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Graduate Student Research Fellowship

Social Transformation Research Collaborative

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12-2022

## Can the Ummah Speak? Reexamining Genealogies of Black Muslim Women within the Black Freedom Movement through the examples of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad

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### Recommended Citation

Razack, Shameem. (2022) Can the Ummah Speak? Reexamining Genealogies of Black Muslim Women within the Black Freedom Movement through the examples of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad. [https://via.library.depaul.edu/strc\\_graduate\\_student\\_research\\_fellowship/1](https://via.library.depaul.edu/strc_graduate_student_research_fellowship/1)

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Introductory Statement

Can the Ummah Speak? Reexamining Genealogies of Black Muslim Women within the Black Freedom Movement through the examples of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad<sup>1</sup>

As an undergraduate student at UIUC, I was involved in uplifting organizing efforts. The involvement and understanding of student and community organizing always relied not only on a coalition contingent upon solely shared identities but also on shared values and political investments of care and solidarity. What I also took away from these spaces was how the coalition lacked in uplifting different perspectives and ideas, even amongst communities. I introduce this project with my narrative as a way to situate the ways I am approaching this project. This experiential knowledge has led me to the project and consider possibilities moving beyond this initial reflection. During my undergraduate years, I became increasingly invested in student and community organizing in the Champaign - Urbana area. As an undergraduate, the experiences amongst Black and Brown communities cultivated an understanding of building community but also raised questions. During this time, I had numerous questions, concerns, and observations of the spaces I approached or occupied as it pertained to being a student tethered to the academy and a person navigating community organizing spaces.

Reflecting on the winter of 2017, the waves and momentum in terms of organizing in response to the current emergent crisis directed by the U.S. nation-state in the aftermath of the U.S. Presidential election caused obvious turmoil, panic, frustrations, and tensions. What was

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<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," *Geographies of Postcolonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation*, 2009, pp. 109-130, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446212233.n7>.

blatantly clear is that this moment and other examples afterward provided room to connect potential issues and gaps. Many experiences, whether community building or direct actions, led me to more critical questions about theorizing in connection to movements. This politics of knowledge seeking and gradually questioning the injustices I observed led me to communities, organizers, peers, facilitators, and educators whom all grappled with questions around violence enacted upon marginalized communities domestically and internationally. However, I began to observe a hesitancy in naming or recognizing the overlaps within connections around anti-blackness and anti-Muslim racism, even within organizing spaces.

My Master's thesis addresses the erasures and narratives of Black Muslim women in the Black Freedom movement. Through examining the systemic processes of anti-Muslim racism and misogynoir in the United States that have led to the erasure of Black Muslim women and through uplifting their contributions within the Black Freedom Movement. I argue limits, erases, and creates hesitancy in considerations of Black women producing knowledge, autonomy, and agency. I examine and draw upon the lives of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad, well-known figures in the Black Liberation Movement/Black Struggle in the US who were also connected to the Nation of Islam. I do this not to make universal claims based on their experiences or offer a simplistic understanding of Black people utilizing spiritual knowledge; instead, an analysis of both Shabazz and Muhammad expounds upon literature that has established a blueprint for critically engaging with knowledge and resistance of Black Muslim women informed by constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion within the Black Freedom Movement. I argue both in terms of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad as Black Muslim American women, who both offer a point of analysis to unpack several factors that would have

influenced their involvement in the second wave of the emergence of the Black Muslim movement (it is important to analyze both women) Particularly a closer examination of the pan-Africanist, Black nationalist, and Islamic principles that led to their conversion to Islam and continued involvement in community building.

In offering this historical context and placing Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz within the Black Freedom movement, it reshifts Women in the Nation of Islam (NOI) and broadly Black American Muslim Women within a history that does not downplay the significance of Women involved in NOI.<sup>2</sup> For example, in her book, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, Ula Taylor discusses how Clara Muhammad meets Fard.<sup>3</sup> Through discussions/teachings, the eagerness to be part of the Temple of Allah created a sense of reclamation of identity, worth, and value in an antiblack world. Through the vehicle of Fard's teachings of Islam, Clara used this as a way of self-preservation. As Taylor writes, "Additionally, Fard instructed all followers to read works by Marcus Garvey, the co-founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA); Judge Rutherford of the Jehovah's Witnesses; Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA); and books on Freemasonry, which were "symbolic" and foretold the "coming of a new prophet."<sup>4</sup>

Tracing these histories and the nuance that they offer further explains contemporary/current issues about understanding what can be deemed as a Black struggle and, more

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<sup>2</sup> Rosetta E. Ross, "Clara Muhammad: Supporting Movement Ideas Outside Its Mainstream," in *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 141-158.

<sup>3</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, "Mrs. Clara Poole," in *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

importantly, continuing Black political struggle and questions around the Feminist struggle. The objective of my project is to explore the complexities further, differences, disjunctures perhaps, as well as nuances in engaging with social movements as it pertains to Black American Muslim communities, particularly the contributions of Black Muslim women.

Further, the project discusses the cultural and historical memory of Muslims in the United States, including a discussion on the constructions of race and racialization in the context of the United States. To engage critically with the argument that broadly, the knowledge produced by Black Muslim women within the United States is erased and ignored through anti-Muslim racism and misogynoir. My thesis will lay the groundwork in terms of constructions of race and, for this matter, mechanisms of racialization as a tool of the U.S. nation-state further to construct the ideal citizen and the racialized 'other.' The United States has constructed race in an arbitrary way that is dependent upon the state's logic regarding who is the ideal citizen and who is deserving of rights and humanity. It doesn't make sense and evolves to preserve/protect normative ideals of white, hetero-patriarchal, Christian ideals, which construct the 'good citizen' in the United States.

Additionally, it shapeshifts to the current emergent crisis within the United States. Understanding and foregrounding this concept' post' 9/11 and the ways that even such a timeframe and marker has established this mainstream understanding and cultural memory that presents itself to be presumed as 'pre' the existence of Muslims. Constructions of post 9/11 discourse and the implicit/explicit anti-Blackness. The conclusion here further implicates the U.S. and better supports resistance tactics and possibilities of utilizing Ummah as a transnational framework.

The production of obsessive policy-driven and military interventions under the guise of diplomacy, and democracy due to the presence and existence of Muslims in the United States, I argue, relies on anti-blackness and anti-Muslim racism. However, racialization presents, shapes, and distorts narratives and essentializes communities. For this project, I am focusing on the genealogies of Black Muslim women in connection to the Black Freedom movement. Including an analysis of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad and their roles further how anti-Blackness and anti-Muslim racism shape and inform the narratives and erasure of Black Muslims such as these public figures in connection to tracing their intellectual contributions within Black movements. I am not necessarily aiming to resolve this issue through a flattened perspective or idea of representational politics in terms of identity.

Beyond just the silences or erasures in naming or considering nuanced conversations around Black spiritual practices and the knowledge it informs. I question if that limits voices and perspectives on strategies towards antiracist, anti-imperialist, and decolonial practices towards self-determination. Are we perhaps reproducing the colonial logic that further prevents or engages with Black people and, in this case, Black women to having their own ‘agency’ and ‘autonomy’? How does this connect to the colonial logic of broad women of color and the understanding of Islam or tropes, imagery, and narratives that solidify the universal caricature of the singular oppressed Muslim woman? Is there no possibility that to be informed by Islamic knowledge, principles, and practice is to leave little room for complexities and different approaches? Can the subject (Black Muslim women) even speak? Who gets to define the terms within which they speak?

## **Thesis Aims**

My project aims to make the argument of anti-Muslim racism dependency upon global antiblackness through textual analysis and archival research—these formations of anti-muslim racism and anti-blackness overlap in several ways to racialize and marginalize groups and communities. I am invested in analyzing intersections of marginalized experiences and the ways it informs and influences social movements. Meaning I am considering how, in this particular project, race, gender, and religion intersect and inform how people organize and contribute to movement work. What does that mean? Meaning due to histories of colonial white supremacist imperial power structures that have, in this case, influenced religious institutions, it has impacted how people operate and navigate society. I am primarily focusing on analyzing archival works that pertain to Black Muslim communities because, from my perspective, there is more to expand upon and bridge connections of religious knowledge and how it has informed blackness. This project is concerned with how Black women in the United States engage with Islam as a religious practice and tool/ guidance within their community-building practices.

To re-examine and expand upon the cultural analysis of the Black Freedom movement about the influence and shaping of the racialization of Muslims is important in this project. The project will utilize archival works in examining figures such as Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad, who both are key figures as Black women involved in the Nation of Islam which coincides with the civil rights and Black power movement. I am interested in how the connections between anti-Muslim racism and anti-blackness shape, influence, and produce narratives that produce limited understandings of movement work and resistance amongst Black Muslim communities. Through systemic oppression, specific lived experiences have informed generations of people within the African/Black diaspora. On a closer examination considering

the impacts of the constructions of religious institutions, it requires nuance and dissection that historically seems flattened, homogenized, and pathologized as simply indoctrination of faith without further analysis of the potentials of self-agency and determination that is formed through a spiritual sense of knowledge. My thesis includes exploring and expanding on scholarly works that focus on Black Muslim communities and their advancements in producing and shaping contemporary movements such as Black Power Movement. I am considering the broader influences, such as spiritual knowledge, as a way of community building and resistance tactics. In considering these broader influences, there is an urgency to examine systemic oppressive structures such as anti-Blackness and anti-Muslim racism that produce narratives, performances, and erasure of the Black Freedom movement. Another point of focus in using the example of Women in the NOI is that this is a particular experience of Black American women engaging with Islam in the act of conversion and practice of Islam in response to white supremacist, colonial imperialist logics of citizenship within the United States.

The question of gender in this project is multifaceted that requires nuance and interrogation. Sylvia Chan-Malik discusses how thinking about how Women of color (in this context, Black women) has shaped an understanding of Islam in the United States.<sup>5</sup> I am especially interested in the logic of misogynoir that led some Black women during the Black Power Movement to convert to Islam. In analyzing secondary texts, documents, and speeches, it is apparent that these historical figures, Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz, recognize their position as Black women in the United States and the subjugation of Black women. Main

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<sup>5</sup> Sylvia Chan-Malik, "Introduction," in *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018), pp. 3-4.



question: How do Black American Muslim women understand Islam as a community-building tool?

## **Context**

My thesis is situated within the field of Women's and Gender studies as a project that expands on literature that attempts to challenge the particular knowledge produced of and by Muslim women within WGS as it calls into question who can speak here. While deconstructing the singular Muslim woman who seems to be brought up in particular, cultural timeframe as well (i.e., Afghanistan, Iran) either as oppressed (continued conversations of the hijab) or imagery of diversity amongst politically left spaces (American flag hijab woman) both offering no space for nuance, complexities, knowledge or simply humanity. If anything, it offers space for U.S. multiculturalism (further reinserting and reinscribing the state's legitimacy). In this case, it showcases the U.S. as the beacon of democracy as opposed to other countries.

Growing up in Champaign - Urbana, I understood my positionality in connection to contemporary moments within the United States and the Global south. To unpack my investment in analyzing and researching stems from my knowledge of racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, and religious affiliation while living in the United States. As a person in my twenties, I experienced and witnessed the social ramifications of post-9/11 U.S. national policy and strategies that enabled an environment that weaponized identity politics. Such strategies shape and inform narratives that racialized and homogenized Black and brown communities. Further, producing them as 'others' through identity markers such as religious affiliation, in this case, Islam. However, the United States presented the veneers of an emerging commodifiable multicultural nation that relied on symbols of patriotism under the guise of the security state. To be clear in

laying out the political climate of the early 2000s to the current day (2022) establishes a few ways that I am approaching this project in terms of 1.) positionality as a Black Queer African Immigrant Muslim on a personal level that informs a cultural memory in terms of self-identification. 2) the knowledge of historical and contemporary examples within the United States that relies on antiblackness and anti-Muslim racism in producing and determining citizenship and rights.

### **Theoretical frameworks**

My thesis is in conversation with transnational feminist, Black feminist, and Islamic feminist frameworks, which I will further explain in the following subsections of the theoretical frameworks. Meaning I will include a few scholars that will be conversing with each other and why matters, particularly for this project. The project is interested in influences such as religion connected to the construction of gender as it pertains to Black American Muslim women. I am particularly highlighting the principles of Islam that connect Black American Muslim women to a global Muslim community. First, I am engaging with transnational feminism because this project is concerned with criticisms of U.S. nation-building and the flow of ideas, which I believe is an interest of transnational scholars. The idea of Islam crossing all these borders is bigger than a product of the United States. In context to this project, Amina Wadud's work is important to discuss with Saba Mahmood.<sup>6</sup>

I am interested in Saba Mahmood's understanding of subjugation, in the *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Subject of Feminism*, as it pertains to her project centering on the Egyptian mosque movement in 1995. particularly Mahmood's interrogation of women's

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<sup>6</sup> Saba Mahmood, "The Subject of Freedom," in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Subject of Feminism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 4-5.

involvement in Islamist movements and the reactions that conclude women are participating in structures of patriarchal subjugation, as well as considering Islamic knowledge as a point of organizing.<sup>7</sup>

I am engaging with Minoo Moallem's work, "Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism," in considering binaries that implicate an assumed 'secular' feminisms and fundamentalisms? as stated, "Both feminism and fundamentalism challenge the modern dichotomies- material spiritual, natural cultural, secular/religious, public/private-to come to a holistic reading of gender relations. While fundamentalist challenges to modern dichotomies find expression in the notion of an essentialized woman as universal particular, feminist claims to particular universals via such notions as "global sisterhood" become a site of struggle against a universalized patriarchy."<sup>8</sup> Similar to Mahmood discussing Minoo Moallem Engaging with texts, Moallem interrogates the symbolism of women in the context of women within the national project.

My thesis aligns with works such as Mahmood and Moallem as I center on Black American Muslim women influenced by Islam and within the Nation of Islam, a religious and political movement. My thesis also raises questions, concerns, and controversies about considering Muslim women's subjugation and participation in religious spaces and communities. In this case, there is space to see a connection between Black American Muslim women influenced by Islam in similar ways as Egyptian Muslim women, as discussed by Mahmood. I am particularly highlighting the principles of Islam that connect Black American Muslim women

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Minoo Moallem, "Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism," *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, 2001, pp. 124-125, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-04830-1\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-04830-1_9).

to a global Muslim community. Similar to Mahmood discussing Minoou Moallem Engaging with texts, Moallem interrogates the symbolism of women in the context of women within the national project.

Amina Wadud, as discussed before, brings in the understanding of Islam crossing all these borders is bigger than a product of the United States. Amina Wadud draws on her own experiences and reflexivity as a Black Muslim woman, particularly her experiences of navigating feminist spaces and the disconnect between Islam and Muslim communities, and the connections of defining themselves or connecting with Feminist spaces.<sup>9</sup> In considering Black American Muslim women and their approaches to knowledge through their experiences that inform their political investments, Wadud discusses the few takeaways from the Beijing conference for Women in 1995 in connecting contemporary issues concerning Islamic feminism. Positionality here is important because of the perpetual silencing and erasure of Black women discussing Islam or being Muslim. The space to articulate vastly different experiences, particularly within academic scholarship, seems rare. Transnational feminism through the lenses of Islamic feminism further highlights Ummah and Islam as transnational, regardless of their presence in the United States.

The project will include Black feminist frameworks. The project will utilize Black feminist frameworks to expand on the analysis of Black women in connection to historical examples of Black feminist struggles that include community building, education, and knowledge production—utilizing Black feminist frameworks in considering intellectual contributions by Shabazz and Muhammad. As practices of community building that are

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<sup>9</sup> Amina Wadud, “Islamic Feminism by Any Other Name,” in *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources and Histories* (S.I., SI: ROUTLEDGE, 2021), pp. 33-45.

foundational in Black feminist praxis and thought. In context to the paper, I will analyze here "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual" by Su'ad Abdul Khabeer. Khabeer's experiences as a Black Muslim woman and navigating both academic and local Muslim communal spaces have informed her that political investment has been met with pushback and erasure due to what she describes as the continued rhetoric and pathologizing of Black women.<sup>10</sup> Her intervention here is to challenge how U.S. Muslim communities reproduce this racializing and othering of Black Muslim women. These experiences help foster an approach in centering knowledge from a community perspective and ultimately allowing for movement work that influences structural change.

I rely on Patricia Hill Collins to frame this understanding of knowledge production and matrix of domination to explore other ways Black women are considering and negotiating with the racialized gendered constructions that occurred during the Black power movement. Collins discusses within the chapter, "U.S. "Black Feminism in Transnational Context," the" importance of an intersectional paradigm and matrix of domination in further expanding on how centering the lived experiences of the U.S. Black women offer insight into the ways systems of oppression and domination and informs and guides resistance. In particular, anti blackness, policy, and the racial logic that perceive Black people and blackness as inherently outside of modernity and lacking the will to 'progress' while also criminalizing, incarcerating, and disposing of Black people, in this case, Black women positioning them outside of a specific symbolism of womanhood that is used for nation-building as they are pathologized as unable to be 'saved.'

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<sup>10</sup> Sohail Daulatzai, Junaid Akram Rana, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual," in *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 287-297.

In later sections of the chapter, Collins discusses the importance of interrogation nationalism as it shapes the U.S. Nation-state, and amongst Black, organizing is utilized as resistance. Angela Davis is another scholar I will rely on regarding her understanding of Black feminism regarding movement work.<sup>11</sup> Black feminism offers ways to complicate even my perspective of analyzing Black Muslim American women and their connections to movement work. In terms of ways Black women are interpreting and navigating with understandings of race, gender in connection to Islam and how that can and has further informed these Black Freedom movements. I will rely on a close reading of Betty Shabazz biographical texts, speeches and archival documents to analyze her own evolving political investments particularly after leaving the Nation of Islam which still connects back to Clara Muhammad as NOI is a basis for Betty Shabazz which in many ways became a foundational aspect of her own political investments within Black social movements.

Offering a Black feminist framework provides an analysis needed to focus on Black Muslim communities. Further, in relating to transnational feminist frameworks, I expand this seeking of spiritual knowledge through an Islamic lens as a politic, and framing the analysis through an Islamic feminisms supports the concepts of knowledge production informing resistance. Islamic Feminism is a framework that Margot Badran states, “is a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminism is both highly contested and firmly embraced.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam* (One World Media, 2009).

## Methods

I am approaching this project through a textual analysis of texts that include any reference to comparative analysis of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad in connection to the Black Power Movement. Although they are two figures in a mass movement, they are the most recognizable within the United States regarding Black social movements. Part of my method is utilizing archives of the Schomburg Center, speeches, and secondary text, which offers a reexamination of both figures in correlation to the Black Power Movement. I am also critical of the ways/politics of archives and what is or is not an archive; I am aware that fewer texts explicitly engage with Clara Muhammad. Similar to Maria Fuente's approach to archival sites is to interrogate the violence of the historical silence that the archives do to enslaved women. Fuentes states, "colonial power subsequently made the archive complicit in obscuring the offenses committed against the enslaved through the language of criminality. my work resists the authority of the traditional archive that legitimates structures built on racial and gendered subjugation and spectacles of terror." For this project, I am examining all documents, audio, texts, and letters connected to Muhammad and Shabazz to consider silences. For example, I will include FBI records on both Muhammad and Shabazz in connection with the Schomburg archival site and digital archives to analyze the narratives produced within these records. Additionally, I will include a discussion in full detail of the textual analysis from the the materials gathered including a letter that is archived at the Schomburg Center sent by Clara Muhammad to Betty Shabazz as Muhammad is traveling to Egypt in which she [Muhammad] discusses sharing a translated Quran in terms of an internationalist ideology (perspective) that Malcolm is boldly stating that carries through Betty's speeches and involvement later on. The

document offers a point of exploration in international solidarity. In terms of taking a deeper dive into considering both women, I first think of Muhammad's establishment of schools, and the investment in Black youth cannot be ignored. I am using literary analysis because I need to lay the groundwork for analyzing any text or reference of broadly Black Muslim women, particularly the public figures Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad, in terms of the narratives, conversations, understandings, and silences. I am also considering how the perceptions of Black women and Islam convey or produce an understanding of the scholarship produced (and who is allowed or deemed credible to produce this scholarship). I am also considering feminist texts that engage with Muslim women for this project regarding the canonical texts within the field of Women's and Gender Studies.

I am using archival works and utilizing interpretations of archival documents from the Malcolm X Paper Collections between the years 1945 -1965 particularly referencing the Betty Shabazz papers in terms of what is included by the Schomburg center and perhaps a discussion of an 'official archival space'. Other methods include text analysis of audio speeches, newspapers, letters, secondary texts such as biographical works. I am using a literature analysis and potentially a media analysis within this project. Additionally, the project will include analyzing or considering storytelling, feminist storytelling as it pertains to movements.

## **Conclusions**

I aim to establish, uplift and contextualize the literature that addresses the significance of engaging with genealogies of intellectual contributions of Black women practicing Islam to the Black freedom movement. In conclusion, this project offers nuance around religious minorities as well as deconstructing racialization processes of communities and the logic of homogenous



communities. This project expands on possibilities of coalition through difference from a feminist perspective. Additionally, engaging with particular experiences of Black communities such as Black Muslim women offers nuances around Black intellectual traditions. However, The project relies on centering Black women and there are ways to expand on this project to even interrogate the constructions of gender, consider the ways spiritual knowledge is informed through binaries of gender.

After the past year of protests, uprisings, and the election of Joe Biden, demands to cut funding of police departments and programs to redistribute that money towards social programs. With the increased work towards movement building against the War on Terror as we reach twenty years since the war in Afghanistan, a coalition still needs to be built. Reaching almost five years later from this particular Muslim ban rally, the urgency for the coalition has grown amongst Muslims and across communities and the necessity for moving towards liberation. A distrust of Muslims which is why the response even amongst Muslim communities (particularly first and second generation Immigrant Muslims) is to perform and present in a way that is 'disarming' or to self surveille towards perception of being 'trustworthy'. Distrust of women at large and 'terrorist' sympathizers loosely connected is the ways in which the fixation over the hijab whether in the U.S, Europe and Global South post - colonial state there is a produced understanding of hijab depending on context that is less to do with religious application and more to do with the control of women to further political agendas.

There is also limitations around discourse in terms of Islamophobia and anti-muslim racism especially as I see with the tracing of examples seems to lag or there are at times hesitancy to connect the presence and influence of Islamophobia in connection to colonization of

Africa and presence of west African muslim communities . This is perhaps due to the complex histories around that but be real there is a correlation there. Irrespective of individual Muslims there is on the basic level of understanding of a collective of people who are connected through the Islamic faith. This understanding of ummah as a transnational framework does not negate differences amongst Muslim communities, practices and the influences of cultural and political influences. Constructions of a 'foreign' Islam is implied even within resistance strategies against Imperialism. People want us in these spaces as symbolism of progress but not the actual ideas of Black people.

My project forces a nuanced interrogation of how pervasive anti-Blackness and anti-Muslim racism is politically and socially. In the Unites States due to the historical and continuing reliance on anti-Blackness to inform anti-Muslim sentiments any discussion of the possibilities of uniquely different experiences within both Black communities and Muslim communities remains unacknowledged. It limits and erases any conversation of Black women and their negotiations, connections, understandings of spirituality beyond Christianity which leaves little to no option beyond the assumed binaries of categories such as 'religious assuming Christian' or 'not at all'. Meaning it leaves the discussion or lack thereof the possibilities of contending with spirituality for Black women in multiple ways it also brings into question do these experiences then matter? To whom do they matter? Or more importantly why do they not matter in discussions of knowledge production?

As I develop this project further there is an argument to be made that perhaps anti-blackness in this case misogynoir removes any possibility to explore the connections of Islamic knowledge that produces and informs Black women who are involved, leading and navigating

communal spaces because historically and currently they are unable to be ‘read’ or perceived as knowledge seekers or intellectuals. The project expands and engages with discourses of Black women and movement work and what is deemed or not organizing work. This is important in terms of what is defined as intellectual knowledge and particularly who is deemed an intellectual quote on quote meaning in order to analyze the text and also recognize the cultural significance of Black intellectuals, Visionaries, organizers is to destruct a colonial white supremacist understanding of knowledge, knowledge production, and hierarchical elitist understandings of intellectuals. In drawing on a few selected texts, there were limitations. I argued for further exploration through Black feminist frameworks that engage with Islam in terms of Black Muslim women's understandings of knowledge production. There are difficulties here in terms of no source of canonical text or anthologies (as of yet) that compile all the scholarship of Muslim scholars, especially, Black Muslim women scholars. Positionality Matters to some extent because of the perpetual silencing and erasure of Black women discussing Islam or being Muslim, and the space to articulate vastly different experiences, particularly within academic scholarship, seems rare. As stated, engaging with differences of knowledge and experiences goes beyond naming identity. Black American Muslim women and their approaches to knowledge through their own experiences that inform their political investments—considering differences amongst Black Muslim women within the African diaspora. Other difficulties within this paper are the nuances around identifying as a feminist for Black Muslim women, even if the concepts and discussions are arguably in line with feminist theorizing, which further pushes false dichotomies such as secular feminist spaces. In discussing this point of assumed secularism, I am in no way removing the tensions of including social constructions such as religion as a site in which white

supremacist, patriarchal, colonial, imperialist, and homophobic rhetoric has been reproduced.

There are necessary interventions in which people in their religious communities are challenging rhetoric and extremism, including within Muslim communities. In this section, I aim to explore the harms of homogenizing Muslim communities as separate and unable to engage with political formations, feminist theories, and feminist movements that are assumed secular.

Further producing notions that Islam is fixed in a traditional and more archaic style of knowledge and offers no point in informing political investments. I am particularly concerned as it pertains to Black women who are practicing Muslims and the ways that such rhetoric around Islam offers limitations to mobilize or forms solidarities that are not then spaces for questioning or hesitations for the coalition as secularism operates in binaries of tradition and modernity. Through discussion in the section of homogenizing Muslim communities essentially limits possibilities of potential sites of coalition building. This paper expands on the possibilities of the coalition through differences from a feminist perspective. Additionally, engaging with particular experiences of Black communities, such as Black Muslim women, offers nuances around Black intellectual traditions. However, this paper relies on centering Black women, and there are ways to expand on this project, even to interrogate the constructions of gender and consider how spiritual knowledge is informed through binaries of gender.



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