Ashley Garner

Black Feminist Piety

A Framework for Engaging Islam in Black Feminist Sociology

Introduction

Garner writes about Black Muslim women because their social position often marginalizes them in religious studies, gender studies, and race studies. She builds a framework for thinking about Black feminist piety (BFP) outside of the "secularity" of sociology, the dominance of Christianity in religious studies, and the stubborn labeling of piety and religiosity as "unfeminist" in gender studies. The BFP of Black Muslim women resists rigid feminist definitions of agency and argues that agency can be used to challenge some social norms while supporting other norms.

Agentic or Not? (p. 184)

Feminist and womanist studies often use an agency perspective that evaluates acts within a "subversive versus submissive dichotomy". Garner problematizes the idea that agency and piety are antithetical to each other because piety and religiosity can afford women influence and power with certain communities. For example, tafsir -- religious exegesis -- can be used to influence community attitudes to sociopolitical issues. BFP analyses might question the purpose of exegesis and how continuous engagement with religious texts may be differently limited to some Muslims.

Core Themes of BFP

Patriarchy

Explicit gender roles in Islam divide responsibilities between genders and try to foster partnership in heteronormative relationships. BFP acknowledges that in patriarchal communities, Black women may prefer families to be organized by gender roles rather than families organized by racism.

Conversion

Converting to Islam can give Black women a chance to shift their personal and social narratives. Black *hijabis* embody a liminal space that somewhat avoids tropes associated with Black women's (a)sexuality. Beyond personal presentation, conversion to Islam is also associated with socio-political movements. While the Civil Rights Era saw a connection between the Black radical tradition and Black Muslim conversion, contemporary conversion may be motivated by ideals other than political consciousness.

(Non)Citizenship

Black people experience (non)citizenship because many institutions deny them full citizenship rights and minimize their sense of belonging. Muslims are also disenfranchised and treated as foreign despite national origins. Black women are positioned as "outsiders within" their religious community and their racial community. Black Muslim women's situations can give insight into how belonging based on identity markers impacts (non)citizenship.

Citation:
Garner, Ashley. 2022. "Black Feminist Piety: A Framework for Engaging Islam in Black Feminist Sociology" Pp. 182-193 in *Black Feminist Sociology*, edited by Z. Luna and W. N. Laster Pirtle. Routledge.