

Module 5: Young, Talented & Muslim: Examining the Diversity of Canadian Muslim Women

| Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21st Century



introduction

This unit provides profiles of noteworthy young talented Canadian women who identify themselves as Muslims. It features links to media clips with interviews and samples of their work.



Sofia Baig – bio

- A 21-year-old spoken-word artist, poet, writer
- Quebecois of Pakistani and Chinese descent
- Student at Concordia University majoring in Community, Public Affairs, and Policy Studies
- Uses her talent to speak out about prejudice, violence, racism, war, and identity
- Has performed all around Canada, the United States, and Europe
- Featured on CNN and in many newspapers
- Recently released her spoken-word album titled *Daughter of the Sand*



“I can’t imagine my life without my writing. This is what I love!”

(Jan. '08, This Magazine)

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Sofia Baig – links

- Website:
www.sofiabaig.com
- CNN Interview:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEHApBpQSOQ>
- Performances:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9u_y4WhPHRs&feature=related
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3vKv7bkR1c&feature=related>



“Some people have this image of a Muslim girl as being very quiet or shy and there's an extreme of thinking we're oppressed. And so I think when they see someone speaking out in general it seems strange. It doesn't match their stereotype. I imagine they're like, why is this random girl wearing a hijab standing there screaming out political poetry?”

(Jan. '08, This Magazine)

Ausma Khan – bio

- Community activist, writer, founder and editor-in-chief of *Muslim Girl magazine*, a North American publication that challenges stereotypes about Muslim women
- Holds a PhD degree in international human rights law from Osgoode Hall Law School
- Completed her LL.B. at the University of Ottawa and has practiced immigration law in Toronto
- Taught international human rights law at Northwestern University and human rights and business law at York University
- Featured in many International publications such as *Asharq Al-Awsat*, the *Organization of the Islamic Conference Journal*, *Arabian Woman*, *Al Ahram Shabab*, the *India Times*, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, *Agence France-Presse*, and the *International Herald Tribune*



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Ausma Khan – links

- CBC Interview:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz_sjHAa78
- Magazine Profile:
http://current.com/groups/on-current-tv/89560852_muslim-girl-magazine.htm
- Q&A with Muslim Girl Magazine's Editor-in-Chief, Ausma Khan:
<http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=5&id=8004>

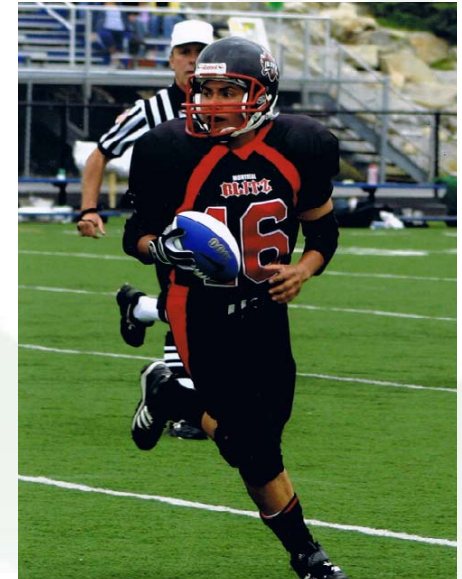


“Most representations of Muslims in the media are negative. Muslim Girl Magazine challenges those perceptions by telling the stories of Muslim teens who are proud to be American and who contribute to American society in so many positive ways. This is a chance for their voices to be heard. Our editorial mandate is to enlighten, celebrate and inspire them.”

(Feb. '07, Asharq Al-Awsat)

Saadia Ashraf – bio

- Founder and owner of the first semi-professional Canadian full-contact women's football team to play in the US-based Independent Women's Football League.
- From a young age, has been passionate about sports, and has coached a number of girls' football teams. She has also received many awards for her athletic and leadership skills.
- Graduated from McGill University, with a Bachelor of Education degree in Phys. Ed.
- Currently manages and plays for the Montreal Warriors, an A level team that has won the league's Ethique Sportive three times.



www.montrealblitz.ca

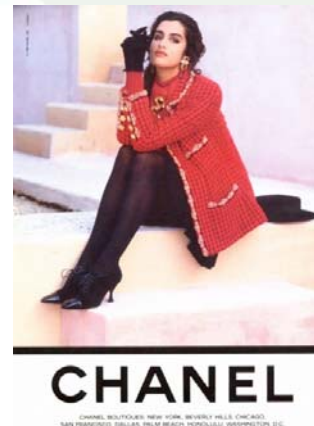
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Saadia Ashraf – bio

- In 2001, began playing quarterback for the Montreal Blitz and soon became the captain of the team.
- In 2004, became the owner of the team and is now president of the Blitz organization.

Yasmeen Ghauri – bio

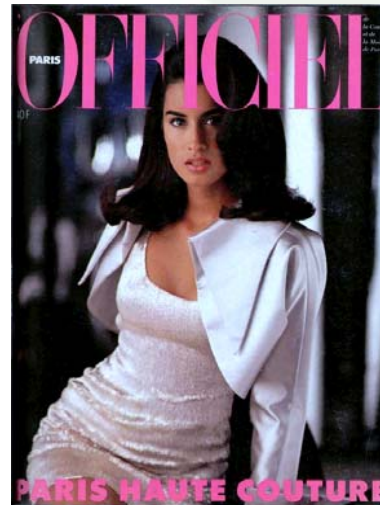
- Famous Canadian supermodel from the 90s
- Born to a Pakistani father and German mother in Montreal
- Featured on covers for *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire* magazines
- Modelled in high-profile ad campaigns for Valentino, Victoria's Secret, Versace, Escada, and Hermès
- Appeared in the 1995 documentary *Unzipped* by Isaac Mizrah



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Yasmeen Ghauri – links

- Ghauri on the runway:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dosO47Xwdio&feature=related>
- Brief interview:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiNOHqJggPU>



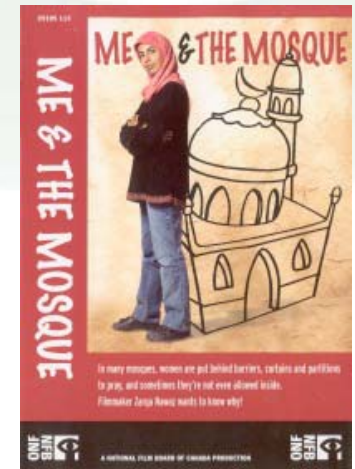
Aliza Vellani – bio

- 17-year-old Canadian television actress from Vancouver
- Plays the role of Layla Siddiqui in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*
- Also made appearances in Nickelodeon's *The Troop* and Carl Bessai's film, *Fathers and Sons*
- Professionally trained in acting, dancing, improv theatre, singing and taekwondo
- Coached her high school junior improv team for 3 years
- Received the BC (2007 & 2008) and National (2007) Istar Award for Arts and Culture



Zarqa Nawaz – bio

- Creator of the Canadian sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, which debuted to a record audience of 2.1 million people
- Founder of Fundamentalist Films
- Born in Liverpool and raised in Toronto
- Holds a Bachelor of Science degree from U of T and a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Journalism from Ryerson University
- Worked as a freelance writer/broadcaster with CBC radio, and in various capacities with CBC *Newsworld*, CTV's *Canada AM*, and CBC's *The National*
- She was an associate producer for a number of CBC radio programs, including *Morningside*



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Zarqa Nawaz – bio

- Her radio documentary *The Changing Rituals of Death* won first prize in the Radio Long Documentary category and the Chairman's Award in Radio Production at the Ontario Telefest Awards
- Produced short films *Fred's Burqa*, *Random Check*, *BBQ Muslims* and *Death Threat*, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival
- Also produced the documentary, *Me and the Mosque*

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Zarqa Nawaz – links

- Fundamentalist Films:
<http://www.fundamentalistfilms.com/>
- Little Mosque on the Prairie:
<http://www.littlemosque.ca>
- Interviews / Speeches:
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=2598097468571500224#>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmubPwDpmic>



Yasmin Warsame – bio

- Warsame was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1976 as the youngest of 21 children she moved to Toronto, Canada as a refugee at fifteen years of age.
- She is a supermodel and judge on *Canada's Next Top Model*
- Modelled for L.A.M.B, Doo Ri, Jeanne Lanvin, Jean-Paul Gaultier, John Galliano, Oscar De La Renta, Fendi, Dolce & Gabbana, Christian Dior, Valentino couture, Escada, Hermès, Shiseido, Chanel, GAP and H&M.
- Featured on the covers of magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Trace*
- Studied psychology and social sciences at Seneca College
- Actively involved with The African Future, a Toronto-based NGO that provides educational and medical support to communities in Somalia
- She entered modeling after the birth of her son and is a working mother.



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Yasmin Warsame – links

- Yasmin talks about G8 and Africa:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWCwz9g00CE&feature=player_embedded#!
(Yasmin at 5:20)
- Yasmin on the runway:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNv5PQVuzl8&feature=related>



“I cover myself up out of respect for my mother. I am Muslim, so I never feel comfortable knowing that my mother could see these shots of me wearing little or nothing. So I hardly ever take such shoots or shows where I have to take my clothes off.”

(July '10, The Times Live)

Farah Nasser – bio

- Canadian journalist and anchorwoman for CablePulse24 and CityTv Toronto's "CityNews"
- Has been active in journalism since high school, where her career began with Rogers Television
- Studied Radio and Television Arts at Ryerson University and European Media Studies at University of Westminster (London, England)
- At the young age of 20, interned with CNN International in New Delhi, India, where she got a chance to interview Mahatma Gandhi's great grandson
- Is an active member of the community, involved with the Aga Khan Foundation, a charity that works for sustainable development in Asia and Africa

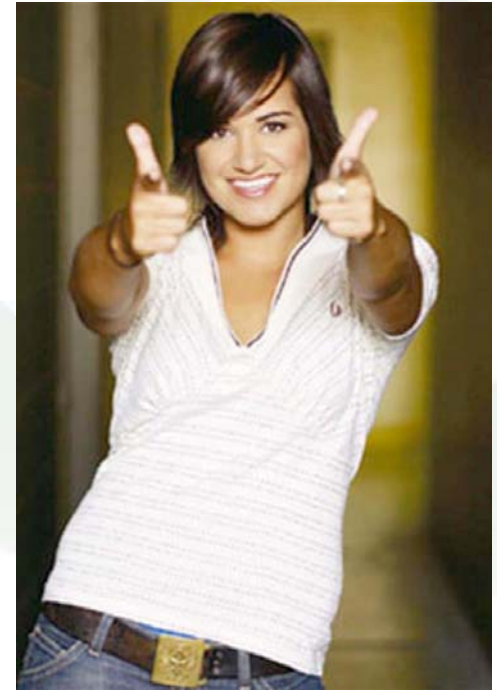


Farah in Action:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdyheigQhjq>

Sabrina Jalees – bio

- A 25-year-old stand-up comedian and columnist for the *Toronto Star*
- Was the youngest comedian to perform at Yuk Yuk's at the age of 16
- Also broke Mike Meyer's record for being the youngest artist hired by Second City
- Performed at the Just For Laughs Festival, recorded a Comedy NOW special for CTV, and toured across North America. Is now part of the award-winning *Allah Made Me Funny* troupe
- Her comedy has landed her a leading role on Much Music's *Video On Trial* as well as many appearances on CBC Newsworld's *The Hour*



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Sabrina Jalees – links

- Website:
<http://www.sabrinajalees.com/>
<http://www.myspace.com/sabrinajalees>
- CTV Toronto Laughs – Profile on Sabrina:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCVbimN2us0>
- Performance on CBC Radio:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaW_LZi2ZI0



Sena Hussain – bio

- A 28-year-old Muslim woman from Vancouver who started Secret Trial Five, an all-girls punk rock band. She is also the lead singer. The band is named after a group of Muslim men who were imprisoned in 2006 by Canadian authorities based on secret evidence and without any charge.
- Her motivation to start the band came after 9/11 when she was appalled by the treatment of Muslims and wanted an avenue to express her voice.
- Punk music is the platform Hussain and her friends chose to write and sing political and satirical songs to challenge racism experienced by Muslims.



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Sena Hussain – bio

- She says, “I hope my music gets through to people, that by seeing us they see that Muslim women aren't what you usually see in the media. Also, I want my music to make people think about how racism is still a very real thing in the West and is used to target communities of colour, and how ignorance can destroy other places and people in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, and so on because it justifies war and imperialism.”

Source: A. Macinnis, September 26, 2009: *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam - Interviews with Omar Majeed, Shahjehan Khan, and Sena Hussain* .
Retrieved from http://alienatedinvancouver.blogspot.com/2009_09_01_archive.html

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Sena Hussain – links

- Secret Trial Five:
<http://www.myspace.com/secrettrialfive>
- YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxklixRK00c>
(Sena & the Secret Trial Five, 8:04 minutes)



Noor Javed – bio

- Print and broadcast journalist; currently a reporter for the *Toronto Star*
- Previously worked with Canadian Press Broadcast News as reporter/editor
- Noor's work has been featured in various national newspapers and on websites, and has been used in radio broadcasts across Canada
- Her journey in journalism began during her undergraduate work at University of Toronto, where she was a staff reporter for campus media
- She graduated from the University of Western Ontario in 2006 with a Master's degree in journalism
- In 2007, Noor wrote a special three-part series in the *Toronto Star* about her experiences of the *Hajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage in Mecca



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Noor Javed – quotes

“Being diverse has definitely been an asset to me to break into the field [of journalism], but it has also presented unique challenges. I have often had to interview people who are hostile, or wary of me because I wear hijab. I have had to convince people that I don't have an agenda. And within the newsroom I have had to fight to not become pigeonholed into only writing stories about the Muslim community. At the same time, when you do write stories about the community, you have to work extra hard to not sound like an advocate. There is often a fine line between the two.”

(Panel Discussion: Diversity Matters, University of Toronto, March 2008)

“The hijab is a fundamental part of my Canadian-Islamic identity, and a part of faith that I consider important enough to have adopted – despite the difficulties that come with wearing it.”

(Toronto Star article, “Choosing hijab doesn't make me more pious,” Dec. 30, 2007)

Dr. Fahima Osman – bio

- Dr. Fahima Osman is the first Somali to be educated as a doctor in Canada.
- She was profiled in Chatelaine Magazine in May 2008 as an Amazing Canadian Woman to watch.
- Her parents fled troubled Somalia just before she was born, eventually settling in Toronto.
- She hopes to work in her parents' homeland when her surgical residency is complete.
- “She’s an inspiration to young women who’ve grown up in difficult circumstances, especially within African communities,” says Dr. Samantha Nutt, executive director of WarChild Canada. “She’s a role model to Canadians as well as Somalis.”



<http://www.somalilandtimes.net/2003/74/7406.shtml>

Reference: http://www.caaws.ca/pdfs/0508-FT-80WTW_entire.pdf

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Dr. Fahima Osman – links

- Globe and Mail:
<http://www.evalu8.org/staticpage?page=review&siteid=2539>
- Somaliland Times:
<http://www.somalilandtimes.net/2003/122/12204.shtml>

Hadeel Al-Shalchi – bio

- Hadeel Al-Shalchi is a Canadian-Iraqi journalist.
- She studied chemical engineering at school before working as a radio reporter and newsreader for the Canadian Broadcasting Corp in Ottawa, Canada.
- She studied journalism at Carleton University, during which she worked in Rwanda as part of the School of Journalism's Rwanda Initiative.
- She now works for the Associated Press as a reporter in their Middle East bureau in Cairo, Egypt.
- She holds the distinction of being the first visibly Muslim woman to report for CBC Television.
- Her journalism allowed her to return to visit her family in Iraq for the first time as she wrote in a 2009 Associated Press article "Reporter's family reunion in Iraq a reality check."



<http://www.rwandainitiative.ca>

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Hadeel Al-Shalchi – quotes

My father believed that Iraq wasn't going to have a bright future in our lifetime, so he chose to leave. I was born in Kuwait, and later moved to Ottawa to become one of nearly 11,000 Canadians of Iraqi origin.

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Hadeel Al-Shalchi – links

- Reference:
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32527059/ns/world_news-midest/n_africa
- Bio:
<http://www.rwandainitiative.ca/internship/interns/alshalchi.html>
- The Country's Daughter:
<http://lastexitmag.com/article/the-countrys-daughter>
- Open democracy:
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/authors/hadeel-al-shalchi>
- Blog from Carleton University's Rwanda Initiative:
<http://www.rwandainitiative.ca/internship/interns/alshalchi-blog/index.html>



<http://lastexitmag.com/article/contributors>

suggested discussion questions:

- Among the personalities featured here, who do you connect with the most and why?
- What do these profiles tell you about Muslim women?
- How do these women compare to the images of Muslim women portrayed in the media?
- What is your biggest surprise regarding these profiles and what you previously thought about Muslim women? Have any of your views changed?
- What are the various ways these women discuss their identity and/or personal struggles?
- What are the different sources of power for these women?
- What characteristics or qualities make these women role models?

