazeem, who runs the terrorist camp in New York. The first picture of Salim occurs at Shop Rite, where both he and John are employed (Inzana 11). Later the reader is introduced to Kazeem at the terrorist camp, where he is a leader. He later sends John off to kill the Imam who reported Muslim terrorist authorities.

⁹⁶ I use approximately for the following reason: The word approximation doesn't indicate a lack of clarity or investigation; rather, it is used for accuracy purposes. It depicts the fact that it is unknown whether some of these are new characters or pictures of people who have previously been included in the total because the artist presented some characters as black shadow figures and others are partially shown.

⁹⁷ Examples of G-d as a fearful force in Judaism include "Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble" (Proverbs 28: 14). In the New Testament, this passage promotes a fear of G-d: "Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either" (Roman 11:20-21).

⁹⁸ Natalie yells "Jesus Christ" out of immense pain twice and screams out "Goddamn" four times in relation to anger and frustration about having nails stuck in her leg (Miller 28; 29; 37; 38). The only other mention of G-d by a westerner occurs when a police officer shouts "Jesus Christ" aloud after learning someone named Carla, probably a relative and/or spouse, has died (Miller 54).

⁹⁹ In the context of sharia law, Kazeem states, "All we wish is for freedom to live under the sharia as Allah intended" (Inzana 21). This reference is drenched in irony as Kazeem mentions "freedom" to "live under sharia," which deprives many Muslims of freedom, especially women, by restricting their movements (Ali). The next mention of G-d in relation to sharia is made by members of the Taliban in Afghanistan, living under sharia law, who tell John, "We live here as Allah intended" (Inzana 65).

¹⁰⁰ It must be noted that religious justification for murder is hardly restricted to any one faith, as evidenced by Christian stories where people kill and find religious justification, e.g., Sergeant York. Biblically speaking, the murder of Jesus has been justified on religious grounds based on the notion of said event transpiring as the means to provide salvation for the masses. Eastern religions such as Buddhism and their members, who are perceived by many as non-violent, are the architects of the ongoing Rohingya Genocide, which has killed tens of thousands while displacing over 200,000 ("Rohingya 'genocide intensifying' as war rages in Myanmar's Rakhine: Brouck"). Inside these two objects of study, killing in the name of G-d is assigned to Muslims, when historically, the religious justification of the murder of those deemed "the other" is widespread

¹⁰¹ This area of analysis is focused on the role that religion plays in the construction of the hero and villain. The narrowing of this focus does not by extension negate the fact that nationalism and political systems such as democracy and autocracy also serve as means of establishing said binary.

¹⁰² The aforementioned passage regarding an eye for an eye is presented within the following context: Exodus 21:22–25 pertains to "the case of men who are fighting and accidentally injure a pregnant woman, causing a miscarriage"; Leviticus 24:17–21 applies "to a man who attacks and maims another"); and lastly, the third instance,

Deuteronomy 19:16–21, "deals with a witness who lies in court to harm an innocent person." In each passage a similar formula occurs: "You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Akin).

¹⁰³ The following provides background on *damnatio ad bestias*. A Roman death penalty known as "punishment to the beast" (*damnatio ad bestias*) was the killing of a prisoner by a wild animal, most commonly a lion or other large cat ("Damnatio Ad Bestias"). Additional examples of comic front covers featuring villainous German troops, leaders, and/or machinery in conflict with American heroes during WWII include *Action Comics* no. 35 (April 1941), *Captain America* no. 2 (April 1941), *Action Comics* no. 39 (August 1941), *Action Comics* no. 40 (September 1941), and *Sensation Comics* no. 13 (Jan. 1943). Similarly, the following are some instances of Japanese soldiers positioned as the antagonists juxtaposed against US superheroes throughout WWII, include *Captain America* no. 13 (April 1942), *Captain Marvel Adventures* (May 1942), *Action Comics* no. 63 (August 1943), and *Action Comics* no. 76 (September 1944) (Holmes; Ciroula; Cronin).

¹⁰⁴ Stromberg as well as this author is not suggesting there were not problematic representations that persisted in films such as *The Kingdom*, released in 2007 professional wrestling, like WWE's 2004-character Muhammad Hassan; and comic books/graphic novels, like *Holy Terror* (Elouardaoui 6). But the argument is being made that there was a concerted effort to balance out, counter or diversify such portrayals.