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We saw our mothers as leaders: Second and third wave black Muslim women discuss faith, activism, and the meaning of motherhood

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Abstract
This project centers the lived experiences of Black Muslim women within the intersecting frameworks of racial and religious diasporas, challenging dominant narratives of Muslim women's oppression and repositioning Black Muslim women as agents of spiritual and social transformation. Grounded in Debra Majeed's theory of female social activism, the work highlights how spiritually guided agency shapes the religious identities and communal roles of Black Muslim women. Writing from an insider's perspective, the author draws upon her personal history and intergenerational memory, tracing her roots to the original Nation of Islam and her formative education in the Clara Muhammad Schools. These experiences serve as both historical evidence and an interpretive lens, illustrating how Black Muslim women, particularly educators and spiritual leaders, cultivated leadership, self-determination, and community uplift. This autobiographical and scholarly reflection adds a necessary corrective to scholarship, which has too often excluded Black Muslim women's voices and contributions. Ultimately, the project reclaims historical space for Black Muslim women within the broader narratives of Black feminist thought and African American religious history.

Keywords: Nation of Islam, black Muslim women, black nationalism, community feminism, oral history

Introduction
This work aims to locate the lived experiences of Black Muslim women within the context of overlapping racial and religious Diasporas, to challenge the notion of oppressed Muslim women, and to push our historical imagination to situate Black Muslim women's leadership and activism within the context of Black feminist activity. I utilize Debra Majeed's concept of female social activism which posits that, the spiritually directed agency of Black Muslim women serves as a centerpiece of their religious identity and reflects their construction and/or reconstruction of participatory roles through which they contribute to the upliftment of their communities, the betterment of society, and the appreciation of women's autonomy and power. (Majeed, Debra, 2013) [14].

Moreover, I write as an insider, allowing the context of my life and the experiences of members of my community to provide the lens through which historical realities are understood and focused. Few African American Muslim women historians have produced scholarship that examines African American encounters with Islam. Consequently, the narrative has been told most often by and from the perspective of the outsiders.

I am a product of overlapping communities. I was born into the original Nation of Islam on September 3, 1972, and later attended Clara Muhammad Schools. My parents became members of the Nation of Islam as teenagers. Like many young African Americans in the 1960s, my parents were the main demographic targeted by the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the original Nation of Islam, used a simple strategy: "go after the young people…once you get them, the older ones will follow through shame." My mother's experience shows the success of this straightforward approach. In 1960, her eldest sister, Emma Jane Smith, shared Elijah Muhammad's message with her mother and six siblings. By 1962, my grandmother, mother, and three aunts in North Carolina had become official members of the Nation of Islam. My mother, Eula Forman, became Eula X at age fourteen. She had previously been involved with Sandy Branch Baptist Church in Rich Square,

NC. My father, Herbert Hickman, was born in Bishopville, South Carolina, in 1947. His parents moved to Paterson, New Jersey, shortly after his birth. In 1963, at age 16, he officially joined the Nation of Islam and took the new name, Herbert X. My parents got married in 1967 and had six children between 1968 and 1975. We are all now practicing Muslims.

My training at Clara Muhammad Schools began in Newark, New Jersey, when I was three years old and continued through the early elementary grades across several Southern states, including Georgia, Tennessee, and Birmingham, Alabama. The Nation of Islam's backing of Black entrepreneurship motivated my father to pursue business opportunities wherever he could find them. He would pack up his wife and six children and move from city to city. No matter where we lived, all six of us received an education at what became known as the Clara Muhammad Schools. The education I gained at Clara Muhammad Schools shaped my understanding of racial, religious, and gender identities. The experience at Clara Muhammad Schools had a profound impact on my growth, largely due to the women who served as my teachers, spiritual guides, and role models. Their mission at Clara Muhammad Schools was to teach boys and girls not only to be effective in their chosen careers but also to see themselves as leaders, to develop self-discipline, and to believe in their ability to accomplish greatness, regardless of their gender.

Part I: Clara Muhammad's Significance

At the dawn of the twentieth century, African Americans comprised twelve percent of Georgia's population, which included at least one Sea Island Muslim community (Sapelo Island and St. Simon). Most African Americans were impoverished and worked as sharecroppers on former slave plantations. Clara Evans was the second daughter born on November 2, 1899, to Mary Lou Thomas and Quartus Evans. Like many other poor blacks, her father worked as a sharecropper to rent the land where they lived. The Evans family were devout Christians who belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, where her father served as a steward and Clara sang in the church choir. Her participation in the church and strong religious beliefs would also be evident in her work within the NOI. Clara achieved what was regarded as a complete education for rural black children in the South by finishing her education up to the seventh grade. Beyond her academic achievements, family members recognized Clara as a highly intelligent and perceptive person. Clara was particularly close to her father, whose background as a church steward equipped him with strong business and organizational skills, which were crucial to her own training and development. The teachings Clara received from her father, along with her religious training and formal education, ultimately prepared her for future challenges.

As a devoted member of her church, Clara spent a great deal of her time there. It was in the church that Clara would meet her soon-to-be husband, Elijah Poole. Elijah attended the nearby Zion Hope Baptist Church, where his father, William Poole, was a minister. Clara's faith in God deeply moved Elijah. Clara's father, Quartus, opposed Clara and Elijah's courtship because Elijah had only received a fourth-grade education, and his family was more destitute than the Evans. Despite her close relationship with her father and against his wishes, Clara and Elijah eloped and married on March 7, 1919. They lived secretly for months before returning to her parents' home. (Muhammad, R. 2020) [15].

By 1923, Clara and Elijah had given birth to two children, Emmanuel and Ethel, and had decided to leave Georgia for Detroit, Michigan. In Detroit, they would have six additional children. Like many African Americans during the Great Migration, the Pooles traveled to Detroit seeking to escape the oppression and poor economic conditions of the South. Additionally, Elijah's father had gone the year before and urged his son to move to Detroit to pursue work in the automobile industry. Unfortunately, the move to the so-called "Promised Land" was thwarted by the same racism and poverty they had experienced in the South. Clara and Elijah found themselves living in abject poverty. Clara's early religious training, her formal education, and the strict work ethic she learned from her father became the foundation she relied on to help her navigate life in a new space and uplift her family as the Nation neared the Great Depression. They were without food, water, heat, and appropriate clothing. Emmanuel Muhammad, the first son, recalled wearing clothes that were so badly worn that the colors were indistinguishable. "Sometimes we didn't know the original color of clothes because they had so many patches," he noted. Soon, Elijah's employment situation worsened, and he began to drink. Clara accepted work as a domestic aid in the homes of Whites, and eventually, the family had to accept public assistance. Between 1923 and 1933, the Poole family grew to seven children, five boys and two girls. Times were so hard for the Poole family that they could only afford meat twice a month. Clara remembered the days when her family was at its lowest point. Clara wrote in Muhammad Speaks, she would go out and try to help him [Elijah], but with five small children, she wrote, "I could not work steadily. However, I was successful when I went door to door, asking for work. The people would question me, and I would tell them the truth. Some of them did not have any work, but they would give me a little money and some gave me food. This was Allah's work, but I did not know it then." (Muhammad, Clara, 1967) [7].

Elijah became deeply ashamed of his inability to provide the necessities for his family and often stayed away from home. At times, Clara searched the neighborhood for her husband, only to find him drinking with friends. Numerous accounts have mentioned that Clara would carry Elijah home on her shoulder when she found him drunk. The challenging times caused Clara to seek spiritual guidance and relief from the hardships she and her family faced. Not surprisingly, when a girlfriend introduced Clara to the teachings of W.D. Fard, a silk salesman and former member of the Moorish Science Temple, Clara was open to receiving his message about the divine goodness of black people and God's liberation of black people. For Clara, Fard's message represented a blend of Christianity, orthodox Islam, and black-nationalist ideology with other belief systems. This new religion addressed many of the major questions she grappled with regarding her place in the universe. Soon after the first meeting with Fard, Clara sent a letter to her mother affirming that "we have found the savior." Followers of Protestant Christianity, the dominant expression among black people, and the original Nation of Islam viewed their Creator and their God as one and the same. It was each community's understanding of the human manifestation of "the savior" that separated them.

It was the "Nation" and not the "Church" that helped Clara find lasting solace, for the messages that Fard focused on addressed God's concern for the earthly liberation of black people rather than heavenly rewards. Thus, Clara and several former Christian women became the female support system for this leader, who made them feel worthy and capable of empowering their men to change their way of life. Clara believed that Fard's message was the medicine her husband needed to help him regain his dignity and self-respect. Within months of their first meeting, Clara invited Fard to dinner to speak with her husband. By 1931, Clara and Elijah had become Muslims and joined the Nation of Islam. Their relationship with Fard lasted from 1931 to 1934. During this period, the Nation of Islam was founded.

The year 1932 unveiled a series of events that would shape Clara and Muslim women's activism within the Nation of Islam. Fard encouraged women to withdraw their children from the public school system and teach them in a homeschool environment. The role of first teacher to the young provided women with a sense of agency and the ability to promote change. Clara, with her seven children as her first students, became the cofounder and first instructor of Muhammad University of Islam—later the University of Islam—the first Black primary and secondary school in the United States with an African-centered curriculum. This curriculum included Clara's own ideas, thoughts, and family history. Additionally, it encompassed vocabulary, English, math, science, and history, emphasizing race pride, self-reliance, and self-discipline. Under Fard's direction, Clara also co-developed the Muslim Girls Training (MGT) and General Civilization Class (GCC), which instructed girls and women in self-defense, modesty, diet, health, hygiene, domestic skills, business skills, and conduct. The MGT class specifically emphasized to girls and women the importance of the Black woman's role as a supportive wife to her husband's success. Clara's leadership as the teacher of the Muslim Girls Training Class and General Civilization Class solidified her status as the iconic figure of a "True Black Muslim Woman." Clara was equally determined to invest her talents and energy into the education of Black children, including her own. Her work as an educator within the NOI mirrored the efforts of Black clubwomen. It was within the NOI that she and other women carved out space to direct their activist consciousness and respond to their marginalization in the larger society. (Amatullah-Rahma, A. 1999) [9].

By the early 1940s, Clara's role as first lady of the NOI, mother, and educator was extended into the day-to-day administration of the organization. Elijah relied on his wife's leadership skills, her intuition, and her ability to be, as early members noted, "the glue that kept the movement together." "She had the courage to be different with great dignity" One member noted. A female member stated, "I felt comfortable with her, which made it easier for me to get out of my expensive, low-necked dresses and put on one longer than all of my friends and associates." (Muhammad, Ester, 1999) It was in the spirit of community activism and envisioning women's work as an extension of "home" work that Clara took charge of the organization in 1942, when Elijah and their son Emmanuel were convicted in Washington, D.C., on draft evasion. They were imprisoned for a total of three years. (Amatullah-Rahman, A, 1999) [9].

Clara had the responsibility to care for her seven remaining children without her husband. She served as their nurturer, disciplinarian, and teacher, responsible for their positive identity formation and education. Additionally, she solicited members of the NOI for financial support for Elijah and Emmanuel's bond and carried the collected funds to Elijah in jail, at least once in a trunk full of one-dollar bills. "With the weight of a Nation of people on her shoulders and an incarcerated husband and son on her mind, 42-year-old Clara assumed the leadership of a heretofore masculinist structure, and simultaneously she was able to more visibly define, represent, and model budding Islamic womanhood." As the NOI's designated 'Supreme Secretary,' Clara intervened during Temple disputes, represented her husband at public engagements within the movement and in the larger society, and transmitted orders from her husband, all while observing, critiquing, and correcting the manner and method in which those orders were implemented.

To many African American Muslims, Clara Muhammad is the most recognized woman pioneer of the original NOI. Her service to the organization for four decades, until her death in 1972, earned her the position of "Mother Clara." Although she is not recognized as a seminal figure among popular Black Nationalists, such as her husband, Elijah, she was indeed the one woman situated at the center of power during the 1930s and 1940s, a critical period in the original NOI's history. Clara Muhammad's leadership as a pioneer of the American Islamic education movement, from which black Nationalist and Afrocentric education movements emerged, and her role as Supreme Secretary for the NOI are often missing from the historical narrative on African American Muslims. Another fact that is also less noted relates to Clara's effort to introduce her husband to the Islamic teachings of Wallace D. Fard, founder of the original NOI in 1930. At times, her leadership style modeled defiance, as she refused to allow her children to attend Detroit public schools and close her home-school operation. On other occasions, she demonstrated commitment, wisdom, and sharp leadership abilities as she guided a national movement in the absence of her jailed husband; and in the presence of male members who were unaccustomed to taking orders from a woman. The activism of Clara Muhammad and other women pioneers in the original NOI challenges conventional claims about marginalized religious worldview and the gendered experience of its female followers. (Mubashir, Debra, 2000) [10].

The narrative surrounding women's activism among African American Muslims is not defined by independent, autonomous action that led to notable female leadership within the highest levels of the NOI. Some might argue that the accounts of Clara Muhammad and other women in the organization, while intriguing, do not necessarily signify a substantial break from traditional notions of Black womanhood in the early to mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, one could contend that since their activism emerged from the margins, the extent of their agency was limited. Conversely, these accounts become compelling in the historical narrative because they arose within patriarchal structures and were experienced by women who deliberately opted to redefine their own ideology of 'women's proper space' against cultural norms that obstructed their paths. Ultimately, the contrasting gender dynamics of the original NOI illustrate the diverse participatory roles available to Muslim women. Their activism was both shaped by and contributed to the growth of African American interpretations of Islam. Consequently, the results of their

efforts serve as the driving force behind the evolution of the movement.

This work seeks to add a new dimension to the study of Black women's religious work by focusing mainly on Black women Muslims within the private domain (i.e., home). Their work was activist in nature and had a profound impact on the entire community. The domestic sphere is a vital site of resistance; in the home, Black women were in charge and had the power to nurture and raise their children to embrace a liberatory consciousness. Therefore, while Black Muslim women's work primarily emanated from the home, it also intersected with community life.

Black religious institutions and Black people with a religious self-understanding have played a vital role in social movements in the U.S. However, the literature acknowledges the moral importance of these movements' achievements yet fails to examine the connections between religious motivations, civic engagement, and the resulting moral and social changes that took place. Scholarship on how Black religious self-understanding influences women's activism, their definition of civic engagement, and their mothering practices is worthwhile to explore.

Part II: Demographics and Timeline

To place this narrative in a specific historical context, I categorize the two groups of women by their periods and the places where they were born. The two groups are categorized as second-wave and third-wave, and are primarily from the South. All six interviewees were paid workers. Some accepted employment as public school teachers when finances required it; however, they sent their children to Clara Muhammad Schools. Others, with an entrepreneurial spirit, established daycare centers and disability service homes, while others worked as laundresses or in roles similar to nursing assistants. Unpaid work was extensive. These women advocated for union workers, parents, and local community political organizations. Most of these women were members of the working or middle class.

The second wave comprises women who were generally born between 1940 and 1960 and who were younger members of the Original Nation of Islam. They joined the Nation while it was still under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, later becoming followers of his son, Imam W.D. Mohammed. Like many young African Americans in the 1960s, second-wave Muslim women were a key demographic targeted by the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad's main strategy was simple: "go after the young people…once you get them, the older ones will follow through shame." The second wave women also identify with a commitment to gender justice, viewing their faith tradition, "Al-Islam," as a feminist monotheistic religion because it advocates for systematic social reform and rights for women in a patriarchal society. (Rouse, C, 2004) [16].

Like their predecessors, first-wave pioneer women and second-wave Muslim women played a central role in legitimizing the social activism of women in the original NOI movement, which was male-centered. The women lived, worked, and worshipped in a community where men, including their husbands, accepted traditional gender conventions. They assumed that women had not proven their right and ability to contribute to the Nation's progress beyond the domestic sphere. These women courageously challenged the boundaries of home to include all aspects of community life. As a result, they created a space through which their contribution to the organization's success would be legitimized and made necessary for group survival. (Mubashir, D. 2004)

The roles of pioneer and second wave Muslim women in the Nation of Islam (NOI) demonstrate that community feminist and social activist beliefs existed among women whose voices have been muted by the male dominant power structure. Their community feminist and social activist activities are illuminated through their roles as mothers. (Mubashir, 2004)

The third wave women consist of those born during the transition period from the Original Nation of Islam to the Orthodox-World Community of Al-Islam (also known as Bilalians) under the leadership of Imam W. D. Mohammed. This transition period begins in the mid-1970s and ends in 1985, following the dissolution of the American Muslim Mission. This group of women differs from the second wave in that they do not share the lived experiences of their predecessors but are beneficiaries of the living memories of the Nation. This is by far one of the most compelling ways in which third, fourth, and fifth wave Muslim women will imagine their past, which includes a long legacy of feminist consciousness. My own identity and feminist consciousness have certainly been informed by my mother and other women in my family and community. Another marked distinction between the two groups of women is that, on average, the younger generation has higher levels of formal education, which provides them with access and agency not often evident in groups without high levels of formal education. This has numerous implications for further analysis, and the level and type of community work may vary based on educational and socioeconomic differences.

The narrative focuses on a series of oral interviews conducted with six women whose primary upbringing is mainly in the southern United States. Feminist scholarship informs the types of questions asked and the ways in which knowledge and the various standpoints of different groups of women transform our understanding of labor, activism, and mothering. The oral histories included questions about family background, employment, community work, mothering practices, religious practices, and descriptions of the changes the women observed in their community since their introduction to the Nation. Each interview was audiotaped and analyzed for themes and patterns to explore the congruent and divergent aspects of the participants' self-definition. The concept of activist mothering extends the work of earlier scholars; however, my research expands this concept by centering religious faith as the core of Black Muslim women's identity formation. The defining features of activist mothering clarify how mothering practices connect Black Muslim women's faith tradition to community work and civic engagement efforts practiced by Black women in other faith traditions.

Part III: Activist Mothering: When we examine concepts of womanhood and motherhood in the context of the second and third waves, descriptions from Black Muslim women about their roles as women and mothers reveal significant differences from conventional mothering practices. They do not view mothering as limited to nurturing children related solely by biology or law. While all of the interviewed women have biological children, they emphasized their desire to bring about change for all Black children.

For example, Yasmine Muhammad said that she believed her community work in Raleigh, North Carolina, was prompted by her desire to "advocate for causes that assist the community, families, and individuals in areas where there is inequality and injustice."(Muhammad, Yasmeen, 2012) [4] Asserting her position, Muhammad highlights a quote attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW):

"Whoever among you sees an evil action, let them change it with their hand [by taking action]; if they cannot, then with their tongue [by speaking out]; and if they cannot, then with their heart [by hating it and feeling that it is wrong] - and that is the weakest of faith…The best of you are those who serve humanity."

She sees a direct connection between being an activist with being Muslim, and being a mother, who nurtured male and female children; her responsibility was even greater.

Activist mothering not only involves nurturing children outside of one's family, but it also encompasses a broad definition of actual mothering practices. These Muslim women defined "good mothering" as encompassing all positive actions that addressed the needs of their children and the wider community. They also believe that inculcating their children with the idea that "their purpose is to be of service" is equally important. For instance, Yasmine, a woman, served as an active member of the YWCA's Family Education Justice Institute for several years.

She credits her success within the group to her training at Clara Muhammad School, "because it taught me to seek excellence, because God made me to be excellent." In discussing the level of community involvement, she and other sisters engage in, she states: "We do all kinds of work-volunteer work at Urban ministries [to combat homelessness], teach and advocate on behalf of Black children in public schools, and teach in the community weekend school." These women collectively view activism as "speaking up and speaking out for people who can't, won't, and don't know that they should speak out for themselves…it is also empowering those individuals to advocate for themselves." "I come from a family and community where speaking out is central to our self-definition…I hold on dearly to that."

Cherly Towsend Gilkes, a sociologist of religion, writes, "Community work is a wide range of diverse tasks performed to confront and challenge racism as a total system and is executed as women's activity to combat racism and empower their communities to survive, grow, and advance in a hostile society. The overwhelming emphasis on education, schooling, welfare rights, and childcare services illustrates the interlocking nature of the so-called separate spheres of family, community, and the state in determining community work. The women's ideas about their identity as mothers or community members influenced their motivation for community work to some extent. (Gilkes, Cheryl, 2000) [12].

Second and third wave Muslim women seem to share the belief that mothering is activism because "shaping the mind of [our] children is the central part of [our] work. [We] teach [our] children to speak out because they have a right and GOD gave them that right. [We] view mothering as an extension of [our] activism.

Patricia Hill Collins' description of mothering in the Black community illuminates the role of "community other mothers," who are essentially the builders of institutions such as religious institutions, schools, childcare programs, and recreation centers. These institutions support the welfare of their neighbors and, by extension, the larger community. She argues that the activities of "other mothers" who are part of the kinship networks in Black communities pave the way for political activism within the community. According to Collins, "a substantial portion of Black women's status in African American communities stems not only from their roles as mothers in their own families but from their contribution as community other mothers to Black community development as well." (Collins, Patricia, 2000) [11].

Black Muslim women recognized their crucial roles in the overall development of their community's children. Whether male leaders acknowledged them or not, these women were wholly committed to building a model community life.

Part IV: Motivating Factors: Early childhood and parents as models

The Muslim women interviewed shared various experiences of racism and sexism they faced as Muslim women. Discussions of both racism and sexism included memories from their early childhood as well as sexist encounters with their husbands and religious leaders. For second-wave Muslim women, experiences of racism intensified by growing up in the Jim Crow South, particularly in rural Eastern North Carolina and Durham. The four Muslim women who grew up in North Carolina during the 1950s and 1960s confronted the physical barriers imposed by the Jim Crow system. Two of these women are sisters, whose mother worked as a domestic servant for a white family in Bertie County, NC, and was widowed at age forty-nine. She raised six of her seven children as a single parent. They recounted several stories about negative interactions they had with the white family employing their mother. In her discussion of racist encounters from childhood, Bakirah noted:

"I remember like it was yesterday when I went to see momma at Elizabeth Jacobs house and she [momma] was standing in the middle of the living room floor where I could see her from the front door of their house and I went to ring the front doorbell and you were not supposed to ring the front door and and a little child my age at the time answered and said Mable is in here but you cannot come in this way…go around the back…and my momma was standing right there and I said but my momma is right there and I'm going through this door and I walked right in." (Muhammad, Bakira, 2012) [2].

For Bakirah, the lesson her mother taught her about the equality bestowed upon her by God could not be taken away by anyone, and she credits this as the source of her courage to transgress Jim Crow lines. Bakirah's discussion of the lesson she learned from her mother parallels Collins' emphasis on concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning in U.S. Black women's epistemology. Her mother's wisdom and teachings helped her to deal with her white female peer who did not recognize her personhood or value. The practice of using concrete experience as a criterion of meaning holds relevance and significance for Black Muslim women just as it does for Black women of varying faith traditions. (Muhammad, Bakirah. 2012) [2].

Many of the women also discussed their experiences with sexism. They attributed their beliefs about their roles to the practices they observed as members of the original Nation of Islam (NOI) and as children of mothers from the second

wave. It is evident from the personal narratives that their perceptions had a significant impact on their commitment to community work. Bakirah and Debra recounted:

"We didn't see Muslim women out in the forefront speaking as spokespersons on behalf of the organization back then, but we saw our mother as a leader and the women from our community who tried to do good work…they were our models." In the Nation, we had Muslim Girls Training (MGT) and General Civilization Classes (GCC), and there we dealt with issues related to our children, husbands, and home life. We could also gain rank as Lieutenant and Captain."(Muhammad, Bakira. 2012) [2].

"To be appointed to either position, women had to embody certain characteristics such as "being a firm yet pleasant person, without children and have a positive character."

For women collectively the role of women in the NOI may have been limited to MGT classes and there were few opportunities for speaking out in public but as an individual I have always held on to my voice in the home and abroad. To me I look at my role as [woman, mother, wife] as if it has no ceiling…I am supposed to act as a woman and as a Muslim. Allah tells me heaven lies at the feet of the mother…whenever things go wrong and I have knowledge about what to do I will be charged by God about what I did-did I act up, step up or walk away? My thing is if you see something [wrong] you should say something." (Muhammad, Bakirah. 2012) [2].

In addition to recognizing the limitations that the women in the NOI felt, the women offered a critique of the "unyielding male authority figures" that functioned within the Mosque. Debra noted,

"Sometimes when there is a job that needs to be done and a female feels that she can do…we should back the sister…but brothers don't want you to make them look bad and sometimes feel like they can't help a woman because they have to be out front and when women take over to get a job done it makes them feel less than…but no matter what-in our lifetime- whether you are a female or a male, there is always a woman in the background to assist you. If you are born a male it is your mother who is always a woman-there to assist and if you are born a female it is still a woman who is there to aid you…so the brothers need to get over being intimidated by a woman and if a woman has a good idea they [brothers] need to back the idea."(Edwards, Debra, 2012) [1].

While the Qur'an addresses the equality of men and women, along with their rights and responsibilities, the male leadership in the Nation emphasized culturally and functionally determined gender distinctions. They taught that a woman's most significant place was within the home. Against this backdrop, women expanded the boundaries of the home to encompass all aspects of developing an organization. Debra's narration is a testament to how these women extended the concept of home. Debra recalled a hadith attributed to Muhammad the Prophet (SAW) which states:

"When you educate a man you educate an individual. When you educate a woman you educate a community. She affirms that "because it's the woman who is going to be a mother, wife, community member and whatever she can be to that whole entire community. But when it's a man he going to be whatever he can to that family…outside of that where does his influence go? When you are a woman you have a lot of roles (children, school, religion, community) and women deserve backing…women play a huge role in being the leaders in the world and we don't get credit for it."(Edwards, D. 2012) [1].

Another second-wave Muslim woman, Rashida, adds further support to Debra's sentiment. She asserts that:

"you gotta keep this in mind- Black women historically have had a different role than women in other culture …we had to help our men. We had to be there to articulate for them… patriarchy did exist but its different than when you go to a Muslim country abroad…the sexes are not equal in pay and status and a whole host of ways but the point I want to make is that black women Christian or Muslim have been right on the front lines with our men as far as the struggle is concerned. (Muhammad, Rashidah, 2012) [3].

Mothering and activism among third-wave women

Many of the women's mothers inspired their desire to serve and support their community. All seven women can be categorized as caretakers in their communities. Six of the seven women reported that their mothers were involved in various community service activities. These activities included feeding those in need, caring for the elderly, assisting young mothers with childcare, working to enhance educational opportunities for young people, and supporting one another like sisters, while also tending to their family needs.

Speaking about the influence of her mother, Yasmine said,

"I believe my definition of gender roles is a continuation and extension from the previous generation because I revered my mother and wanted to emulate her. It also expressed itself in the home and in the Masjid. Community involvement became important when my children entered school and I wanted to improve race relations for Black children. (Muhmmad, Yasmine, 2012).

Aisha said she has always known that "women have a high standing in God's eyes and through the example of Muhammad the Prophet (SAW). My role model was my mom and teacher, and I defined womanhood in the way I saw her. (Rasheed, Aisha, 2012) [6].

Wakeelah noted that

"Attending Clara Muhammad schools helped to ground my racial, religious, and gender identity. The Clara Muhammad school experience had a major impact on my development because of my mother and the women who served as my teachers, spiritual guides, and role models. The teacher's mission at Clara Muhammad Schools was to educate boys and girls to not only be productive members in the community through their chosen field, but also to see themselves as leaders, to be self-disciplined, and to believe in their ability to achieve greatness. (Muhammad, Wakeelah, 2012) [5].

Wakeelah's acknowledgement of the role women played concerning education is directly linked to the sentiment shared by second-wave Muslim women. In her interview, Rashida mentioned the same Hadith that another second-wave Muslim woman had quoted:

"When you educate a man you educate an individual. When you educate a woman you educate a community. If a man won't treat you right he won't educate you right either!. That was part of our belief system… That was a part of our responsibility to educate our own because we could have stayed home and educated our children but we wanted to educate our own…there was a very strong community spirit

that this something we wanted for our children and we wanted a foundation. Education is an investment…our people grew up - even when they were not Muslim- they grew up believing that education was the path out of poverty…it would be the liberator for us and we carried that same value system on and we wanted our children to have a sense of our values too…that is why I think it is important to perpetuate the importance of education. It leads to breaking the cycle of poverty and that is important to me." (Muhammad, Rashidah, 2012) [3].

"As African American Muslims, we have an obligation to uplift our people and that does not mean bringing them to the faith…it is bringing a sense of betterment to the African American. The Qur'an speaks about bringing improvement to your community…it speaks about excellence. So if we as Muslim women- we want to put things into practice- and we want to perpetuate it…education is the way you do that for the next generation and the generations to follow." (Muhammad, Rashidah, 2012) [3].

While each of the third-wave women shared positive views of their mothers and articulated an awareness of their shared experiences, they also recognized several differences between themselves and their second-wave predecessors. They challenge traditional notions of gender and mothering while continuing to express a desire to maintain and sustain community ties and improve community life. However, they wish to do this on their own terms, utilizing more of their personal power than their predecessors did in the previous generation. Aisha enthusiastically shared:

"I had an epiphany as a married woman after listening to the Imam's message, which centered women's roles as mothers and in society (i.e., business, govt, education)." (Rasheed, Aisha, 2012) [6].

Marriage led Aisha to question her acceptance of her parents' beliefs. Raised with a strong sense of her ability and choice, she credits that positive self-identity with influencing her decision to pursue math as a field of study, which women do not traditionally pursue. She aims to inspire her daughter to explore other ways to make a positive contribution to society. Yasmine criticized how second-wave women positioned themselves last.

"They believed that your children, husband, and community come first, and race was at the core of this belief. Women who sacrificed were recognized with a badge of honor and praised in the community for making the sacrifice." (Muhammad, Yasmine, 2012).

Yasmine and Aisha emphasized the importance of self-preservation among Muslim women through the concept of women's empowerment.

"Female networks, they are priceless… the minute I got it and I got it good, I know I had to hold on to it…This [network] with practicing Muslims who are married has changed me and helped me get through the struggle." (Muhammad, Yasmine, 2012).

Aisha said she tells her daughter: "no mother should neglect herself until the point of almost killing herself in any religion." She also tries to demonstrate an alternative view of mothering and parenting for both her son and daughter by holding her husband to a higher standard through sharing domestic duties and nurturing the children. She wants her children to see themselves as equal partners in relationships.

Aisha and Yasmine view the spaces created for Black Muslim women through the Original NOI as essential for fostering group cohesion and community survival. Aisha noted: "I know I need help with mothering, being married and in community work… without it, life was more difficult, and I felt like I had been through war." The examples provided by their activist mothers and other women helped reinforce their beliefs and empower them to effect change in their communities. First- and second-wave Black Muslim women passed this legacy to their children through their words, actions, and lifelong commitment. Although these intricate relationships created tensions between groups, they also influenced a new generation of Black activist mothers within the W.D. Mohammed community.

Conclusion

The narrative surrounding women's activism among African American Muslims does not primarily showcase independent, autonomous action that leads to prominent female leadership at the highest levels of Islam. Some might argue that the stories of Black Muslim women, while compelling, do not necessarily reflect the agency that significantly challenges conventional notions of Black womanhood in the early to mid-twentieth century. Moreover, it could be contended that, because their activism emerged from the margins, the impact of their agency was diminished. Conversely, these stories become engaging in the historical context because they arose from within patriarchal structures, experienced by women who consciously chose to redefine an ideology of 'women's proper space' in opposition to cultural norms that obstructed them. Ultimately, the differing gender politics of the original Nation and the W. D. Mohammed community highlight the variety of participatory roles available to Black Muslim women. Their activism was both influenced by and instrumental in shaping African American interpretations of Islam. As a result, the outcome of their efforts serves as the driving force behind the movement's development. (Mubashir, D, 2000, Karim and Gibson, 2012, Taylor, U. 2017) [13, 17].

In summary, second-wave Black Muslim women are activist mothers and community feminists. They viewed themselves as part of a social movement that they believed empowered Black individuals, both men and women, to help themselves. Whether they were in the classrooms of Clara Muhammad schools, public schools, or their homes, they shared a common mission: to contribute to improving the living conditions of African Americans in their community. Their work, whether requiring individual efforts or collective action, communicated clear messages: we can do for ourselves, we must work together, and we must educate our children. These Black women collectively utilized their efforts and their belief in the ideals of Islam and its programs to bring about change in their community. As a result, they acted as change agents, similar to the Southern civil rights activists, Black Baptist women, domestic laborers, and their enslaved foremothers, who strove to create a better future for generations to come.

Third-wave Muslim women continue to embrace the core values established by the women of the Original NOI. The primary responsibility for both generations of women is motherhood. Being a "good" mother means being an activist-an advocate not only for your biological children but also for all youth and vulnerable individuals in the community you identify with. This advocacy is expressed through the establishment of religious and educational

institutions, asserting women's rights to self-determination, engaging in community organizing, and mothering.

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