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From Humayun Khan to Kamala Khan: Ambivalence Towards The Muslim Super Hero

The 2016 Democratic National Convention saw the emergence of an unlikely national hero: Humayun Khan. Khan had passed away long before the Democratic National Convention while on duty as an American soldier in Iraq, but his parents brought him back to life as they stood on the DNC stage and his father, Kazir Khan, delivered a speech about his bravery as a soldier. Kazir Khan described how a suicide bomber drove a taxi through his son's base, how Humayun shouted for everyone to take safety, and how he ran towards the car to prevent it from getting any further before it exploded and killed him (Hirsh). In the wake of anti-Muslim sentiments being released by then presidential candidate Donald Trump, this speech did something important: it allowed Muslim Americans to be viewed as heroes. Yet, the amazement and surprise elicited by Kazir Khan's speech about his son reveals that many Americans were conditioned to think that a Muslim-American could not be a hero. In a society where 40% of Americans believe in reinstating a Muslim registry to prevent terrorism, the shock of most people over Humayun Khan's story was not because of his bravery in the face of danger, but was because a Muslim-American showed bravery, heroism, and proved their biases incorrect (Gallup). While Kazir Khan's speech was a rebuttal to Trump's Islamophobia, these discriminatory sentiments are not new and many Americans have been conditioned to view

Muslim Americans as the enemy in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (also referred to as the 9/11 terrorist attacks throughout the paper).

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, "anti-Muslim hate crimes [were] approximately five times more frequent than they were before 2001" making the total number of crimes rise from "20-30 Anti-Muslim hate crimes a year. . . to nearly 500 a year" (FBI). The September 11th terrorist attacks being carried about by Muslim men who were apart of the radical Islamic group Al-Qaeda, suddenly transformed all Muslim Americans as enemies to non-Muslim Americans. The divide between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans can be seen in a Newsday interview when a 9/11 survivor named Donovan discusses how he is still processing his grief from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Donovan talks about how what motivated him to keep moving forward in his grief is that he "didn't want them [the terrorists] to win. [He] wanted to keep on fighting" (Ochs). This creates a scenario where terrorists are rightfully coded as the enemy, but it becomes complex because all Muslim Americans are coded as enemies and are denied their rights to be protected citizens, no matter what they do for their country. Navy officer Fatima Ahmed explains the difficulties of being a Muslim and serving America when she says "it's the feeling you can't be American enough—when you can't get more American than serving in the military. . . When they see ISIS, they think that's what Muslims are, what all of us are, which is incredibly wrong" (Wright). The complications of the binary separating American heroes and Muslims have always existed, but it took Kazir Khan's speech to make them more visible. The fascination around Humayun Khan's heroism as a Muslim-American transformed him into a potent political tool that countered Donald Trump. His posthumous valorization also transformed him into a

superhero for Muslim Americans: even in death, he was able to make the invisible wounds that a post 9/11 society imposed on Muslim Americans visible and did so while fighting for his country.

Ms. Marvel by G. Willow Wilson literally embodies this powerful concept of a Muslim American superhero by making Kamala Khan, a first generation American, Pakistani, Muslim, woman fight crime as Ms. Marvel. Kamala's confusion, fear, and eventual understanding of her identity as a superhero fighting crime in Jersey City, New Jersey allows her to show the nuances of being a Muslim American living in a post 9/11 society just as Humayun Khan did. She shows these nuances in such a subdued manner that many readers would not think to categorize *Ms. Marvel* as a comic that testifies to the painful post 9/11 Muslim American experience. But by subtly showing the effects of 9/11 on Kamala's experience as a superhero, the comic does just that.

Ms. Marvel's ability to produce commentary on a post 9/11 society in the United States without explicitly mentioning 9/11 is evident in a scene in the first volume of *Ms. Marvel, No Normal (*which from this point on will be referred to as *Ms. Marvel*). In this scene, Kamala finds herself with a gunshot wound in her chest after preventing a robbery in a convenient store. Her friend Bruno, who works at the convenient store, begins to call the police but is prevented from doing so by Kamala herself. Despite her life-threatening injuries, Kamala panickily urges Bruno not to call the authorities. Lying on the floor with blood oozing from her shirt, Kamala tells Bruno that if he calls the cops "my parents will freak, the NSA will wiretap our mosque or something, and then they'll sell me to science!" (*Ms. Marvel*). As a first generation, Pakistani,

Muslim superhero, the effects of Islamophobia pose more of a threat to Kamala than the bullet lodged into her chest. This moment, among many others throughout the series, highlights how in addition to the many other dangers facing superheroes, the effects of Islamophobia in a post 9/11 world is yet another danger Kamala must consider when fighting crime. The salience and danger of Islamophobia in society is not just a reality for Kamala, but for many Muslim Americans living in a post 9/11 United States. Because of this, Kamala's experiences as Ms. Marvel provide a relatable protagonist for Muslim Americans reading the comic, but it also allows non-Muslim Americans to become exposed to the effects that 9/11 has had on Muslim Americans in a subtle, yet effective way. For example, when Kamala tells Bruno not to call the cops because the NSA will wiretap her mosque, she does not need to provide any explanation for readers to understand why this is the case. Living in a post 9/11 society has normalized the surveillance and criminalization of Muslim Americans, and being able to understand this reference shows how accustomed society is to the stereotypes associated with Muslim Americans. Exploring the effects of 9/11 without mentioning the event itself allows Kamala to show readers the world as Muslim Americans have been living in it: Unable to specifically mention the effects of 9/11 on Muslim Americans due to its stigma, yet continually suffering on a structural and individual level in society as a consequence of the Islamophobia this event generated.

The silence surrounding 9/11's effects on Muslim Americans results from the ambivalence that a post 9/11 society has created that only allows Muslim Americans to be viewed through stereotypes. The need to view Muslim Americans only through villainizing stereotypes was used to mobilize support for the war in Iraq. Edward Said, in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, talks about how imperial conquests are not just defined by taking land but by

creating a mindset that allows the domination of a group to be possible. Said states that imperialism and colonialism are supported by the idea that "certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like 'inferior' or 'subject races'" (9). Instead of the words "inferior" or "subject races" being used to describe Muslim Americans as a dominatable identity, they were instead branded with words such as "radical," "Al-Qaeda," or "terrorist." This branding of Muslim Americans as villains allowed them to be controlled domestically within the United States, as the majority of Americans viewed them as an enemy that had to be subdued, monitored, or expelled from the United States. Yet, there are Muslim Americans like Humayun Khan, that are coded as heroes. But Humayun Khan proves that to be a Muslim-American hero, one must perform an extremely heroic act. This creates an ambivalence around 9/11, as it only allows Muslims to be viewed on either end of the spectrum: Either as terrorists that are complicit in the act of 9/11 or as heroes that perform the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Ms. Marvel is an important comic because Kamala breaks this ambivalence by humanizing the Muslim-American experience. By showing how she perseveres through the daily challenges 9/11 poses on her life, Kamala shows that Muslim Americans do not only need to be valued when they are a hero, but as regular citizens inherently deserving of rights. A major way that Kamala shatters the ambivalence towards Muslim Americans in a post 9/11 society is when she explains why she chooses to fight crime in Jersey City as Ms. Marvel. In the face of the negative stereotypes that impose a great danger on Kamala, one may wonder why she chooses to fight crime, but the answer according to Kamala is as simple one: "Jersey City is my home" (*Ms.*

Marvel). This answer shows how Kamala forms a connection with her country despite the backlash her identities receive from it, and allows her to provide insight into how Muslim Americans and other marginalized identities are able to form a connection to a country that traumatizes them. The same sentiments can be seen in Muslim Americans who chose to serve the United States in the armed forces. Ahmed states that she serves America through the Navy because "I'm Muslim and American—I have a love and belief in both passionately" (Wright). The depiction of Kamala fighting for her city, and the parallels that her motivations have with those of Muslim Americans who fight for the United States in the armed forces, humanizes Muslim Americans and breaks the post 9/11 ambivalence that surrounds their identity. By applying a deconstructive and critical reading to *Ms. Marvel*, the ambivalence of 9/11 towards Muslim Americans is displayed through the traumatic effects of nationalism and imagined communities on Kamala's identity as a first generation American, Pakistani, Muslim woman, but it also provides insight into how this trauma can be used to provide understanding and healing towards the Muslim-American community.

The Effects of Nationalism and Imagined Communities on Muslim Americans' Identity

The uncertainty Kamala feels being a Muslim and Pakistani superhero reveals the negative effects of post 9/11 imagined communities on Muslim Americans' identity and how these imagined communities were fueled by an exclusionary and familial model of nationalism that defined Muslim Americans as the enemy. The doubt Kamala expresses about being a Pakistani, Muslim American superhero does not just arise from her own personal insecurities,

but from the fact that her identity is not coded as a hero in America. Kamala displays her insecurities arising from the dissonance between her perception of a stereotypical American hero and her own status as a hero when referring to the blonde Carol Danvers (her Ms. Marvel predecessor) by saying "I guess that's who I thought a hero had to be" (*Ms. Marvel*). This quote shows how Kamala thought that a superhero had to be a blonde, white woman, or in other words, had to have the qualities of a stereotypical American. Later in the comic, Kamala demonstrates reconciliation of her complex identities by saying "it took me awhile to figure out that Ms. Marvel could be me. That I didn't have to pretend to be someone else in order to wear the lightning bolt" (*Ms. Marvel*). Kamala's struggle with her identity as a superhero shows how the effects of being a Muslim American in a post 9/11 society has made her internalize the stereotypes that code Muslim Americans as the enemy to American safety. The internalization of these stereotypes is correlated to the effects of nationalism and how it creates exclusionary imagined communities.

In his book, *Imagined Communities*, Ben Anderson analyzes the exclusionary effects of nationalism by defining the nation as "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (49). The fact that a nation is an imagined political community allows it to define what qualities are accepted within the imaginary community. This makes the nation an inherently exclusionary space, as dominant identities within it will police who can be within its community and will enforce these exclusions throughout literature, media, news, and other aspects of a nation's society. Anderson goes on to explain this exclusion enforced by the nation through its imagined communities when he explains that a nation is imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet

them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives in the image of their communion" (49).

In other words, it is impossible for every American to meet every other American in their

lifetime, yet when we think of an American, certain characteristics come to mind. These are the

characteristics that constitute the imagined communities of a nation, and in the United States, the

characteristics of Muslim Americans are currently excluded from this community. After 9/11,

Muslim Americans were coded as enemies to the imagined community of the United States, and

this created a sense of nationalism that fueled Islamophobia (Yenigun). Nationalism aiding the

construction of Islamophobic imagined communities can be seen in how the ideas non Muslim

Americans hold about Muslim Americans stray far from the truth. For example, a study

conducted by the Brookings Institute revealed that "61 percent of people view Islam

unfavorably" due to the association of Islam and Muslims with attacks such as the Pulse

nightclub shooting, the San Bernardino shooting, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks and how it

supports the idea that the majority of Muslims are terrorists (Telhami). Despite this belief being

widely held, it is easily refuted by the fact that less than 0.0002% of Americans killed since 9/11

were killed by Muslims (Kurzman, 4). The fact that many Americans can hold incorrect and

uncontested beliefs about Muslim Americans, and that these beliefs dominate the major social

order of the United States, shows the power of nationalism to form imagined communities that

define and implement exclusions.

Kamala shows how the post 9/11 imagined community of the United States makes it

difficult for her to fit into society. For example, Kamala greatly struggles with assimilating into

the groups of white, American students at her high school. Kamala's white peers consistently

label her with western tropes of Islam, such as assuming that she cannot go out to late night

parties with them because she is a woman that has no autonomy to make her own decisions (Shadid). Kamala, in an attempt to defy her parent's strict curfew and as a way to fit in with her white peers, sneaks out of her house to attend a late night party. When Kamala arrives to the party, her white peers are surprised and exclaim that they thought she wouldn't make it because she was "locked up" inside her house. They soon abandon her at the party, but only after telling her that they are going to stand somewhere else because "she smells like curry" (*Ms. Marvel*). When a pervasive smoke filters the party (a smoke that is later discovered to have granted Kamala her superpowers) she is transported into a room with The Avengers. Iron man then engages her in conversation about the party by telling Kamala "you thought that if you disobeyed your parents--your culture, your religion, your classmates would accept you" and then asks, "what happened instead?" Kamala answers by saying "they laughed at me instead. Zoe thought that because I snuck out, it was okay for her to make fun of my family. Like, Kamala's' finally seen the light and kicked the dumb inferior brown people and their rules to the curb" (*Ms.Marvel*). This exchange shows how imagined communities that utilize nationalism to support Islamophobia not only exclude Muslim Americans, but creates a hierarchy where the values and norms of non-Muslim Americans are superior to those of Muslim Americans. Just as "humans can be stratified in evolutionary development, so can cultures" through the implementation of exclusive imagined communities (Duster, 491). The feeling of exclusion and the denigration of one's culture while trying to find inclusion is not a problem that is unique to Kamala, but that impacts the identities of many Muslim Americans. Research on American Muslim youth "suggests that an identity that integrates both American and Muslim aspects of self is associated with positive outcomes such as wellbeing" but, it has been hard for many Muslim Americans (as it was for Kamala) to find this balance as "in the wake of the 9/11

terrorist attacks, identity has become particularly complicated to navigate for American Muslims because of the struggle to integrate their dual identities as both American and Muslim (Sirin & Fine, 2010). Kamala's struggle, and its parallels with the struggles of many Muslim Americans, shows that there is a difficulty to integrate dual identities and find a societal niche because of how nationalism and imagined communities work together to code Muslim Americans as the enemy and as an inferior culture.

The structure of nationalism is able to cast Muslim Americans in a low position in the social hierarchy due to its familial framework. This familial framework exists because of how nationalism not only connects the accepted people of a nation no matter their geographic position, but also in how it can unite citizens throughout time. Nationalism is viewed as a linear concept, where all Americans throughout time are united (Cooper). This bolsters the dedication one has to their country, and makes them feel as if they are part of a family. This family structure makes those who are accepted within the imagined community feel closer together, but it excludes and subdues the cultures of those who are excluded from the imagined community. Because the effects of nationalism mirror this family structure "[social] hierarchy becomes naturalized because it is associated with the seemingly 'natural process of the family" (Collins, 64). In terms of Muslim Americans, their culture was placed so low on the social hierarchy after 9/11 that they are not seen as part of the imagined community in any way. Instead of being seen as a family member that is low on the social scale, such as an unfavorable brother or distant uncle, they are instead seen as a perpetrator that violates the safety of the family and must be excluded at all costs. The idea of Muslim Americans being perpetrators that are placed low on the social hierarchy in America's post 9/11 imagined communities can be seen in both *Ms.*

Marvel and in today's society. In *Ms. Marvel*, this happens when Kamala's white peers find it acceptable to make degrading assumptions about Kamala's culture, such as women having no autonomy or that all Muslim are forced to wear headscarves. Kamala's peers think these oppressive aspects are inherent to a Muslim's identity, and this justifies their exclusion of Muslims from their imagined community. The ignorance towards this identity then manifests in oppressive policy, such as Trump's Muslim ban or the Muslim registry that was enforced soon after 9/11 (Frumin). The discriminations towards Muslim Americans both in reality and in *Ms.Marvel* is a result of nationalism's familial structure that enforces exclusionary imagined communities.

These imagined communities also create a culture of ambivalence towards Muslim Americans, as they are either inherently villains or only respected if they demonstrate heroism at an extreme level. Ambivalence is a term coined by Homi Bhaba, who is well known for the advances he has made in contemporary postcolonial studies. Ambivalence is produced when there is an opposition in the perceptions and realities of a culture, and these oppositions create a split identity in the colonized other that consists of their own cultural identity and the colonizer's identity (Bhaba, 78). This split-identity arises because of how the colonizer defines reality for themselves and how it impacts the colonized. For the colonizer, "the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power to some prior archaic image or identity. Paradoxically, however, such an image can neither be 'original'—by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it—nor identical—by virtue of the difference that defines it" (Bhaba, 49). In other words, the split identity of those that are colonized is a result of the false reality the colonizer is trying to build through imagined communities in the aftermath of traumatic events.

The fabrication of this reality that the colonizer tries to build is also seen in the ambivalence that exists for the colonizer, as the images they use to build their reality can neither be original or identical. This makes the colonial presence ambivalent because it is split between an appearance of being original, but also its expression through repetition. This means that the traumatic event that the colonizer uses to build imagined communities always changes, but the methodology of using a traumatic event to build imagined communities that gives the colonizer power is always the same. In a post 9/11 world, the colonizer (which is composed of dominant racial identities in America) is trying to find power by using a traumatic event (9/11) to redefine imagined communities that exclude Muslim Americans. The fabrication of this is extremely evident through the contradiction of the Muslim-American hero and villain, as they are both tied to the origin of Islam, yet one is viewed positively and one negatively. Even though Muslim Americans are coded as the enemy, if someone with that identity is able to code themselves in a way that allows them to be included in the imagined community, then they are suddenly accepted despite their other characteristics that would qualify them as an enemy. This ambivalence complicates the identity of Muslim Americans regarded as heroes and creates the split identity described by Bhaba, because even though their individual actions are being lauded, they still live in a system that codes them as a perpetrator and does not take accountability for the Islamophobia it has perpetuated in the aftermath of 9/11.

This ambivalence can be seen in *Ms. Marvel* when Kamala successfully locates a group of children who have been missing from Jersey City. When the cops arrive to the scene of the crime that she has solved, one of the cops tells Kamala that "you just cleared a year's worth of missing persons' files by finding this place. I owe you one" (*Ms. Marvel*). When Kamala does

something that is extremely beneficial and heroic for society, her Muslim American identity vanishes and she is only seen as a hero. Yet this ambivalence for Kamala still exists, because her identity cannot exist in this hero vacuum for her. That is because the moment she is not doing something heroic, she is coded as an enemy to American values. This ambivalence also exists for Muslim Americans in the armed forces. While there have been various Muslim Americans who have been awarded Purple Hearts, the armed forces did not start officially recording the name of these Muslim American recipients until 2013--meaning that Humayun Khan, who received his purple heart in 2004, technically isn't listed as a recipient (Wright). This shows that society is willing to grant in social Muslim Americans the title of hero, but because of their low position in the social hierarchy of America and the ambivalence of a post 9/11 society, even as heroes they are systemically treated different from non-Muslim American heroes.

Encircling Trauma to find Healing

Kamala's strongest power is her ability to encircle the trauma elicited for Muslim Americans in an ambivalent post 9/11 society in a way that liberates this identity from the stereotypes that portray them as villains to non-Muslim Americans. Kamala experiences trauma living in a post 9/11 society in the sense that "events seen as traumatic seem to reflect a particular form of intimate bond between personhood and community and, most importantly, they expose the part played by relations of power" (Jennifer, 4). In *Ms. Marvel*, the power relations in society are revealed through the countless moments that emphasize the individual and structural superiority of non-Muslim Americans. For example, Kamala having to fear the

NSA wiretapping her mosque or feeling that she has to "be fake and act like Zoe" whenever she

is around her white peers show that a post 9/11 society (through nationalism and imagined

communities) legitimized social actions that suppress Muslim Americans (*Ms. Marvel*). This

ultimately reveals an imbalanced power dynamic between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans

that favors the latter. Kamala's trauma of living in a post 9/11 society is paralleled in the

struggles of Anika Rahman, a Muslim-American who lived in New York during 9/11. A week

after 9/11, Rahman states that "I am so used to thinking about myself as a New Yorker that it

took me a few days to begin to see myself as a stranger might: a Muslim woman, an outsider,

perhaps an enemy of the city. Before last week, I had thought of myself as a lawyer, a feminist, a

wife, a sister, a friend, a woman on the street" (Tahil). In the case of Rahman, the relations of

power can be seen in how she cannot even control her identity, and suddenly has to reconfigure

her actions and how she perceives herself due to being coded as an enemy. Kamala combats

these power relations by reclaiming autonomy through the encircling of trauma. Encircling

trauma recognizes that

> "In its birth into symbolic or social order, into language, the subject is formed around,
>
> and through a veiling of, that which cannot be symbolised--the traumatic real. The real is
>
> traumatic, and has to be hidden or forgotten, because it is a threat to the imaginary
>
> completeness of the subject. The 'subject' only exists in as far as the person finds their
>
> place within the social or symbolic order" (Edkins, 6).

In other words, encircling trauma requires one to understand how trauma influences the

construction of their identity and how this constructed identity only exists in relation to how

society's imagination has constructed the trauma. In terms of living in a post 9/11 society, this requires Kamala to realize that the perception of Muslim Americans as inferior isn't because this identity is inherently inferior, but is a result of how imagined communities were designed to exclude Muslim Americans after 9/11. Kamala's ability to integrate both her Muslim and American identities, instead of trying to solely fit into the defined and imagined characteristics of just one, shows that she understands the fabrication of these identities in relation to trauma and that she chooses to deconstruct them. An example of this is when Kamala uses an Ayah from the Quran as motivation to use her powers as Ms. Marvel for the greater good of society. When debating if she has the strength or if she is in the position to save a drowning Zoe, Kamala recites the Ayah which reads "whoever kills one person, it is as if he has killed all mankind, and whoever saves one person, it is as if he has saved all mankind" (*Ms. Marvel*). This then provides Kamala the strength she needs to transform into Ms. Marvel and save Zoe. For Kamala, Islam is not restrictive even though her white peers portray it to be that way. Instead, the religion aids her in being the hero she needs to be.

Encircling trauma allows Kamala to break the power of stereotypes of Muslim Americans for both minority and majority identity groups. Stereotypes are an ideological construction that allow for the construction of an identity group as "other." These stereotypes also produce an unchanging and rigid order in society that freezes those who are characterized by stereotypes, as stereotypes depict an identity group as "other" without admitting the possibility that this identity group could change or differentiate (Bhaba, 100). As a result of stereotyping, Muslim Americans are cast as terrorists, the enemy, and as a threat, but no act of heroism can permanently alter this classification. Kamala's actions start to dismantle this negative classification of Muslim

Americans and this has two effects. The first one is that Muslim Americans reading this book can encircle trauma on their own and use trauma to understand that these limitations placed on their identity are socially constructed and that they can move past them. The second effect is that it allows non-Muslim Americans to learn about the complexities of being a Muslim American in a post 9/11 society and provides them with the information to help dismantle these systems on an individual, interpersonal, and systemic level. The positive effects for both Muslim and non-Muslim Americans in breaking the mold of Islamophobic stereotypes is exemplified in a scene where Kamala returns to a sanctuary built in a gym in Jersey City for residents who have been attacked in a crime in Manhattan that has parallels to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. When Kamala returns to the sanctuary after saving citizens in Manhattan, she sees how her actions have inspired her classmates, as they are helping set up food and water for those who were attacked and have set up a non-denominational prayer center. This moment makes Kamala realize that even though she does not always get along with her peers and society is inherently flawed, "at least we're not okay together. And even if we don't always get along, we're still connected by something you can't break. Something there isn't even a word for. Something … beautiful" (*Ms.Marvel*).

This moment creates solidarity between non-Muslim and Muslim Americans by emphasizing restorative justice and it is a result of Kamala encircling her trauma. Restorative justice "is an approach to justice that personalizes the crime by having the victims and the offenders mediate a restitution agreement to the satisfaction of each, as well as involving the community" (Price). By integrating her Muslim and American identities, Kamala fully expresses the experience of her complex identities and the trauma of living in a post 9/11 society. This

creates an effect where both the reader and the characters in the comic feel the need to modify their behavior to create a more inclusive society for the identity that is being oppressed. In *Ms. Marvel*, an example of that is when her peers create the non-denominational prayer center. This shows other Muslim Americans that they do not have to pick and choose aspects of their identity, but that their identities can merge together and that merging these identities is a way to find justice in one's community. By integrating her Muslim and American identities, Kamala also shows that Muslim Americans do not only exist on either ends of a spectrum as heroes or villains. She shows that the characterization a of Muslim Americans is tied to stereotypes that reinforce exclusionary imagined communities. By demonstrating this, Kamala emphasizes that whether they are heroes or not, Muslim Americans should be valued as citizens that inherently deserve the protection and respect of their country.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the *Ms. Marvel* series, Carol Danver tells Kamala that "the fate of the world is out of your hands. It always was. But your fate – what you decide to do right now – is still up to you … Today is the day you stand up." Kamala's ability to believe in this message grows throughout the series and it correlates with the confidence she has in her own identities. In the beginning of the series, Kamala's fate is dictated by the social norms that are created by oppressive Islamophobic imagined communities. She struggles to find a way that she can fit into the imagined American or Muslim communities, but struggles to do this as a Muslim-American. Kamala begins to break down the barriers imposed by nationalist imagined communities when

she integrates her Muslim and American identities. Doing this not only allows Kamala to fully express the effects of a post 9/11 society on her identity, but it allows the reader (whether they are non-Muslim or Muslim) to understand the effects of a 9/11 society on their identity and devise ways to combat its negative effects.

The reason that Kamala is able to encircle her readers into the trauma that exists in their own world is because she encircles her own trauma to create restorative justice in the *Ms. Marvel* universe. When Kamala expresses the difficulties she experiences as a Muslim American, such as worrying about the NSA, being taunted by her classmates with Islamophobic stereotypes, or struggling to accept that she is able to be coded as superhero, the reader is fully exposed to her trauma. Knowing this trauma makes it even more radical that Kamala uses it to create justice, such as when she uses Islam to motivate herself to fight crime and save the very people who have plagued her with stereotypes that complicated her identity. When Kamala encircles her trauma, the characters in *Ms. Marvel* are exposed to the nuances of a Muslim-American identity. Just like with Humayun Khan, Kamala allows them to realize that a Muslim identity is not separate from an American or heroic one. This realization is what enacts restorative justice in both the comic and for the reader. Reading *Ms. Marvel* not only allows the characters within it and the reader to realize the difficulties of integrating a Muslim and American identity, but it allows them to identify the barriers that make it difficult. For Muslims, this allows them to see the social constructions that enforce their oppression, and just like for Kamala, identifying these constructions brings them one step closer to dismantling them. For non-Muslim Americans, it allows them to realize how they aid the construction of these barriers. This realization allows both Muslim and non-Muslim American readers (as well as the characters in the comic) to

partake in restorative justice as the majority identity begins to take responsibility for their actions and the minority identity beings to realize what injustices they need remedied.

This restorative justice aspect of Kamala is what makes her and the comic unique. Out of all of Kamala's super powers, her greatest one is hope. There are many books, articles, and documentaries that reveal the same information that a deconstructive and critical reading of Ms. Marvel does: Nationalism fuels exclusionary imagined communities, Muslim Americans are oppressed, and 9/11 has changed the way we conceptualize Islam and race in America. But the growth in Kamala's narrative arc and the way that she presents this information to the reader as if you were reading her diary implies that there is trust in you as a reader to have the hope that you can change the society you live in. Just like Humayun Khan, she makes the ambivalence of a post 9/11 Islamophobic society visible. But she continues the work that Humayun was unable to carry on: she not only highlights the issues facing Muslim Americans, but encircles Muslim Americans and non-Muslim Americans into the struggle of finding justice that holds everyone's experiences and actions accountable to liberation. In the presidential administration that currently presides in 2017, this type of justice is not only important, but is necessary to preserve civil rights in our society.

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