

My family was instrumental in shaping my career through both their objections and their eventual support. I have had many successes within the field and hope that my shared experience can shed some light on the many barriers that I have faced. I think that the first and most difficult barrier to overcome is the objections raised by the Black Muslim community to females pursuing a career in sports. It is important that our communities begin to engage in a wider capacity with the sport sector and start to understand the challenges as well as the vast opportunities available to those who have a passion for the game. I hope that my story can positively change the community views and result in an increase in the number of Black Muslim females, who feel confident to pursue football just like me. The pathway that my school coach created for my generation is the same pathway I am trying to create for the next.



JAWAHIR ROBLE

Jawahir Roble is the UK's first female Muslim referee. She is a Somali-born British football player, coach and mentor. She has won several awards and has been featured on many national media platforms in the UK in her work to encourage and inspire girls into pursuing a career in football.

THRIVE

BY MUNEERA WILLIAMS

In the summer of 2014, my friend Nisa came to visit. She was living in Brooklyn, New York at the time and she embodied everything I wanted to be as a young 30-something Muslim woman. It is not that I wanted her job or her particular lifestyle and it's not like we had exactly the same outlook on life, but there was something about her that always made me feel refreshed. In hindsight, I think it was her dedication to thriving. This pursuit was not haphazard nor unintentional. Nisa purposefully made an effort to wake up every morning and feel good, she was attuned with how her skin felt, what her hair needed, the power of good people in one's life, the side effects of othering, based on race, gender and faith; and she sought to counter that. For myself, I had been waking up every day and just going through the motions, not really thinking about a happier mindful me. I had become used to bouts of anxiety, depression, and harmful thinking since my early teens, but that summer my body had had enough, I felt heavy and worn and was in need of a change. Nisa, the daughter of an Imam, was the first woman I met who had completed a triathlon. After much questioning she showed me how she started running using the Couch to 5K method, that summer was the summer I slowly introduced intentional wellbeing into my life.

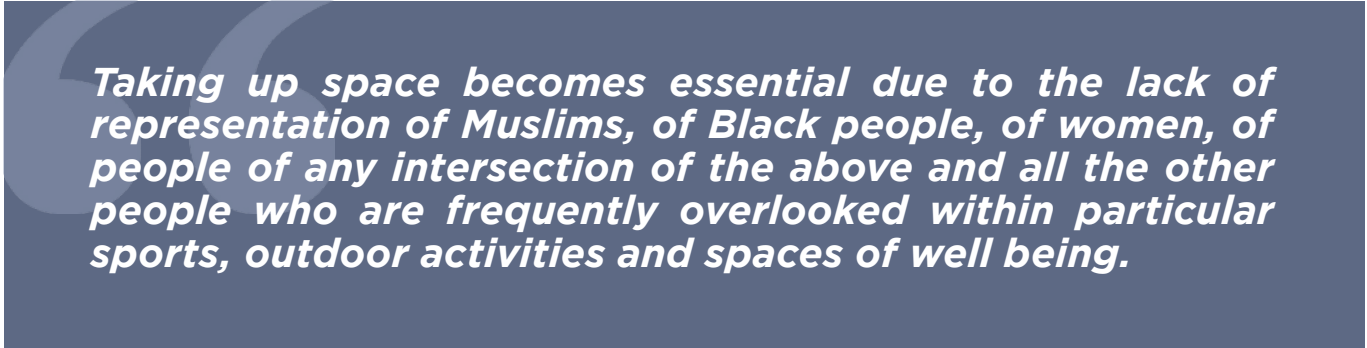
Just under 6 years later and we are at the beginning of a global pandemic. I am sitting in a doctors surgery after ignoring letters from the doctor requesting me to book an appointment for almost a year now. I have been having severe knee pain for a while, and although I did not know the details I knew the result of the MRI scan that I had taken a year ago would result in me having to give up running. "It has taken me a year to come to terms with it," I explained to the doctor. Up until now running had been my go-to stress management, and here he was telling me I could no longer pursue it, and that's when I started cycling.

The Bristol to Bath Cycle Path is a 15-mile off-road cycle lane which was once an old railway route between the cities and is now one of the most popular railway cycling routes in the country (Wills, 2019). After I mastered cul de sacs, outgrew car parks and finished my free cycling lessons with Life Cycle Bristol, it was time to master said cycle path. My instructor and a neighbour prepared me with everything that I would need to know and wear. Gloves, because the first thing you will do if you fall off your bike is push out your hands to cushion the fall, helmet to protect my head of course, water and snacks, and glasses to protect my eyes from bugs, sun, wind, rain and any flying loose debris. The thing that they could not protect me from however is the overt feeling of difference as a result of the actions of other cyclists.

The unfortunate thing about privilege and prejudice, is that it is one of those really difficult things to prove, and the onus is always on the recipient to prove that the snigger, the look, the comment, or the laugh was insidious? This is how racism, sexism and every other form of hate-based -ism or phobia has been allowed to permeate society. There is no way that I can prove that it was because of my gender, race, faith or even size that I received all of the aforementioned when I rode on the cycle path on that day, but what I can say, is in talking to other Black and brown people, working-class people, women, and anyone of any intersection of the above, who has been cycling for longer than I have, they talked of an archetype of a white middle-class male that is heavily represented in cycling. As I was noticing this in my personal experiences, little did I know that there was a wider discussion going on about the

lack of representations and the exclusivity that saturates cycling. Whether it was women being excluded from cycling groups, or Black men being approached by police at the end of cycling routes and quizzed about "what they had been up to." A more overt example was during the heat of summer, the heat of lockdown, and the heat of tension due to the continued murder of Black people at the hands of authorities, people from all walks of life were declaring Black Lives Matter yet on prominent cycling platforms there were ongoing discussions about how cycling should be a Black Lives Matter Free zone.

The idea that cycling was a safe space for middle-class white men alone was something that I wanted to challenge. The joy of cycling and inclusion in cycling is something that I wanted everyone to feel was accessible to them. That was one of the inspirations for Black Muslim Women Bike.



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Rather than it being exclusively for Black Muslim women, myself and my co-founder Sabah Soufi, realised those who are on the margin have the potential to make space for everyone if they decide to take up space themselves. As bell hooks said, "the margin is more than as a site of deprivation, it is the site of radical possibility." Once we set up the platform we began to meet other people further along on the journey of taking up space and reclaiming cycling. I say reclaiming because, for many of us, cycling was not something totally new. It was something that was a part of our childhood, yet somewhere between there and adulthood, cycling became a luxury and not just in terms of finance, but a cultural luxury. Cycling was a part of our history, many members of my family used to cycle throughout the hilly peaks of St Thomas Jamaica, with baskets full of vegetables like breadfruit, yam and green banana, delivering them to peoples houses. And then there are those who have always been cycling but have just never been represented.

My city, Bristol is fast becoming known as a cycling city, yet complaints of lack of diversity and representation, and lack of support for Black cyclists and cyclists of colour into mainstream clubs are conversations that are now being had. One of the main cycling organisations looking to push the agenda of cycling in the city has denied the relevance of this topic by saying the percentage of cyclists is in line with the diversity of the city. In other words, 'we are happy with the way things are currently, and therefore this is not a conversation that we will be having.'

Here we are in the era of fighting for the acceptance of Black lives to matter; not thrive, prosper, flourish or bloom, just matter. The state of existence is still a conversation, still an argument to be made, a debate to be had. This is why it becomes essential for all those on the perceived margins to take up space in areas outside of struggle and victimisation. Taking up space becomes essential due to the lack of representation of Muslims, of Black people, of women, of people of any intersection of the above and all the other people who are frequently overlooked within particular sports, outdoor activities and spaces of well being. It is a tool for resisting, existing and thriving. This becomes more than a pursuit of the individual, but an endeavour where the efforts of each individual go some way to the re-humanisation of the whole. This is not to say we are not human, nor is the individual tasked with ‘saving the nation,’ yet when the sight of a Black Muslim woman on a bike, on a cycle path, in cycling gear is an oddity to the extent that people are emboldened to, express “you don’t belong, thriving is not afforded to you,” This is the dehumanisation that we need to resist.



MUNEERA WILLIAMS

Muneera Williams @Blackmuslimwomenbike on instagram and some other women who are resisting and shifting perspectives Shazfit, Olly B, Asra Run Club, Zainab Alema, Asma Elbadawi, and @Abiir187 on Instagram.

**SPORTS PERFORMANCE
ACADEMY: AMBITIONS AND
CURRENT WORK**

BY AL-AMEEN AMODU