8-2023

Can the Ummah speak? reexamining genealogies of Black Muslim Women within the Black freedom movement through the examples of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad

Shameem Razack
DePaul University, srazack@depaul.edu

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

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

August 2023

BY

Shameem H. Razack

Department of Women's and Gender Studies

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

DePaul University

Chicago, Illinois

Table of Contents

Can the Ummah Speak? Reexamining Genealogies of Black Muslim Women within the Black Freedom Movement through the Examples of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad[1]

As I rewatch Spike Lee's 1992 film, *Malcolm X*, I am reminded of the importance of expanding the narratives that offer insight into public figures who have shaped and inspired social movements in the United States generations of people.[2] While the film does reflect a certain reality and understanding of people, it does not consider the complexities or nuances of their lives and histories. To truly recognize and honor the lives of these activists, organizers, and overall communities, it is necessary to think of alternative ways to highlight the lives and journeys of the women within these movements. As a result of curiosity, the thesis focuses on two of the most notable Muslim Americans mentioned in this case; Betty Shabazz, the wife of El Hajj Malik Shabazz (also known as Malcolm X), and Clara Muhammad, the wife of Elijah Muhammad. Although these two figures are prominent, there is still an erasure of their legacies, narratives, and practices of community building. More importantly, erasing that knowledge further produces the idea of Islam itself being perceived as 'illogical' at 'tension' with feminist theorizing and for this project implies that the Muslim women themselves in these communities are unable to critically think of their religious identity and how it informs the way they navigate this world.

My Master's thesis analyzes the legacy of Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz through their children, particularly Imam W.D. Muhammad and Ilyasah Shabazz, and the impact they maintained through community relationships, which included friendships and coalitions. I argue that focusing on Muhammad and Shabazz's relationships emphasizes the significance of Black American Muslim women cultivating a community through their interpretations of Islam which

[1] 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.
[2] *Malcolm X*, DVD (Warner Bros., 1992).

offer a unique spiritual and political consciousness. While researching Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) and Betty Shabazz, it became more evident that the relationships they fostered amongst their children and friends reveal the importance of discussing this part of their lives because, without that exploration, our understanding of Muhammad and Shabazz's legacies creates limitations and leaves both women to be a footnote within the literature surrounding the Nation of Islam (NOI).

The project considers the limited and narrow narratives of Muslim women produced within Feminist studies. I make this claim based on experiences in academic and communal spaces that have perpetuated the singular image of a Muslim woman that relies heavily on a racialized and gendered 'other' or 'foreign' type of body. As well as only inserting Muslim women in one particular time, location, and political context, which means recognizing cultural and racial differences amongst Muslim communities is still important to highlight. Beyond this, it is essential to connect both points around Islamic knowledge and the assumed secular space because, within Feminist studies, I do believe part of the monolithic image of Muslim women is tied to the limitations of what we consider 'authentic' forms of knowledge or sources of knowledge. The tendency to assume that all communities rely on anything but spiritual or religious knowledge creates limitations to exploring various communal relationships built upon shared beliefs and values.

Academic scholarship typically does not allow for the expression of vastly different experiences. As a result, there is an assumption that Islam is a fixed, archaic style of knowledge that does not inform political consciousness. Also, this leaves no room to dissect and analyze the overlapping intersections of oppression that shape various experiences amongst Muslims and other marginalized communities. Particularly concerning Black Muslim women and how

anti-Muslim rhetoric in feminist spaces limits their opportunities to mobilize or form solidarities. For Black Muslim women, these spaces are not places for questioning or hesitations, for the coalition as secularism operates in binaries of tradition and modernity. This combination of rhetoric that limits understanding Islam and racializing Muslims as South Asian and Arab creates the racialization process. In turn, post-9/11 helped expand the United States' security. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer argues in the essay, "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual," that this logic of erasure, exclusion, and marginalization of Black Muslim women reproduces or marginalizes all U.S. Muslim communities as fundamentally outside of constructions of an idealized U.S. national identity.[3] Incorporating or assimilating into American identity comes with specific cultural, religious, and personal costs for U.S. Muslims. Anti-Blackness perceives Black people and Blackness as inherently outside of modernity, which justifies the U.S. in criminalizing, incarcerating, and disposing of Black communities.[4]

Thesis Aims

A primary objective of the thesis is to emphasize the importance of community building through mothering to recognize Black Muslim women's contributions. Specifically, the thesis addresses the legacies of Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz through their children, namely Imam W.D. and Ilyasah Shabazz (I. Shabazz), as well as their friendships. Centering the relationships of Muhammad and Shabazz highlights how Black American Muslim women cultivate community through their interpretations of Islam, which offers a unique spiritual and political consciousness. The project developed into a focus on these relationships that shape the legacies of Muhammad and Shabazz.

---

[3] Daulatzai, Sohail, Junaid Akram Rana, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer. "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual." Essay. In *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire*, 287–97. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
[4] Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2016).

Considering Shabazz and Muhammad's relationships to motherhood and friendship allows for reexamining how they have created their legacies as Black Muslims. I do this not to make universal claims based on their experiences or offer a simplistic understanding of Black people utilizing spiritual knowledge. Instead, I offer an analysis of both Shabazz and Muhammad's lives, education, and work, expounds upon literature that critically engages with Black Muslim women's knowledge and resistance practices that are informed by constructions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion within the Black Freedom Movement.

This project challenges the assumption that Islam is simply an indoctrination of faith without further analysis of the potential of self-agency and self-determination formed through a spiritual sense of knowledge. Considering the constructions of religious institutions requires nuanced examination and dissection to counter Black Muslim's historically flattened, homogenized, and pathologized image. Similar to explorations of Black freedom struggles connection to Christianity, highlighting how the traditions of hymns and spirituals kept people believing that a release from enslavement and, later, Jim Crow, Islam has done similar work that has been referenced through a cult of personality, rather than an in-depth examination of how the Quranic practices also aided in movement building and perseverance. However, I attempt to articulate here that analyzing the positionality of Black Muslim women such as Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad demands the ability to discuss the various schools of thought amongst Muslim communities that are tied to people's lived experiences and how they may expand on interpretations and challenge dominant Islamic interpretations.

The thesis reexamines the role of women in the Nation of Islam (NOI), and generally Black American Muslim women, within a new historical context that acknowledges the

contributions and significance of women involved in NOI.[5]. It offers a historical context and places Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz within the Black Freedom movement. Tracing these histories and the nuance, they further illuminate current issues that concern 'what can be deemed as a Black struggle.' More importantly, these critical histories aided people in continuing the Black political struggle and questions around the Feminist struggle.

Positionality is important because of the perpetual silencing and erasure of Black women when discussing Islam or Muslim identity. In analyzing secondary texts, internal documents, and speeches, it is apparent that these historical figures, Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) and Betty Shabazz, recognize their position as Black women in the United States and the effects of subjugation on Black women in general. Based on these understandings, my main question is: How do the legacies of Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz offer insight into Black women's understandings of Islam and community building?

Lastly, the approach for the project included excerpts of the 1992 *Essence* Magazine interview with Betty Shabazz titled, "Loving and Losing Malcolm,".[6] As well as a 40 min interview through the documentary, *Eyes on the Prize: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965-1985* with Betty Shabazz.[7] I use literary analysis to lay the groundwork for analyzing any text or reference of broadly Black Muslim women, particularly the public figures Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad, regarding the impact of their legacies maintained through children and communal relationships. I explore how the perceptions of Black women and Islam convey or

---

[5] 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.

[6] Betty Shabazz, "Loving and Losing Malcolm," ed. Susan Taylor, *Essence*, 1992

[7] Blackside Inc., ed., "Interview with Betty Shabazz," *Eyes on the Prize II | Eyes on the Prize: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-1985* - Washington University - Digital Gateway, 1988, http://repository.wustl.edu/spotlight/eyes-on-the-prize-america-at-the-racial-crossroads-1965-1985.

produce an understanding of the scholarship produced and who is allowed or deemed credible to produce this scholarship.

The project I am undertaking seeks to explore how the legacies of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad have been maintained through their children and communal relationships. To this end, I examine all documents, audio, texts, and letters connected to both women. The interviews with Shabazz from the 1992 *Essence* Magazine article and the Eyes on the Prize documentary are of particular interest, which provides insight into her experiences as a public figure. Through literary analysis, the project seeks to uncover how perceptions of Black women and Islam have been shaped by scholarship and who has been deemed credible to produce such scholarship. By understanding the impact of both Shabazz and Muhammad, we can better understand the history of Black Muslim women and the current state of their representation.

Significance

In focusing on community building through mothering, I challenge understanding what constitutes legitimate activism by Black Muslim American women. My thesis is situated within the field of Women's and Gender studies as a project that expands on literature that challenges the disciplines' lack of engagement with knowledge produced by Black Muslims and calls into question who can speak in this space that is supposed to be devoted to the pursuit of social justice. Furthermore, there is importance in naming the active role patriarchy plays within the familial structures that Shabazz and Muhammad maneuver as Black women. That said, the tendency to overstate this point erases any potential to complicate understanding Islam's role as a vehicle to develop a spiritual and political consciousness for Black women. The devaluing of practices of care work and fostering relationships through mothering removes any possibilities of understanding the significance of alternative modes of community building.

Deconstructing the stereotype of a singularly Muslim woman, whose image appears during specific cultural timeframes within a binary of (for example, Afghanistan, Iran), it becomes evident that either these women are depicted as oppressed or as exemplars of diversity among politically left spaces (American flag hijab woman), both of which offer no room for nuance, complexity, knowledge, or simply humanity. It allows U.S. multiculturalism to reinsert and reinscribe the *state's* legitimacy. In this case, it showcases the U.S. as the beacon of democracy instead of other countries. An analysis of Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz creates space for the argument that Black American Muslim women have always engaged with Islam and Muslim communities transnationally. For example, Shakeela Hassan, who became a close friend of Muhammad and Shabazz, points to their international reach and solidarity.[8] Black American Muslim women and their approaches create knowledge through their experiences that then inform their political investments.

Further, multi-religious communities challenge understandings of race, racialization, community, migration, and the relationships between Black and Brown communities. Another interesting point is that Amina Wadud, an Islamic scholar in the article, "Islamic Feminism by Any Other Name," offers historical context to the increase of marginalization of women's contributions to Islamic thought.[9] Wadud does say there is contemporary work done regarding Muslim women's movements; she recalls issues in connection to nationalist movements and the emergence of political Islam. That is a site that, on multiple fronts, has been weaponized to interpret further, excuse, and support binaries that include the separation of Muslim communities and feminist movements. In the discussion on religious freedom, Sullivan and Afqai connect

[8] Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers, and Mian Ahmed Shaheer Afaqi. "Shakeela Hassan: Narrating Religious Freedom in the Twenty-First Century." *American Religion*, n.d.
[9] El Dina Omari et al., "Islamic Feminism by Any Other Name," essay, in *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories* (London, UK: Routledge, 2021), 33–45.

Shakeela Hassan's piece and argue that the United States has never functioned as a solely secular space. Another key assertion that Sullivan and Afqai highlight is that this space has always functioned as a multi-religious space, despite the dominant discourse of religious freedom, the U.S. Nation-State.[10] Specifically, the bridge and connection between police and other state apparatus to manage Muslims in the United States is similar and overlaps with the hyper-surveillance of Black and Brown communities. All of whom are vulnerable to over-policing, surveillance, detainment, and deportations. Khabeer also discusses the U.S. in terms of national identity and how Black Muslims are not included as part of that identity.[11]. Articulating Muslim communities as synonymous with South Asian and Arab communities conflates, and flattens, significant differences between Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities. Racializing Muslim communities as one racial group supports the U.S. Nation-State's racialized logic.[12]

In connecting Shabazz and Muhammad, it is important to note the rift that led to Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz leaving the Nation of Islam and forever changing the dynamics between these prominent families. I argue that these forces limit, erase, and create hesitancy for scholars when they do not investigate how Black Muslim women produce 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 Liberation Struggles in the U.S., who were also connected to the Nation of Islam. This project highlights Black Muslim women's engagement

[10] Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers, and Mian Ahmed Shaheer Afaqi. "Shakeela Hassan: Narrating Religious Freedom in the Twenty-First Century." *American Religion*, n.d.
[11] Daulatzai, Sohail, Junaid Akram Rana, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer. "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual." Essay. In *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire*, 287–97. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018., 287–97.
[12] Ibid.

and contributions within social movements as it pertains to Black American Muslim communities as both women converted to Islam and yet took different routes in their journey.

Theoretical Frameworks

Framing the paper on mothering and the story of Hajaar which both Muhammad and Shabazz are the symbolic 'Hajaar' of their communities, shifts the understanding of mothering through an Islamic perspective since the focus is the legacies of Muhammad and Shabazz as mothers and community members. The project relies on defining legacy intertwined with the impact on Muslim American communities and the legacies maintained by their children. In this thesis, I am relying on Islamic feminist scholarship to consider the importance of positionality that guides interpretations of Islam, in this case, Black Muslim American women—in this case, relying on Amina Wadud to discuss Hajaar offers varied perspectives of the story and its interpretations.[13] In the thesis, I draw upon Amina Wadud's work, "Towards A Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class And Gender," who brings in the understanding of Islam and draws on her own experiences and reflexivity as a Black Muslim woman, particularly her experiences of navigating feminist spaces, the disconnect between Islam and Muslim communities, and the connections between defining themselves or connecting with feminist spaces.[14] 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

---

[13] Wadud, Amina, "A New Hajar Paradigm: Motherhood and Family," essay, in *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld, 2006), 120–58.
[14] Amina Wadud, "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class, and Gender," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (1995): 37, https://doi.org/10.2307/1051608.

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.

My thesis is grounded in 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 foundational in Black feminist praxis and thought. Khabeer shares her experiences as a Black Muslim woman whose political investment in both academic and local Muslim communal spaces has been met with pushback and erasure due to what she describes as the continued rhetoric and pathologizing of Black women. Her intervention challenges how U.S. Muslim communities reproduce this racializing and othering of Black Muslim women. These experiences help foster an approach to centering knowledge from a community perspective, ultimately allowing for movement work that influences structural change.

I rely on Patricia Hill Collins chapter in *Black Feminist Thought* titled,"Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," to frame this understanding of knowledge production and matrix of domination to explore other ways Black women consider and negotiate 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 operate and informs and guides resistance.[15] In particular,

[15] Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," essay, in *Black Feminist Thought* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), 77–78.

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.'

Collins also discusses the importance of interrogating nationalism as it shapes the U.S. Nation-state, and amongst Black women, organizing is utilized as resistance. 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 and 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's 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 political investments within Black social movements. Offering a Black feminist framework provides an analysis needed to focus on Black Muslim communities.

Motherhood and building a community amongst Black Muslim America

Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz as mothers offer a complex, nuanced understanding of Black Muslim women's practices of Islam. Exploring both women as mothers offers nuance around their politics through the continued influence of younger generations of Muslims in the U.S. To be clearer on the usage of motherhood as a frame to understand Muhammad and Shabazz is to offer not an argument for suffering mothers but perhaps mothering as part of connecting and maintaining community through the vehicle that is the practice of Islam that not

only exposed Black women but black families to an attempt to alternative to the realities of family structure.[16]

Centering the relationships of both Muhammad and Shabazz, I argue, highlights how Black American Muslim women cultivate community through their interpretations of Islam, which in itself offers a unique spiritual and political consciousness. This argument offers the space to discuss those alternative nation-building practices through Black Muslim's understanding of mothering. Focusing on motherhood amongst Black Muslim communities offers the ability to grapple with the tensions that inform Black mothering within the United States and the complexities of Black womanhood. Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought*, challenges the controlling images of the Mammy and the Matriarch as she recognizes mothers as complex while challenging the normative understanding of Black family structures as "deviant."[17] As Patricia Hill Collins discusses, the imagery of the Black Matriarch is perceived as an unfeminine head of households because they challenge traditional patriarchal families. Further, Black mothers, particularly single Black mothers, are pathologized as inherently "bad" mothers while blamed for poverty.[18] Multiple factors must be considered when considering mothering through the lens of Black Muslim women. Motherhood itself is read particularly in the context of feminist studies as the ground for contentious debate. For example, Black mothers and their understanding of Black motherhood cannot be separated from a patriarchal society (U.S.).

[16] Caregiving is not exclusive to women as well as the traits of nurturing and care are not gender exclusive. However, for this project, I aim to focus on Black women's experiences through caregiving in Muslim American communities.
[17] Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," in *Black Feminist Thought* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), pp. 77-78.
[18] Ibid.

In considering the particularities in the oppression of Black women, desirability plays a significant role as an individual or community that is perceived desirable. Black women within the U.S. and Western discourses are understood as undesirable within their societies. This discourse began during enslavement and was then solidified by the Moynihan Report; this is seen through the policing and management of bodies perceived as disposable or undesirable.[19] Doris Witt argues in the essay, "What (N)Ever Happened to Aunt Jemima: Eating Disorders, Fetal Rights, and Black Female Appetite in Contemporary American Culture," that eating disorders influence the constructions of motherhood and matriarchy for young Black women and ultimately construct specific desires of motherhood.[20] Pregnant Black women are perceived as dangerous and are surveilled. Witt notes that working-class women of color are susceptible to social control. The assumption is that working-class women of color are in a precarious state, making them a perfect demographic that can be managed, especially if resources are offered.[21] Witt continues by stating that punitive systems are in place of concern for Black women. She discusses the surveillance of the State and includes the responses within the Black Power movements, which, then, tended to hyperfocus on Black women as laborers.[22]

In situating Black American Muslims, there is a need to discuss the foundations of the Black community's connections and contradictory understandings of Motherhood within Black Nationalist movements, which rely on patriarchal interpretations of care work and labor

[19] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1983).
[20] Kimberly Wallace-Sanders and Doris Witt, "What (N)Ever Happened to Aunt Jemima: Eating Disorders, Fetal Rights, and Black Female Appetite in Contemporary American Culture," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), pp. 239-262.
[21] Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, "Docile Bodies," essay, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 135–68.
[22] Kimberly Wallace-Sanders and Doris Witt, "What (N)Ever Happened to Aunt Jemima: Eating Disorders, Fetal Rights, and Black Female Appetite in Contemporary American Culture," in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), pp. 239-262.

(reproductive labor). NOI and Black Nationalist groups have relied on these understandings of women. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer points out the internalized misogyny and complicity of patriarchy amongst women to articulate the Islamic traditions that challenge racial and patriarchal notions of supremacy within and outside Muslim communities. These people have invested in distorted understandings of engaging with difference.[23] As Witt points out, for example, Elijah Muhammad had his dietary manual, which focuses on guidelines for what Black women should eat while pregnant; this example shows the social pathologizing of Black women. She cites Dorothy Roberts' argument that negative perceptions of Black women's appetite, especially while pregnant, influence the punitive system that has criminalized working-class women of color. Overall, Witt argues that it is necessary to contextualize Black women's health within political conditions.[24]

In contrast, Jamillah Karim and Dawn Gibson discuss women in the Nation of Islam (NOI)(also known colloquially as The Nation) in the book, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*, and their particular educational systems, including the Muslim Girl Training (MGT) and the Muhammad University of Islam (MUI) during the 1950s and 60s.[25] Karim and Gibson argue that there were opportunities for women's leadership and contributions; they complicate the narratives surrounding NOI women in stating that MGT, Nation's schools, and business enterprises offered community and employment. However, I would argue that NOI's rhetoric of gendered roles mirrors traditions within American Christianity—women who wanted a religious community needed to adhere to these guidelines. In later sections of the

[23] Daulatzai, Sohail, Junaid Akram Rana, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer. "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual." Essay. In *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire*, 287–97. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
[24] Elijah Muhammad, *How to Eat to Live, Book One*, by Elijah Muhammad (Chicago, Il: Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 2, 1967).
[25] Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim, "Introduction," Introduction in *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014), 25–26.

thesis, I will explore the subtle differences in considering how the narratives of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad are shaped as Shabazz leaves the NOI.[26]

Both texts offer varied perspectives on how Black American women engage in these community spaces. The article by Arlene Edwards, "Community Mothering: The Relationship Between Mothering and The Community Work of Black Women," discusses the term' othermothers,' essentially, the practice originates from West African concepts of maintaining community through the role of taking care of children, regardless of the relationship to the child. That framing offers the ability to understand care work in addressing community needs.[27] There is space to read the work of Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz as care work for Black American Muslim communities. Part of the narratives that I am critically engaging in is what happens when we come to the automatic conclusion that such work led by Black Muslims is deemed inauthentic and does not have clear aims, no lineages, traditions, and knowledge that comes from these communities that are invested in maintaining community connections? The assumed secular space to create community reproduces a colonial and orientalist imagination of how Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities engage with spiritual and religious knowledge.[28] A particular example that centers on Black Muslim Americans includes the Dillon reports that included an investigation of Muslim communities such as Detroit, where NOI members were homeschooling their children. This led the State to investigate if these children were abused due to their not attending public schools. Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) is

[26] Ibid
[27] Arlene E. Edwards, "Community Mothering: The Relationship between Mothering and the Community Work of Black Women," Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, accessed March 17, 2023, https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/2141.
[28] Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

documented as being adamant about teaching her children at home, as she felt the public school system was inadequate for teaching children, especially Muslim children, as it pertains to Islam through a Black nationalist consciousness. In contextualizing this historically, Muhammad is staunchly against her children attending schools during the Jim Crow era, which does highlight the experiences of Black womanhood and motherhood for Black Muslim American Women—highlighting the factors of not only an anti-Black educational system but one that is also rooted in anti-Muslim racism.[29]

Traces of Hajaar through the Legacies of Betty Shabazz and Clara Muhammad

In this section, I will explore the influence of the Quranic story of Hajaar with Shabazz and Muhammad. Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz are revered within their communities. However, more importantly, the purpose of having them converse with this hadith or story is to reaffirm these Muslim women who relied on their faith and influenced the emergence of Muslim American communities as they are the 'Haajars' within their community. For this project, I frame mothering as a point to build these communal relationships for Muhammad and Shabazz; this is significant as the connotation of mothering and care work is perceived as insignificant labor within the U.S., so to reframe within an Islamic perspective offers space to explore Muhammad and Shabazz's legacies.

Contextualizing Shabazz's life with the story of Hajaar (Hagar in the Christian Bible) offers a point of Islamic reference devoid of centering a predominantly white, middle-upper elite classed feminist rhetoric that assumes only knowledge production stems from secular spaces. Reflecting on this week's texts further offered space to consider mixed-method approaches in projects that shift the understanding of historical movements. This section offers more of a

[29] Ula Yvette Taylor, "Allah Temple of Islam Families: The Dillon Report," in The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam (Chapel Hill, and NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), pp. 42-43.

symbolic nature of Muhammad and Shabazz and their influences within Muslim American communities.

An analysis of Black Muslim women and the connection to the story of Hajaar offers a space to discuss potentially the spiritual power and knowledge informed by Islamic interpretations (tafsir) based on lived experiences offering a space of knowing and investment in Black futurity and nation-building.[30] The importance of mothers and caregivers in Islam as the first educators of youth makes them responsible for teaching and informing them about Islam. Although, that is also weaponized to presume all responsibility be put on women to care for their community and tethered to a biological sense of caregiving. However, within the Qur'an, at several points, the overall emphasis is that believers of this faith should seek Islamic knowledge regardless of gender. In this context, considering Shabazz and Muhammad as mothers offers an exploration of their interpretations of Islam based on their lived experiences as Black Muslim women. Further, connecting with the story of Hajaar contextualizes both Shabazz and Muhammad within the Black history of Islam. Mustafa Briggs states, "Makkah, the city which every Muslim is obligated to visit at least once in their life, and in whose direction they face and prostrate towards in prayer five times a day, was founded by Hajaar, the African wife of the patriarch Ibrahim. Therefore, when you arrive at the Ka'bah and run between Safa and Marwa, honoring the Symbols of Allah, you also honor the legacy of the mother of Makkah, a Black African woman".[31]

In the story of Hajaar, Allah had revealed to Ibrahim to take Hajaar to Makkah with her child Ismael. Ibrahim would then return to Canaan (present-day Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and

[30] Wadud, Amina. "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class, and Gender." Journal of Law and Religion 12, no. 1 (1995): 37–50. https://doi.org/10.2307/1051608.
[31] Mustafa Briggs and Haseya Rashid, “Daughters of Hajar Female Scholarship in the African Islamic Tradition,” essay, in *Beyond Bilal* (Orlando, FL: Mustafa Briggs & Co. Publishing, 2022), 175–76.

Palestine). Abraham pleaded to Allah to provide for Hajaar and Ishmael.[32] In desperation, Hajaar ran between the Safa and Marwa hills in search of water for her son, and ultimately, through the seventh attempt to run, Allah provided water; after this, Mecca became the holiest site within Islam. Hajaar in the Quran and Hadith led to the foundations of the holiest site within Islam, the Ka'bah, which still is a location that Muslims worldwide travel for the pilgrimage of the hajj. The story of Hajaar is used here as more of a religious context that further shapes the significance of Muhammad and Shabazz as Black Muslim women who have influenced and inspired a generation of Muslim Americans.

Amina Wadud's chapter on Hajaar connects to her motherhood experience and highlights Hajaar's struggles as a single mother. She writes about the haunting grip of the famous Prophetic hadith:' Paradise lies at the feet of the mother.' Wadud pushes back against the strain of upholding the dignity of Muslim women's public image of being the sole provider of care and nurture for her children; this offers context about how Muslim women interpret these stories and illustrates the complexity of motherhood.[33] 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 and Blackness as inherently outside of modernity while also criminalizing, incarcerating, and disposing of Black communities.[34]

The following section explores the long-lasting legacy of Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) within American Muslim communities. First, I discuss (C. Muhammad) as a

---

[32] Qur'an, 14:37

[33] Kecia Ali, Juliane Hammer, and Laury Silvers, "Painful, Personal, Particular: Writing, Reading, and Representing Her (Self)," essay, in *A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Work and Life of Amina Wadud* (Great Britain, UK, 2012), 23–25.

[34] El Dina Omari et al., "Islamic Feminism by Any Other Name," essay, in *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories* (London, UK: Routledge, 2021), 33–45.

complex figure concerning internalized ideals and performance of a Black Muslim woman. In relation to the complexities of the most prominent woman in the Nation of Islam, I analyze the relationships of her seventh child, W. Deen Mohammad, and then her friendship with Shakeela Hassan.

Clara Muhammad's legacy through Imam W.D. Muhammad and Shakeela Hassan

Clara Muhammad (formerly known as Clara Evans), born in 1899 in Macon, Georgia, grew up in a devoutly Christian community, and her father was a pastor.[35] C. Muhammad is known as a prominent leader of the Nation of Islam as Elijah Muhammad's wife. However, she also developed and led the way to create the foundational aspects of the Nation of Islam by developing an educational curriculum for Muslim youth. Clara Evans married Elijah Poole in 1919 and settled in Detroit, Michigan.[36] During this time of the move, Elijah struggled to obtain a job, and at this time, Clara worked and would later meet Fard Muhammad.). Through the encouragement of Clara, later, Elijah would convert to Islam.[37] In 1934 the Muhammad began their in-home teachings in Detroit.[38] Later, Muhammad would resettle in Chicago, Illinois, to start recruiting more Black Americans to become members of the Nation of Islam. For example, in Ula Taylor's The Promise of Patriarchy, she discusses the first meeting of Clara Muhammad and William Fard Muhammed (W.D. Fard).[39] Through discussions and teachings, Clara

---

[35] R. Zakiyyah Muhammad, *Mother of the Nation: Clara Evans Muhammad: Wife of Elijah Muhammad, Mother of Imam W. Deen Mohammed (The Latter Years: 1930 - 1972)* (Monee, IL: Institute of Muslim American Studies (IMAS), 2022).
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ula Yvette Taylor, "Allah Temple of Islam Families: The Dillon Report," essay, in *The Promise of Patriarchy Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 42–43.
[38] Bayyinah S. Jeffries, *A Nation Can Rise No Higher than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self Determination, 1950-1975* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).
[39] 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.

Muhammad's eagerness to be part of the Temple of Allah gave her a sense of reclamation of identity, worth, and value in an anti-Black world. Through the vehicle of Fard's teachings of Islam, Clara used this as a way of self-preservation. Clara Muhammad's legacy, most notably, is rooted in her investment in Islamic education which led to the creation of Islamic schools beginning with her teaching her children at first in Detroit In 1931, making her a pioneer in providing this primary and secondary independent schools as the curriculum centered not only Islam for Black Muslim youth but offered Black history and Education something during Jim crow was not offered in public school education in the United States for Black children.

In connecting this, I mainly focused on her seventh child, Imam W.D. Muhammad, through his developed gender philosophy as he cites through interviews his admiration for his mother and his understanding of Islam led him to reject previous narrow gendered norms within the Nation of Islam as it pertained to women as well as prompted him to connect with the larger global Umma. This is significant as it offers insight into the shift of ideas of gender amongst Muslim American communities. Another person in connection with Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) is Shakeela Hassan, a retired medical professional who met both Elijah and Clara Muhammad in the 50s here in Chicago, Illinois, and who later created the fez. I draw on Shakeela Hassan's interviews and memoirs. This is significant as it also shows the lasting legacy of Black American Muslim communities reaching different communities, including non-Black Muslims.

Clara Muhammad is viewed as the 'ideal Black Muslim woman' and was revered within the Nation of Islam and the broader Muslim community. She played a significant role in establishing this African American Muslim community. Connecting the life and legacy of Clara Muhammad, particularly through Imam W. Deen Muhammad's' leadership, constructs the

similarities in the Islamic tradition of Hajaar as the mother of the Prophet Ismael. Hajaar is a revered woman in Islam who, through her faith in Allah and protecting and caring for her child, established the holiest sites in Islam. Nevertheless, so often, the retelling of Hajaar's significant role as a believer and mother is devalued similarly. Clara Muhammad's role in collaboratively building and maintaining the Nation of Islam with Elijah Muhammad is erased.

In this section, I explore the long-lasting legacy of Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) within American Muslim communities. First, I discuss C. Muhammad as a complex figure in relation to internalized ideals and performance of a Black Muslim woman. In relation to the complexities of the most prominent woman in the Nation of Islam, I analyze the relationships of her seventh child, W. Deen Mohammad, and then her friendship with Shakeela Hassan. In this section, I offer nuance by complicating the understanding of Clara as a passive figure. Instead, I posit that she is a guiding force in the investment of changing certain norms within the Nation of Islam (NOI), even if it was unintentional.

Clara Muhammad's Influence on Imam W.D. Mohammed

Imam W.D. Mohammed, through his leadership of the NOI during 1975 - 1980, made a shift from the original teachings of the Nation of Islam by grounding his teachings from the Qur'an and removing certain principles that contradicted the teachings of Islam—for example, notions of God in a person.[40] Further, Imam W.D. Mohammed guided community members to participate in observing Ramadan through fasting with the Ummah during the Islamic calendar (originally NOI around Christmas). He also removed the Fruit of Islam and Muslim Girls Training; this is significant as it would usher in new changes to the overall structure of NOI. Focusing on Imam W.D. Mohammed's leadership, although not always perfectly executed (even

[40] Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim, "'Thank God It Changed!' Women's Transition to Sunni Islam, 1975–80," essay, in *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014), 75–129.

reproducing misguided notions of piety through false understandings of feminist principles), offers insight into not only a shift for the Nation of Islam but an exploration of interactions with Imam W.D. Mohammed and his mother, Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad), influenced the change.

In the interview with Montage in 1978, he discusses how he shifted the leadership of the NOI.[41] He explicitly states that there are differences between how his father approached the teachings of Islam and how he would include the understanding that W.D. Mohammed believed Elijah mainly focused on the social issues at the time of his leadership and not necessarily invested in the religious understanding of Islam at points in the interview it can be inferred that Elijah took several liberties that took advantage of early converts who had no clear understanding of Islam. This relates to Ajile Rahman and Zakiyyah Muhammad's' interpretations of W.D. Muhammad's' investment in changing the overall structure of the Nation of Islam under his leadership came from his several discussions with his mother, C. Muhammad.[42] In the interview Living History with C Lincoln, Imam W.D. Muhammad states:

> We are encouraged even to have our own opinion if our opinion doesn't go and counter anything established by the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] (hadith), so we encourage to have our own opinion Islam has had different schools of thought still has the Islamic world still have different schools of thought what's wrong with another school of thought what's wrong with more

[41] "Imam W. Deen Mohammed - 1978 Montage Interview," YouTube, May 3, 2017, https://youtu.be/75uZWPTGdp0.
[42] R. Zakiyyah Muhammad, "The Mission Is Greater," essay, in *Mother of the Nation: Clara Evans Muhammad: Wife of Elijah Muhammad, Mother of Imam W. Deen Mohammed* (The Latter Years: 1930 - 1972) (Monee, IL: Institute of Muslim American Studies (IMAS), 2022), 124–25.

> opinion. I'm for more opinions, and I'm for more growth in Islam. I don't think we have stopped growing. Islam is not a static religion. That's my position.[43]

This quote offers context to Imam W.D. Muhammad's approach to transitioning the Nation of Islam towards the unified Islamic principles of the global Ummah as opposed to the Black separatist teachings taught prior to Warith Deen Muhammad's leadership. In the next section, I will discuss the attempts to move toward that understanding of Islam through Shakeela Hassan's friendship with Clara and Elijah Muhammad years before the new leadership.

Through the interview, Imam Muhammad reclaims an Islamic tradition that firmly centers the Qur'an and broad Islamic principles that guide Muslims globally.[44] He does reveal a few things from this interview that offer a point of exploration as it helps to consider Clara Muhammad's influence. First, Imam W.D. Muhammad clarifies that the original Nation of Islam achieved the goal of creating the foundations of a distinctly Muslim American community, which should not be diminished or taken for granted. On a personal note, his words resonate as it is a reminder that the foundations of Muslim-American communities, even today, are heavily indebted to African American communities, which maintained them for generations. Second, Imam Muhammad mentions that early on in his life, his parents supported education for him and his siblings.[45] This Islamic education has proven to offer him the ability to be conscious and critical even with his father's teachings of Islam. At one point in the discussion, he states that there are many schools of thought on Islam and proclaims that women are the first educators for

[43] "Living History Presents Imam W. Deen Mohammed," YouTube, August 1, 2016, https://youtu.be/EpusWnTGY9k.
[44] ibid
[45] ibid

Muslim youth. In other words, the guidance and ability to seek knowledge of his *Deen* (religion) heavily relied on his mother, Clara Muhammad.[46]

First, as I continue to reflect on Shabazz and Muhammad's legacies, there is clear space for critique in discussing the treatment of women within the NOI. There is a line between people's agreed-upon intimate relationships. In reading literature, including The *Promise of Patriarchy*, women were and are invested in a particular heteronormative relationship, and I cannot offer an opinion. However, in this case, there is space to be critical of investment in family structures that are occupied by the disenfranchisement of women to maintain a level of hierarchy and excuse abuse. Although there may be the best intentions with Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad) and her involvement in Muslim Girl Training (MGT), looking further, Clara and Elijah initially emphasized a lot of the outer appearance and public performance of an 'ideal' Black Muslim. Ajile Rahman helps further clarify the educational aspect of youth learning about Islam to make connections with Imam W.D. Muhammad, who would progress further through conversations that even challenged both parents.

In thinking of Clara Muhammad, as perceived as an 'ideal' Black Muslim woman, it is fascinating that her idealism and investment in respectability as it pertains to how Black women who were part of the NOI must dress, behave and act as Ajile Rahman discusses C. Muhammad also pathologized women solely as mothers and wives for the Nation of Islam and offers examples through.[47] Even still, that logic of performing what Abdul-Khabeer states amongst

[46] R. Zakiyyah Muhammad, "The Mission Is Greater," essay, in *Mother of the Nation: Clara Evans Muhammad: Wife of Elijah Muhammad, Mother of Imam W. Deen Mohammed* (The Latter Years: 1930 - 1972) (Monee, IL: Institute of Muslim American Studies (IMAS), 2022), 124–25.
[47] Ajile Aisha Amatullah-Rahman, "She Stood by His Side and at Times in His Stead: The Life and Legacy of Sister Clara Muhammad. First Lady of the Nation of Islam, 1999" (dissertation, Atlanta University Center, 1999).

Muslim communities, 'misguided piety,' did not work in her favor.[48] This speaks to the fact that some women may have been able to navigate through the NOI under Elijah Muhammad's leadership, such as Ula Taylor and Ajile Rahman, who discuss that some women who held leadership positions were offered a certain privilege and level of power in surveilling other women, the emphasis of performance in appearance and behavior leaned into conservative rhetoric and desirability that historically subjected Black communities to be perceived as incapable to achieving white supremacist hetero-patriarchal norms as opposed to theological principles that unite across unique differences.[49] The performance and appearance of Muslim women observed through both Shabazz and Muhammad offers complex narratives and further influence the ways they individually approach Islam and the legacies through their children W.D. Muhammad's approach to shift to global principles of Islam I infer that even the teachings by Elijah fall flat for him through the unfortunate experiences of C. Muhammad exemplify this through Shabazz there is less of an emphasis of appearance and performance of Islam that is ironic would be viewed as less respectable to a Muhammad even though Shabazz aspires to position herself in the black elite this speaks to the broader flawed investment of debating whether or not Muslim women should dress or observe the hijab for example. More importantly, considering the particular experiences of Muhammad and Shabazz articulate the stakes for Muslim women in order to navigate a society that is invested in misogynoir and islamophobia, it leaves the inability to be complex as a practicing Muslim to hold multiple truths and to offer spaces of various interpretations of Islam that connects back to people's lived experiences.

---

[48] Sohail Daulatzai, Junaid Akram Rana, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual," essay, in *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire* (Minneapolis, MN, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 287–97.
[49] Da'Shaun Harrison and Kiese Laymon, *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2021).

In reading the chapter that discusses Clara Muhammad's trip to Egypt, it offers an intimate look into her sense of despair and isolation, mirroring the story of Hajaar, who, in the sense of desperation, is left to fend for water when Prophet Ibrahim leaves her (Hajaar) states "Allah will provide," it can be inferred that C. Muhammad herself recognized her commitment to her faith was separate to her husband. That deep level of indescribable faith made her a conduit of change in her community.[50] As well as several scholars, Zakiyyah Muhammad, Ajile Rahman, and Karim and Gibson, would all note within the literature on Clara Muhammad and W.D. Muhammad that there were even internal criticisms of how the Black nationalist religious community misguided many in terms of the core principles of Islam. Further, the failures and infidelities of E. Muhammad, stated by Zakiyyah Muhammad, stated that although Clara Muhammad returned to the NOI, her faith in Allah allowed her son Imam W.D. Muhammad to consider changes that would build and connect with the global Umma.[51]

Imam W. Deen Mohammed is fascinating in his connection with the Nation of Islam. I rely on his interviews and secondary sources to highlight what makes his leadership uniquely different from Elijah Muhammad can be argued that Clara Muhammad influenced W. Deen Mohammed's understanding of Islam. Clara Muhammad as a mother within the NOI, was invested in the education of young people. However, through the constructions of Muslim Girl Training and Fruit of Islam, there is an overemphasis on certain ideals of a 'good Black Muslim'

[50] Qur'an, 14:37

[51] The investment of patriarchy, white supremacy, homophobia, and transphobia through religious text is harmful and relies on power, controlling narratives, and preventing education. Criticism should not be taken as inherently negative. However, Imam W.D. Muhammad discusses critique and challenging, varied interpretations as part of Islamic tradition. In considering the connections of education and women, Muslim communities historically and currently, rather than offer space for women to educate themselves on their religion, are more invested in denying that education. Further, the idea that women cannot offer intellectual contributions to Islamic knowledge is ahistorical. For example, the Surah, Al-Mujadilah, was revealed after Khawlah bint Tha'labah had challenged certain common understandings of women positioning with marriage. (Qur'an, 58).

that reproduce the same dominant white supremacist and patriarchal rhetoric of gender performance. I explore the constructions of the Muslim Girl Training classes and unpack the complexities and contradictions around C. Muhammad's understanding and investment of gender norms amongst Muslim men and women. However, in exploring W. Deen Mohammed's upbringing as it pertains to his education, key differences shifted his understanding of gender and Islam. First, it is noted that Elijah Muhammad traveled and was not as present in the lives of his children and was formerly incarcerated.[52] This meant Clara Muhammad had been leading the Nation of Islam for some time and was the main caregiver for their children. C. Muhammad was invested in young people, including her children receiving the best education, including a robust Islamic education. As noted by several scholars, the University of Islam (later on called the Clara Muhammad Schools) brought in teachers knowledgeable in Islam and Arabic. W. Deen Muhammad, in several discussions, articulates that his understanding of Islam directly stems from the Quran and hadith. In the Living History interview, W. Deen Muhammad states

> Everything has to be as one community, so my response is that I believe that one community is decided by two things, actually three. I would say three, at the maximum, our concept of God, the concept of the Prophet, and the concept of man. That is our unity, concept of God, concept of the Prophet, and concept of man. Because man and the Prophet are the same for us, the Prophet is a common human being. He's just like we are as far as a human. His nature is like no divine nature and our Prophet. Our Prophet cannot be God, so to me, that is unity, and the Quran is the focus. That is what binds us all together. We all read the same Quran, you know, that says the same thing that gives us the same idea about God.

[52] Ula Yvette Taylor, "Allah Temple of Islam Families: The Dillon Report," essay, in *The Promise of Patriarchy Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 42–43.

> It gives us that idea about the Prophet. It gives us the idea about the unity of man. Now we know that language branches out into other areas of thought and knowledge are all [encompassing] and all-embracing, we know that, but to me, the focus for the unity is not our culture, not our way we dress. It's not the language we speak. It's not even the thought in religion. As long as we respect the essentials of the Quran and the essentials in the life of Muhammad, the Prophet, peace be upon him.[53]

W. D. Muhammad sees his interpretation of Islam in connection with the larger Ummah/ universal principles of Islam. W. Deen's education is fascinating because, as noted by himself and secondary sources, Fard Muhammad conveyed to his mother, C. Muhammad, that he (W. D Muhammad) would eventually lead the NOI. However, as W. Deen Muhammad continued with his Islamic education, this caused tension between him and his father. The Hassan both confirm that Akbar Muhammad continued his education in Egypt and returned, which caused conflict among the family. Of course, this is also the time after Malcolm X parted ways with the Nation of Islam and when Clara Muhammad spent time with her children due to her husband's infidelity.[54] I bring this up in context to Imam W. Deen Muhammad as it is not coincidental that his interpretation of Islam, particularly considering the treatment of women, seemed to change by his ability to learn Islam largely. However, I imagine the experiences of his mother exposed the contradictions in the outward public statements by the Nation of Islam promising to 'protect' Black women when those promises could not even be guaranteed for his mother.

The Significance of Clara Muhammad's Relationship with *Shakeela Hassan*

[53] "Living History Presents Imam W. Deen Mohammed," YouTube, August 1, 2016, https://youtu.be/EpusWnTGY9k.
[54] R. Zakiyyah Muhammad, "*Mother of the Nation: Clara Evans Muhammad: Wife of Elijah Muhammad, Mother of Imam W. Deen Mohammed (The Latter Years: 1930 - 1972)*" (Monee, IL: Institute of Muslim American Studies (IMAS), 2022).

Exploring the friendship with Shakeela Hassan offers multiple things regarding Clara Muhammad (C. Muhammad). Due to the downplaying of C. Muhammad's collaboration with Elijah and shaped the NOI prior to the change in leadership, it assumes C. Muhammad might not have her ideas and interpretations of Islam. Further, it exposes the assumption that all women of NOI, including Muslim women not part of the Nation of Islam, did not debate or challenge each other on Islam and even influence men, in this case, Imam Mohammed. Later, I discuss the friendships among Muslim women, including non-Black women. I argue that because the United States is structured on white supremacist segregation that what is missed is discussing friendships interracially because of the way the U.S. is structured based on racist and segregated communities that we miss the community building and friendships cross-culturally.[55] Lastly, it shows the lasting impact of the NOI goes beyond what some have termed a separatist movement.

Shakeela Hassan immigrated to the United States in 1956 from Hyderabad, British India, to pursue medical training at Northwestern University in Chicago. Later, she would meet her husband in the same city.[56] Her interest in medical training stemmed from the city being near immediate family in neighboring states.[57] Despite having unique differences, Hassan and C. Muhammad connect as Muslim women. However, their shared faith creates a long-lasting friendship. Shakeela Hassan helped create the Fez hat that Elijah Muhammad would wear and became a distinct symbol for the leader of The Nation of Islam. What gets stripped away from narratives regarding Muslim communities is the ability to openly the most vulnerable parts of

[55] Atiya Husain, "Moving beyond (and Back to) the Black–White Binary: A Study of Black and White Muslims' Racial Positioning in the United States," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 4 (2017): 589–606, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1410199.
[56] Shakeela Zia Hassan, *A Starry Crown Making of a Fez A Symbol of Distinction and Evolution for Leadership of Hon. Elijah Muhammad, The Leader of The Nation of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Harran Productions Foundation, 2019).
[57] Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Mian Ahmed Shaheer Afaqi, "Shakeela Hassan: Narrating Religious Freedom in the Twenty-First Century," *American Religion* 3, no. 1 (2021): 82–105, https://doi.org/10.2979/amerreli.3.1.04.

oneself while existing as a Muslim, particularly in the United States. Of course, surveillance, incarceration, and state violence leading to premature deaths present the incentive to constantly speak for and present a romanticized version of the community. Ironically it was not the spiritual leaders who were most revered but the marginalized Muslims who taught me the core principles of Islam. It is the women, femmes, and non-binary folks that I call friends and loved ones that I have confided in at times when I questioned everything, including God. However, my friends showed me kindness and modeled the purest forms of radical love. My friendships have brought peace and knowledge on a spiritual level. Radical love includes self-reflection and honesty amongst your loved ones. Shakeela Hassan discusses her friendship with Clara Muhammad lovingly and honestly. In Shakeela Hassan's memoir, she states,

> In reflection on our journey of what my husband and I were blessed to travel with, in time, I came to understand the Hon. Elijah and Sister Clara Muhammad's purpose for the quality improvement of a community—a community dealing with abuse, discrimination, lack of self-respect, and so much more. Hon. Elijah and Sister Clara Muhammad's pursuit and purpose for the historical attempts at social and spiritual reform of the Black community was the energy and sense that personally furthered, enlightened, inspired, and kept our admiration captured to focus on the good![58]

Hassan's memories of C. Muhammad highlight the importance of friendship amongst Muslim women. We may not share the same sentiments on everything. As shown in the interviews, Shakeela Hassan questioned certain rhetoric even when her husband was less inclined to

[58] Shakeela Zia Hassan, *A Starry Crown Making of a Fez A Symbol of Distinction and Evolution for Leadership of Hon. Elijah Muhammad, The Leader of The Nation of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Harran Productions Foundation, 2019).

question the actions of Elijah in his mistreatment of his wife. However, patriarchy maintains the marginalization of women by any means necessary. However, the love and kinship among Muslim women offer kindness that the dominant society refuses because they still question our existence and our judgment (or passivity) to practice this faith.

Another interesting point is that the historical context of Hassan's friendship with Muhammad exposes two things 1) Although the United States functions as a segregated society under Jim Crow. Muslim have always operated beyond the Nation- states' control socially. It is fascinating to both be hyper-surveilled and yet invisible. Due to the literal concept of Ummah connecting people beyond race, ethnicity, gender, and class. 2) The existence of Hassan's relationship with Muhammad as well as Hassan's interview, supports the literature that Fard Muhammad's knowledge of Islam stems from the Ahmadiyya's arrival in the U.S. doing missionary work which complicates the NOI's statement/political investment to be a Black separatist organization if the interest in Islam is due to interactions with non-Black Muslims.

Further, Hassan's three-hour interview revealed other things as well as it pertains to interactions of non-Black Muslims and immigrant Muslims with Black American Muslims. Zia Hassan alludes to Elijah's lack of understanding of the universal tenets of Islam, partly because he needed help to grasp that there are several schools of thought within Islam. As Zia Hassan puts it, Elijah's association of mainly Sunni and Shia Islam is just a cultural and political issue amongst immigrant Muslims, so in his understanding, Black American Muslims should not engage with those politically influenced differences. Based on this logic, it offers context to Elijah Muhammad's use of Islam within the NOI as not entirely based on the Quranic interpretations, and this is articulated as well by Shakeela Hassan, who retells the discussions she had about Elijah's interpretation of God in man stating,

> Shakeela Hassan (6:00 - 6:13): I said, how can he be God? Let's stop here, right here; how can he be God? And he said he knew what I was saying, and he knew what he was saying was not what he meant to say. But he had to say. So, he looked at me and said, why not? I said, no, I'm asking that question, Brother. Because this is, to me, I'll say, 'Qul huwal laahu ahad,' [Surah Ikhlas 112:1]. That one I had known for all my life. So, I said he was not bound to anyone, etc. So, he said, yeah. 'I'm not saying anything about that, but isn't God everywhere?' I said yeah, that's like my grandma said. That God is next to your jugular. You ask more questions to everybody else, but why not pray and ask God? So, I said, I remember those things. But it cannot be God, Brother. Change the words, maybe. I didn't want to use the word message because he used to call himself Messenger. But it was better to be a messenger in English, translated, the one who brought you the message than [the] Prophet, who prophesied. Because somehow, I believe in reflecting [what] I had in my heart, he might think he is Mohammad. And I just wanted to save myself from that thing. More than saving him. I do not believe I'm sitting here and talking to Mohammad Peace be Upon Him. So, he was like that. But I think he talked a lot to Zia. [To Zia Hassan] You never asked a question that way to him. But you brought it up to clarify.[59]

The statement made by Hassan connected to Imam W. Deen Muhammad revealed that his conversations with his mother influenced him to start learning on his own about Islam. However, the relationship between Hassan and the education of Akbar and W. Deen makes it unclear how this policy was enacted. More importantly, similar to Malcolm X's travels to other countries,

[59] Jared Milburn et al., eds., “Close Friends of Elijah and Clara Muhammad—Part I,” Muslims of the Midwest, November 13, 2016, http://muslimsofthemidwest.org/.

interacting with Muslims, including Ahmad Osman, completely changed his political and spiritual journey. Osman, a Sudanese Muslim, first challenged Malcolm X's interpretation of Islam. Osman would later support and accompany Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz on their pilgrimage to Hajj—Malcolm X's political consciousness, especially regarding gender change. Similarly, to this shift for Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz, in their understanding of the universal principles of Islam, Imam W. Deen Muhammad, based on his own words, shifted towards this understanding of a global practice of Islam. In the following section, I discuss Betty Shabazz's entrance into the Clara Muhammad-created community of Black Muslim American women, leading her to become an influential leader and educator, paving the way for a new, unique expression of Black Muslim womanhood and fostering friendships.

Betty Shabazz's legacy through friendship and mothering

Betty Shabazz (formerly known as Betty Dean Sanders) at the time of her passing and still today is one of the most revered Black Muslim American women in terms of popular cultural references and overall image of the Black Muslim woman. In 1956 Shabazz became a nurse and worked in New York.[60] Later the same year, Shabazz joined the Nation of Islam and became a health teacher for the Muslim Girl Training classes (MGT) in Temple No. 7.[61] Shabazz married Malcolm X, a prominent Minister of the Nation of Islam, in 1958.[62] In a 1988 interview for *Eyes on the Prize: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965-1985,* Shabazz would later state

[60] Russell John Rickford, "Bahiyah," essay, in *Betty Shabazz, Surviving Malcolm X: A Journey of Strength from Wife to Widow to Heroine* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2005), 35.
[61] Ula Yvette Taylor, "Allah Temple of Islam Families: The Dillon Report," essay, in The Promise of Patriarchy Women and the Nation of Islam (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 97.
[62] Jane I. Smith, "Islam in the African American Community," essay, in Islam in America (Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series) (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 97–98.

that she admired the unique ways Malcolm X gave his speeches and intertwined Afrocentrism and theology to uplift Black people.[63]

In "Garments for One Another: Islam and Marriage in the Lives of Betty Shabazz and Dakota Staton," Sylvia Chan Malik offers a rich and nuanced discussion of Betty Shabazz as a public historical figure, but more importantly, as a Muslim woman within the context of the United States.[64] Shabazz's connection with faith was not a linear journey. However, similarly, her lived experiences offered challenges and opportunities for self-reflexivity while she experienced the violence of systemic oppression in the U.S. as a Black woman. In this thesis, I focus on her pilgrimage of Hajj, which she participated in after the assassination of Malcolm X and the reason I focus on this for two reasons it is this Hajj that gives her a sense of hope after losing her husband so violently gives her spiritual guidance but also builds a coalition of people supporting her. She would mention this pilgrimage's importance in an *Essence* magazine interview in 1992. The pilgrimage helped her personally, allowing B. Shabazz to witness global support from the international Muslim community. She would be approached by many people who supported Malcolm and recognized him and Black American Muslims as part of this Umma. This is significant, especially when in the U.S., Malcolm X and, by proxy, B. Shabazz was not well received or liked even after his death. It is important to note this reaction of B. Shabazz because it is, in fact, Islam that offered B. Shabazz the ability to build community through fostering these friendships and, later on, coalition building, such as her involvement in

---

[63] Blackside Inc., ed., "Interview with Betty Shabazz," Eyes on the Prize II | Eyes on the Prize: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-1985 - Washington University - Digital Gateway, 1988, http://repository.wustl.edu/spotlight/eyes-on-the-prize-america-at-the-racial-crossroads-1965-1985.

[64] Sylvia Chan-Malik, "Garments for One Another Islam and Marriage in the Lives of Betty Shabazz and Dakota Staton.," essay, in *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018), 107–50.

the campaign against apartheid in South Africa which connected her to Winnie Mandela during her visit to New York.

Betty Shabazz navigates tragedy through the guidance of Islam, and her reliance on community offers an alternative narrative that uplifts and centers the legacy that Ilyasah Shabazz (I. Shabazz) retells of her mother. Betty Shabazz exemplified a Muslim woman who drew upon interpretations of her faith, lived experiences, and political consciousness that developed into philanthropic work. Islam offers solace and resolve for B. Shabazz and provides a model for her children to mirror as they grow up, as seen in how I. Shabazz discusses her mother. Also, as Betty Shabazz continues to uplift the legacy of Malcolm, it is an act to challenge the negative perceptions of Malcolm within the U.S. and even in the Civil Rights Movement. B.Shabazz and her hajj pilgrimage should be taken as a shift into further developing a political consciousness that would later influence solidarities across borders and interfaith based. Even based on reading the biography by Rickford and her interview in *Essence*, Betty Shabazz has always uplifted Malcolm and his message and influenced a more progressed understanding of faith and social justice, including his perspective of women. Additionally, in the context of the assassination of Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam did not support B. Shabazz and her children, which led to fostering new relationships with other community members, allies, and supporters who were showing solidarity in the wake of the death of Malcolm X.

Expressions of Black Muslim womanhood uplifted through Ilyasah Shabazz.

Betty Shabazz and her understanding of faith to guide her and her children while also her conviction of reclaiming Malcolm X's legacy that at the time of his assassination was unraveling due to his recent and public split from the Nation of Islam it seemed like Malcolm began to separate himself from the NOI, it was a tumultuous time, but it offered a point to rely on Allah to

guide him. Likewise, Betty Shabazz, post the assassination of Malcolm X, would come to have a rebirth as it pertains to her understanding of faith and political consciousness. I will discuss more through the biography by Russel Rickford and interviews with herself and Ilyasah Shabazz. As a convert to Islam, B. Shabazz had to reconcile the (traumatic) experiences of losing her husband and the residual issues left by leaving the NOI. Betty Shabazz sought spiritual guidance to persevere through the extreme violence she experienced because it is not necessarily the more prominent public example of community building and political participation. It is more so the essence of her reclaiming Malcolm X's story and her influence in various spaces of reminding people of Malcolm X's legacy that offers insight into her understanding as a Black Muslim woman in the United States as well as her understanding of black nationalist politics that stems from her political participation.

Broadly connecting B. Shabazz and C. Muhammad in conversation to affirm the nuanced perspectives of Black Muslim women, the freedom of interpretation, and existing as a Muslim. Pilgrimage to Hajj offers the ability to discuss Umma and B. Shabazz's spiritual connection and reclamation as a Muslim woman. The story of Hajaar connects both women in thinking about faith, struggle, and community as Muslims. Betty Shabazz explicitly articulates a sense of faith in Allah in several sources, even through tragedy. Rickerford describes the pilgrimage to the Hajj as follows.

> I don't know where I'd be today if I had not gone to Mecca to make Haji shortly after Malcolm was assassinated. Two young doctors -one from Harvard and the other from Dartmouth -invited me to go to Mecca in my husband's stead. And that is what helped put me back on track. Malcolm said, "Don't look back, and don't cry. Remember, Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt." I began to understand the

> meaning of that statement. Going to Mecca and doing Hajj was very good for me because it made me think of all the people who loved me and were for me, who prayed that I would get my life back together. I stopped focusing on the people trying to tear me and my family apart.[65]

Shabazz's pilgrimage of the Hajj should be significant political and spiritual development, similar to Malcolm's enlightenment after the Hajj. First, this is one of Islam's core pillars that Muslims from different backgrounds participate in yearly. B. Shabazz states in *Essence* magazine that the pilgrimage was a source of salvation during a heavy time in her life. I relate this chapter of her life to the story of Hajaar as B. Shabazz related this story of perseverance through a revered woman in Islam. This story offers an example of Betty Shabazz seeking Islamic traditions within her life regardless of whether her practice of Islam was perceived as the most prominent. I cannot nor will not judge how 'religious' someone is because practicing Islam is an inherently intimate relationship between the believer and Allah. There is a reason that numerous points within the Quran emphasize that each person has a direct connection with Allah. This is why when some Muslims are more invested in the oppression and discrimination of marginalized groups from seeking Islamic knowledge, it is an act of shirk. Further, in a historical context, stories that focus on women, and in this case, an Egyptian woman, a mother, speak against a narrative that seems to disregard the influence and Islamic knowledge produced by African communities.

Ilyasah Shabazz's reflections on her mother in the memoir, *Growing Up X* uplifts the narrative of Betty Shabazz as a woman who consciously interpreted her way to exist. More importantly, even under strict guidelines as a member of the Nation of Islam, Betty Shabazz

[65] Betty Shabazz, "Loving and Losing Malcolm," ed. Susan Taylor, *Essence*, 1992.

recognized alternative ways to navigate and exist as a Black Muslim woman that relied on her investments in education, political consciousness, and faith.

Ilyasah Shabazz states

> In the wake of my father's death, Mommy had begun taking the first few tentative steps in creating, or recreating, her own identity, which was proudly linked to, but distinct from, that of Malcolm X. She had begun the challenge of becoming more fully herself. That's not to say Mommy was not a wallflower who had to learn to stand on her own for the first time in her life. Betty Sanders possessed drive and ambition long before she met my father. She had already traveled from a comfortable, sheltered life in Detroit to racist Alabama and then to the bright lights of New York. She had already earned her nursing degree. And in marrying my father, she had, for the first time in her life, defied the wishes of her parents. Even as a member of the Nation of Islam, which taught that women were to be subservient, my mother maintained her sense of independence. She was a nurse, taught classes for Muslim women, and developed a curriculum at mosques up and down the East Coast. If someone asked her opinion, she gave it wholeheartedly and without hesitation, not believing she should keep quiet just because she was a woman or the wife of Malcolm X. She declined to be a second-class citizen in the same way she declined to cover her hair. She believed hair covering was a cultural dictate, not religious, and she chose not to follow it.[66]

Such a narrative of Betty Shabazz is erased in dominant discourses due to biased notions of Muslim women and the assumption that Malcolm X became this prominent figure solely by his

[66] Ilyasah Shabazz and Kim McLarin, "Camp Betsey Cox," essay, in *Growing up X* (New York, NY: One World/Ballantine Books, 2002), 82–83.

work and actions. This further disregards particularly the women who influenced his progression.[67] This excerpt from *Growing Up X* connects B. Shabazz's words in reflecting on her childhood growing up with her family to the introduction to the Nation of Islam and how it has shaped her understanding of self. It also depicts a difference between B. Shabazz and C. Muhammad. It allows for varied expressions of Black Muslim womanhood which tends to be flattened and never uplifted in reflecting on both women.

Furthermore, in answering a question regarding what young people can learn from Malcolm X's legacy, B. Shabazz articulates that the solutions can be found in coalition building. Even though the question focuses on Malcolm X's legacy, B. Shabazz expresses her understanding of political consciousness intertwined with religious philosophies stating,

> [Betty Shabazz:] What should young people know about Malcolm? I think one of the most important things in the view of contemporary society is that they should know about his internal strength and discipline and understand that a lot of people can climb the mountains and deal with people on a very affluent level but don't understand what is happening in the valleys. And that if they are going to be future leaders, people will have to understand the diversity of people, ethnicity, politics, and religion. You know. And if you've, you, you really look at our society today, you find the Baptists preaching to the Baptists and the Methodists preaching to the Methodists, and the Buddhists to the Buddhists, and the Muslims to the Muslims. Religion must cross those lines and deal with people on an

[67] Erik S. McDuffie and Komozi Woodard, "'If You're in a Country That's Progressive, the Woman Is Progressive': Black Women Radicals and the Making of the Politics and Legacy of Malcolm X," *Biography* 36, no. 3 (2013): 507–39, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2013.0036.

> ecumenical basis or level. And I think people will have to put humanity above the power of politics.[68]

In the response, it is clear that she is not arguing for an absence of religion which some would assume because of her separation from the Nation of Islam, which further supports the argument that even with leaving the Nation of Islam, the principles and influences, including an introduction to Islam has influenced Betty Shabazz in her later years which signifies the lasting legacy of Black American Muslim communities as it pertains to Black American women in this case or that different religious communities cannot contribute to social-political change. Moreover, this response is uniquely different from other interpretations of the coalition that rely on secular principles of community building, potentially alienating communities that rely on their religious philosophies of social justice. However, she believes that interfaith and international solidarities are possible and necessary. This is uniquely different from the previous core principles of the Nation of Islam (NOI). This example offers the intellectual progression of Betty Shabazz and the shift towards her involvement in international solidarities, such as the campaign against South African Apartheid.

Additionally, this statement offers insight into the ways B. Shabazz formed her community after the assassination of Malcolm X. In Ilyasah Shabazz's memoir, she states, **"**When my father was assassinated, some people might have expected my mother to return to the Christian faith of her youth...My mother was a devout Muslim; few people realize that because she was extremely private about her faith."[69] Part of the mystery is the public narrative of Betty Shabazz seems to correlate her active effort to keep certain aspects of her life more private with

[68] Blackside Washington University in St. Louis Inc., "Interview with Betty Shabazz," 2021.
[69] Ilyasah Shabazz and Kim McLarin, "Camp Betsey Cox," essay, in *Growing up X* (New York, NY: One World/Ballantine Books, 2002), 42.

her being inactive entirely from any forms of movement work. Malcolm X was a messenger that influenced people then and even in present-day movement work. For B. Shabazz, her presence and, more so, the connection with women such as Winnie Mandela solidified her commitment to all oppressed peoples struggling towards liberation. Similarly, the flattening of the singular understanding of a Muslim woman based on outer appearance (e.g., hijab) overshadows the shared principles that Muslim women such as Betty Shabazz rely on to seek guidance in their lives.

Malcolm's legacy does transcend beyond the United States and even domestically. Various marginalized communities claim a stake in his legacy. Still, more importantly, through analyzing literature about or on B. Shabazz, that legacy seems to overshadow who she was as an individual. I think it plays a significant role in the misunderstanding and erasure of her legacy. B. Shabazz went the route of completing a doctorate, raising her children, and supporting current social movements at the time, including the movement against South African apartheid, and domestically became interested in supporting organizations advancing education for women, as I. Shabazz discusses. Her legacy and existence included the expectation of the wife of and the naysayers who had unresolved issues with Malcolm and Black Islam. However, it offered an alternative and still has a legacy for other Black and Muslim women.

It is interesting to see the way Ilyasah Shabazz and Sister Aisha discuss B. Shabazz as an overall Black woman who does not have a tainted image of Islam; she speaks that Betty Shabazz must have influenced that within her children, regardless of her leaving the Nation of Islam. Moreso, it is interesting that even though she was private about her religious practice of Islam, it seems through her own experiences, she did not associate the public performance of representing a 'Muslim woman,' which is in contrast to the training within Muslim Girl Training and became

more concerned with the principles and actions that exhibit the core tenets of Islam. It speaks to B. Shabazz modeling her understanding of existing in the world as a Black Muslim woman, particularly with her children. That being said, part of the reason is to have these women in conversation. However, I did not want to play into the idea that there is a binary ideal Muslim woman I see play out in the biography between B. Shabazz and C. Muhammad.

Fostering Friendships and Coalition Building

Another point to be made here is that through friendships, Betty was able to make the pilgrimage to Hajj, showing that her spiritual journey included a community (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) who understood the importance of her faith to not only heal but rebuild and continue forward with her children. These friendships and connections would also influence her approach to parenting her children. I choose to focus on Ilyasah because her memoir on growing up as the daughter of Betty Shabazz retells and centers this narrative of her mother as a socially conscious and religious woman guided by Islam.

Particularly, I. Shabazz references her mother, "she made sure that we learned about the significant contributions that women made to the world, …that Islam made to the world, and the significant contributions that the continent of Africa".[70] Ilyasah also discusses in the memoir having teachers who taught them history and Islam, "So, on Wednesday afternoons, Brother K. Ahamad Tawfiq came to our house to teach us Arabic and to lecture us about the Qur'an and Africa. He was a sheik, the Imam of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood in New York, and a wonderful storyteller.".[71] It personifies the saying 'it takes a village' even beyond the socially constructed ideas of caregiving, and mothering builds a community invested in the care of youth

[70] "The Intellectual Life & Legacy of Dr. Betty Shabazz," YouTube, December 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/live/ILW9K3myZ_s?feature=share.
[71] Ilyasah Shabazz and Kim McLarin, "Camp Betsey Cox," essay, in *Growing up x* (New York, NY: One World/Ballantine Books, 2002), 57.

in their communities. Friendships are a necessity for survival, and they offer the care, kindness, and accountability that is absent for many who are oppressed and viewed as disposable.

Part of the community building amongst women, in particular, is the cultivation of friendships that support and care. I argue that Betty Shabazz's friendships emphasize her approach to mothering as part of connecting and maintaining community through the practice of Islam. This is significant because it demands expanding how community building and organizing are defined. Broadly, a focus on friendships of Betty Shabazz shows her commitment to movement work and social justice. Exploring the friendships maintained by Betty also reveals the intertwined relationship between her spiritual and political journey. Both Rickford and Sister Aisha note that Betty Shabazz intentionally was private with her practice of Islam. However, the personal is political. Sister Aisha further states,

> Because I wanted to honor her passion for being private in her religious practice, and I continued to do that, but what I want to say is that one of the things that I did to try and amplify Dr. Shabazz's presence was to create Dr. Shabazz, the Dr. Shabazz award ceremony for nearly twenty years consecutively. We did these award ceremonies at the Schomburg Center. What we did and the reason that I wanted to do this was, first and foremost, to make it clear to the public that, yes, Dr. Shabazz was an Islamic woman right, and this was at a time when many people did not want you to know this family to be Muslim.[72]

Hearing Ilyasah and Sister Aisha speak about Betty Shabazz brought up something I initially needed to consider but offered more context. Her friendships are also tied to her approach to community building. A formation of friendships that are tied to similar struggles (Winnie

[72] "The Intellectual Life & Legacy of Dr. Betty Shabazz," YouTube, December 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/live/ILW9K3myZ_s?feature=share.

Mandela) as mothers, but also in a closer analysis of Shabazz post the assassination of Malcolm X; it was her friendships that helped her during this time and shaped how she would move forward as a Muslim woman and as an activist. These friendships are generally seen as of less value and ultimately, Shabazz's friendships are seen as unimportant. However, through the interactions and relationships with Shabazz, each person offers a piece to that legacy that transcends the public figure and the activist but a holistic perspective of the person that is Betty Shabazz.

Thesis Conclusion

Overall, this paper provided an opportunity to reflect on the lives of two prominent Black Muslim women, Clara Muhammad and Betty Shabazz. Through exploring their relationships and philosophies, there is further nuance and understanding of Black Muslim communities domestically and abroad. Moreover, the project has been ambitious, aiming to uplift and contextualize the literature that addresses the significance of engaging with the genealogies of intellectual contributions of Black women practicing Islam to the Black freedom movement. Through this research, it is clear that Clara and Betty greatly impact Black Muslim women and the Black freedom movement.

On another note, a sense of pressure came with the project. It is an ambitious project because the people I include here deserve nothing less than to be uplifted, offer space for the nuances and complexities within their lives, and, most importantly, center their humanity. Something that is often taken for granted and dismissed due to people's investments in misunderstanding marginalized communities. Hopefully, the project will 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.

Bibliography

Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. *Roman transliteration of the holy Quran with full Arabic text*. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.

Ali, Kecia, Juliane Hammer, and Laury Silvers. "Painful, Personal, Particular: Writing, Reading, and Representing Her (Self)." Essay. In *A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Work and Life of Amina Wadud*, 23–25. Great Britain, UK, 2012.

Amatullah-Rahman, Ajile Aisha. "She Stood by His Side and at Times in His Stead: The Life and Legacy of Sister Clara Muhammad. First Lady of the Nation of Islam, 1999." Dissertation, Atlanta University Center, 1999.

Briggs, Mustafa, and Haseya Rashid. "Daughters of Hajar Female Scholarship in the African Islamic Tradition." Essay. In *Beyond Bilal*, 175–76. Orlando, FL: Mustafa Briggs & Co. Publishing, 2022.

Chan-Malik, Sylvia. "Garments for One Another Islam and Marriage in the Lives of Betty Shabazz and Dakota Staton." Essay. In *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam*, 107–50. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018.

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images." Essay. In *Black Feminist Thought*, 77–78. London, UK: Routledge, 2000.

Daulatzai, Sohail, Junaid Akram Rana, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer. "To Be a (Young) Black Muslim Woman Intellectual." Essay. In *With Stones in Our Hands: Writings on Muslims, Racism, and Empire*, 287–97. Minneapolis, MN, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Davis, Angela Y. *Women, race & class*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1983.

Edwards, Arlene E. "Community Mothering: The Relationship between Mothering and the Community Work of Black Women." Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, 2000. https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/2141.

Foucault, Michel, and Alan Sheridan. "Docile Bodies." Essay. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 135–68. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995.

Gibson, Dawn-Marie, and Jamillah Karim. "'Thank God It Changed!' Women's Transition to Sunni Islam, 1975–80." Essay. In *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*, 75–129. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014.

Gibson, Dawn-Marie, and Jamillah Karim. "Introduction." Introduction. In *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*, 25–26. New York, NY: NYU Press, 2014.

Harrison, Da'Shaun, and Kiese Laymon. *Belly of the beast: The politics of anti-fatness as anti-blackness*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2021.

Hooks, Bell. *Outlaw culture: Resisting representations*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994.

Husain, Atiya. "Moving beyond (and Back to) the Black–White Binary: A Study of Black and White Muslims' Racial Positioning in the United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 4 (2017): 589–606. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1410199.

"Imam W. Deen Mohammed - 1978 Montage Interview." YouTube, May 3, 2017. https://youtu.be/75uZWPTGdp0.

Inc., Blackside, ed. "Interview with Betty Shabazz." Eyes on the Prize II | Eyes on the Prize: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-1985 - Washington University - Digital Gateway, 1988. http://repository.wustl.edu/spotlight/eyes-on-the-prize-america-at-the-racial-crossroads-1965-1985.

"The Intellectual Life & Legacy of Dr. Betty Shabazz." YouTube, December 20, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/live/ILW9K3myZ_s?feature=share.

Jeffries, Bayyinah S. *A nation can rise no higher than its women: African American Muslim women in the Movement for Black Self Determination, 1950-1975*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.

"Living History Presents Imam W. Deen Mohammed." YouTube, August 1, 2016. https://youtu.be/EpusWnTGY9k.

Malcolm X. DVD. Warner Bros., 1992.

McDuffie, Erik S., and Komozi Woodard. "If You're in a Country That's Progressive, the Woman Is Progressive': Black Women Radicals and the Making of the Politics and Legacy of Malcolm X." *Biography* 36, no. 3 (2013): 507–39. https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2013.0036.

Milburn, Jared, Donté Smith, Shane Heath, Isaiah Johns, and Mika Byar, eds. "Close Friends of Elijah and Clara Muhammad—Part I." Muslims of the Midwest, November 13, 2016. http://muslimsofthemidwest.org/.

Muhammad, Elijah. *How to eat to live, book one, by Elijah Muhammad*. Chicago, Il: Muhammad's Temple of Islam No. 2, 1967.

Muhammad, R. Zakiyyah. *Mother of the Nation: Clara Evans Muhammad: Wife of Elijah Muhammad, Mother of Imam W. Deen Mohammed (The Latter Years: 1930 - 1972)*. Monee, IL: Institute of Muslim American Studies (IMAS), 2022.

Muhammad, R. Zakiyyah. "The Mission Is Greater." Essay. In *Mother of the Nation: Clara Evans Muhammad: Wife of Elijah Muhammad, Mother of Imam W. Deen Mohammed*

(The Latter Years: 1930 - 1972), 124–25. Monee, IL: Institute of Muslim American Studies (IMAS), 2022.

Omari, El Dina, Juliane Hammer, Mouhanad Khorchide, and Amina Wadud. "Islamic Feminism by Any Other Name." Essay. In *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories*, 33–45. London, UK: Routledge, 2021.

Rickford, Russell John. "Bahiyah." Essay. In *Betty Shabazz, Surviving Malcolm X: A Journey of Strength from Wife to Widow to Heroine*, 281–82. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2005.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Shabazz, Betty. "Loving and Losing Malcolm." Edited by Susan Taylor. *Essence,* 1992.

Shabazz, Ilyasah, and Kim McLarin. "Camp Betsey Cox." Essay. In *Growing up x*, 82–83. New York, NY: One World/Ballantine Books, 2002.

Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *In the wake: On blackness and being*. London, UK: Duke University Press, 2016.

Smith, Jane I. "Islam in the African American Community." Essay. In *Islam in America (Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series)*, 97–98. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers, and Mian Ahmed Shaheer Afaqi. "Shakeela Hassan: Narrating Religious Freedom in the Twenty-First Century." *American Religion* 3, no. 1 (2021): 82–105. https://doi.org/10.2979/amerreli.3.1.04.

Taylor, Ula Yvette. "Allah Temple of Islam Families: The Dillon Report." Essay. In *The Promise of Patriarchy Women and the Nation of Islam*, 42–43. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Vernon, Leah. *Unashamed: Musings of a fat, Black Muslim*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019.

Wadud, Amina. "A New Hajar Paradigm: Motherhood and Family." Essay. In *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, 120–58. Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2006.

Wadud, Amina. "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender." *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (1995): 37. https://doi.org/10.2307/1051608.

Wallace-Sanders, Kimberly, and Doris Witt. "What (N)Ever Happened to Aunt Jemima: Eating Disorders, Fetal Rights, and Black Female Appetite in Contemporary American Culture." Essay. In *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, 239–62. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

Washington University in St. Louis, Blackside, Inc. "Interview with Betty Shabazz," 2021.

Zia Hassan, Shakeela. *A Starry Crown Making of a Fez A Symbol of Distinction and Evolution for Leadership of Hon. Elijah Muhammad The Leader of The Nation of Islam*. Chicago, IL: Harran Productions Foundation, 2019.