

BLACK MUSLIM COSMOPOLITANISM: THE GLOBAL CHARACTER OF NEW YORK CITY'S

BLACK MUSLIM MOVEMENTS, 1929-1990

Rasul Hanif Miller

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Supervisor of Dissertation

---

Mary Frances Berry

Geraldine R. Segal Professor of American Social Thought  
and Professor of History

Graduate Group Chairperson

---

Benjamin Nathans, Associate Professor of History

Dissertation Committee

Eve Troutt Powell

Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of History

Cheikh Anta Babou

Associate Professor of History

Ann Farnsworth-Alvear

Associate Professor of History

*Dedication page*

To the elders, whose wisdom, insight, and willingness to share their stories made this  
work possible.

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## ABSTRACT

BLACK MUSLIM COSMOPOLITANISM: THE GLOBAL CHARACTER OF NEW  
YORK CITY'S BLACK MUSLIM MOVEMENTS, 1929-1990

Rasul H. Miller

Mary Frances Berry

This dissertation examines Black American orthodox Muslims' engagement with Islam in Africa during the twentieth century. In the 1930s, growing numbers of Black Americans in urban centers of the U.S. embraced Islam. Their interest in African Diasporic pasts and pan-Africanism fueled their desire to build connections with Islamic communities and scholarly genealogies beyond the nation's boundaries. The urban environment of New York City nurtured such connections and influenced Black Muslims' theological orientations. These communities engaged discourses of Black and Muslim Internationalisms, reflecting the global character of the city. As a result, they prioritized building solidarities with Muslim immigrants in the U.S. and Muslims abroad — especially those from and on the African continent. This led to the emergence of a unique cultural and sociopolitical disposition that I term Black Muslim cosmopolitanism, which reinforced Black American Muslims' ability to imagine themselves within a global context. I argue that New York City's Black American orthodox Muslims actualized their notions of global citizenship through travel, religious education, and historical inquiry, and that they engaged and reconfigured the doctrinal articulations and religious practices of Muslims in places like Senegal, Egypt, and Sudan to construct approaches to Islam uniquely suited to meet the needs of Black communities in the urban U.S.

This dissertation thus provides insight into how religious identities and political imaginaries are mutually constituted, and contributes to our understanding of the emergence of alternative modalities of cosmopolitanism during the twentieth century. It draws upon more than sixty original oral life histories from members of the various New York City Black Muslim congregations as well as memoirs written by community members, census records, local Muslim community publications, site visits, and participant observations conducted locally in around New York City and in Medina Baye, Senegal.

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## INTRODUCTION: INVISIBLE BLACK MUSLIMS

In March of 1954, Malcolm X arrived in New York City and began his illustrious career as the minister of Harlem's Mosque #7 of the Nation of Islam. He would go on to serve as Elijah Muhammad's national representative and help catapult the organization to an unprecedented level of success. The subsequent growth of the Nation of Islam into a huge, national religious organization introduced scores of people throughout the United States to the Muslim faith and helped facilitate Islam's emergence as a popular religion amongst Black Americans. However, at the time when Malcolm X first arrived, it appears that there were no more than a few dozen members of the Nation<sup>1</sup> in New York City, with some estimating its national membership at around only 400 followers.<sup>2</sup> But this was by no means the beginning of the Black American Muslim presence in New York. By the time of Malcolm's arrival, there were certainly hundreds, and possibly thousands of Black Americans in New York City alone who would have identified themselves as Muslims. The majority of them embraced the tenants of the Sunni Muslim tradition, which both its adherents and critics in the U.S. often referred to as "orthodox" Islam. In spite of their long history in New York City and in several other major cities around the country, Black American orthodox Muslims have received little scholarly attention. Both the dominant historical narrative and popular perception usually hold that the Nation of Islam preceded the presence of any significant numbers of Black American orthodox Muslims in America. Who, then, were these Black American orthodox Muslims who

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<sup>1</sup> Here and throughout the text, I use the phrase "the Nation" to refer to "the Nation of Islam". I have adopted this approach in conformity with the naming practices of most of the community members whom I interviewed.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Evanzz, *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 159.

built religious communities in New York City prior to 1954? Where did they come from? What did they believe? How did they worship? What impact did they have on the city's religious, cultural, and political landscape?

This dissertation examines the development of the Black American orthodox Muslim community in New York City from 1929, when a pioneering community member began a journey that took him to New York, then Turkey, then Egypt before settling in nearby New Jersey where he would exert significant influence on Muslim congregations throughout the region, to 1989, the year that the first known American-born woman to memorize the entire Qur'an completed her studies at a boarding school in Senegal collaboratively founded by West African and Black American Muslims. This introduction discusses how previous academic works have dealt with the emergence of Islam as a major part of the Black American religious landscape during the twentieth century. It historicizes the notion of "Black Muslims" and problematizes some of the perceptions associated with the term, challenging depictions of Black American Muslims as heterodox and provincial. This chapter also explains some of the terminology and key theoretical concepts that animate subsequent chapters.

The first chapter examines the role of three institutions in preserving a communal memory of Islam's place in the Black Atlantic world among the descendants of enslaved Africans in the U.S. These institutions –Prince Hall Freemasonry, Marcus Garvey's UNIA, and the Moorish Science Temple – were all instrumental in keeping that memory alive even as the realities of trans-Atlantic slavery and the era of racial terror that directly followed made it virtually impossible for enslaved African Muslims to transmit their Islamic identity or religious education to their progeny. These institutions thus set the

stage for the reemergence of Black American orthodox Muslim communities in the early twentieth century, and in some cases served as incubators for those communities.

The focus of chapter two is a figure named Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen who, after serving as one of the most prominent leaders of the Moorish Science Temple during the 1920s, left that community in 1929 and began promoting orthodox Islam. After a short stint in New York amidst the city's nascent orthodox Muslim community, Ezaldeen went on to travel to the Muslim world, pursuing Arabic and classical Islamic education in Egypt for roughly five years. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1936, Ezaldeen began organizing some of the first Black American orthodox Muslim congregations, creating a national network to bring the country's Black orthodox Muslims together, and serving as a mentor to a younger generation of Black American Muslim leaders who would go on to establish communities of their own on the East Coast and in the Midwest. Professor Ezaldeen also represents an important node in the development of what I term Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism. By building on the moral geography and alternative historical narrative popularized by Noble Drew Ali, and then expanding that narrative to include the Arab World, Professor Ezaldeen inspired many Black American orthodox Muslims to move beyond simply identifying with an imagined Afro-Asiatic community and instead engage orthodox Islam and Arabic language and culture more substantively. Moreover, Professor Ezaldeen empowered Black American orthodox Muslims by increasing their awareness of the Africanity or 'Blackness' of a sizable number among the Arabs of antiquity, including some of those who made up the ranks of the Prophet Muhammad's followers.

The third chapter discusses the life of two Caribbean-born Black American orthodox Muslims – Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal and his wife, Mother Khadijah Faisal – and the community they built together in Brooklyn beginning in the late 1930s. As the founders of one of New York City’s first Black American-led mosques, the Islamic Mission of America, alternatively known as the State Street Mosque, Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah enjoy a special status as architects of the city’s first thriving Muslim community with significant Black American membership. Utilizing oral histories collected from members of the State Street Mosque community representing two generations, along with census records and Shaykh Daoud’s own writings, I reconstruct and analyze the culturally vibrant community of Black American jazz artists and cultural influencers that the State Street Mosque nurtured. I also consider the presence of African, Arab, and South Asian Muslim immigrants at the State Street Mosque as Black American orthodox Muslims worked to build an ethnically diverse religious community of Muslims in New York City. This example, along with that of smaller orthodox Muslim communities founded in Harlem during the same period that were similarly constructed, reveals the role of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism in fueling Black Americans’ desire to support and collaborate with immigrant Muslims, which in turn reinforced Black American Muslims’ global cultural consciousness. I further examine Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s strategies to achieve self-determination for Muslims in the U.S., their efforts to promote their Muslim faith, and their commitment to fostering solidarity between Black Americans and the formerly colonized peoples of the Muslim world. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the Black American led, multiracial community of worshipers who attended the State Street Mosque since its founding in the late 1930s was

supplanted by a community of Arab Muslim immigrants during the 1970s, resulting in the partial erasure of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's unique cultural and historical legacy.

Chapter four excavates the power-building strategies that Black American orthodox Muslims adopted during the 1960s and 1970s. It focuses on the two largest and most influential New York City mosques that were founded during this period. The first, Masjid Ya Sin in Brooklyn, served as the headquarters for the Dar ul Islam Movement – the largest national network of Black American orthodox Muslim communities in the U.S. at its height. The second, the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood in Harlem, is the lineal descendant of Malcolm X's Muslim Mosque Inc., which he formed after being forced out of the Nation of Islam in 1964. During this period, Black political and cultural nationalism became central parts of Black community and religious life in the city, which transformed Black American Muslims' attitudes around not only religion, but also gender, race, and political economy. Simultaneously, the emergence of Islamic nationalism in the Middle East and South Asia shaped the beliefs and practices of Muslims around the globe, including Black Muslims in New York City. Demographic shifts made it difficult to maintain the multiethnic Muslim communities that characterized the preceding decades. In an era characterized by grassroots organizing, hypermasculine militancy, and radical critiques of white, western capitalist hegemony, these communities sought to achieve a greater degree of self-determination by building alternative political economic infrastructures that consisted of businesses, schools, print periodicals, and urban militias that implemented systems of community policing. While members of the Dar ul Islam movement and the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood faced

similar challenges associated with urban poverty and the War on Drugs, their ideological responses diverged in significant ways as contestation between Black and Muslim internationalisms prompted Black American orthodox Muslims to engage communities and discourses beyond the U.S.'s borders in varied ways.

The fifth chapter examines one of the trajectories produced by Black American orthodox Muslims' increased engagement with the communities and discourses of the broader Muslim World that took place during the 1970s. As globalization made Muslim communities in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East more accessible to those living in the U.S., Black Muslims' cosmopolitan consciousness inspired some Black American Muslims to pursue a more substantive engagement with the communities, histories, and institutions of majority-Muslim countries. During the late 1970s, some members of the Dar ul Islam movement and the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood became increasingly interested in the traditions of Sufism on the Indian subcontinent and in sub-Saharan Africa, respectively. Fueled by an enduring interest in African Muslim Diasporic pasts, some Black American orthodox Muslims sought to cultivate tangible relationships with African Muslims and traditions of African Islamic scholarship. This chapter thus provides a case study of the American Tijani Sufi community, which is the oldest and largest Black American Sufi community in the U.S. The Black Americans who joined the Tijani Sufi order actualized long-standing notions about African Muslim Diasporic connectedness by traveling in large numbers to the Tijani hub of Medina Baye, Senegal, where they collaborated with Senegalese Islamic scholars to found the African American Islamic Institute — a school and humanitarian organization dedicated to fostering cross-cultural exchange through religious education.

## Sources

In conducting research for this dissertation, I collected more than sixty original oral life histories from members of the various communities I discuss throughout. I met many of these women and men in the context of my research, while others I had a prior relationship with. My youngest narrators were in their late 40s. These people were born into the communities that I focus on in this study and continued to identify with some Black American Muslim community during their adult years. Most of the people interviewed were much older – in their 60s, 70s, or 80s at the time of our interview. As a Black American Muslim in my 30s, I presented myself to my interviewees as their coreligionist with a shared racial identity. In these ways, I was seen as a member of a shared community. This, combined with the extensive community relationships that I had cultivated before undertaking the project, afforded me considerable access, with some interviewees openly expressing their added confidence in – and higher expectation of – my ability to share their stories with care and discretion.

My relationship with the Black Muslim communities in the region began during my early childhood in nearby North Jersey. My father had frequented several New York City mosques since the 1970s. I subsequently moved out of the area but began visiting New York City every summer as a high school student during the late 1990s. I deepened my community connections in the years that followed, ultimately moving to New York City in the Fall of 2005. I frequented many of the city's mosques, studied formally and informally with local Muslim religious scholars, and spent time with community elders. The insights gleaned from being an embedded member of New York's Black Muslim

community for many years not only provided me greater community access, but also aided me in the process of interpreting and decoding the data I collected. My narrators were able to discuss nuanced issues related to debates about Islamic doctrine and practice, intercommunal conflicts, and subtle social and cultural dynamics without sacrificing their legibility.

Overall, my positionality in relation to my narrators brought with it a host of advantages and limitations. As a man, I felt empowered to push my male narrators to more critically reflect upon the gender relations at play in their religious communities, as well as to discuss the challenges and pressures to meet societal expectations they faced as Black men. When interviewing women, I was forthright in inviting them to describe their gendered experiences as Black Muslim women. Due to my age and my status as an academic researcher, I was far from a peer to the women and men that I interviewed. In some cases, this may have influenced my narrators to depict the communities they participated in an overly positive manner. However, by interviewing a diverse group of people with regard to gender, class, and congregational affiliation, I was able to challenge and corroborate the narratives that were dictated to me. I attempted to account for the inherent limitations of working with oral histories by utilizing a host of additional sources. I consulted memoirs written by community members, religious texts published in Arabic and English, newspapers, census records, local Muslim community publications, site visits, and participant observations conducted locally in around New York City, and abroad in Medina Baye, Senegal.

During my fieldwork in New York, I regularly attended community events, classes, and worship services and had countless discussions, sometimes off the record,

with formal and informal leaders as well as rank-and-file members of New York City's Muslim communities. This allowed me to better understand the social relations and cultural contexts that helped shaped Black Muslim life in the city. It also brought into focus a unique Black Muslim oral *tradition* through which communal memories of Black American Muslim history have been preserved and transmitted across generations. Participant observations conducted in Medina Baye, Senegal enabled me to better contextualize the beliefs and epistemologies promoted in the town's traditional West African Muslim learning circles and practices associated with the Tijani Sufi order – interrogating the reasons why Black American Muslims embraced them and how they appropriated them to serve their own religious needs.

### **The Politics of Black Orthodox Muslim Illegibility**

Prior to the 1930s, the literature on Islam in America was rather scant. Newspaper articles and a number of works published by Christian missionary groups bore witness to the presence of Muslim communities in several major U.S. cities that attracted growing numbers of Black American migrants from the South. Both the Moorish Science Temple and the Ahmadiyya community — two heterodox Muslim groups that served as the most active promoters of Islamic identity among Black Americans prior to the late 1930s — produced their own literature, which enjoyed a growing audience of Black American readers. However, scholarly treatments of Black American Muslims were virtually non-existent at this time. During the late 1930s, this began to change. In 1938, the American journal of Sociology published an article entitled “The Voodoo Cult Among American Negro Migrants.” This work by Erdmann Beynon, a Christian minister, focuses on the

Nation of Islam during the 1930s, and seems to be largely inspired by sensational headlines in local Detroit newspapers in the wake of clashes between the Nation and the police. Beynon's article makes reference to what the author seems to perceive as a sort of paradox between the "cultural isolation" experienced by members of the Nation and their "functional relationship in the metropolitan economy."<sup>3</sup> He also gives significant attention to the curious and rather vague allegation that some members of the nascent Nation of Islam in Detroit engaged in human sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> While it is clear that Beynon viewed the Nation of Islam as a worthwhile subject of study, and probably more sympathetically than law enforcement officials, it is equally clear from his depiction of the Nation as an 'organized cult' attractive to 'maladjusted negroes' that he likely questioned its legitimacy as a religious community.<sup>5</sup> He also attributes the appeal of the Nation among Black migrants from the South to their disillusionment with life in the North and its promotion of "race-consciousness and anti-Caucasian prejudice."<sup>6</sup>

In 1944, the anthropologist Arthur Huff Fauset published a landmark text entitled *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, providing a survey and analysis of five Black religious institutions that had been recently established as a result of the Great Migration. One of the five "cults" he considers is the Moorish Science Temple of America. Fauset gives significant consideration to the Moorish Science Temple's beliefs, practices, and doctrines, and his locating of the movement within a context of urban Black religious heterodoxy falls more or less in line with earlier depictions of Black American

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<sup>3</sup> Erdmann Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (1938): 894.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 900.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 906.

identification with Islam as novel and eccentric, and a product of these Black American's political consciousness rather than their religious sensibilities.

In 1961, C. Eric Lincoln published *The Black Muslims in America* during a period that saw a groundswell of interest in the Nation of Islam. Primarily a sociological study, the work gives some consideration to community's religious practice, but depicts the Nation primarily as a political movement. Lincoln's treatment is quite sympathetic, demonstrating why the Nation of Islam and the beliefs espoused by its two most visible leaders, Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, appealed to more and more Black people in the U.S. However, he remained hampered by the same dichotomous framework that guided the works of earlier authors who felt inclined to explain the motivations of members of Black Muslim congregations as either "political" or "religious." This notion continued to color depictions of Black American Muslims among scholars up to the turn of the century.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, a number of scholars crafted works on Black American Muslims that were far richer in depth and breadth than most of their predecessors. Two examples are Richard Brent Turner's *Islam in the African American Experience* and Edward Curtis IV's *Islam in Black America*. Curtis followed his work with *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* in 2006. Both of these authors provided thorough treatments of Black American Muslim communities and offered valuable insights about the intellectual genealogy of some of the most prominent leaders in these communities. However, their works were also impacted by the pervasive theoretical trends of the field. While Turner's work is path breaking, he takes at face value the notion, promoted by orientalist scholars of Islam, that Islamic orthodoxy is

synonymous with the textualist approach to Muslim religiosity that has become normative in the modern Middle East. This forces Turner to discuss Islam in the African Diaspora not in terms of Black Muslims' engagement with the tradition, but rather in terms of their signification of Islamic identities.

Curtis' works discuss the tensions and inconsistencies between popular notions of Islamic orthodoxy and the rather heterodox iterations of Islam crafted by the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple. He correctly challenges the presumption of early authors like Lincoln and Udon who depict the Nation as primarily a political, rather than religious, organization. However, Curtis not only asserts the Nation's validity as a religious movement. He goes further to assert the *Islamicity* of the Nation. In other words, he maintains that since the members of the Nation understood themselves to be Muslim, there need be no further conversation as to the legitimacy of their notion of Islamic identity. While this approach allows him to take seriously the religious beliefs, claims, and practices promoted by the Nation of Islam, it also mutes the intense contestations over Islamic orthodoxy between competing Black Muslim communities that helped define both the Nation of Islam and early twentieth century Black orthodox Muslim communities.

This conundrum was famously considered by the cultural anthropologist Talal Asad in his 1986 essay "The idea of an anthropology of Islam." In the essay, Asad asserts that, for the anthropologist, that are three ways to define Islam:

"(1) that in the final analysis there is no such theoretical object as Islam; (2) that Islam is the anthropologist's label for a heterogeneous collection of items, each of which has been designated Islamic by informants; (3) that Islam is a distinctive historical totality which organizes various aspects of social life."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 2.

Asad concludes that the first option is not tenable because there is, in fact, something in the world called ‘Islam’. He further contends that the second possibility is problematic, because to define Islam as anything that any self-proclaimed Muslim imagines it to be creates a paradox. If two Muslims challenge one another’s claims to be Muslim, then which definition of Islam must we accept, and which definition will we reject? After affirming the third option as the only acceptable one, Asad offers a useful device for thinking about Islam that acknowledges a diversity of thought among Muslims while still recognizing that all Muslims are engaging a shared set of sources, doctrines, and practices. He refers to it as a discursive tradition. In other words, for Asad, Islam *is* the broader tradition of ideas and practices that all Muslims engage, albeit on their own terms. By adopting this approach in my own work, my goal is to move beyond constraining discussions of Black American Muslims as either politically or religiously motivated. Instead, I seek to challenge that very dichotomy and instead interrogate how Black American Muslims sought to engage various ideological currents that emerged out of global Muslim discourses.

### **1975: The Birth of Black orthodox Islam?**

The historiography of twentieth century Black American Muslim communities has tended to reflect a teleological narrative that culminates with a massive shift of Black American Muslims towards Sunni Islam in 1975 upon the passing of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Elijah Muhammad’s son, W. D. Mohammed, emerged as the leader of his father’s movement, the Nation of Islam, and began to initiate several radical changes within the community on a national level — not the least of which being his

espousal of orthodox Sunni, ‘global’ Islam by 1976. This transition coincided with the emergence of large immigrant Muslim communities in the U.S. in the wake of changes in U.S. immigration policies a decade earlier.<sup>8</sup> This historical moment is presumed, by many, to have provided Black American Muslims with their first substantive introduction to Sunni Muslim orthodoxy en masse. Perhaps the foremost theorist of Black American Islam, Sherman Jackson, has referred to adherents to the pre-1975 ideology of the Nation of Islam, as well as members of the older Moorish Science Temple as being ‘proto-Islamic,’ encapsulating the teleological nature of this narrative. The Black American orthodox Muslim communities that I chronicle and analyze in this dissertation problematize that narrative. Further, they undermine the assertion made by some historians that Sunni Islam’s “universalist” nature rendered it incompatible with the political sensibilities of Black Americans primarily concerned with combating anti-Black racism and racial discrimination in the U.S.

Thus, Black American expressions of Islam have often been depicted as largely heterodox. Indeed, some of the most important and impactful Muslim movements in the U.S. have challenged the relevance of many orthodox Muslim doctrines. In an effort to assert the historical importance of African American Islam, scholars like Sherman Jackson and Edward Curtis IV have given a great deal of consideration to Black American heterodox Muslim movements. These movements played an integral role in the spread of Islam throughout the U.S. However, the approach of such scholars has

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<sup>8</sup> The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished previous quota-based systems based on national origin. The new policy instead sought to attract highly skilled immigrants, thus leading to an increase in immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

contributed to an imbalance in the literature and reinforced a false dichotomy between different iterations of Islam, which they often depict as wholly distinct from one another.<sup>9</sup>

In such scholarly portrayals, “Black American” Islam, typified by the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple, is branded as heterodox, nationalistic, and invested in the cultural and political economic project of Black empowerment. Conversely, Black American orthodox Muslims have been depicted as conventional, universalist, and comparatively apathetic with regard to the injustices that face African-descended peoples in the West. In this manner, the historiography of Black American Islam has come to resemble that of Islam in “Black” Africa — the “Islam *Noir*” that has plagued historians and theorists of African Muslim societies since the colonial era. Like its counterpart in the field of Islam in Africa, Black American Islam has been depicted as predominantly heterodox and provincial.<sup>10</sup> However, the work of scholars of Black American Muslim movements like Jackson and Curtis is distinct from that of advocates of *Islam Noir* in important ways. In their work, Black American Islam is not associated with the docility of *Islam Noir*, nor is the “authentic” Islam of what is imagined to be the Muslim world seen as necessarily superior. On the contrary, many of the tendencies of orthodox Muslims in this context are portrayed as foreign, culturally predatory, and incompatible with the radical, anti-imperial politics of Black Nationalism. In this manner, the subordinate position of “Black” Islam is turned on its head. This inversion is, perhaps, reflective of the anti-racist sympathies that these authors exhibit. And to this end, their

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<sup>9</sup> Amir Al-Islam, “Sunni Islam in the African American Experience: The Dialectic and Dialogic of Race, Ethnicity, and Islamicity Mapping and Decoding The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, 1964-2001” (PhD diss., New York University, 2010), 99–100. Al-Islam makes the related point that such trends have obscured the experience of Black Sunni Muslims, and ignored the wide diversity that exists among Black Muslims generally.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Islam noir, see Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11-17.

emphasis on the importance of groups like the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple for the emergence of Islam in the twentieth century U.S. achieves a commendable goal. Moreover, regardless of what political agenda we may glean from the work of such authors, the importance of these groups and the impact of the ideologies they promoted on the broader intellectual, cultural, and political landscape of the U.S. cannot be overstated.

Though it may appear expedient for the aforementioned reasons, such a historical rendering has produced a considerable degree of erasure. While scholars have explored the history of the Nation of Islam with some analytical rigor across two generations (notably, even the Moorish Science Temple has not received a comparable degree of attention), there has still been little academic study of Black American orthodox Muslim communities. The city's largest and most prominent Muslim house of worship, Brooklyn's Islamic Mission of America, attracted many of the musicians that made up Brooklyn's legendary jazz scene.<sup>11</sup> It would go on to directly inspire the creation of the Dar ul Islam movement, which ultimately became the nation's largest African American Sunni community with affiliated mosques in major cities around the country, attracting radical Black activists such as the former SNCC leader and Black Panther H. Rap Brown, now known as Imam Jamil al-Amin. The same Brooklyn community, founded in the 1930's, would inspire the creation of the Ansarullah community, whose reach would include notable creators of culture from the hip-hop generation.<sup>12</sup> This is not to mention the Black American Sunni Muslim communities of cities like Chicago, Philadelphia,

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<sup>11</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, "Ahmed Abdul-Malik's Islamic Experimentalism," in *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Well known hip hop artists believed to have had some affiliation to the Ansar Allah movement include the likes of Jay-Z, Afrika Bambaataa, De La Soul, and Twista to name just a few.

Detroit, Newark, Cleveland, Pittsburg, and St. Louis, with histories dating back just as far. What the emergent narrative of Black American Islam has rendered illegible is the very thing that it seeks to affirm — the presence of a Black American Muslim community that felt empowered to interpret the Islamic faith on its own terms. Moreover, elucidating the long history of this community is critical to the construction of an unabashedly “American” Islam capable of successfully reconciling the purported conflicts between an Islamic religious and philosophical worldview and that of Western modernity.

### **Writing Local Histories of Black American Muslims**

The story of Islam in twentieth century New York City is characterized by constant transition. During the early twentieth century, the city would feel the indelible impact of the Great Migration, the New Negro Movement, the founding of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association in the U.S., the first World War, and the beginnings of the Harlem Renaissance. These events served as the backdrop for the emergence of what Patrick Bowen has termed the African American Islamic Renaissance, referring to millions of African Americans’ embrace of the Muslim faith between roughly 1920 to 1975.<sup>13</sup> While this phenomenon would go on to alter the religious landscape of the entire country, it was primarily concentrated in a handful of cities on the East Coast and Midwest during its initial stages. Detroit, Chicago, Newark, Pittsburg, Buffalo, Philadelphia and, of course, New York City all boasted some of the earliest, numerically significant Black Muslim communities that emerged during the postbellum period.

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick D Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States. Vol. 2. The African American Islamic Renaissance, 1920-1975* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

Thus far, most of the literature on Islam in America has endeavored to craft national narratives and attempted to draw conclusions that are generalizable to Muslim communities throughout the country.<sup>14</sup> While these works have proved quite useful and informative, several scholars have demonstrated that a focus on particular cities is needed to uncover important regional differences that distinguish Muslim communities across varied American geographies. Works like Zain Abdullah's *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem*, Vivek Bald's *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*, and Sally Howell's *Old Islam in Detroit* demonstrate how the demographics and specific sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dynamics of New York City and Detroit respectively significantly impacted Islam's tenor in those cities.

Thus, the current study argues that the appearance and character of orthodox Black Muslims communities in New York between the late 1920s and the 1980s owes much to the unique environment cultivated by the city. During the early twentieth century, New York became the new home for a large community of Black Southern migrants in search of new economic opportunities, as well as new ways of being and new systems of belief. As a result, it also witnessed what the Black religious historian Sylvester Johnson has describes as the "rise of the Black ethnics," as many Black people embraced religious traditions that prompted them to reject the racial category of "Negro" and, instead identify themselves as "heirs to a unique, rich heritage comprising their own religion, customs, rituals, even language."<sup>15</sup> New York had this in common with other

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<sup>14</sup> A few examples include Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Edward E. Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester A. Johnson, "The Rise of Black Ethnics: The Ethnic Turn in African American Religions, 1916–1945," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (2010): 125–63,

major cities like Chicago and Philadelphia. Like Detroit, a city that attracted a particularly large population of Arab Muslim immigrants during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, New York City hosted communities of immigrants from majority-Muslim countries – in this case from South Asia, East and West Africa, and the Arab World – that were larger than those found in most other major U.S. cities. In addition to these factors, New York’s status as a port city, the home of Marcus Garvey, and arguably the country’s leading cultural hub all coalesced to provide a unique cultural context that influenced the sensibilities of its growing numbers of Black American Muslims. As a result of these factors, New York City’s Black American orthodox Muslims developed a consciousness informed by a history of Black Internationalism and discourses around anti-colonial solidarity and Afro-Asian solidarity, labor organizing and struggles for Black self-determination, African-centered Black cultural nationalism, and notions of Islamic religious orthodoxy. These characteristics converged to bring about an emergent Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism that would largely define the trajectory of the city’s Muslim population and would impact its Black religious and cultural life over the course of the following century.

### **Theorizing Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism**

I define cosmopolitan as any person or community that self-ascribes membership into a broader, multi-ethnic collective, thereby facilitating exchanges between a multiplicity of cultural influences within that collective. This does not necessarily imply

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<https://doi.org/10.1525/rac.2010.20.2.125>; Judith Weisenfeld, *New World a-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). Weisenfeld discusses the emergence of ‘religio-racial movements’ during the first half the twentieth century. I rely on Weisenfeld’s framing in my discussion of early twentieth century Black American orthodox Muslim communities in chapters 2 and 3.

actual interaction between individual members of this collective from differing ethnic backgrounds, though it may certainly give rise to such. Thus, the cosmopolitanism of Black American Muslims had two dimensions: one spatial, and the other imaginary. In other words, Black American Muslims were cosmopolitan with regard to the multi-ethnic communities they helped to build, and also with regard to the way they imagined themselves as members of a transnational faith community, promoting them to draw upon ideas and cultural expressions from beyond the borders of the U.S. My conception of a unique Black Muslim cosmopolitanism is informed by Arjun Appadurai's notion of cosmopolitanism from below. Appadurai's framework, like my own, expresses the multiplicity of perspectives inherent in the idea of cosmopolitanism, but without connoting the "self-cultivation, universalism, or the ideas of globalism with which it is historically linked in Enlightenment Europe."<sup>16</sup> This does not, however, preclude other concepts of self-cultivation or globalism that emerged independent and outside Enlightenment Europe, such as those grounded in the ideologies of Islam or Pan-Africanism. Indeed, Appadurai goes on to explain this cosmopolitanism from below "has in common with the more privileged form of cosmopolitanism the urge to expand one's current horizons of self and cultural identity and a wish to connect with a wider world in the name of values which, in principle, could belong to anyone and apply in any circumstance."<sup>17</sup> He describes this kind of cosmopolitanism in the context of the activism crafted by impoverished, marginalized, and homeless residents of low-income communities and slums in Mumbai, India. In elucidating the qualities of cosmopolitanism from below, he depicts a cosmopolitan orientation that has three salient characteristics.

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<sup>16</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Cosmopolitanism from Below: Some Ethical Lessons from the Slums of Mumbai," *The Johannesburg Salon* 4 (2011): 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 28.

First, it is developed for and by the underprivileged rather than the wealthy. Second, it emerges out of a locale marked by its diversity, accessibility (Mumbai being a large “island city”, similar to New York City ), and the trans-regional origins of its inhabitants — Appadurai refers to Mumbai as “a city of ‘outsiders’ from the start. Third, it lends itself to the mobilization of resources in the service of the underclass. With regard to this last point, Appadurai describes the strategies for community organization, economic cooperation, and activism that these trans-regional networks fostered in Mumbai.

The organizational structures, political economic strategies, and activism of the UNIA, the MST, the Nation, Sufi Abdul Hameed, and later that of the MIB and the Dar ul Islam movements all demonstrate parallels to such a mobilization of the concept of cosmopolitanism in their ability to draw on knowledge and or coalitions outside of their specific cities and, in some cases, outside of the US. If we consider the broader Black American context out of which Black Muslim cosmopolitanism grew, then the economic cooperatives of Ella Baker, the labor organizing of A. Phillip Randolph, the “Don’t buy where you can’t work” campaign, and the early political successes of Adam Clayton Powell – all of which took place in Harlem during the first half of the twentieth century – can be identified as examples of this particular kind of cosmopolitanism from below.

However, as applicable as Appadurai’s theorization is here, it is also important to understand that Black Muslim cosmopolitanism is the product of a particularly Black cultural and intellectual milieu. As I will attempt to demonstrate, this context was marked by a global awareness and a particular political orientation grounded in activism and resistance to white supremacy that took shape within Black American communities

during the early 1900s.<sup>18</sup> In *Black Cosmopolitanism*, Ifeoma Nwankwo recounts the emergence of a transnational consciousness among people of African descent in the Americas. She defines cosmopolitanism as “the definition of oneself through the world beyond one’s own origins,” and posits her conception of Black cosmopolitanism as a way for understanding how many people of African descent throughout the Black Atlantic came to see themselves, and be seen by others, in relation to imperialism, modernity, and globality.<sup>19</sup> Emboldened by triumph of the Haitian revolution and a sense of impending justice for Blacks in the Americas who were the product of a history of slavery and imperial subjugation, this consciousness was inherently anti-colonial. The discourses of Garveyism, Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism, and Black internationalism could thusly all be conceived as an outgrowth of the Black cosmopolitan consciousness that she examines. The emergence of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism was thus spurred on by the same sociopolitical and cultural impulse. Black Americans in New York City — many of whom had been impacted by the discourses of Garveyism and Pan-Africanism, some of them plugged into the global networks of Freemasonry, and others having pursued careers as musicians and merchant seaman — carried with them the legacy of this Black cosmopolitan consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Such a consciousness gave rise to an anti-colonial rhetoric

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<sup>18</sup> This will become clear in my discussion of the relationship between Black American orthodox Muslim communities and the discourses of Pan-Africanism, anti colonialism, and the Black Power movements.

<sup>19</sup> Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005): 9; Julius Sherrard Scott and Marcus Rediker, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018). Scott and Rediker’s text provides a revealing account of how African Diasporic communities throughout the Caribbean developed communication networks that facilitated a transnational awareness of Black liberation movements in the wake Haitian revolution.

<sup>20</sup> For discussions of Freemasonry among Muslims in America, see Robert Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Ghanea-Bassiri, A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order*. For a discussion of the linkages between Islam and music, see Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture* (New York: Vintage, 2014).

of Afro-Asian solidarity within the discourse of early twenty century Islam in America.<sup>21</sup> Against a historical backdrop that included both World Wars, colonization, racial segregation, and a close proximity to the small numbers of non-white Muslim immigrants who had no choice but to build relationships with their new Black neighbors, this consciousness would be nurtured and transformed in the context of the Muslim communities that took form before 1955. Thus developed this Black Muslim cosmopolitanism: a cosmopolitanism from below, but one that was uniquely born out the experience of Black people in the West during the early twentieth century who chose to embrace the religious identity of Islam, and who entered into conversation and community with other non-white peoples as a result of this identification.

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<sup>21</sup> This is reflected in the concept of the “Asiatic” in the writings of Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad, as well as in the orthodox Muslim communities’ propensity to build connections with Muslim immigrants from Asia and Middle East and to find inspiration in movements from those regions.

## CHAPTER 1: AN ORIGIN STORY

### **Black Muslim Memories**

Ascertaining the origins of New York City's Black Muslim community presents a number of challenges. The early history of these communities went largely undocumented. Due to the city's ever-changing demographics, many of the pioneering collectives of Muslims who helped to initiate the emergence of New York's thriving Muslim scene have long disappeared, leaving only faint traces. However, there exists among Black Muslim community elders a distinct oral tradition regarding the various routes by which their religious communities took shape. This oral tradition can provide historians with instructive clues about the early history of Islam among Black Americans. While interviewing more than sixty Black Muslim elders in preparation for this dissertation, I found that two such streams were mentioned with some frequency. A number of the elders I interviewed indicated that Black Muslims had been involved in Marcus Garvey's UNIA, and asserted that the Garvey movement provided some early twentieth century Black New Yorkers with an introduction to Islam.

Perhaps less surprisingly, the Moorish Science Temple served as a second important organization that helped facilitate interest in Islam among Black Americans around the country. It is noteworthy, however, that contrary to the narrative reflected in many written historical accounts about Islam in America, members of the Moorish Science Temple in New York and throughout the Northeast seem to have embraced a distinctly orthodox orientation to their Muslim faith as early as the 1930s.<sup>22</sup> Black

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<sup>22</sup> An exception to this trend among academic works can be found in several publications by Patrick Bowen that showcase what I refer to as "Moorish American Islamic orthodoxy." See Patrick D. Bowen, "The Search for 'Islam': African-American Islamic Groups in NYC, 1904-1954," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 2

Freemasonic orders serve as a third stream identified in accounts written by scholars like Robert Dannin and Patrick Bowen. While this third stream did not come up often in my own interviews, the relationship between Freemasonry and groups like the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam has been discussed rather widely by historians.<sup>23</sup> Black Muslim material culture also bears witness to the probable link between Black Islam and Black Freemasonry. Early twentieth century Black Muslim communities' embraced an aesthetic that closely mirrored that of Black Shriners like those who attended the Mecca Temple and Jerusalem Temple whose images appeared in newspapers like Newark's *Star Ledger* and Harlem's *Amsterdam News* during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>24</sup> These three streams – Black Freemasonry, Garvey's UNIA, and the Moorish Science Temple – provided a means by which many Black Americans in urban centers around the country during the early twentieth century became acquainted with the idea that Black Americans, and indeed people of African descent the world over, enjoyed a historical connection with Islam. In this way, these institutions served as repositories for older communal memories of the Muslim presence among Black Americans' enslaved African ancestors, and Islam's role in the West African societies from which they were kidnapped.

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(April 2012): 264–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01372.x>; Patrick Bowen, "Grand Sheik Frederick Turner-El: A Moorish-American Trailblazer." *Ali's Men*, 2014, [https://www.academia.edu/6246670/Grand\\_Sheik\\_Frederick\\_Turner-El\\_A\\_Moorish-American\\_Trailblazer](https://www.academia.edu/6246670/Grand_Sheik_Frederick_Turner-El_A_Moorish-American_Trailblazer).

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Allen, "Religious Heterodoxy and Nationalist Tradition: The Continuing Evolution of the Nation of Islam," *The Black Scholar* 26, no. 3–4 (September 1996): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.1996.11430810>; Edward E. Curtis, "African-American Islamization Reconsidered: Black History Narratives and Muslim Identity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 659–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfi074>; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*.

<sup>24</sup> A Freemasonic offshoot, the Shriners are a fraternity that emphasizes fun and philanthropy along with Freemasonry's general principles. The Shriners' rites and rituals are characterized by an appropriation of Islamic symbols.

## Recalling an African Islamic Past

It is well documented that a significant percentage of the enslaved African people who were abducted and brought to the Americas during trans-Atlantic slavery were Muslim.<sup>25</sup> Arriving at a more precise estimate of the number of Muslims among those enslaved is difficult. Like virtually all figures associated with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the estimates advanced by scholars are contentious. However, several historians have approximated that as many as one third of all enslaved Africans were Muslims. A number of scholars, including Allan Austin, Sylviane Diouf, and Michael Gomez have written rather extensively about the efforts of enslaved Muslims to preserve their religious practices and identity amidst the exceptionally hostile, repressive, and dehumanizing conditions that characterized slavery in the Americas. In New York City, the 1991 discovery of a burial ground for enslaved Africans and their descendants bore testament to this history, as a number of the bodies were enshrouded and buried facing the East in accordance with Muslim funerary procedure. In North America, there is an abundance of documentation regarding prominent enslaved African Muslims during the nineteenth century, including figures like Omar ibn Said, Bilali Muhammad, Old Lizzy Gray, Yarrow Mamout, and Prince Abdul Rahman ibn Sori.<sup>26</sup>

Thus far, scholars have been unable to identify straight lines of transmission between these nineteenth century Black Muslim communities and individuals and the Black Americans who came to identify with Islam during the twentieth century. This has

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<sup>25</sup> Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Abdullah Al-Ahari and Bilali Muhammad, *Bilali Muhammad: Muslim Jurisprudist in Antebellum Georgia*, 2012; James H. Johnston, *From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Precious Muhammad, "Researching Muslim Ancestors," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 34-35; Omar ibn Said and Ala A. Alryyes, *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

lead historians like Edward Curtis IV to assert that there is little to no relationship between the two.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, a researcher for the American Muslim council once asserted that there was a “sixty year gap in the history of Islam in Afro-America,” between the legal end of American chattel slavery and the Moorish Science Temple’s rise to prominence in the urban north during the 1920s.<sup>28</sup> In reality, the sheer proximity of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Muslim communities makes it hard to dismiss the possibility that the latter was influenced by the former. Many academic genealogies of Islam in America, including Curtis’s *Islam in Black America* begin with the figure of Edward Wilmot Blyden, the celebrated Presbyterian missionary from St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands who advocated for the repatriation of Black people in the Americas to the African continent who is sometimes credited as the ‘father of Pan-Africanism.’<sup>29</sup> The time period of Blyden’s life and work reveals the likelihood of linkages between Black Muslims in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Blyden lived during the same period as several of the aforementioned formerly enslaved Black Muslims and would go on to become a pivotal figure in the intellectual development of Islam among twentieth century Black communities in the West. He studied Islam and Arabic extensively and traveled to Sierra Leone, where he encountered West African Muslims and their institutions.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, Blyden vigorously promoted the notion that African people enjoyed a far

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<sup>27</sup> Edward E. Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Imam Al-Hajj Talib Abdur-Rashid, “A Brief History of the Afro-Islamic Presence in New York,” *Souls* 12, no. 1 (March 2, 2010): 3–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999940903571270>.

<sup>29</sup> Additional examples include Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> One important example is Blyden’s encounter with the an important, albeit short lived Islamic University founded by Islamic scholar and ruler Foday Tarawaly in the village of Gbile in Northeastern Sierra Leone. See C. Magbaily Fyle and Cyril P. Foray, *Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 51-52.

healthier and more affirming relationship with Islam than with Christianity in works like *Islam, Christianity, and the Negro Race* as well as in his other writings and speeches.

Though documentation on the phenomenon of enslaved Black Muslims in the Americas would have been relatively scarce, it is probable that Blyden would have learned about his Black Muslim contemporaries like Nicholas Said, Yarrow Mamout, and Omar Ibn Said given his interest in Islam and Pan-Africanism. These figures wrote, gave speeches, and were featured in periodicals, paintings, and popular discussions. Blyden would become a major influence on another important Pan-African thinker who figures prominently in Black American Muslim history, Duse Mohammed Ali. Ali would in turn influence, and frequently collaborate with, perhaps the most important Pan-African voice among Black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century, Marcus Garvey. Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association would go on to play a significant role in introducing Black Americans in New York City to Islam during the early twentieth century, as will be discussed below.

The historian Michael Gomez in his path breaking study *Black Crescent* drew on his extensive research on Islam throughout the African Diaspora on both sides of the Atlantic to speculate about the possible connections between nineteenth and twentieth century Black Muslim communities. While he falls short of locating the ever-elusive straight line connecting the two, he lays ground for some fascinating hypotheses. He points out the geographical proximity between important antebellum Black Muslim communities that persisted into the subsequent century — like the one that thrived on Sapelo Island, off the coast of Georgia — and the birth places of Elijah Muhammad and Noble Drew Ali, the founders of the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple

who were born in Georgia and North Carolina, respectively.<sup>31</sup> Gomez also theorizes about the possibility that cultural exchanges between formerly enslaved Africans, displaced Native Americans, and lower class whites gave rise to a number of groups often referred to as “triracial isolates” throughout the U.S., but especially in the Southeast and Midwest regions, and a subculture that developed among a handful of such groups that often appropriated Islamic symbols.<sup>32</sup>

While these speculations are inconclusive, he ends his discussions of the possible relationship between these two distinct eras of Black Islam in the Americas with an anecdote about a Mrs. Gallivant, a self-described “Ishmaelite” woman from a triracial isolate background who was active in the Moorish Science Temple during the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> I was reminded of this anecdote a number of times while conducting research for this dissertation. I encountered several Black American Muslims who, similarly, articulated narratives of their family histories that indicated an awareness of the fact that someone among their enslaved ancestors identified with Islam. In several cases, these women and men recalled learning about Muslim ancestors from family members only after their conversion.

Another striking example came during an interview I conducted with Layla Abdul-Wahab. Layla had grown up as a member of Shaykh Daoud’s Islamic Mission of America, a historic mosque located at 143 State Street in Brooklyn. Layla’s daughter had informed me prior to the interview that she believed her mother must have been

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<sup>31</sup> Weisenfeld, *New World a-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* makes a very compelling case for her competing theory that Noble Drew Ali was actually born in Virginia, but probably had North Carolinian roots.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Angelo Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 185.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 200.

introduced to Islam around the age of four when Layla's mother converted to the faith and married a member of the Brooklyn congregation. However, when I asked Layla, she informed me that her mother had always been Muslim, but simply had no Muslim community to participate in prior to discovering the State Street mosque. In fact, she further asserted that her grandmother had been Muslim. When I asked how her grandmother became aware of the Muslim faith, she answered that she did not know. Given Layla's age, having been born in 1941, this would indicate that her family identified with Islam as early as the late nineteenth century.

Such oral narratives are difficult to substantiate. However, the fact that they exist and are not terribly uncommon serves as evidence that at least some Black Americans were aware that Islam was possibly a part of their ancestral histories. Such an awareness made the claims of Black Muslim proselytizers sound compelling. Whether they espoused orthodox or heterodox iterations of Islam, those who advocated an Islamic identity for Black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century almost always preached a reclamation of a religious and ethnic identity that predated slavery in the Americas, and a reinsertion of Black Americans into a global community centered somewhere on the other side of the Atlantic.<sup>34</sup> It is telling that Shaykh Daoud's own retelling of his origins and family history connected him to no less prominent a figure in West African Islamic history than Samori Toure, along with some very interesting additional details.

“My grandfather, one of Africa's great Chiefs, and one of the wealthiest was a Moor, and so was my father whose mother was an east Indian, born in Mauritania.

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<sup>34</sup> See Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*; Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

We are of the Bambara tribe. Known as the Rift night riders, who fought the French from 1865 until 1890 with Samory Toure...”<sup>35</sup>

While such an origin story may seem fanciful, it is important to understand it in the context of the discussions about Black American identity and race that took place during the first half of the twentieth century, especially in urban centers like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. As Black Americans sought to craft more affirming historical narratives that located their origins beyond the boundaries of North America, they drew upon the writings of authors like Martin Delany, Edward Blyden, and W. E. B. DuBois, who asserted the Africanity of historically important civilizations like ancient Egypt, Nubia, Abyssinia, and the Moorish empires of North Africa and Spain. Influenced by a rising anti-colonial sentiment, they also tended to emphasize, and perhaps embellish, historical connections between non-European peoples. In reality, these Black intellectuals could be said to have anticipated modern ideas about the social and historical constructedness of race. As a result, they went about the task of using contemporary knowledge of African and Near Eastern history to construct new and empowering ethnic, and often ethno-religious identities. Out of this context emerged various popular Black religious discourses, including iterations of Ethiopianism, Black Judaism, and Islam. Black Muslims often drew upon discourses around racial and ethnic difference in the Muslim world and questioned the very legitimacy of American racial categorizations. As a result, early Black American Muslim movements often espoused ethnic identities that might seem strange to the uninitiated — asserting themselves to be African, Arab, Moorish, Sudanese, Asiatic, or, as in the above passage quoted from Shaykh Daoud’s

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<sup>35</sup> Hajj Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal and Muhammed Abdullah Al-Ahari, *Islam, the True Faith, the Religion of Humanity* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 10.

writings, even Indian. While all of these categorizations were taken up by some contingent of Black Americans who identified with Islam, the one that proved most compelling prior to the 1940s was the Moorish Americanness. Understanding how Moorish American identity grew in popularity during this period is, therefore, critical for understanding the various routes by which Islamic identity became a fixture in Black urban communities in New York City and elsewhere. And, as historians like Richard Brent Turner and Robert Dannin have demonstrated, understanding the historical development of the Moorish Science Temple in turn requires an exploration into the histories of Black Freemasonry and the UNIA in urban Black communities — both of which exerted significant influence over the MST's structure, symbolism and rhetoric. Therefore, we can begin excavating the oral tradition of Black American Islam by discussing the roles of Freemasonry and Garveyisms in preserving a communal memory among Black Americans of their historical relationship with Islam, Africa, and the Near East.

### **The Garvey Movement and the Birth of Black Muslim Tradition**

A number of historians have discussed the impact of Garveyism on the formation of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam.<sup>36</sup> It has also been documented that a number of Black Americans who joined the Ahmadiyya movement between 1920 and 1923, when a pioneering Ahmadiyya missionary named Mufti Muhammad Saadiq lived in the U.S., had been UNIA members. These include roughly forty Garveyites who attended a series of five lectures delivered by Saadiq at UNIA meetings in Detroit in

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<sup>36</sup> Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*; Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience."

1923.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist political discourses and historical narratives that circulated among Garvey's followers influenced Black Muslim intellectuals and spiritual seekers over the course of the twentieth century. In New York in particular, where Garvey maintained his headquarters from 1916 to 1927, the UNIA introduced a number of Black Americans to Islam. The UNIA did not promote any one religion in particular, and Garvey's own writings reveal a kind of monotheistic ecumenicalism that allowed people of African descent from virtually any religious tradition to embrace both his organization and its political philosophies. However, through references to Allah and the Islamic Prophet Muhammad in a few of Garvey's writings and speeches, similar references in UNIA hymns, and the presence of a small but visible contingent of Muslims in the UNIA's ranks, Garveyism facilitated many twentieth century Black Americans' first encounter with the Muslim faith. Garveyism thereby helped to increase public awareness of Islam's role in the history of Africa and African descended people the world over.

A section from the final pages of Garvey's classic work *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* demonstrates Garvey's comfort invoking the Muslim faith and its history on the African continent. He writes,

“You, white-men, have taught us the love of God, you have had us to see Him in all goodness and perfection; is He a mockery to you? He must be something real. Must we by your actions deny His goodness and love for us and seek and search for the God of Africa, the Allah most high, noble and Almighty?”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Imam Al-Hajj Talib Abdur-Rashid, “Al-Islam and the Garvey Movement,” *Signs of the Time* (blog), August 24, 2010, <http://imamtalib.blogspot.com/2010/08/al-islam-and-garvey-movement.html>; Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover: Majority Press, 1986), 75-76.

<sup>38</sup> Marcus Garvey, *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Or, Africa for the Africans, Volume 1* (The Majority Press, 1923), 412.

Oral histories of prominent members of New York City's Black orthodox Muslim community further elucidate the impact Garvey's engagement with Islam. One of the community elders I interviewed was Rahkiah Abdurrahman. She was a Black orthodox Muslim woman who joined Shaykh Daoud's Islamic Mission of America during the late 1940s. She is often referred to in the community as 'Mama' Rahkiah as a sign of respect in light of her many years of service. Mama Rahkiah quickly came to occupy a leadership role within the State Street community. She recalls first hearing about Islam from members of Garvey's UNIA during her youth. She recounts,

**Mama Rahkiah:** "When I first heard about (Islam) it was in New York. These people (pause) it was one of the first, I guess you'd say, pioneers trying to wake up the Black people. I can't think of his name..."

**R.M.:** Was it Garvey?

**Mama Rahkiah:** Garvey, yea!. And, you know, he was organizing then. And a lot of the people who were interested in *history*, they were, sort of, following him."<sup>39</sup>

Born in Salamanca, New York, about an hour from Buffalo in 1930, Mama Rahkiah moved to the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York, at the age of seven along with her mother, aunt, and two cousins. During her youth, she became aware of the active community of Garveyites who convened for meetings in Harlem, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, though she was too young at the time to participate. Years later, she learned more about Islam along with a young graphic artist and musician with whom she shared a love of history. Soon after, the two married and found their spiritual home in the community of the Islamic Mission of America at 143 State Street. Rahkiah and her

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Rahkiah Abdurrahman, Brooklyn, NY, 11 April 2014.

husband, Bilal Abdurahman, would go on to make major contributions to Black and Muslim cultural life in Brooklyn that will be discussed in the next chapter. However, it is noteworthy that she traced her very first introduction to Islam to encounters with followers of Marcus Garvey that she met as a young person, and that, for her, followers of Garvey and practitioners of Islam were linked by a shared interest in the histories of people of African descent. Mama Rakiah's experience is indicative of Garvey and the UNIA's role in preserving the memory of the place of Islam and Muslims in global Black history — a role that is confirmed by the documented evidence of Black Muslims' participation in, and Indian Ahmadiyyah Muslims' collaboration with, the Garvey movement.

Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid serves as the Imam of Harlem's Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, a community that is roughly thirty years younger than the Islamic Mission of America, though no less historic.<sup>40</sup> Imam Talib also provided me with insight into Garvey's impact on the development of Islam in New York City. Imam Talib provides a perfect example of what I refer to in my introduction as *community historians* and *community connectors*. As both a clergy member and an independent researcher, Imam Talib has investigated the history of Islam in New York City and much of the country, and he disseminates this history through his sermons, lectures, and essays. In one brief but informative essay, he synthesizes various primary and secondary sources to provide a compelling picture of the level of awareness that UNIA members would have had about Islam during the 1920s.<sup>41</sup> He recounts a 1922 convention of the UNIA that was convened

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<sup>40</sup> For more on the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, see Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience."

<sup>41</sup> Abdur-Rashid, "Al-Islam and the Garvey Movement."

to determine whether the UNIA “should adopt Islam as its official religion since three-quarters of the black world were Muslims and Muslims were better Christians than Christians.”<sup>42</sup> While the resolution was not passed, it was presided over by Garvey himself who nonetheless acknowledged that the matter was “of vital interest and importance,” and Garvey ultimately “advocated inter-religious dialogue and meeting.”<sup>43</sup>

Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam spent more than five decades as a member of New York City’s Muslim community, participating as a member of the Nation of Islam, and at least four Black orthodox Muslim congregations thereafter — often serving as a religious authority. While he would go on to occupy various positions of leadership within New York City’s Muslim community from the 1970s onward, in the mid 1960s he was a precocious young worshipper at the International Muslim Society, located at 303, West 125th St. The International Muslim Society served as Harlem’s primary orthodox Muslim house of worship during the 1940s, 50s, and much of the 1960s, and was attended by a diverse, multiethnic congregation that include immigrants from East and West Africa and South Asia, as well as Black Americans with roots in the American South and the Caribbean. From the elders who worshiped at the International Muslim Society prior to the 1960s, Imam Sayed inherited an oral tradition that provides clues about the history of Islam in New York City from the 1910s to the 1950s. These elders included Black American Muslims who had been followers of Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, and former members of the MST who had found their way to orthodox Islam. They made up a significant portion of the congregation. This oral tradition depicted a process of evolution for a cadre of Afro-Caribbean and African American Muslims in New York City who had

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<sup>42</sup> Martin, *Race First* as cited in Abdur-Rashid, “Al-Islam and the Garvey Movement.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

been members of the UNIA, subsequently joining the Moorish Science Temple, and ultimately forming the backbone of the city's Black American orthodox Muslim community, helping to establish a number of religious institutions including the International Muslim Society and, eventually the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, located at 1 Riverside Drive on the corner of 72nd Street in Manhattan. The latter would undergo a major expansion in the 1980s, moving to its current location on the corner of 96th Street and Third Avenue, and becoming one of the city's largest and most visible mosques. According to the attendant Black Muslim oral tradition, this group of Black American Muslims acquired the building at 1 Riverside as well as the plot of land that is now the site of the mosque on 96th Street sometime around the early 1940s through relationships they had cultivated with the consulate general of Japan in New York. In the subsequent decades, representatives from the collective decided to donate the property and land for the purpose of building a large, multi-ethnic mosque with a close relationship to the American embassies of majority Muslim countries with diplomatic ties to the US. As a result, representatives from a coalition of Gulf Arab nations succeeded in acquiring the property deeds from these Black Muslims.

Historical documentation seems to corroborate at least some parts of this story. Records indicate that the International Muslim Society was indeed founded by a group affiliated with the Moorish Science Temple, even though it has ostensibly been associated with orthodox Islam and provided a worship space for a multi-racial orthodox Muslim congregation since its inception in the 1940s. Founding documents of the Islamic Cultural Center of New York acknowledge the contribution a Black Muslim couple, Abdul Wadud Bey and Dr. Rizkiah Bey, in helping to establish that community space.

The last name ‘Bey’ is an indicator of membership in the Moorish Science Temple, as members customarily adopted the last name ‘Bey’ or ‘El’ to mark their embrace of the alternative history and alternative geography promoted by Noble Drew Ali. While aspects of this historical narrative remain as yet unproven, there is enough evidence to render the story plausible, and to give clear directions for further research. In this way, the Black orthodox Muslim oral tradition preserved by community elders like Imam Sayed has preserved an account that is almost certainly at least partially true. Moreover, regardless of the accuracy of this account, the simple fact that numerous elders and community historians of the city’s Black orthodox Muslim community commonly credit the UNIA for providing the genesis of the Muslim presence in twentieth century New York City, and articulate a historiography that links various present day Muslim congregations to that history, serves as a powerful indicator of the historical narratives that animate Black orthodox Muslim identity. These are the kinds of historical narratives that informed the religious, cultural, and political sensibilities of Black orthodox Muslims in New York City over the course of the century. As such, they serve as one of the primary forces behind the emergence of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism.

### **Freemasonry and the Preservation of Black Muslim Memory**

Freemasonry occupies a prominent place in the history of African American organizing and activism.<sup>44</sup> Equally significant is the contribution of Black Freemasonry to the development of affirming, empowering images and historical narratives about

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<sup>44</sup> For a brief introduction, see Chernoh M. Sesay, “The Dialectic of Representation: Black Freemasonry, the Black Public, and Black Historiography,” *Journal of African American Studies* 17, no. 3 (September 2013): 380–98, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-013-9250-9>.

Black people in America.<sup>45</sup> A hallmark of the Black American Freemasonic tradition is the invocation of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Ethiopia as indicators of the latent potential for greatness within people of African descent. As Joanna Brooks notes, “Masons worldwide claimed that their ritual practices ... derived from an ancient Egyptian order, a history to which the members of the African Lodge could make a double claim.”<sup>46</sup> She goes on to explain that “the Egyptian ‘roots’ of the Order came to be a recognized and celebrated dimension of Prince Hall Freemasonry.” Prince Hall was the founder of the African Lodge, the first Black Freemasonic Lodge in the Americas, and the most prominent tradition of Black American Freemasonry still bears his name. The mysterious nature of Freemasonry along with Freemasons’ pretensions to preserve and transmit occult knowledge only served to bolster Prince Hall Freemasons’ claims upon the inheritance they derived from Ancient African civilizations. In her article, “Prince Hall, Freemasonry, and Genealogy,” Brooks goes on to chronicle the role of John Marrant, an influential African American preacher and missionary in the late eighteenth century, in the historical development of Ethiopianism.<sup>47</sup> Marrant was a prominent Freemason and a contemporary of Prince Hall, who similarly invoked Ethiopia in important addresses like his *Charges to the Lodge at Charlestown* and *Metonymy*. As pillars and pioneers of late eighteenth century traditions of African American religious and social organizing, Marrant and Hall’s rhetorical use of Ethiopia as a symbol of civilizational excellence, Diasporic connectivity, and Divine favor for people of African descent went on to impact Black authors, activists, and intellectuals for over a century.

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<sup>45</sup> Maurice Wallace, “‘Are We Men?’: Prince Hall, Martin Delany, and the Masculine Ideal in Black Freemasonry, 1775-1865,” *American Literary History* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 396–424.

<sup>46</sup> Joanna Brooks, “Prince Hall, Freemasonry, and Genealogy,” *African American Review* 34, no. 2 (2000): 197, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2901249>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

While Brooks' work provides a window into the important but little known relationship between Prince Hall Freemasonry and the emergence of Ethiopianism in the Americas, Black Freemasonic invocations of Ancient Egypt are more common and have been written about more widely.<sup>48</sup> Martin Delany, one of the earliest Black activist intellectuals to overtly articulate the political philosophies that are today referred to as Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism was also a prominent Freemason. In his 1853 publication, *The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry: Its Introduction into the United States and Legitimacy Among Colored Men*, Delany asks, "[f]rom whence sprung Masonry, but from Ethiopia, Egypt, and Assyria — all settled and peopled by the children of Ham?"<sup>49</sup> Notably, he claims the legacies of Ancient Egypt and Ethiopia, as well as the ancient Near Eastern and Levantine civilization of Assyria, for the children of the Biblical figure Ham, who was generally believed to be the progenitor of Black people the world over. He does so, in part, to make an argument for Black Americans' right to independently practice the rites of Freemasonry, but also posits a global unity for all people of African descent and proclaims the historic grandeur of the ancient civilizations they built. The historical narratives that Black Freemasons like Prince Hall, John Marrant, and Martin Delany worked to develop, which celebrated African civilizations like Ancient Egypt and Ethiopia and connected them with the worldwide African Diaspora, helped to facilitate the emergence of the cultural and political traditions of pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism throughout the Americas.<sup>50</sup> These traditions, intern,

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<sup>48</sup> For an academic treatment, see Scott Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egyptomania*, New Americanists (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). For a popular example, see George G. M James, *Stolen Legacy: The Greek Philosophy Is a Stolen Egyptian Philosophy* (Eworld Incorporated, 1954).

<sup>49</sup> Wallace, "'Are We Men?'" 410.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

heavily influenced the architects of various Black religious movements, including those that became popular among Black Americans in urban centers during the Great Migration.<sup>51</sup> Several figures associated with Islam's emergence in the US who will be discussed below, including Edward Wilmot Blyden, Duse Mohammed Ali, Noble Drew Ali, and the lesser-known Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen built upon these intellectual legacies, making them their own and taking them in new directions. In this manner, Prince Hall Freemasonry contributed to the development of new and empowering ideas about race, genealogy, and Black World history that were closely associated with the doctrines of early twentieth century Black Muslim movements.

### **Muslim Masonic Encounters**

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were several encounters between Islam and Prince Hall Freemasonry that were particularly significant. The first occurred in 1828 when members of the African Lodge No. 459, the first Black Masonic lodge founded by Prince Hall in Boston in 1776 encountered a living embodiment of the connection between the rich history of Muslim societies in North and West Africa and the Black women and men living in the Americas. The African Lodge hosted Ibrahima Abdul Rahman ibn Sori, the famed 'Prince Among Slaves,' and assisted him and his wife in their quest to obtain funds to secure freedom for their enslaved children and grandchildren. Abdul-Rahman's story provides a pertinent example of how the ethnic and religious histories of enslaved West Africans, including West African Muslims, helped

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<sup>51</sup> Weisenfeld, *New World a-Coming*.

facilitate the emergence of new, Atlantic World racial identities as they were transformed by the crucible of American slavery.<sup>52</sup>

Abdul-Rahman's father had served as the *Almami*, the spiritual and temporal ruler of the eighteenth and nineteenth Islamic polity of Futa Jallon in present day Guinea, had been kidnaped and sold through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, ending up in Natchez Mississippi. Abdul-Rahman had obtained his freedom, largely as a result of the deep historical connection between the North African and Iberian 'Moorish' civilizations that would, much like Egypt and Ethiopia, come to symbolize the greatness of Africa and its people in the eyes many Black Americans, and the many Islamic societies throughout West Africa. A local Natchez newspaper editor named Andrew Marschalk discovered Abdul-Rahman's fluency in Arabic and found his story compelling. Abdul-Rahman expressed his desire to write a letter to his family in Africa but subsequently, despite Marschalks urging, proceeded to drag his feet for several years.<sup>53</sup> Historian Terry Alford, who published an illuminating biography of Abdul-Rahman in 1986, has suggested that this was due to Marschalk's inference that, since Abdul-Rahman was a Muslim and literate in Arabic, he must have been Moroccan.<sup>54</sup> He further posits that Abdul-Rahman may have been reluctant to craft the letter because he perceived Marschalk's misattribution of his geographic origin. Alford cites as evidence for his theory the fact that Abdul-Rahman did agree to write the letter after meeting Cyrus Griffin, a prominent Virginian judge who, having served as the last President of the Confederation Congress — the precursor to the modern-day United States Congress — would likely have been

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Angelo Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Terry Alford, *Prince Among Slaves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

considerably more knowledgeable about world geography and history. As Alford explains, Abdul-Rahman informed Griffin that he was actually from the city of Timbo in Futa Jallon. The subsequent letter that Abdul-Rahman penned in Arabic was sent, by Marschalk, through his state senator Thomas Buck Reed to the State Department. This attracted the attention of Secretary of State Henry Clay.<sup>55</sup> Clay informed President John Quincy Adams who, having been informed that Abdul-Rahman was a Moorish Prince, presumed that his note was in fact a “letter to the Emperor of Morocco, in Arabic.”<sup>56</sup> In light of the warm diplomatic relations between America and Morocco, Clay then successfully persuaded Abdul-Rahman’s owner to grant him his freedom in 1828.

Generally, scholars have either characterized Marschalk’s ‘mistake’ as a cunning scheme to leverage American foreign interest to secure Abdul-Rahman’s freedom, or attributed it to his, and President Adams’, misinformed assumption that only a Moroccan ‘Moor’ would know Arabic.<sup>57</sup> Arnold, for example, remarks that it was Griffin who, unlike Marschalk, knew “the difference between a Moor and a Pullo.”<sup>58</sup> However, in the articles Griffin subsequently published recounting Abdul-Rahman’s story, he also describes him as a ‘Moor’, and attempts to establish his racial superiority over any mere ‘Negro.’ He describes Abdul-Rahman’s “unblemished character” as “somewhat remarkable, as he has been, of course, the constant associate of negroes with whom vice is almost instinctive.” He goes on to attempt to explain that forty or so years of enslavement in North America had altered Abdul-Rahman’s appearance, making him

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<sup>55</sup> Jill Lepore, *A Is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 229.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid; Alford, *Prince among Slaves*; Diouf, *Servants of Allah*.

<sup>58</sup> Alford, *Prince among Slaves*, 90. “Pullo” is a synonym for Fula or Fulani, a descriptor of Abdul-Rahman’s actual ethnic or ‘tribal’ identity.

look more like a negro with regard to his complexion and the texture of his hair. Griffin writes,

“Although modern physiology does not allow color to be a necessary effect of climate, still one fact is certain that a constant exposure to a vertical sun for many years, together with the privations incident to the lower order of community, and an inattention to cleanliness, will produce a very material change in the complexion.”<sup>59</sup>

These factors notwithstanding, Griffin goes on to use the kind of phrenological race-science that was popular in his day to conclude about Abdul-Rahman that, “his entire physiognomy is unlike that of any negro we have ever seen.” In the same article, however, Griffin makes reference to Abdul-Rahman’s actual homeland in ‘Footah Jallo’, demonstrating a clear knowledge of the fact that Abdul-Rahman was not Moroccan. This elision of Pullo or Fula identity with Moorish identity was likely not the result of an elaborate plot on the part of either Griffin or Marschalk to obtain Abdul-Rahman’s freedom out of altruism. Both men were supporters of the slave system. Griffin was a slave owner, and Marschalk went on to express regret for helping Abdul-Rahman obtain his freedom and contempt for Abdul-Rahman’s efforts to obtain freedom for his children.<sup>60</sup> How, then, does one reconcile Griffin’s demonstrated ignorance about Abdul-Rahman’s ethnic identity with his awareness of his West African origin?

The explanation for the confusion lies in the fact that the perceived connection between ‘Moorish’ identity and Muslim West Africa was not nearly as ridiculous as some historians may have presumed. In fact, the relationship between the Muslim societies of Senegambia and the ruling dynasties of North Africa stretch at least as far back as the

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<sup>59</sup> Cyrus Griffin, “The African Homeland of Abdul Rahman Ibrahima,” *Southern Galaxy*, June 5, 1828. Reprinted in Allan D. Austin, ed., *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publications, 1984).

<sup>60</sup> Lepore, *A Is for American*.

Almoravid dynasty, which lasted from roughly the middle of the eleventh century to the middle of the twelfth. At their height the Almoravids, who founded the Moroccan city of Marakesh as their capital, governed a territory that stretched all the way from the Iberian Peninsula in the North to areas along the Niger and Senegal rivers in the South. Indeed, the West African title *marabout* commonly used to refer to a person of religious learning and/or spiritual advancement is likely a testament to the Almoravid's history in the region, being derived from the Arabic term Al-Murabit — for which the word *Almoravid* is merely the anglicized form. Historically, there were certainly some violent clashes between West African Muslim societies south of the Sahara and the *Maghribi* kingdoms to its North, particularly the Sa'di dynasty who undertook an empirical occupation that effectively ended the reign of the Songhai empire in 1591 due in large part to the former's acquisition of firearms and gunpowder.<sup>61</sup> However, there is also a long history of trade and intellectual and cultural exchange between the societies above and below the Sahara dessert.<sup>62</sup> With this in mind, and given the persistent, albeit false, stereotype of West African religion as inherently animistic, there is little wonder why the term 'Moor' came to signify African Islamic identity broadly defined in the minds of many white American and European observers who were largely ignorant of the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual diversity among both West and North African Muslim communities. In short, the term 'Moor' has always been a rather amorphous term, used at varying points in history in Europe and the Americas to refer to North African *Amazigh* (Berber)

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<sup>61</sup> Alexander Mikaberidze, ed., *Conflict and Conquest in the Islamic World: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 892; Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, *Towards an Understanding of the African Experience from Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 79-80.

<sup>62</sup> Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks, and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

peoples, Arabs, Sub-Saharan Africans, Muslims generally, and even Indians.<sup>63</sup> Often applied to any ‘dark-skinned’ people, it has even been used as a synonym for ethno-geographic markers like ‘African’, ‘Ethiopian’, and ‘Negro’, rendering its occasional association with Black Americans rather appropriate.<sup>64</sup>

In August of 1828, When Prince Ibrahima Abdul-Rahman spoke at Boston’s African Masonic Hall, his audience included numerous members of Boston’s colored community and prominent abolitionists. Among these there were, not surprisingly, members of the African Lodge like C. A. de Randamie and David Walker.<sup>65</sup> Walker would go on to publish his famous *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* the very next year. A few scholars have commented on this meeting and hypothesized that Walker could have been influenced by Abdul Rahman’s religious views or Muslim identity. Ala Alryyes speculates that Walker could have borrowed some of his arguments against slavery from Islamic scripture. He comments on the “remarkable similarity” between the Qur’an-inspired reproach of slavery crafted by Omar Ibn Said, another well-known enslaved African Muslim who lived in the nineteenth century and wrote in Arabic, and the “anti-slavery language employed by David Walker” in his famous text.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Robert Dannin informs his readers that Walker “seemed deeply affected by the old man’s resiliency after four decades in slavery,” and characterizes Walker’s rhetorical approach

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<sup>63</sup> David Assouline, “Moors,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little Brown, 2002); P. E. Pieris, *Ceylon and the Hollanders, 1658-1796*, 3rd ed (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1999), 1918.

<sup>64</sup> J.A. Rogers, *Nature Knows No Color-Line: Research into the Negro Ancestry in the White Race* (Helga Rogers, 1952); Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>65</sup> Lepore, *A Is for American*, 256; Randamie’s status as a member of African Lodge #459 is attested to by his inclusion in the “Declaration of Independence of African Lodge” on June 18th, 1827. *Records of African Lodge #459 Boston and Philadelphia*.

<sup>66</sup> Said and Alryyes, *A Muslim American Slave*, 18.

to challenging slavery, as well as his being a Freemason, as indicative of what he terms “unchurched culture.”<sup>67</sup> Such connections remain purely speculative. However, it is quite plausible that the encounter with Abdul-Rahman would have added to Walker’s general awareness of the religious diversity throughout the African Diaspora, and the presence of Muslims among African Americans’ ancestors. Notably, Walker exempts the “Pagans, Jews and Mahometans” from the crimes of trans-Atlantic slavery — reserving his indictment for “Christian Americans” specifically.<sup>68</sup>

Another encounter between the traditions of Black Freemasonry and Black American Islam that is particularly significant for students of early twentieth century Black American Muslim movements comes by way of the Prince Hall Shriners. A fraternity inspired by Arab and Islamic symbols and open only to Freemasons, the Shriners were founded in 1872, choosing as their official name the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (AAONMS). In June of 1893, 13 Black men, who were also Prince Hall Freemasons, founded the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (AEAONMS) in Chicago, inaugurating the tradition of Black Shrinedom. By adding *Egyptian* to their title, the men who founded the order invoked the grandeur of Ancient Egypt as a way of proclaiming the greatness their African legacy. The time and place of the lodge’s founding are quite significant, as May of 1893 marked the opening of the historic World’s Fair: Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. The Chicago World’s Fair featured an elaborate replica of a Cairo street, complete with a mosque and minaret, houses and shops constructed using genuine Egyptian style

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<sup>67</sup> Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 15, 21.

<sup>68</sup> David Walker and James Turner, *David Walker’s Appeal, in Four Articles: Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America: Third and Last Edition, Revised and Published by David Walker, 1830* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993), 48.

architecture, camels, donkeys, replicas of Cairene landmarks, and Egyptian people engaged in everything from Islamic ritual worship to popular Egyptian social activities.<sup>69</sup> The extravagant scene was a big hit, and it fueled American interest in the cultures of ‘the Orient’. The Black Freemasonic historian Joseph A. Walkes speculates that the spectacle may have delivered the primary inspiration for the founding of the AEAONMS. He explains,

“The merchants’ houses were all highly decorated, the balconies extended over the street, the doors inlaid with tracing in ivory. The goods to be sold, all of oriental character, were offered by vendors sitting cross-legged in their places. All Egypt had sent contributions: mummies, beetles, ivory, brass-works, embroidery, sweetmeat, white gold and silver coins (ancient and modern), slipper, scarf and fezzes – all to be purchased by the visitors. Perhaps here, the cradle of Prince Hall Shrinedom. Perhaps!”<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, in its internal documents, the AEAONMS cites the 1893 Columbian Exposition as the moment when its founder, John George Jones was “said to have been introduced to the ritualistic mysteries of the Order by one Ali Rofelt Pasha, Deputy and representative from the Grand Council of Arabia.”

The 1893 Chicago’s World’s fair attracted significant attention from the local African American population, as well as a number of prominent Black activists. The Centennial International Fair, the nation’s first official World’s Fair, held in Philadelphia in 1876 barred African Americans from participating, even denying them the construction jobs associated with building the fairground.<sup>71</sup> The situation had not improved much by 1893. However, African Americans were allowed to visit the Fair during a special

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<sup>69</sup> István Ormos, “The Cairo Street at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” in *L’Orientalisme Architectural Entre Imaginaires et Savoirs, Actes Du Colloque International*, ed. Mercedes Volait and Nabila Oulebsir (Paris: Institut national d’histoire de l’art, 2006); Joseph Walkes, *History of the Shrine: Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, Inc. (Prince Hall Affiliated): A Pillar of Black Society, 1893-1993* (Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of North and South America and Its Jurdictions, Inc., 1993), 9.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 131.

“Colored People’s Day”. A second notable exception was the participation of Frederick Douglass. He had attended the 1876 Centennial Exposition as an observer, albeit after being initially denied access by Philadelphia police and requiring the escort of New York Senator Roscoe Conkling.<sup>72</sup> At the Chicago World’s Fair, at the behest of Haiti’s representatives, Douglass, who had served as U.S. minister resident and consul general to Haiti, presided over the Haitian pavilion. On January 2nd, 1893, four months before the opening of the Fair, Douglass delivered a lecture on Haiti to “fifteen hundred of the best citizens of Chicago,” at the historic Quinn Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>73</sup> In his speech entitled “Haiti and the Haitian People,” Douglass praised Haiti and the accomplishments of its people, and celebrated it a source of inspiration and instruction for African Americans and, indeed, the entire World.<sup>74</sup> He goes on to defend Haiti’s right to self-determination in the face of calls to make it a US protectorate.

In the months leading up to the Columbia Exposition, Douglass had been discussing possible strategies to use the platform as a way to call attention to the epidemic of anti-Black violence in America with a prominent member of Chicago’s Black community. Ida B. Wells campaign to expose the “Southern Horrors” of lynching had deeply impacted Douglass, and the two began working on a pamphlet that could be distributed to those in attendance showcasing “accounts of lynchings, hangings, burnings at the stake, whippings, and all southern atrocities.”<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, Wells was unable to complete work on the pamphlet, as her anti-lynching activism carried her to Britain for

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>73</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti: The Haitian Pavilion” (January 2, 1893).

<sup>74</sup> Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism*, 147-149.

<sup>75</sup> Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 132.

the first time in April of that same year.<sup>76</sup> In addition, while Douglass felt that Exposition provided an important opportunity to bring international attention to the plight of Black Americans, Wells and her husband, the prominent Chicago based lawyer, journalist, and activist Ferdinand Lee Barnett, felt that the resignation of Black attendees to a single “Colored People’s Day” warranted protest in the form of a boycott.

In spite of the decision by Barnett and others to boycott, many Black Chicagoans did attend the Chicago World’s Fair on their designated day. As stated above, John G. Jones, the founder of the AEAONMS was likely one of those in attendance. He and Barnett were both part of a very small cadre of prominent Black lawyers in Chicago who “have been credited with designing the political blueprint that assured black elected representatives in the state legislature, the Chicago city council, and other public offices.”<sup>77</sup> The two even collaborated in the founding of several other Chicago Freemasonic organizations including the Prince Hall Masons, the Odd Fellows, and the Knights of Pythias.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps then, it is little surprise that Ferdinand Barnett would also become one of the founding members AEAONMS, the nations’ very first Black Shriners lodge, albeit partially inspired by an event he chose to boycott.

Members of the AEAONMS and similar fraternal organizations that it inspired would go on introduce Black communities in Northern, urban cities around the country to a Muslim themed aesthetic, pictured in portraits and newspaper articles wearing elaborate Fezzes embroidered with Temple names like ‘Medina’, ‘Arabic’, ‘Persian’, ‘Jerusalem’,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>77</sup> John Clay Smith, *Emancipation the Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 370.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

and ‘Hadji’.<sup>79</sup> One Black Shriner spin-off group formed in 1910, the Mecca Medina Temple of Ancient Free and Operative Masons, was founded by a man who alternatively went by the names Prince De Solomon and Abdul-Hameed Suleiman. He sometimes attached the titles Reverend, Dr., or Professor to his name and claimed to hail from Sudan and/or Egypt, who governed Sudan at the time. Suleiman promoted his Mecca Medina Temple specifically to Prince Hall Freemasons and Shriners contending that, by joining his lodge and eschewing any connection to white Shrinedom, they would obtain greater autonomy and authenticity. Labeling Prince Hall Freemasonry as “spurious”, he maintained that “he had been sent to the United States to establish pure genuine Masonry as authorized by the Mother Lodge of Mecca.”<sup>80</sup> According to a newspaper article from the period, Suleiman claimed that “there has never been a Negro Shrine in the United States which was not bogus, and infringing upon the white man’s rites.”<sup>81</sup> Suleiman appears to have established chapters of his Mecca Medina Temple in New York City in 1910 and Youngstown, Ohio in 1920. However, he does not seem to have convinced a significant number of Prince Hall Shriners to join his lodge. He offered the “authentic authority” provided by his Mecca Medina Temple, which would simultaneously make “all of the Prince Hall Shriners Mohammedans” to Caesar R. Blake, Jr. who served as the Imperial Potentate of the AEAONMS from 1919 to 1931.<sup>82</sup> Blake expressly declined the offer, proclaiming that “[m]embers of our organization are Christians and would not consider becoming Mohammedans or joining nay other religious body for any consideration whatsoever,” and that “we would not care to come under the jurisdiction of

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<sup>79</sup> Walkes, *History of the Shrine*, xii-xv.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

any foreign body or influence of any kind.” For Blake, the authentication and authorization that AEAONMS members enjoyed among American Prince Hall Freemasons was enough. Suleiman’s strategy made some sense, as the AEAONMS was in the midst of a series of legal battles with the white Shriners who challenged their legitimacy. However, he likely did not account for the high level of self-confidence and self-determination enjoyed by Prince Hall Freemasons who were quite satisfied with their preexisting legitimizing narrative. Suleiman continued to spread his ideas through other means as a spiritual advisor and healer in Newark, NJ.

The historian Patrick Bowen makes a compelling case that this Mecca Medina Temple and its founder served as a primary influence on Noble Drew Ali, and that Ali may well have participated in similar movement alongside Suleiman prior to his founding the MST. In 1913 Ali drew upon this particular tradition of Prince Hall Freemasonry – that of the Mecca Medina Temple and of Black Shriners more generally – along with various influences including the New Thought Movement, Buddhism, Rosicrucianism, and Islam to found the Moorish Science Temple of America, an organization that may have done more to spread awareness among Black Americans about the historical relationship between Islam and people of African descent in the Atlantic World than any other.

### **Moorish Americans and Muslims**

While Freemasonry provided an indirect link for Black Americans to an African Islamic past during the nineteenth century, and the Garvey movement played a prominent role in introducing Islam to urban Black communities in major cities in the early

twentieth century, the Moorish Science Temple enjoyed the most success in popularizing Islam among Black Americans prior to the 1930s. While the theology and ritual practices of the MST differed from those of most Muslim communities around the world, its sacred texts and religious leadership taught that Black Americans, and people of African descent in the Atlantic World generally, had a natural connection to the Muslim faith and encouraged them to embrace it.<sup>83</sup> Despite its many departures from orthodox Islamic belief and practice, which have been well documented elsewhere, the MST's broad notion of Islamic identity was not without precedent.<sup>84</sup> Historically, Muslim thinkers and theologians have used terms like *ahl al-qibla* (people who turn toward Mecca in prayer) and *Islamiyyin* (lit. Islamic people) to refer to groups who self-identify as Muslims, yet espouse certain heterodox beliefs or practices.<sup>85</sup> This does not mean that Muslim religious scholars sanctioned groups. However, it indicates that the Islamicity of such groups was often at least up for discussion. Also, in the context of early twentieth century Black America, Black migrants to urban areas often embraced new religious movements associated with new constructions of racial identity grounded in alternative histories and moral geographies that challenged the dominant, white supremacist

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<sup>83</sup> Examples include Noble Drew Ali's *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America* and the catechism entitled "Koran Questions for Moorish Children."

<sup>84</sup> For a description of the beliefs and practices of the Moorish Science Temple, see Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 41-51; Edward E. Curtis, "Debating the Origins of the Moorish Science Temple: Toward a New Cultural History," in *The New Black Gods: Arthur Huff Fauset and the Study of African American Religions*, ed. Edward E. Curtis and Danielle Brune Sigler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 70-90.

<sup>85</sup> Examples of classical era Islamic scholars who used such terms in this manner include Abu al-Hassan al-Ash'ari, the eponym of the *Ash'ari* school associated with orthodox Islamic theology and author of the work *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin* (lit. The Statements of the Islamic People), and Ahmad al-Sirhindi, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Indian Islamic scholar who asserted that some of the blameworthy innovators among the greater Muslim community who generally exhibited proper theological beliefs must, therefore, be counted among the "ahl-al-qibla." See Volume 3, letter 38 from his collection of letters entitled *Maktubat*. For a further discussion of the latter example, see Sayf Ad-Din Ahmed, *Al-Albani Unveiled: An Exposition of His Errors and Other Important Issues* (Millat Book Company, 2009).

American racial hierarchy. In keeping with this trend, the MST argued that ‘Blackness’ (a term they actually rejected) was inextricably linked to ‘Muslimness’ by invoking an alternative geography that highlighted the relationship between people of African descent in the Atlantic World and majority Muslim societies in the Arab World and North and West Africa (especially Morocco). By embracing the teachings associated with the MST, Black Americans could reconnect to a powerful historical and cultural legacy of African descended peoples that included the civilizational achievements of the Moors of North Africa who governed the Iberian peninsula for almost 800 years.

The historian Judith Weisenfeld discusses the origins and beliefs of the MST in her 2017 book *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration*, presenting this religious community as a prime example of what she terms religio-racial movements. She describes the MST, as well as the Nation of Islam, various Ethiopian Hebrew congregations, and the Father Divine Peace Mission as movements that “called on blacks to reject the classification of themselves as Negro, which leaders taught was a false category created for the purposes of enslavement and subjugation.”<sup>86</sup> She further explains that these religio-racial moments “offered alternative identities for individual members and black people as a whole,” and that they “linked religious and racial identity in ways that challenged conventional American racial categories.”<sup>87</sup> This description certainly fits the MST, who rejected the term ‘Negro’ and referred to Black Americans as ‘Asiatics,’ — teaching that only by reclaiming their true identity as Moors could people of African descent in the Americas achieve spiritual and material salvation. In this way, Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the MST, exhibited an

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<sup>86</sup> Weisenfeld, *New World a-Coming*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

understanding of the historical and social constructedness of race roughly seventy years before it became a widely accepted notion within American intellectual discourse.

According to the community's internal narrative, the Moorish Science Temple was founded in 1913 in Newark, NJ by Noble Drew Ali, who was considered a prophet by his followers. Noble Drew Ali was probably born Thomas Drew or Timothy Drew, and migrated from the South, likely North Carolina or Virginia, to Newark, NJ sometime between 1900 and 1918.<sup>88</sup> The MST's popularity soared during the 1920s, after Noble Drew Ali moved its headquarters to Chicago. The city's thriving Black community included prominent Black professionals with ties to various Freemasonic organizations including the AEAONMMS, founded only about thirty years earlier. Thus, the MST may have benefited from some Black Chicagoans' prior awareness of Islam's Black Atlantic World history. The MST's subsequent national success deeply intensified Islamic affinities among Black people in urban American spaces. Some scholars estimate that, at its height in the late 1920s, the MST boasted some thirty thousand members around the country.<sup>89</sup> The community developed a network of Temples in cities like Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Newark, Baltimore, and Kansas City. Each local Moorish community developed businesses that generated income and simultaneously promoted healthy life alternatives for urban Black communities.<sup>90</sup> They also attempted to attain a level of political economic independence. Later Black American Muslim communities, both orthodox and heterodox, would continue and build on this trend, implementing

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 47. It is important to note that the account that Weisenfeld reconstructs of Noble Drew Ali's life based on historical research largely conforms to the account provided in the MST's hagiographic narrative.

<sup>89</sup> Patrick D. Bowen, "Abdul Hamid Suleiman and the Origins of the Moorish Science Temple," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 2, no. 13 (September 2011), 31.

<sup>90</sup> For more on the Moorish Science Temple's advocacy of healthy life alternatives, see Emily Suzanne Clark, "Noble Drew Ali's 'Clean and Pure Nation': The Moorish Science Temple, Identity, and Healing," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no. 3 (February 2013): 31–51, <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2013.16.3.31>.

innovative strategies to pursue these same goals. The MST built grocery stores, sought farmland and, through Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Manufacturing Corporation, produced alternative health care items including teas, tonics, and oils. The MST's national newspaper, *The Moorish Guide* served as a platform to spread the teachings of its prophet, Noble Drew Ali, and to provide the national Moorish community with information about his accomplishments and those of local MST temples. It also presented news on current events from a Moorish perspective.

The MST has often been depicted as a decidedly heterodox religious community, only marginally influenced by orthodox Islamic beliefs and practices. It is also commonly portrayed as a Black Nationalist organization with little interest in building multiracial alliances that went beyond simply cultivating Black Americans' sense of belong to an imagined community of 'Asiatic' Muslim peoples around the world. However, Patrick Bowen's recent works on the history of Black American Muslim converts and the communities they built make the compelling case that, during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, congregations affiliated with the MST in and around New York City identified less and less with national MST leadership, and increasingly adopted beliefs and practices associated with orthodox Islam.<sup>91</sup> In some cases, they also began to include some Arab and North African immigrants in their community building activities. These Black American Muslims embraced both Islamic orthodoxy and the alternative geography and cultural legacy they inherited from their Moorish Science Temple roots. This orientation served as the underpinning of the Black American Sunni Muslim tradition that blossomed in and around New York City in subsequent decades.

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<sup>91</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States* Vol. 2, Chapter 9.

Sheikh Abdul-Wadood Bey and Dr. Rizkiah (or Rezkiah) Bey, a rather prominent Black professional couple living in Harlem during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, serve as two of the best examples of Black orthodox Muslim community pioneers in New York City with Moorish Science background.<sup>92</sup> In the 1930s Abdul-Wadood, then known as Grand Sheikh Walter Price Bey, served as the leader of Harlem's Moorish Science Temple number 41. Although their congregation was initially affiliated with the largest Moorish Science Temple faction to emerge after Noble Drew Ali's death, by the mid 1930s Temple number 41 seems to have become increasingly independent as a national leadership crisis left the MST more and more decentralized. Simultaneously, Moorish Americans in Harlem encountered a growing community of Black orthodox Muslims in Harlem. Located at 1 East 125th Street near Madison Avenue in Harlem, MST Temple number 41 was a short walk away from the Islamic Propagation Center of America on 108 West 128th Street near Lenox Blvd. The latter was likely Harlem's most visible orthodox Muslim institution until the early 1930s. Bowen speculates that Walter Price Bey's decision to change his name to Abdul-Wadood Bey was likely fueled by his encounter with a prominent Moorish American turned Black orthodox Muslim leader named Professor Muhammed Ezaldeen who spent time in Harlem before traveling abroad in 1929. By 1935, an Egyptian immigrant laborer, presumably an orthodox Muslim, was instructing "a class of approximately 50 children (in) the Arabic language and Moslem religion" at Temple number 41. Possibly reflecting its ideological transformations, the same MST Temple changed its name several times during the 1930s – first to the Moorish Islamic Academy, then the Moorish Islamic Center and, finally, to the Moorish National Islamic Center (MNIC). In the early 1940s, meetings of the MNIC took place at

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 401.

Abdul-Wadood and Dr. Rizkiah Bey's residence in Harlem. An insurance inspector and a chiropractor respectively, the couple were well regarded throughout the Muslim community, and continued to be so throughout the 1950s. However, by 1943, the size of the MNIC had dwindled and, by 1944, it was ostensibly defunct.

While the physical meeting space may have shut down, Abdul-Wadood (now commonly referred to as 'Sheikh') and Dr. Rizkiah Bey's contribution to the building of New York City's Muslim community was far from over. Sheikh Abdul-Wadood Bey would participate in orthodox Muslim gatherings throughout the 1940s and 50s and, by 1943, the two were associated with the International Muslim Society (IMS), located at 303 West 125th Street.<sup>93</sup> IMS or 303 as community members usually referred to it, served as Harlem's primary orthodox Muslim place of worship up until the 1970s. Some historians have contended that 303 was initially founded by Somali Muslim immigrants around 1941, and later obtained the support of Sheikh Abdul-Wadood and Dr. Rizkiah Bey, along with other Black American Muslims who had been associated with the MNIC that now embraced orthodox Islam.<sup>94</sup> Others have identified Abdul Wadood Bey as the founder of 303. One of the Black American Muslim elders I interviewed, Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam – who served as a member and a leader in several Muslim communities from the 1950s until today, recounted that while attending 303 as a young man, he and a friend unearthed documentation confirming that the mosque was actually founded by former members of the Moorish Science Temple.<sup>95</sup> In either case, the oral tradition that Imam Sayed recounts is once again instructive. Whether their association with 303 began

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<sup>93</sup> Patrick D. Bowen, "The Search for 'Islam': African-American Islamic Groups in NYC, 1904-1954," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 2 (April 2012): 270-277, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01372.x>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 268-269.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam, Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

at the time of its founding around 1941, or after dissolving the MNIC around 1943, Sheikh Abdul-Wadood and Dr. Rizkia's story demonstrates the truth of the narrative that orthodox Islam began to flower in New York City as Black Americans who had been impacted by the Moorish Science Temple became increasingly attracted to orthodox Muslim beliefs and practices. As we will see in the next section, this process likely began during the late 1920s. By the early 1940s, orthodox Islam had become far and away the most popular iteration of Islam among Black Americans in and around New York City. Imam Sayed further recounted that this same community of Black American Muslims who, according to oral tradition, 'evolved' from being Garveyites to MST members and finally to orthodox Muslims then went on to establish the religious institutions that became associated with immigrant Muslims in New York City — with the contributions of these Black American Muslims ultimately being erased. The primary institution he mentioned was the Islamic Cultural Center of New York-NY, the flagship institution for Sunni Islam in New York City up until today with a Mosque that holds several thousand worshippers. The exact nature of the relationship between ICC-NY and this older community of what I call Black American orthodox Moorish Muslims is unclear. However, one of founding documents of the ICC-NY provides evidence that its founders did indeed feel a sense of indebtedness towards these Black Muslim pioneers. In this document, Dr. Muhammad Abdul Rauf, a religious scholar and graduate of the famed Al-Azhar University in Cairo who served as the Imam of the ICCNY at the time commends "the Beys" for their role in "the conversion of numerous American citizens", and credits Abdul Wadood Bey with the writing of "articles on Islam [that] reveal a depth of genuine knowledge."<sup>96</sup> The later statement bares further testimony to the level of Islamic learning

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<sup>96</sup> Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, *History of the Islamic Center: From Dream to Reality* (Washington D.C.: The

that Black American Muslim religious leaders like Sheikh Abdul-Wadood managed to acquire prior to the 1960s. By the time of his passing in 1954, Sheikh Abdul-Wadood had still maintained his use of the last name ‘Bey’, a surname adopted by members of the Moorish Science Temple to mark their conversion.<sup>97</sup> The fact that he and his wife Dr. Rizkiah never shed this identifier is indicative of Black American orthodox Muslim leaders’ continued embrace of the historical narratives and alternative geographies that they encountered as members of the Moorish Science Temple. This early generation of New York City’s Black American Muslims had no problem reconciling their orthodox religious beliefs and practices with the Black Internationalist cultural and political sensibilities they espoused prior to their embrace of orthodox Islam.

In addition, the Black orthodox Muslim communities that emerged from the 1930s onward built on many of the strategies employed by the Moorish Science Temple and embodied some of its core principles. Specifically, they constructed communities that resembled the Moorish Science Temple in three key areas. First, as mentioned above, they sought to create self-determined communities through cooperative economics, the creation of businesses, and community sponsored print media. To these efforts, later Black Muslim communities would add various community policing initiatives and independent educational institutions for the youth of their communities. This was the case not only for Black orthodox Muslim communities, but also for the Nation of Islam. Second, prior to the 1960s, many Black orthodox Muslim men adopted a similar aesthetic as Moorish Americans — with the men donning a simple red fez to mark their religious status and combining it either with other forms of “Eastern” attire or conventional

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Islamic Center, 1978), 14.

<sup>97</sup> Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, 44.

western dress. And third, while Black orthodox Muslim communities rejected what they viewed as heterodox theological views associated with the MST, they simultaneously embraced alternative histories and moral geographies that were the same as, or closely related to, those of the MST — consequently developing cultural and political orientations that had much in common with those of Moorish Americans. However, as these Black orthodox Muslims strove to build multiethnic and, ultimately, transnational communities with coreligionists who were not Black Americans, they developed a more cosmopolitan world-view. This third category of continuity between the MST and early twentieth century Black orthodox Muslim communities in New York City is particularly relevant to my discussion of the history and contours of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism. Black orthodox Muslim communities are generally depicted as having emerged after the rise of the Nation of Islam and in the context of increased immigration of skilled professionals from majority Muslim countries. However, contrary to this conventional historiography of Islam in America, Black orthodox Muslim communities developed not after but alongside the Nation of Islam. In this manner, Black Muslim cosmopolitanism developed among Black orthodox Muslim communities in conversation with, and sometimes in opposition to, the cultural and political disposition cultivated by the Nation of Islam.

Another important node in the development of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism occurred when a prominent leader in the Moorish Science Temple left that community and, after traveling abroad to live and study in the Muslim World, became a major influence on nascent communities of orthodox Muslims in the US, especially in the Northeast. After embracing orthodox Islam, this pioneering Black Muslim spiritual

seeker built on the tradition initiated by religio-racial movements like the Moorish Science Temple and constructed a new religio-racial identity that was closely related to, yet distinct from, that of Noble Drew Ali. The next chapter recounts the story of Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen and the emergence of a “Black Arab” American racial construction based on the historical and cultural connections, as well as perceived phenotypical similarities, between Black people in the modern Atlantic World and the Arabs of antiquity.

## CHAPTER 2: BEING BLACK, BECOMING ARAB: THE AFRO-ARAB IMAGINARY OF PROFESSOR MUHAMMAD EZALDEEN

Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen was born James Lomax. But over the course of a spiritual journey with Islam that spanned more than three decades, he changed his name three times — first to James Lomax Bey, indicating his membership in the Moorish Science Temple, then to Ali Mehmed Bey, and finally to Muhammad Ezaldeen. Each of his transformations were prompted by evolutions in his understanding of theology and history. These evolutions inspired new racial constructions, each precipitating a shift in the moral geography and historical narrative he employed in order to make that construction legible to other Black American Muslims. This, in turn, impacted his cultural and political orientations, and motivated particular kinds of solidarities. As a result, Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen's story not only provides insight into the emergent culture of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism that developed among Black orthodox Muslims in and around New York City during and after his lifetime, but also demonstrates how Black Muslims' theological convictions, moral geographies and political imaginaries were mutually constituted.

### Setting the Stage: Two Sudanese Muslim Forefathers of Black American Islam

Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen became one of the most influential promoters of orthodox Islam among Black Americans during the late 1930s. His journey through varying iterations of Islam took him to several cities that figure prominently in the history of Islam among Black Americans, including Newark and Chicago. His encounters with orthodox Islam came during the late 1920s — first in Detroit and, subsequently, in New

York City. The Muslim communities he discovered in these two cities were interconnected in several ways. Both places were home to a small but growing, multi-racial contingent of orthodox Muslims who interacted with Black American members of groups like the Moorish Science Temple and the Ahmadiyyah movement. It is likely that his encounter with orthodox Muslims in Detroit influenced Ezaldeen, then known as Lomax-Bey, in his decision to leave the Moorish Science Temple. He thereafter deepened his relationships with orthodox Islam while residing in New York for one year. The Muslim communities of New York city and Detroit were further linked by the efforts of two Sudanese born Muslim immigrant activists, Duse Mohammed Ali and Sheikh Satti Majid, who worked to organize Muslims in both cities. These two Afro-Diasporic Muslims helped to inject a Pan-African and Pan-Islamic consciousness into the intellectual milieu of the nascent orthodox Muslim communities of the urban American centers where they were active. Thus, by exploring the community building efforts of these two Sudanese forefathers of Black American Islam, we can better understand some of the factors that made orthodox Islam appealing to Muhammed Ezaldeen and the many Black Americans who embraced it beginning in the late 1930s.

### Sheikh Satti Majid

Satti Majid Muhammad al-Qadi Suwar al-Dhahab was born in 1883 in the Sudanese town of al-Ghaddar, Old Dongola to a scholarly Muslim family.<sup>98</sup> Around the

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<sup>98</sup> Patrick D Bowen, "Satti Majid: A Sudanese Founder of American Islam," *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 2 (2013): 194–209; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, *Wanderings: Sudanese Migrants and Exiles in North America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 17-32; Ahmed Abu Shouk, JO Hunwick, and R.S. O'Fahey, "A SUDANESE MISSIONARY TO THE UNITED STATES: Satti Majid, 'SHAYKH AL-ISLAM IN NORTH AMERICA', AND HIS ENCOUNTER WITH NOBLE DREW ALI, PROPHET OF THE MOORISH SCIENCE TEMPLE MOVEMENT," *Sudanic Africa* 8, no. 1997: 140–145.

turn of the century, he left Sudan for Egypt, hoping to enroll at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. However, unable to pursue this dream, he carried the religious knowledge he had already acquired from his studies back home in Sudan with him to England, where he may have worked as a sailor, and where he started the Islamic Missionary Society. This was the first of several religious organizations and benevolence societies that would establish during his twenty-five-year sojourn in the West. He arrived in the US, probably in the year 1904, at the age of 21 and began his career as a Muslim missionary and organizer. His first years in America were spent in New York, where he found inspiration from Shaykh Mehmed Ali, the Imam of a small mosque housed in an apartment located at 17 Rector Street in Lower Manhattan that was affiliated with the Ottoman Embassy.<sup>99</sup> The Rector Street Mosque served as an incubator for the city's small but diverse community of immigrant Muslims. Majid collaborated with Imam Mehmed Ali, and continued to be involved with this community into the 1920s, even after leaving New York to help organize Muslims in other cities. Much of his efforts in New York revolved around working to secure financial support and employment opportunities for working class Muslim immigrants from Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and the Indian subcontinent, most of whom had probably worked as maritime workers on British ships. This demographic accounted for the lion's share of the city's Muslim immigrant population at the time.

In 1912, Majid traveled to Detroit where he is believed to have worked with an organization called the United Moslem Association. In addition, he established a chapter of the Red Crescent Society and raised money for a Muslim cemetery. Majid was also active in Buffalo, NY from around 1924 to 1927. Although he stayed rather mobile –

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<sup>99</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*. Vol. 2, 375-378.

visiting communities in various cities – a Buffalo apartment above a Muslim owned coffee house that served as a center for local Muslim life likely served as Majid’s primary residence during that period. Majid appears to have enjoyed more success in Buffalo than perhaps any other city. In 1924, he cofounded the Buffalo Muslim Welfare society which, according to a local newspaper, already boasted at least 700 hundred members less than four months after its incorporation.<sup>100</sup> Majid also spent time in Pittsburgh, where he founded the African Muslim Welfare Society. He may have maintained a residence in that city as well. As Majid crisscrossed between each of these cities, he not only organized immigrant Muslims, but also introduced orthodox Islam to small pockets of Black American immigrants from the American South and the Caribbean.<sup>101</sup> By the time he departed for East Africa in 1929, traveling to Egypt and back to Sudan, Majid had succeeded in building a small network of Black American orthodox Muslims in several major cities where Lomax Bey would also find success promoting orthodox Islam upon his return to the US in the late 1930s.

Majid’s legacy includes not only his institution building work in the US, but also letters that he penned to his followers in America from Sudan and Egypt. They reveal a portrait of a Muslim missionary strongly committed to religious orthodoxy (his attempts to discredit the Moorish Science Temple and the Ahmadiyyah movement as heterodox are well documented) and deeply concerned with issues of social justice.<sup>102</sup> He sought to organize and build power for aggrieved communities of Muslim minorities in the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 380; Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 32.

<sup>101</sup> Among his Black American converts to Islam were Murad Jemel and Mohammed Amen. The latter had been a member of Garvey’s UNIA. For more, see Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, 328.

<sup>102</sup> For more on his efforts to discredit the Moorish Science Temple, see Abu Shouk, Hunwick & O’Fahey, “A Sudanese Missionary to the United States,” 147-150.

American cities he frequented. They also reveal a desire to articulate his faith in a manner that could address the problem of American racism. This is reflected in the mission of the African Moslem Welfare Society of America that he helped to establish in Pittsburgh, which was to “unite the Moslem people; [...] eradicate racial differences due to their color and nationality, and bring them in closer association with each other.” While such an invocation of unity based on Islamic identity may seem at odds with the Black Nationalist sentiments of other groups that promoted Islam among Black Americans in the early twentieth century like the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple, Majid’s words likely appealed to the related, Black *Internationalist* intellectual current within the philosophy of the equally influential UNIA. As Penny Von Eschen observes, the Garvey movement, “created for the first time a feeling of international solidarity between Africans and people of African descent ... (and) Garvey transformed African Americans from a national minority into a global majority.” These aspects of Majid’s approach, along with his identity as an African Muslim immigrant, and his aesthetic – as a dark skinned man who sported a red fez and a suit reminiscent of the Prince Hall Shriners – lent to his appeal among Black Americans.

### Duse Mohammed Ali

Duse Mohammed Ali, like Satti Majid, provided Black Americans a representation of Islam that resonated with their racial and political sensibilities. In fact, unlike Majid, whose primary reason for traveling to the US appears to have been to spread his faith, Duse Mohammed Ali’s motivations were predominantly political. Born in Egyptian occupied Sudan in 1866 to an Egyptian military officer named Abdul Salem

Ali and his Sudanese wife whose name remains unknown, Ali studied in London from a young age.<sup>103</sup> After a brief stint back in Egypt and Sudan at the age of fifteen, during which Ali's father and brother were killed in the midst of the Urabi revolt, Ali embarked on a rather successful career in London as an actor and a journalist.<sup>104</sup> In 1911, Ali published *In the Land of the Pharaohs*, a history of Egypt that served as an endorsement of Egyptian nationalism and a critique of British occupation. The work also displayed Ali's Pan-African sensibilities and helped secure him an invitation to the Universal Races Congress in London that year. The following year, Ali launched the *African Times and Orient review*. The journal was conceived as a "Pan-Oriental, Pan-African journal at the seat of the British Empire which would lay the aims, desires, and intentions of the Black, Brown, and Yellow races – within and without the Empire – at the throne of Caesar."<sup>105</sup> Circulated internationally, the periodical achieved considerable success and became an important organ for articulating a Pan-African and anti-colonial political perspective. Ali became a central figure in London's Pan-African circles, and a visible proponent of Afro-Asian solidarity. While there is no clear indication that Ali was particularly religious at the time, his Islamic identity served as a testament to the religion's compatibility with anticolonial activism as a potential instrument for cultivating unity between African and Asian peoples. Between 1912 and 1914, Marcus Garvey worked with Ali at the *African Times and Orient Review* while attending Birkbeck College in London. The period served as an important one for Garvey as he formulated his own brand of Pan-Africanism. In

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<sup>103</sup> GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, p. 204; Catherine Lynette Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 182.

<sup>104</sup> Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora Since 1787* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1; Donald Reid, "The 'Urabi Revolution and the British Conquest, 1879–1882," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 217–38.

<sup>105</sup> Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 39.

1914, Garvey started his Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica, and established the organization's first American chapter in New York City three years later. In 1921, Ali traveled to New York to collaborate with Garvey. Over the course of the next ten years his work to organize Muslims in New York and Detroit, as well as his continued involvement in the arts facilitated his contributions to the further development of Islamic communities in the US.

Just as in London, Garvey and Ali worked together in producing an influential Pan-African journal. But this time, Garvey was at the helm. Ali contributed articles about happenings on the African continent for Garvey's *Negro World* – a weekly publication which, at its height, outsold virtually every other major Black American newspaper. Ali's articles were read widely by Black American intellectuals throughout the USA as well as the Caribbean, where Black sailors routinely smuggled copies of the paper which was banned in most British and French colonies. Ali had also been heavily influenced by the views of Edward Wilmot Blyden and used his platform to spread similar ideas about Islam's unique suitability for people of African descent. As an African born Muslim who espoused Pan-Africanism, Ali became an important symbol of Islam's place within the broader Black radical tradition, and a key figure in the intellectual genealogy Islam in America. As the historian Sally Howell insightfully observes, “[b]y adopting the slogan ‘One God, One Aim, One Destiny,’ and including Muslims like Duse Ali in the pages of *Negro World*, Garvey became an early American promoter of Islam as an African religion with potential to link non-whites in their opposition to Euro-American racism and colonial oppression.”<sup>106</sup> Garvey's role in popularizing Islam in the US and spreading

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<sup>106</sup> Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 77; GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 203.

awareness about its relationship to Africa was augmented by Duse Mohammed Ali's contributions to the *Negro World*.

In 1922, Ali started the American African Orient-Trading Company, a business aimed at using American capital to foster economic development in Africa. Like Garvey's Black Star Line, the company provides a window into how people throughout the African Diaspora imagined their Pan-African political perspectives could be mobilized to cultivate global Black economic power. Unfortunately, just like its Garvey-run counterpart, the American African Orient-Trading Company was never able to achieve economic success. But Ali would have the opportunity to pursue his Pan-African and anti-colonial political goals once again in Detroit – this time through faith-based organizing. In 1925, he was invited by some Indian members of Detroit's orthodox Muslim community to come and help organize a mosque there.<sup>107</sup> Howell describes the religious institution that was envisioned by Ali and the Detroit based Muslims he worked with as similar to the mosque Ali frequented in the English town of Woking – an Ahmadiyyah run, ethnically diverse Muslim place of worship that also served as “a center of Muslim anticolonial activism in Europe.”

Ali did, indeed, relocate to Detroit where he served as president of the Universal Islamic Society, an important early orthodox Muslim institution.<sup>108</sup> While the majority of its worshipers were immigrants from Greater Syria, the Indian subcontinent, and Turkey, there is evidence that a small number of Black Americans in Detroit embraced Islam and began attending UIS as well. As in London, Ali also achieved notable success in Detroit as an actor, allowing him to promote his political ideas and religious identity through the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 76-77.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 75.

arts. He garnered interest among Black Americans not only because of his Pan-Africanism, but also because of his “oriental mystique.” Figures abounded during the 1920s and 30s in the urban North who used pervading notions of the mystical orient to attract religious fidelity and often financial support from American spiritual seekers. While Ali does not appear to have undertaken a career as a ‘holy man’ in this fashion, such trends undoubtedly contributed to his appeal as an artist and political organizer.<sup>109</sup> His aesthetic, which was virtually identical to that of his fellow Sudanese Muslim activist Satti Majid, simultaneously invoked images of Black American Shriners, members of the burgeoning Moorish Science Temple, and young Arab Muslim activists and intellectuals, providing a bridge between ‘East’ and ‘West’ with his very appearance.

Ali spent less than three years in Detroit. He returned to New York in late 1927, around the same time that his former collaborator Marcus Garvey was being deported to Jamaica after spending four years in prison for a politically motivated conviction on charges of mail fraud. During his time in Detroit and back in New York, he continued his attempts to build an African trading company but remained unsuccessful. In 1931, Ali relocated to Lagos, Nigeria where he spent the remainder of his life continuing his successful career as a journalist. The communities of Muslims that he left behind in Detroit and New York would exert considerable influence on James Lomax Bey as he evolved to become a pioneering promoter of orthodox Islam, and thus provide context for his story.

### Becoming “Bey”

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 78.

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1886 James Lomax was born to a large family in the small, rural town of Abbeville, South Carolina, which has the dubious distinction of being both the “birthplace and deathbed of the confederacy”.<sup>110</sup> His parents Jacob and Alice were farmers. By the year 1900, Alice Lomax had borne fourteen children, twelve of whom were still living. The six youngest still resided with Jacob and Alice and all of them did farm work. Jacob was probably a sharecropper, and the family likely worked on a plot of land that he rented. While the family’s educational opportunities were limited, all of them with the exception of two-year-old Carrie Lomax were listed as literate according to that year’s Federal Census, possibly indicating a parental emphasis on education. Such would certainly foreshadow the intellectual trajectory of the young James. By 1910, Jacob Lomax appears to have acquired the means to purchase a farm of his own. In that year, he also seems to have changed his racial identification – with that year’s census classifying him as ‘Mulatto’ rather than ‘Negro’ for the very first time.<sup>111</sup> This also foreshadowed his son James’ complicated relationship with racial categorization later in life.

It is unclear at what point James Lomax encountered Noble Drew Ali’s teachings. There is some evidence to suggest that he may have been a follower of the nascent Moorish Science Temple movement in Newark, New Jersey in the late 1910s. But by 1920, James lived with his older brother Jacob, in Chicago, IL, which became Noble

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<sup>110</sup> Edward E. Curtis, “Ezaldeen, Muhammad,” in *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History, 2-Volume Set* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2010), 175; *New World Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Abbeville, South Carolina,” last modified January 26, 2018, ([https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Abbeville,\\_South\\_Carolina](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Abbeville,_South_Carolina)); 1900 U.S. Census, Abbeville, South Carolina, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 8, sheet 10 (handwritten), dwelling 176, family 178, James Lomax; digital image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), citing Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900. T623, 1854 rolls.

<sup>111</sup> 1910 U.S. Census, Calhoun, Abbeville, South Carolina, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 9, sheet 4A (handwritten), dwelling 48, family 48, Jacob Lomax; digital image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), citing Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. NARA microfilm publication T624, 1,178 rolls.

Drew Ali's home and the site of the Moorish Science Temple's headquarters around 1923.<sup>112</sup> Now known as James Lomax-Bey, he was one of the original incorporators of the Moorish Science Temple in 1926 and head of the Moorish Science Temple's Grand Temple in Chicago.<sup>113</sup> As a high-ranking official in the movement, and likely one of those most trusted by Noble Drew Ali, Lomax-Bey was appointed to lead Detroit's Temple Number 4 in 1928, and to serve as the Supreme Grand Governor for the state of Michigan. The Detroit temple quickly became one of the most prominent Moorish Science Temple communities in the nation – perhaps the strongest outside of its headquarters in Chicago. In 1928, Temple Number 4's successes were frequently mentioned in the pages of the community's national newspaper *The Moorish Guide*. One article that year recounting a visit to Temple Number 4 by Noble Drew Ali himself referred to it as “one of the largest Temples in the United States.”<sup>114</sup> It continued, “[b]rother Lomax Bey has done a wonderful work in building up one of the most powerful Temples in the organization. He was formerly in charge of the Grand Temple at Chicago, but when the demand for a strong leader at Detroit became necessary, he went there.” The article promised even more coverage of the Moorish Science Temple's success in Detroit in the form of a “more extensive article in the MOORISH GUIDE telling of the work of Temple No. 4.”

In another 1928 article, the *Moorish Guide*'s “Report of Temples” section, which chronicled the economic achievements, debts, and revenues of temples around the

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<sup>112</sup> 1920 U.S. Census, Chicago Ward 2, Cook (Chicago), Illinois, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 88, sheet 3B (handwritten), dwelling (unlisted), family (unlisted), James Lomax; digital image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), citing Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. NARA microfilm publication T625, 2076 rolls.

<sup>113</sup> Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 84.

<sup>114</sup> “Big Spiritual Demonstration Witnessed at Temple,” *Moorish Guide* (National Edition), Vol. 1 No. 3, September 14, 1928, 1.

country informs readers that Detroit's Temple Number 4 boasted four businesses: two grocery stores, a printing press, and a laundry. In addition, it listed total revenue for that year at \$19,458, just under \$300,000 in today's currency, making it by far one of the most economically prosperous Moorish Science Temple locations at the time. This financial success would play a role in creating an eventual rift between Lomax Bey and Noble Drew Ali.<sup>115</sup>

The very next year, a Chicago based Moorish Science Temple leader named Claude Greene broke away from Noble Drew Ali's leadership.<sup>116</sup> The resulting schism produced scandalous allegations and violent contestations over community authority as prominent members of the Moorish Science Temple became involved in what many saw as an attempted coup. Greene may have influenced Lomax-Bey who appears to have become disgruntled with the expectation that a significant portion of the funds raised in Detroit needed be sent to the headquarters in Chicago. As a result, he also broke ties with his former spiritual guide, declaring the Detroit Temple's independence from the national body of the Moorish Science Temple. As mentioned above, Lomax-Bey's sudden rejection of Noble Drew Ali's claims to religious authority after years of promoting his declaration of prophethood was likely fueled, in part, by his discovery of Detroit's orthodox Muslim community during this period. In fact, it was later reported that he had served as the head of the Michigan branch of the Turkish Society for the Protection of Children during this time.<sup>117</sup> Less than two years later he would travel to Turkey to seek support for Black American Muslims who wished to flee the rampant horrors of anti-

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<sup>115</sup> Michael Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks: Muslims in Newark, New Jersey: A Social History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), 50.

<sup>116</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2*, 214-215.

<sup>117</sup> "U.S. Negro Moslem Fails to Get Job," *Clarion-Ledger*, July 7, 1930.

Black terrorism in 1930s America and relocate to the Muslim World. These factors, along with his eventual adoption of the name Mehmed – a distinctly Turkish rendering of *Muhammad*, are indicative of the relationships Lomax-Bey may have begun cultivating in Detroit, where many of the Muslims who attended UIS were Turkish.<sup>118</sup>

In May of 1929, Noble Drew Ali responded by calling for Lomax-Bey's resignation as Supreme Governor of Michigan and head of Temple Number 4. When Lomax Bey attempted to register a new organization called the Mohammedan or Moorish Church Temple, using the same address as Temple Number 4, a Detroit community member still loyal to Ali alleged that Lomax Bey had embezzled funds from the national organization. Lomax Bey was arrested but was out by the following night, speaking at a Moorish meeting. The meeting turned violent, resulting in a gun fight that left two Moors and two police officers wounded.<sup>119</sup> Shortly thereafter Claude Greene was killed. Noble Drew Ali would die the following year under mysterious circumstances, possibly killed by Greene's supporters in retaliation or, alternatively, due to beatings Drew Ali received from police while in their custody.<sup>120</sup> Amidst the chaos, James Lomax-Bey, also targeted by Claude Greene's killers, fled to Brooklyn, New York, where he lived for a year before traveling abroad.

Lomax-Bey's time in New York may not have been very long, but it was rather significant. He arrived in April of 1929, roughly three months after Satti Majid's departure. While in Egypt, Majid exchanged letters with his followers in the US who

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<sup>118</sup> I owe a special thanks to the independent researcher Akil Fahd for pointing out this connection to me for the first time. Fahd also deserves credit for discovering many of the newspaper articles and other original sources regarding Muhammad Ezaldeen from the 1930s and 40s are cited by myself and other historians.

<sup>119</sup> "4 Wounded in Lodge Riot," *Detroit Times*, March 13, 1929; "Detroit Followers Riot," *Chicago Defender*, March 23, 1929.

<sup>120</sup> Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 272.

inquired about Lomax-Bey, who was also living in Cairo by that time.<sup>121</sup> It seems likely that Lomax-Bey would have heard of Majid while in New York, perhaps visiting the mosque at 17 Rector Street. Patrick Bowen speculates that Lomax-Bey may have founded the Moorish Temple Church in Brooklyn, pointing to the similarity between its name and that of the Moorish Science (or Mohammedan) Church Temple that he attempted to start in Detroit the previous year.<sup>122</sup> What makes his case even more compelling is the fact that the Moorish Temple Church would go on to promote an approach to Moorish Science that incorporated various elements of orthodox Muslim belief and practice, encouraged the study of Arabic, and attracted at least one orthodox Muslim immigrant from Egypt.<sup>123</sup> In later years, Lomax-Bey's continued relationship with New York based Black Muslim communities would have far reaching implications. Throughout the city, as well as in nearby New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, the line between Moorish Science affiliated communities and those that championed orthodox Islam became increasingly blurry. This fact has made it difficult to determine the point at which pioneering figures in Black Muslim history like Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal and Abdul-Wadud Bey embraced Islamic orthodoxy. Some scholars have asserted that both these figures had once been members of the MST. In the case of Shaykh Daoud, others have attempted to bolster his orthodox Muslim legitimacy by asserting that he had always been an orthodox Muslim. It is interesting to consider the implications of a third possibility, that at the time of their conversion a person could simultaneously embrace orthodox Islam and the ideas about race and history associated with the Moorish Science

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<sup>121</sup> Abu Shouk, Hunwick & O'Fahey, "A Sudanese Missionary to the United States," 183-184. The person referred to as both "Mohammad S.L. Deen" and "Mr. E.L. Deen" in the letter is almost certainly Muhammad Ezaldeen. See Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 386.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 389.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 401.

Temple. Such an orientation would, in many ways, prefigure the ideology that Lomax Bey developed.

### Becoming Ali Mehmed

While in New York, James Lomax-Bey went through a second transformation. Now identifying with a more orthodox iteration of the Muslim faith, he changed his name once again, this time taking the name Ali Mehmed Bey. His continued use of the Bey surname reveals his enduring commitment to aspects of the Moorish Science Temple's alternative history and alternative construction of race – in spite of his rejection of its theology.<sup>124</sup> On May of 1930, Ali Mehmed Bey and nine of his followers set sail for Turkey where he attempted to secure farm land from the Turkish government for Black American Muslims who wished to leave the US. Bey made his petition on the grounds that he and the members of his community were “suffering from racial problems in America” and sought to benefit from “Turkey’s traditional impartiality to negroes”.<sup>125</sup> His strategy anticipated that of later Black activists who similarly attempted to leverage America’s poor track record with regard to the treatment of Black people to build solidarities with competing nations.<sup>126</sup> For Black American Muslims like Ali Mehmed Bey and those after him, this also meant simultaneously appealing to ideals of Islamic racial egalitarianism. Bey’s background, having grown up on a farm in South Carolina, likely fueled his interest in agriculture as a means of securing a degree of economic independence – a quality he exhibited throughout much of his life. Though he did obtain

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 389; Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks*, 46, 50.

<sup>125</sup> Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 84.

<sup>126</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

the sympathy and support of some individuals in Turkey, Turkish government officials were unmoved by his request. His time in Turkey overlapped with the presidency of the secular nationalist Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, rendering Bey's appeals to Muslim religious solidarity less than compelling. An associated press article ran in various American newspapers around the country in 1930 describes the small cohort as "finding the hunt (for jobs) a hard one." Another from November of 1931 describes them as "digging the sewers of Istanbul to gain their daily bread."<sup>127</sup>

### Becoming Ezaldeen

Shortly thereafter, Ali Mehmed Bey moved on to Cairo, Egypt. In Cairo, he underwent a final transformation that endured for the rest of his life. There he became connected with the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA).<sup>128</sup> This connection may have been initiated by Shaykh Satti Majid, who became an active member of Cairo's intellectual and activist circles after leaving the US.<sup>129</sup> Founded in 1926, YMMA was one of several religio-political societies that emerged in Egypt during the 1920s. Along with another such society, the more well-known Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan Al-Banna two years later, YMMA was among the most influential. It attracted young Muslim men from the emerging *effendi* class, which consisted of "urban, educated middle class of native Egyptians."<sup>130</sup> While such societies were not ideologically nationalistic per se, they acted as important cultural and intellectual incubators for Arab Nationalism

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<sup>127</sup> "Detroit Negro Moslems Hunt Jobs in Turkey," *The Burlington Free Press*, July 14, 1930; "U.S. Negro Moslem Fails to Get Job," *Clarion-Ledger*, July 7, 1930; "Founders of Ill-Fated Colony Now Dig Sewers in Turkey," *Gettysburg Times*, November 18, 1931.

<sup>128</sup> Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks*, 41; AAUAA FBI file, Report, 3/22/1944, Newark file 100-18924; AAUAA FBI file, Report, 10/20/1943, Buffalo file 100-6320.

<sup>129</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2*, 386, 390-391.

<sup>130</sup> Israel Gershoni, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

in Egypt and encouraged grass roots activism. They also cultivated an approach to Islam that attempted to balance religious conviction and commitment to tradition with modernism. This intellectual tradition owed a great deal to turn of the century Egyptian intellectuals like Jamal Ad-Din al Afghani and Muhammad Abduh.

YMMA ranks included a number of religious scholars linked to Al-Azhar University and facilitated Ali Mehmed Bey's religious education and Arabic language instruction. Over the course of five years in Egypt, he obtained a mastery of Arabic that was almost certainly unparalleled among American born Muslim converts at the time. Through YMMA's sponsorship he received formal preparation and authorization to serve as a *da'i*, a person trained to propagate Islam.<sup>131</sup> Ideologically, his encounter with the Muslim intellectual circles of 1930s Egypt allowed him to serve as a capable bridge between Black American and Arab traditions of religion and resistance. Indeed, there were many commonalities between the Garvey infused Black Nationalist sentiments of the Moorish Science Temple and the Afghani influenced Arab Nationalism embodied by young Egyptian intellectuals in the 1930s. Both Garvey and Afghani were vehement opponents of Western Imperialism. Both attempted to challenge European dominance by exhorting their own people, Muslims and Africans throughout the Diaspora respectively, to emulate the strong posture of competing nations. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Afghani challenged Egyptians, and Muslims more generally, who had been "born into slavery and (were) living under despotic rule" to "[l]ive free and happy like other nations or else die as martyrs."<sup>132</sup> Decades later during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Garvey challenged the world's

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<sup>131</sup> This was very likely accompanied by some type of *ijaza* – a traditional certificate of Islamic religious learning that usually indicates a degree of religious authority.

<sup>132</sup> A. Albert Kudsi-Zadeh, "Afghānī and Freemasonry in Egypt," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (January 1972): 31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/599645>.

“400 million Black People” to prove themselves more than a mere “race of cowards... imbeciles.... (and) good for-nothings,” by doing “what other nations have done, what other races have done,” and warned that if they could not, then they “had better die!”<sup>133</sup>

As mentioned above, the aesthetic of the young Egyptian intellectuals that he met in Cairo was almost identical to the standard attire associated with the Moorish Science Temple. And for a keen observer like Ali Mehmed Bey the intellectual and political similarities between these two streams of anticolonial resistance were undoubtedly clear. Thus, Ali Mehmed Bey went on to craft an articulation of his racial and religious ideology that fused the racially affirming historical and political consciousness of the MST – and by extension that of Pan-African intellectuals like Blyden, Garvey, and Dubois – and the Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic sensibilities of Arab thinkers like Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida. The resulting admixture was an ethnic marker that Bey referred to as the ‘Hamitic Arab.’ This final transformation prompted one last name change. While in Egypt, he took on the name Muhammad Ezaldeen, perhaps drawing inspiration from Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, a prominent Palestinian religious scholar who served as president of the YMMA chapter in Haifa from 1928 until his death in 1935.<sup>134</sup>

In 1936, Muhammad Ezaldeen returned to the US where he went on to instruct and organize communities of Muslims along the Eastern seaboard for more than twenty years. The orthodox Muslim religious orientation he adopted after leaving the MST and the radical

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<sup>133</sup> Marcus Garvey, “Made in Harlem,” (1924), <http://marcusgarvey.com/?p=830>; Lisa Palmer and Kehinde Andrews, eds., “Black Is a Country: Black People in the West as a Colonized Minority,” in *Blackness in Britain* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 53.

<sup>134</sup> Ted Swedenberg, “The Role of the Palestinian Peasantry in the Great Revolt (1936-1939),” in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, ed. Edmund Burke, Ira M. Lapidus, and Ervand Abrahamian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 189.

new ideas about racial and ethnic identity he developed while in Egypt would both go on to influence the direction of Islam in America for well over half a century.

### **Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen and the Hamitic Arab Idea**

Upon returning to the US, Ezaldeen set about the work of spreading orthodox Islam among Black Americans in various cities on the East Coast and in the Midwest by either establishing new communities of Muslims or supporting those that already existed. The name for the network of communities he initiated, located in the States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida, was the Addeynu Allahe Universal Arabic Association (AAUAA). He also started an umbrella organization called Uniting Islamic Societies (UIS) that attempted to bring together AAUAA members and representatives from other communities around the country through a national conference.<sup>135</sup> Throughout the American Muslim community, he came to be referred to as Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen, in recognition of his exceptional knowledge of both Islam and Arabic, and his commitment to spreading this knowledge among Black American Muslims.<sup>136</sup>

In the years following his return to the US, several young men emerged as active promoters of orthodox Islam and community leaders in their own right. Three such young men figure especially prominently in the history of Black American Islam. They include the aforementioned Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal in Brooklyn, about whom more will be written in the next chapter, Sheikh Nasir Ahmed in Philadelphia, and al-Hajj Wali Akram

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<sup>135</sup> Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks*, 41-63; Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 393-396; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 48-55, 63.

<sup>136</sup> In this context, the title Professor may have served as a translation of the Arabic title *ustadh*, which signifies formal learning and teaching. Alternatively, the title may also have been derived from a prior career as a public school educator.

in Cleveland. Each of these men appear to have been influenced, to varying degrees, by Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen.

Sheikh Nasir Ahmed was born Walter Smith in Columbus County, North Carolina on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1896.<sup>137</sup> By the middle of the 1920s, he served as a leader of the nation's third largest Moorish Science Temple community and ran its local grocery store.<sup>138</sup> In the early 1930s, as many Moors around the country began exploring new Islamic religious movements in the wake of Noble Drew Ali's death, the man then known as Walter Smith Bey became one of a number of Moors based in and around the Ohio River Valley who joined the Ahmadiyyah movement. It is likely that he obtained the Arabic name Nasir Ahmed from a Cleveland-based Ahmadiyya missionary. Rather than eschew the ideas he encountered through the Moorish Science Temple in total, Ahmed maintained his emphasis on using Islamic identity to speak to the concerns of urban Black communities and maintained his relationships with Moors in the region. These qualities undoubtedly contributed to his exceptional popularity, leading the American Ahmadiyya authority of the time to appoint him to the position of *Sheikh* along with a number of other African Americans, as well as to the post of *Imam* for the Cleveland Mosque – a distinction he held alone. In 1934, as tensions between the Ahmadiyya community's exclusively Indian immigrant leadership and its Black American base began to surface, Sheikh Nasir Ahmed

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<sup>137</sup> Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Marriage Records and Indexes, 1810-1973, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for Nasir Ahmad, married 1934, from Cuyahoga County Archive; Cleveland, Ohio; Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Marriage Records, 1810-1973; Volume: Vol 171-172, Page: 161, Year Range: 1934 Jan - 1934 Oct, citing *Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Marriage Records, 1810-1973*. Microfilm publication, 137 rolls. Reels 1-110. Cuyahoga, Ohio; U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for Nasir Ahmad, from The National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; *World War II draft cards (Fourth Registration) for the State of Pennsylvania*, Record Group Title: *Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975*, Record Group Number: 147; Series Number: M1951 citing United States, Selective Service System. *Selective Service Registration Cards, World War II: Fourth Registration*. Records of the Selective Service System, Record Group Number 147. National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>138</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 330-332.

was sent to Philadelphia – supposedly to organizing a community there – In an attempt to undermine his growing popularity. The strategy backfired and helped to precipitate an exodus on the part of a sizable contingent of Black American Ahmadiyya members who began to affiliate themselves first with the Lahoris, a competing Ahmadiyya faction whose beliefs aligned more closely with orthodox Muslims, and ultimately with Islamic orthodoxy outright. During the 1940s, Sheikh Nasir Ahmed and his followers were members of Professor Ezaldeen’s AAUAA and lived in a “secluded agrarian community” in South New Jersey aptly named ‘Ezaldeen Village.’<sup>139</sup> In 1949, they branched off to form the International Muslim Brotherhood, an urban based, Sunni Muslim mosque located in South Philadelphia. Today its descendent, the Quba Institute, continues to serve members of city’s orthodox Muslim community, now operating in West Philadelphia.

Hajj Wali Akram, who was born Walter Gregg in Caldwell, Texas on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1904 followed a very similar path.<sup>140</sup> He embraced Islam and the Ahmadiyya movement in 1923 in St. Louis Missouri through Nathaniel P. Johnson.<sup>141</sup> Also known as Sheikh Ahmed Din, Johnson was another member of the Moorish Science Temple who joined the Ahmadiyya movement, and later went on to form his own religious movement called the Fahamme Temple. In the late 1920s, Akram also moved to Cleveland and joined the same Ahmadiyya community that attracted Sheikh Nasir Ahmed. In the year following Ahmed’s departure for Philadelphia, Hajj Wali Akram led another group of African

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<sup>139</sup> Quba Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies. “History.” qubainstitute.com. <https://www.qubainstitute.com/about/history/> (accessed July 11, 2019).

<sup>140</sup> U.S. Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for Wali A. Akram citing *Find A Grave*. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>; U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for Wali A. Akram citing Social Security Applications and Claims, 1936-2007.

<sup>141</sup> Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 37-38.

American Ahmadiis who severed ties with foreign and immigrant leadership, establishing the Muslim Ten Year Plan.<sup>142</sup> This community also embraced orthodox Islamic after a brief stint of promoting the ideology of the Lahori branch of the Ahmadiyya movement.



**Figure 1:** The Uniting Islamic Society of America's First Convention in Philadelphia, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1943 was attended by some of the most influential Black Muslim religious leaders of the earlier part of the twentieth century. In the front row, furthest to left stands Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal wearing a multicolored robe. To his immediate right stands Al-Hajj Wali Akram sporting a suit and tie and a fez. In the center, dressed in a black robe and with a noticeably grey beard stands Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen. In the row behind them further to the right stands Sheikh Nasir Ahmed, also wearing a suit with a fez, who towers over the others due to his considerable height.

Each of these Black American orthodox Muslim pioneers emerged around the time that Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen began organizing branches of his AAUAA in various cities on the East Coast and in the Mid-West, including Hammonton, Whitesboro,

<sup>142</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*. Vol. 2, 396.

and Newark, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Cleveland and Columbus Ohio, Buffalo and Rochester, New York, and Jacksonville Florida. And each of them collaborated with Professor Ezaldeen. All three of them are pictured in a 1943 photo from the first Uniting Islamic Societies convention, organized by Professor Ezaldeen, held in Philadelphia on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1943 at the South Philadelphia YMCA located at 1724 Christian Street. Though each went on to develop their own, distinct leadership style and articulation of orthodox Muslim belief and practice, they all adopted some of the ideas and approaches pioneered by Professor Ezaldeen, their esteemed Black orthodox Muslim elder who added legitimacy to all of their movements as a homegrown, Black American Muslim religious authority trained in the Muslim World. While each of his younger contemporaries worked to build thriving Muslim communities in the urban centers of New York City, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, Ezaldeen's AAUAA took a different approach – establishing two rural Muslim villages in an attempt to achieve true self determination and greater religious autonomy.<sup>143</sup> In addition to the aforementioned Ezaldeen Village, the town of Jabal al-Arabia (lit. the Arabic mountain) was established in West Valley, outside of Buffalo, NY. Both of these settlements have largely dissipated, though a handful of their founders' descendants live on in both locations. Perhaps the largest footprint of Professor Ezaldeen's institutional efforts lives on in northern New Jersey, where Ezaldeen's followers established urban mosques that still operate today in a number of cities including Newark and Elizabeth.<sup>144</sup> But culturally and ideologically, Black American orthodox Muslim mosques throughout Northeast, and perhaps around the country, bare the marks of his influence.

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<sup>143</sup> Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 34.

<sup>144</sup> Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks*, 53, 59, 64.

Today, more than sixty years after his passing in 1957, there are likely few living witnesses who learned about Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen's teachings from him directly. Furthermore, Ezaldeen experienced failing health during the 1940s, losing both his legs to amputation due to complications stemming from an injury he incurred after stepping on a nail while building his intended family home in West Valley, New York.<sup>145</sup> This condition limited his ability to travel in his later years. However, a generation of inheritors maintained his ideological legacy, especially in New York and New Jersey. One of his more prominent successors, Wahab Arbubakrr, served as the president of the AAUAA after Professor Ezaldeen's passing.<sup>146</sup> He was followed in that position by his collaborator Sheikh Heesham Jaaber. Jaaber is notable within African American history for conducting the Islamic funeral rites for Malcolm X, and for his influence on the renowned literary giant Amiri Baraka – who accepted Islam and received his name at Jaaber's hands.<sup>147</sup> Since his passing in 2007, Jaaber's sons, Sheikh Muhammad Jaaber and Sheikh Ali Jaaber, have continued to serve the Muslim community of Northern New Jersey as religious leaders and educators. Other prominent heirs to Ezaldeen's legacy in Northern New Jersey include Sheikh Akeel Karam, who founded another influential mosque in Newark during the 1960s, and Sheikh Kameil Wadud, who led an effort to

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<sup>145</sup> Curtis, "Ezaldeen, Muhammad," 176.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 175-176; "Wahab Arbubakrr Obituary." legacy.com.

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/name/wahab-arbubakrr-obituary?pid=178796640> (accessed July 11, 2019).

<sup>147</sup> Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 59; Heesham Jaaber, *The Final Chapter: I Buried Malcolm (Haj Malik El-Shabazz)* (New Mind Productions, 1993). From Jaaber, he received the name Amir Barakat, meaning 'blessed prince' in Arabic. However, he would later adopt Amiri Baraka, the Swahili form of the name, under the influence of Maulana Karenga.

maintain a self-sustaining, urban Black Muslim community in Newark in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>148</sup>

Another such figure was Imam Hassan Mubarak, who served as the Imam of the AAUAA's Unit Number 9 located in Buffalo, NY.<sup>149</sup> Less than an hour away from *Jabal Arabia*, the intentional community founded in West Valley by Ezaldeen and his followers, Buffalo appears to have enjoyed a strong Muslim presence between the 1940s and the 1970s. While the origins of the city's Muslim community can be traced at least as far back as the 1920s when Satti Majid was active there, Islam became more influential as a result of the AAUAA, who founded its Buffalo chapter in 1938. While a core group of its members found a large plot of land in the area that would become Jabal Arabia and resided there, many continued to work in Buffalo. One prominent example is Sheikh Daoud Ghani, an early follower of Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen who served as a leader of the community, and who "for over forty years rose from his bed every morning and braved the treacherous winters of the snowbelt to reach his job twenty-five miles away in Buffalo."<sup>150</sup> At its height, AAUAA chapters owned land in West Valley, New York and Hammonton New Jersey, the cites of Jabal Arabia and Ezaldeen Village respectively, and controlled buildings in Buffalo, New York and Newark, New Jersey – with membership in the area estimated by some to have reached a thousand or more. By the late 1960s, much of the AAUAA's presence in Buffalo had waned. However, a community of roughly 30 families of Black American Muslims continued to meet and

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Osman Karriem. New York, NY. 2 August 2010. Osman Karriem was a friend and travelling companion of Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, who he also managed. Also, see Curtis, "Ezaldeen, Muhammad," 175-176.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Layla Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 10 April 2015; Interview with Nuru Raheem, Atlanta, GA. 11 April 2015.

<sup>150</sup> Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 267.

worship together in the city. They were led by Imam Hassan Mubarak who was noted for his intellectual prowess and described by some as one of Professor Ezaldeen's best students.

In 1968, Jana Amatu Al Wakeel took shahadah, embracing Islam at age 22 along with her husband while living in Buffalo, and joined unit number 9 of the AAUAA. She had moved to Buffalo around 1958 at the age of 12 from West Point Kentucky, a small time 29 miles away from Louisville where she had lived with her paternal grandparents since she was six. Upon moving to Buffalo in her youth, Jana resided with her mother and stepfather, Claude Clay, whose nephew Cassius would become perhaps America's most celebrated Black Muslim convert – the world champion Muhammad Ali. Jana largely credits her stepfather for instilling within her an abiding sense of pride in her African American heritage, and a strong desire to learn about African history. She recounts how televised examples of racial terrorism aimed at Black Americans fostered a political militancy within her that, along with her interest in Black history, ultimately led to her embrace of Orthodox Islam.

"I remember the riots and I couldn't understand, well, why are they sick...siccing the dogs out on people who are protesting, who don't have any weapons. So that prepared me to become a very militant young lady after I went to school in Buffalo (chuckles). Um, and I just was searching for the history and that's what brought me to Islam. Not anybody selling me a paper or giving me dawah on the corner, searching for the history. And as I started to read, uh, about all of the great inventions of African Americans, I said, there's more to it than this. I have to go back to the origin what was going on in Africa. And I studied that history. And I was just amazed at what our people did back then."<sup>151</sup>

She further explains that, prior to becoming Muslim, her passion around issues facing Black people resulted in her affiliation with the Black Panther Party – a path she shares in

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

common with many Black Americans who embraced Islam in East Coast cities during the late 1960s and 1970s.

“And so through studying African history, it brought me to Islam. Although I was a militant and a Black Panther and all of that back in... maybe from 18 to 22, I took my Shahada at 22. Never had a fight in my life, but I would be out there (yelling) ‘burn baby burn!’ with my fist in the air and my Angela Davis afro.”<sup>152</sup>

Nuru Raheem was also a member of the Buffalo AAUAA community who embraced Islam around the same time. Born in Akron, Ohio, Nuru moved to Buffalo after a stint studying at Morehouse University in Atlanta, GA. From there, he moved to Buffalo where he embraced Islam in 1971. Like Jana, he became politicized in the years preceding his religious conversion in his early twenties.

I actually got radicalized probably more down (in Atlanta), ‘cause I met, when I was at Morehouse, I met Kwame Ture (who was formerly known as) Stokely Carmichael. I met Jamil Al-Amin (who formerly known as) H. Rap Brown. Because they were all on campus at the time. It was just a, it was a little hotbed of (activism). Cleveland Sellers.... they were all on campus. down there on the West End when I was here. And then when Dr. King got shot, that night, in Atlanta was a riot..... So I was already kind of fired up.<sup>153</sup>

Both Jana and Nuru recall encountering the Nation of Islam prior to joining the AAUAA. Both recounted having mixed feelings about the NOI, recognizing aspects of the group they respected, but not feeling compelled to join. They also both recounted finding the message of the AAUAA, as articulated by Imam Hassan Mubarak, as well as a *da’i* of the community named Amir al-Haqq, to have been profoundly moving.<sup>154</sup> From the testimony of Black American Muslims like them who joined the AAUAA after Professor Ezaldeen’s passing, along with the writings and accounts of his successors who

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> See description of the term *da’i* in relation to Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen on page 77.

studied with him directly, we can derive a great deal of insight into Professor Ezaldeen's ideology and why it has endured as a uniquely compelling articulation of Islamic orthodoxy.

### **Defining the (Black) Hametic Arab**

The defining characteristic of Professor Ezaldeen's unique articulation of Black American orthodox Muslim identity is encompassed within his concept of the "Hametic Arab."<sup>155</sup> Ezaldeen taught that Black people in the Americas were descended from the Biblical figure of Ham. While the belief that all Black people were Ham's descendants was popular in the West at the time, the Hamitic nature of Black identity was often understood to be something negative – invoking the notion of the "curse of Canaan," and by extension Black subordination.<sup>156</sup> Ezaldeen stripped Hamitic identity of its negative associations, and instead used it merely as a way to demonstrate the ancient origins of the modern Black race. In this manner, he built on the tradition of Noble Drew Ali who similarly argued that Black people in North America were the descendants of the architects of great North African civilizations, who were themselves descended from the Biblical Canaanites. However, Ezaldeen paired the 'Hamitic' racial marker with an Arab cultural identifier. Thus 'Hamitic Arab' served to signify a Black subgroup among a larger Arab cultural community. This approach had several implications that appealed to Black Americans who embraced the AAUAA's message. First, it seized upon a prophetic

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<sup>155</sup> For a very brief introduction to Professor Ezaldeen's notion of the Hamitic Arab, see Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks*. Regarding its connection to the teachings of Noble Drew Ali, see Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 33-34.

<sup>156</sup> Genesis 9:20-27. Canaan was the Biblical son of Ham and Ham is often depicted as the progenitor of all Black people. Although the Bible singles out Ham's son Canaan for the curse, later commentators extended the curse backward to include Ham and, thereby, all of his descendants. Thus the "curse of Canaan" came to represent the idea of Black inferiority.

argument against ethnic hierarchy. In a well know *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have cautioned his followers against their pre-Islamic tendencies toward Arab chauvinism by informing them that anyone who speaks Arabic is, in fact, an Arab.<sup>157</sup> Such a strategy, it can be argued, was indicative of a premodern epistemology that conceptualized human difference according to language and cultural rather race.<sup>158</sup> Such sentiments were consistent with the notions of Black identity popularized by religio-racial movements like the Moorish Science Temple and various Black Hebrew congregations of the early twentieth century. While explaining the Hametic Arab ideal, Nuru discussed the way it drew upon religion and history to craft a more affirming racial identity for Black people tied to Arabic language and culture.

“...the Qu'ran speaks of identifying people by the particular language that you are. And the Hametic part of it simply kind of represents your skin color by virtue of the descendancy of the children of Noah. You know, which is Biblical. So we do come from (that) seed through the generations that got kind of spread out. Our skin color does have a distinguishing feature from the Arab there (in the Middle East). That's how I looked at it. We weren't just black. We had something else that was attached to it. A principle underlying why we looked like we do, which is a religious, ethical foundation, not just color.”<sup>159</sup>

This characterization is consistent with that of other prominent AAUAA members including Sheikh Hisham Jabber and Wahhab Arbubakr.<sup>160</sup> Sylvester Johnson discusses the appeal of newly constructed *ethnic* identities based on language and culture for Black Americans who embraced early twentieth century religio-racial movements like the MST,

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<sup>157</sup> This particular *hadith* (a saying or action attributed to Prophet Muhammad) is related by Ibn ‘Asakir, the famous twelfth century Sunni Muslim scholar from Damascus. The complete statement referenced in this *hadith* can be translated as follows: “Being an Arab is neither (derived from a person’s) father nor mother: it is the tongue. He who speaks Arabic is an Arab.”

<sup>158</sup> For a succinct summation of this idea, see Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Layla Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 10 April 2015; Interview with Nuru Raheem, Atlanta, GA. 11 April 2015.

<sup>160</sup> See Nash, *Islam among Urban Blacks*. My assertion is also based on several discussions with AAUAA members from the North Jersey area.

Black Hebrew groups and, as in the case of the AAUAA, Black orthodox Muslim movements of the same period. Johnson writes,

“These new religious movements promoted theologies and practices of ethnic heritage that redeemed converts from social death, a condition marking them as people without peoplehood, relegated as nonmembers of the American nation. The result was a new religious order that asserted blacks were a people with peoplehood, with history and heritage that transcended the space and time of the American experience of slavery and racism.”<sup>161</sup>

Nuru speaks to the appeal of Black *ethnic* religion as he discusses his enthusiasm for the new ethnic identity he encountered upon his embrace of orthodox Islam through the AAUAA.

“I loved it. You know, I didn't want to be just black, you know, it didn't, it didn't work. It wasn't enough. People beat us up too much. You know, we had to have something else. Black people were victims in this society. It's sad to say but we are! Those who claim only blackness, you become victims in this society. We have to, we have to do better than that if we want to survive.”<sup>162</sup>

For Nuru and other members of the AAUAA, this new ethnic identity served as the basis for a distinct nationality they referred to as ‘Hametic Arab American.’ By embracing Islam, they simultaneously inherited an entire cultural system, comprised of a distinct religion (Islam), a language (Arabic), an aesthetic (Arab and African influenced), and a history. This history connected these Black American Muslims to Africa and the Arab world through an alternative geography similar to that of the Moorish Science Temple but enriched by a more substantive engagement with the Arab and African culture as a result of Professor Ezaldeen’s experiences in Egypt, and reinforced by increased travel

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<sup>161</sup> Sylvester A. Johnson, “The Rise of Black Ethnics: The Ethnic Turn in African American Religions, 1916–1945,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 20, no. 2 (2010): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rac.2010.20.2.125>.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Layla Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 10 April 2015; Interview with Nuru Raheem, Atlanta, GA. 11 April 2015.

opportunities among his followers, many of whom journeyed to Mecca to perform the *Hajj*.

While the Arabophilic aspect of the AAUAA ideology may be obvious, its teachings are also characterized by an African centered undertone. Like many Black intellectuals from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these Black Muslims asserted Black excellence by proclaiming the ‘Blackness’ of the architects of ancient civilizations in Egypt and North Africa, Ethiopia, and the Arab World. This fusion of Pan-African and Pan-Arab political and cultural orientations was very much in line with the intellectual trends of early twentieth century Pan-African thinkers like Edward Wilmot Blyden and W. E. B. DuBois.<sup>163</sup> While reflecting on their experiences with the AAUAA, Jana and other community members alluded to several aspects of Professor Ezaldeen’s teachings that reveal this subtle Pan-Africanist undercurrent within his construction of Hametic Arab identity, including his interest in Ancient Egypt and assertions of the Blackness – and by extension African origins – of the people of premodern Arabia. When asked whether or not she would characterize the AAUAA as ‘Afrocentric,’ Jana responded by pointing out the aesthetic of members of the AAUAA in a photograph from the early 1940s.

“Well, if we look at that picture, I won't say that it is Afro centric. Well, look at the garb. They look like they came straight from out of the desert, don't they? So maybe we can use that word Afrocentric. And back then they were dressing like that.”<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> W. E. B Du Bois, *The Negro* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 1915); Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Islam, Christianity and the Negro Race* (London: W. B. Whittingham, 1888). I was also informed of Professor Ezaldeen’s interest in Egyptology by Sheikh Anwar Muhaimin, senior Imam of Philadelphia’s Masjid Quba and the Quba Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Layla Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 10 April 2015; Interview with Nuru Raheem, Atlanta, GA. 11 April 2015.

Jana's comments reflect the ways that 'African' and 'Middle Eastern' aesthetics often overlapped in the minds of Black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, images of Africa and the Middle East were often closely associated with one another. As we will see, this trend would change as greater numbers of Black Americans were able to travel to both regions, and knowledge of the particularities of African and Arab cultures became more abundant among academics and laypersons alike. Still, the association of Africa with the Arab world was not without merit. The long history of interaction and intermingling between the two is well documented.<sup>165</sup> Jana went on to observe the broader Black Muslim community's growing awareness of the contributions of people of African descent in establishing Muslim civilizations, even for the nascent Muslim community during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and depicted the AAUAA as something of a pioneer in this regard. She explains,

“[w]e're learning today that many of the Arabs had Abyssinian mothers, even the companions of the Prophet. Many of them. I think, you know, we knew that, but maybe not to great detail. And the fact that we said Hametic Arabs, but that really meant Africans, right? .... And the Prophet said in a hadith, *Salallahu 'alaihi wa Sallam*, he said that a person who speaks Arabic is an Arab. And we know the Sudanese, you know, and North African -- going all the way over to Morocco -- we know that they don't even claim to be Africans, not, not too much because they are a mixture of Arabs and Africans.”<sup>166</sup>

Insightfully, Jana observes the unwillingness of many Arabic speaking peoples on the African continent to associate with Africa and, by extension, Blackness. For members of the AAUAA, asserting that many Arabs were and are both Black and African provided a way to connect Black American Muslims to the broader Muslim world while simultaneously challenging currents of anti-Blackness in the Arab World that could serve

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<sup>165</sup> DuBois, *The Negro*; Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails*.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Layla Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 10 April 2015; Interview with Nuru Raheem, Atlanta, GA. 11 April 2015.

to undermine the authenticity and scholarly legitimacy of certain Black Muslim populations – including West African Muslims and their Black American descendants.

Though the Hametic Arab identity construct that Ezaldeen mobilized while creating the AAUAA shared much in common with that of Moorish Americans (i.e. members of the Moorish Science Temple) and a few other notable Black American intellectuals, his ability to ground this alternative Black ethnic identity in a strong knowledge of Arabic and Arab culture, along with his firm grasp of Islamic orthodoxy and relationships with institutions in the Arab World, made the AAUAA unique. Jana captures this dynamic concisely.

“I think what he taught was something brand new. Not really though, because he had been part of the Moorish Science (Temple). But when he came back with the language and some of the culture, the clothes and all of that, I think it was different. I think it was something different (from) what had been happening in the past.”<sup>167</sup>

She further reflects on how Black orthodox Muslims’ feelings of kinship toward Muslims in Africa have only increased over time. She remarks, “I think we have a different relationship today than we had maybe 30 years ago, 40 years ago, because there are a number of African American families living there permanently.” She went on to mention several Black American Muslim families who have traveled to the African continent, residing there for a number of years. It is telling that almost all of the families she mentioned travelled to Medina Baye, Senegal, a city that serves as the subject of a later chapter. She continues, “I think it's, it feels different to me than it did then (now that) we realize that (Africa) is where we came from and (Africans) realize, okay, this is part of my family! So I see a different kind of awareness today than I did in the past.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

A final hallmark of Professor Ezaldeen's vision for the AAUAA was his desire to cultivate a level of autonomy of Black American Muslims. The foremost manifestation of this was his attempt to build the Black Muslim farming villages of Jabal Arabia and Ezaldeen Village. Both of these settlements seemed to have been sanctioned by municipal charters. While some of its details and provisions may have been largely forgotten, AAUAA members and community historians frequently reference the organization's charter or 'seal'. Nuru for example remarked that "[t]he seal authorizes essentially (that) the Adden is a nation unto itself under the laws of the constitution religiously, something like that." Jana further clarified one of the key provisions granted by the charter regarding law enforcement. She recalled "[s]omething that I remember (is) that we had the right to have our own police department because we were a nation unto ourselves."<sup>169</sup>

In order to realize Professor Ezaldeen's vision for a rural AAUAA enclave in upstate New York, complete with its own police department and agricultural operation, his followers purchased a sizeable plot of land in the area of West Valley during the late 1930s. The land they acquired was near an industrial waste dump. Nuru explains,

"That was the intent (inaudible) the farm at West Valley was, this is where all this was going to happen. It just didn't ever materialize. You know West Valley's built on a landfill. Did you know that? That's one reason they got it kind of cheap. It was an industrial waste landfill whether or not its necessarily hazardous material, whatever industrial entities were upstate New York in that area that used that area that we now call West valley as a landfill."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Ultimately, this may have detracted from Jabal Arabia's long-term sustainability, contributing to the decision of many AAUAA members and their descendants to abandon the property in subsequent years.<sup>171</sup>

The ethnoreligious identity constructed by Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen proved influential long after his passing in 1957. He saw considerable success during his life as a religious scholar, community organizer, and a promoter of the Muslim faith. He built a national network of Black orthodox Muslim communities that included chapters in cities like Newark, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Columbus, Youngstown, Buffalo, Rochester, and Jacksonville, Florida. In addition, he and his followers established two rural villages in Hammonton, New Jersey and West Valley, New York, both of which are still populated by the descendants of his followers, however few in number. Moreover, his blending of Islamic orthodoxy with cultural Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism still impacts the Black American Muslim landscape today. The resulting affinity for elements of Arab culture and aesthetics, along with a high regard for the Arabic language, continue to pervade urban Black orthodox Muslim communities all around the country, and especially in northeastern cities like Philadelphia, Newark, and Buffalo. The aesthetic, culture, and Arab ideological orientation of many Black Muslim communities in the urban north bare testament to the long-standing impact of Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen and his unprecedented ability to craft a compelling vision of orthodox Islam based on his knowledge of both the religion and history of Africa and the Arab World.

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<sup>171</sup> During a visit to the site of Jabal Arabia on July 17, 2016, I discovered that a few of the descendants of the community's founders still live in the area. However, the majority have moved away and the mosque had fallen into disrepair, ostensibly signaling the end of a once thriving Muslim religious community.

### CHAPTER 3: SHAYKH DAOUD AND MOTHER KHADIJAH: THE MATURATION OF BLACK MUSLIM COSMOPOLITANISM

The alternative geography developed and promoted by the Moorish Science Temple and the UNIA greatly impacted the cultural, intellectual, and religious landscape of Black communities in New York City. Subsequently, Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen's modified version of that alternative geography helped fuel the rise of Black orthodox Muslim communities in Northeastern cities like New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Buffalo. In New York City, one of the younger Black Muslim intellectuals who had been influenced by Professor Ezaldeen promoted a slightly different cultural orientation that would come to characterize the development of that city's first longstanding Black Muslim institutions. Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal and his wife, Mother Khadijah engaged aspects of the sacred historical narratives popularized by the MST and the AAUAA while crafting their own alternative geography that included the Muslim societies of sub-Saharan Africa. As Black Americans' awareness of African history and African societies grew, this approach helped to sustain and augment the resonance of Islam for Black New Yorkers. It also lent itself to an engagement with African-centered art that helped make Islam a cultural force in the city. As a result, Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah set the stage during the 1940s, 50s, and early 60s for the growth of the city's Muslim community in subsequent decades, as the faith became increasingly associated with the rising popularity of varying forms of African cultural nationalism. The majority of the Black Muslim communities and institutions that emerged during the mid-1960s and beyond thus bore the stamp of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's influence. It is largely under their tenure as the city's most visible and

influential Black Muslim leaders – between the late 1930s and early 1960s – that the phenomenon of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism truly began to crystalize, shaping the contours of Black Muslim community life in the city.

### **The Huge Impact of the Little-known Shaykh**

Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal and his wife, Khadijah, who community members refer to as “Mother” Khadijah, stand as two of the most important figures in the history of Islam in New York City and the surrounding area. The pioneering scholar of Islam in America Aminah McCloud writes,

“[a]long with its central masjid in New York, Faisal’s organization from the beginning acted as an umbrella for many smaller Muslim communities that dotted the northeastern coastline. It has been estimated that over sixty thousand conversions to Islam took place in Shaykh Daoud’s community in his lifetime.”<sup>172</sup>

In spite of his importance to the historical development and spread of Islam among Black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century, which is readily attested to by religious leaders and elders from Muslim communities across the region, Shaykh Daoud and his views have often been mischaracterized in the scholarly literature. These mischaracterizations reflect the problematic categorizations that plague many academic treatments of Black American Muslims. In light of his role in the early history of Islam in America, when knowledge about orthodox Islam was supposedly hard to come by, some historians have depicted Shaykh Daoud as a product of heterodox or “proto”-Islamic groups — specifically the Moorish Science Temple or the Ahmadiyya community.<sup>173</sup> Others, in light of his espousal of orthodox Islam during this early period, have imagined him as a proponent of a kind of ‘Islamist’ religious orientation aligned with foreign and

<sup>172</sup> Aminah Beverly McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 22.

<sup>173</sup> Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 253; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 63.

immigrant interests, with some presuming him to be an Arab immigrant himself.<sup>174</sup> However, further investigation reveals that the ideological character of the community that Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah built was simply too dynamic and robust to describe using pervasive theoretical frameworks that tend to essentialize Black American Islam. Shaykh Daoud was a Black Internationalist and an Orthodox Sunni Muslim. For reasons discussed in the previous chapter, it should not be imagined that these two identities would have been in conflict. Rather, in the context of New York City during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, they likely reinforced one another.

### **An Overview of Sheikh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's Career**

Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal was born David Ambrose Donald on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1891 to William D. Donald and Jestina St. Bernard on the island of Grenada in the British West Indies.<sup>175</sup> After studying in French and English schools there, he went on to become an exceptional violinist, with additional training as a vocalist and pianist. At the age of 21, he travelled to New York City where he obtained a scholarship to study music. He was preceded by two older brothers. Festus, who was three years his senior, arrived in

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<sup>174</sup> Edward E. Curtis, "Islamism and Its African American Muslim Critics: Black Muslims in the Era of the Arab Cold War," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 683–709, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2007.0054>; 683-709. Smith, *Islam in America*, 58.

<sup>175</sup> U.S., Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for David Ambrose Donald citing Social Security Applications and Claims, 1936-2007; Daoud Haroon, "A Tribute to Shaikh Daoud Faisal," n.d., <http://mancebomosaic.com/writing/a-tribute-to-shaikh-daoud-faisal-pt-1/>. This brief, two-part tribute to Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal is a valuable source for biographical information concerning his early life. Its author is one of the Sheikh's closest students, Hajj Daoud A. Haroon. Prior to its publication, virtually all academic accounts of Sheikh Daoud's life suffered from serious limitations and several inaccuracies. Hajj Haroon also provided me with a great deal of informal oral testimony that is partially responsible for inspiring my present work. The information he provides in his online article has been corroborated by members of Sheikh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's inner circle who I interviewed in preparation for this dissertation. Since its publication, new scholarship has been produced with a more accurate depiction of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's life and work, especially in the works of Patrick D. Bowen. See Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2*; Bowen, "The Search for 'Islam,'" 264–283; Bowen, "Satti Majid," 194-209.

New York in 1907.<sup>176</sup> Cleaver who was ten years older than David followed suit in 1908.<sup>177</sup> Both chose to make Harlem their home, working various jobs and renting rooms during their early years in the US, and living together for a time. By 1920, both brothers seem to have been relatively well established. Cleaver worked as a longshoreman and lived with his wife and children in an apartment one block north of historic Strivers' Row.<sup>178</sup> Festus fared similarly well, living just a few blocks away from his brother in his own apartment with his wife and child. Both had one or two lodgers. Festus had secured a job as a street railway porter.<sup>179</sup> When David, who would become Shaykh Daoud, arrived on June 6<sup>th</sup> of 1913, he moved in with Festus. At some point thereafter, he also joined his older brother in working for a railway company. By January of 1924, Festus had come to own an apartment building at 108 West 128<sup>th</sup> Street. That same year, David married a twenty-five year old Afro-Caribbean vocalist from Bermuda named Clara Forbes who had also been living in the city. David and Clara moved into the apartment that Festus owned and continued living there through the 1920s. David was as industrious as his older brother, and clearly something of a renaissance man. In addition to his job at the railway, he continued his engagement with the arts. Using the apartment at 108 W 128<sup>th</sup> St. as his base, he opened up his Donald Concert Bureau, which promoted an eclectic mix

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<sup>176</sup> 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Manhattan Assembly District 21, New York, New York, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 1440, sheet 25A (handwritten), dwelling (unlisted), family (unlisted), Festus Donald; digital image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), citing Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. NARA microfilm publication T625, 2076 rolls.

<sup>177</sup> 1910 U.S. Federal Census, Manhattan Ward 12, New York, New York, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 0632, sheet 12B (handwritten), dwelling 1, family 249, Cleaver Donald; digital image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), citing Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. NARA microfilm publication T624, 1,178 rolls.

<sup>178</sup> 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Manhattan Assembly District 21, New York, New York, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 1435, sheet 15A (handwritten), dwelling (unlisted), family (unlisted), Cleaver Donald; digital image, *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), citing Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. NARA microfilm publication T625, 2076 rolls.

<sup>179</sup> 1920 U.S. Federal Census, Manhattan Assembly District 21, New York, NY, pop. sch., (ED) 1440, sheet 25A (handwritten), dwell.(unlisted), fam. (unlisted), Festus Donald.

of performances in the area and offered lessons in music and elocution.<sup>180</sup> Clara, who may have taken lessons from her husband prior to their marriage now joined him in providing musical instruction to patrons of the concert bureau. David also performed as a violinist, wrote and promoted plays, and served as a musicians' manager and union leader. His work as a labor organizer provides a commonality with other Black Muslim leaders of the 1920s and 30s, including Sheikh Satti Majid and Sufi Abdul-Hamid.

While the couple's engagement with the arts was quite lucrative, it was not the only collaborative effort they staged from their Harlem apartment. Having now adopted the religion of Islam, 108 W 128<sup>th</sup> St. also became the headquarters for David's Islamic Propagation Center of America in Harlem, which served as the primary organ for their work to promote their Muslim faith from its founding in 1928 until the late 1930s.<sup>181</sup> By 1939 David and Clara had become rather active in this regard, and were known throughout New York City by the Arabic names they adopted: Daoud Ahmed Faisal and Khadijah Faisal.<sup>182</sup> That year, Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah left Harlem for a

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<sup>180</sup> "Realm of Music," *The New York Age* November 28, 1931, 7; Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 398.

<sup>181</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 183.

<sup>182</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 392, 402; U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for David Ahmad Donald, from the National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; Record Group Title: Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975; Record Group Number: 147; U.S. Naturalization Records Indexes, 1794-1995, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed 18 July 2019), search for Khadijah Daoud Faisal, from National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; Index to Naturalization Petitions of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, 1865-1957; Microfilm Serial: M1164; Microfilm Roll: 54; Documents show that, like many Black American converts, Shaykh Daoud continued to use his birth name in an official capacity, while using his 'Muslim name' in community circles. For example, on a draft registration card issued in 1942, Shaykh Daoud gives his name as "David Ahmad Donald," paring the first and last name of his birth with the middle name he adopted upon becoming Muslim. Sometime during the 1940s, both he and Mother Khadijah chose to change their names legally, with their full Arabic names appearing on official documents thereafter.

brownstone in Brooklyn, which they converted in to a mosque – the historic Islamic Mission of America or ‘State Street Mosque’ – during the 1940s.<sup>183</sup>

The Islamic Mission of America or “The Mission”, as it was referred to by its early attendees, was located at Sheikh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s apartment at 143 State Street, a short walk from the nearby pier. Prior to designating the property as a Masjid, Sheikh Daoud continued to run his ‘school of élocution’ there, which served as a “finishing school – whose clientele were the children of the wealthy residents of Brooklyn Heights.”<sup>184</sup> Additionally, the facility was envisioned as a “mission for indigent Muslims” and provided a life line for a community that was predominantly working class.<sup>185</sup> In particular, Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah offered various forms of assistance, including temporary lodging, to numerous immigrant Muslims who came to New York City as students, laborers, and merchant seamen. Shaykh Daoud eventually purchased the building as well as two other apartment buildings across the street.<sup>186</sup> As a result of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s support services for the city’s small but diverse Muslim community, the Arab, African, and South Asian immigrant presence at 143 State Street was strong. Several scholars have attributed Shaykh Daoud’s relationship with Muslim immigrants in general, and those from Sudan in particular, to his longtime association with Satti Majid, a Sudanese Muslim missionary who probably served as an

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<sup>183</sup> Edward E. Curtis, *Muslims in America: A Short History*. (Oxford University Press, 2009), 40. Records from the 1930 Census also indicate that Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah rented an apartment in another section of Brooklyn that year. It is unclear whether he continued to use his brother’s Harlem apartment as a base of operations while residing in Brooklyn during the 1930s, or move back to Harlem for a stint prior to establishing his long term residence at 143 State Street.

<sup>184</sup> Haroon, “A Tribute to Shaikh Daoud Faisal.”

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC, 30 July 2016; Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 400.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC, 30 July 2016; Interview with Sadia Abdul Hakim, Brooklyn, NY, 31 March 2014; Islamic Mission of America: Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal FBI file, Report, 11/15/1961.

early mentor during their days in Harlem. In 1944, the Mission was incorporated in the State of New York and became legally recognized as a religious institution — one of the first Islamic organizations in New York City to enjoy that status.<sup>187</sup> While service continued to be a component of the activities at the Mission, Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah incorporated more religious programming over time – beginning regular Friday congregational prayer and classes for religious instruction.

The mosque at 143 State Street continued to operate and grow in subsequent years. It served as New York City’s most visible Islamic institution at least until the mid 1960s, enjoying the attendance of prominent visitors and foreign dignitaries. The five daily ritual prayers incumbent upon all Muslims were observed there, and Shaykh Daoud invited teachers from around the world to give classes and lectures on a host of subjects at the mosque. During the 1950s and 60s, he commissioned a South Asian *hafiz* (a person who has memorized the entire Qur’an) to provide instruction in the Muslim holy book over a sustained period – one of the first such educational opportunities accessible to Black Americans in the country. He created a “federation of NYC Islamic groups that included eight major Muslim organizations.”<sup>188</sup> The Shaykh also wrote books to promote and teach the rudiments of Islam. Mother Khadijah provided religious instruction for Muslim women on subjects that ranged from the rules and rituals of purification and prayer to Islamic funerary procedures. She created a Muslim women’s organization called the Muslim Ladies Cultural Society, which provided a model for numerous women-led Black Muslim educational, activist, and advocacy organizations that emerged

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<sup>187</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 183; Islamic Mission of America FBI file, Report, 9/09/1956, 4; Islamic Mission of America FBI file, Report, 11/09/1956, 4

<sup>188</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 7.

between the 1950s and the 1980s.<sup>189</sup> Mother Khadijah trained and inspired a network of Black Muslim women who crafted programs and built organizations that served the community for two successive generations. The mosque hosted official celebrations for the *Eid* (the major Muslim holiday, which occurs biannually) and worked closely with Muslim countries represented at the United Nations. Shaykh Daoud even served, for a time, as a UN representative for the Kingdom of Morocco, and is purported to have received an official endorsement from the King of Jordan for his efforts.<sup>190</sup> He is also reported to have served as the United States Muslim representative to the United Nations.<sup>191</sup>

During the 1960s and 70s, three influential communities were founded by former attendees of the State Street mosque. The first was the Ya Seen Mosque, which served as the national headquarters for the Dar-ul-Islam movement, often referred to simply as ‘the Dar’. Founded in 1962 by a handful of young men who studied the fundamentals of the Muslim faith at State Street and wished to create a more movement-oriented organization, the Dar quickly became the largest network of Black American orthodox mosques in the nation, with affiliated mosques located in many major American cities. The second, the Ansar Allah community, which was active from the 1970s until the late 1980s, was often marred in scandal and viewed as heterodox by most Muslim congregations in New York and around the country. However, it had a significant cultural impact due to its influence on many prominent figures associated with hip hop music and culture. The third, Masjid Farouq, was started in 1977 by an Arabic speaking,

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<sup>189</sup> Interview with Hajja Kareemah Abdul-Kareem, New York, NY. 14 April 2014; Interview with Aisha al-Adawiyyah, New York, NY. 8 March 2014.

<sup>190</sup> McCloud, *African American Islam*, 22.

<sup>191</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 7.

predominantly Yemeni community at 552-54 Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, in the heart of an Arab ethnic enclave that emerge in the 70s.<sup>192</sup> Shaykh Daoud's efforts to help working class Arab immigrants establish themselves in the city likely contributed to the rise of this Arab community along Atlantic Avenue, just a block away from State Street. More will be said about the Dar ul Islam Movement and the Ansar Allah community in the following chapter. But what is important to note here is that many of their defining characteristics – the Dar's emphasis on organization, national unity, and self-determination for Muslims in the United States, and the Ansar Allah community's emphasis on art and culture as a means to spread awareness of Islam and build social capital – can be traced to their founders' formative experiences at the mosque established by Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah.

Unfortunately, in the years leading up to his passing, Shaykh Daoud began to experience extreme senility. The demographics of his mosque had changed dramatically. Most of the city's young Black American Muslims now attended other mosques that emerged during the 1960s and 70s, including those established by Shaykh Daoud's former students. The nascent immigrant community that Shaykh Daoud help supported in its early years had now grown in size and strength in the aftermath of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Now, a bustling Arab enclave had emerged in a neighborhood adjacent to the State Street mosque. While some of its pioneering members felt a sense of gratitude for the aging Black American man of Afro-Caribbean origin who buoyed them when they were few in number, the younger Arab immigrants who arrived

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<sup>192</sup> Ferris, "To 'Achieve the Pleasure of Allah': Immigrant Muslim Communities in New York City 1893–1991." in *Muslim Communities in North America*, edited by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, 209–230. SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 214.

more recently did not. Disconnected from the historical legacy that Shaykh Daoud represented, the largely Yemeni community disregarded and undermined the Shaykh in their mosque, which had once been his house. In 1980, Shaykh Daoud passed. Several community elders recounted to me stories of Black American Muslims who came from around the city in an attempt to rescue what they could of his writings and belongings. What they could not salvage in time was thrown away by the new congregation that supplanted the African American led, multiracial coalition of worshipers that attended the mosque in years past. While Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah had no biological children, they found surrogate sons and daughters among many of the young people who made their home in the community they built. A younger Indonesian man named Omar Bey who had been one of those surrogate sons was serving as the Imam as Shaykh Daoud's health was failing. He likely adopted the name Bey after Shaykh Daoud, who also used it on occasion. Perhaps unable to appreciate this familial dynamic, some members of the new immigrant community at the mosque attempted to force a marriage between the Indonesian Imam and Mother Khadijah. For them, Shaykh Daoud's widow was simply an elder woman who lived at the mosque, and for the Imam to live there simultaneously was viewed as improper according to their conservative mores. Many of the former attendees of the State Street mosque, who now only visited occasionally, lamented this as the ultimate disrespect.<sup>193</sup>

In 1992, Mother Khadijah passed as well. Her obituary from *The New York Times* testified to her place in American Muslim history, acknowledging that "her leadership was broader than Brooklyn Heights," and recounting how she "traveled around the

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Sadia Abdul Hakim, Brooklyn, NY, 31 March 2014; Interview with Rahkiah and Zainab Abdurrahman, Brooklyn, NY, 11 April 2014. This was also commonly mentioned in my discussions with well over a dozen members of the State Street community.

country with her husband, addressing women's groups on Islam.” The article’s description of her large funeral, attended by several hundred people, also gives a snapshot of the kind of community she helped to create:

“She and her husband worked to bring immigrant Muslims and new American converts to the faith together in one mosque. The success of their effort was evident at her funeral there yesterday, where Muslims from Pakistan and Morocco prayed shoulder to shoulder with American black converts”<sup>194</sup>

To its credit, the Arab congregation who had come to worship at 143 State Street did decide to name the mosque in honor of its founder. Perhaps this was a last courtesy extended by the community’s elders who retained a memory of its earlier history. During the 1950s, one of Shaykh Daoud’s greatest supporters and closest friends had been Ghalib Muhammad, a Yemeni merchant seaman who tearfully remembered Shaykh Daoud as an invaluable source of guidance and sustenance for the city’s diverse Muslim community comparing him to “a match that was lit in a very dark room.” Today, Masjid Dawood does, indeed, bear the name of its founder. However, much of its history has disappeared, preserved only in the oral accounts of a rapidly aging population of Black American orthodox Muslim elders.

The disappearance of the congregation who worshiped at the State Street mosque from the late 1930s to the 1970s may appear tragic. However, the long-term impact of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s vision and religio-cultural orientation is a testament to the success of their efforts. Black Muslim elders throughout New York City still credit Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah with paving the way for the emergence of the large, ethnically diverse community of Muslims that now populates the city. While many younger Black American and immigrant Muslims may not be familiar with their

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<sup>194</sup> “Sayedah Khadijah Faisal Is Dead; Co-Founder of Mosque Was 93,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1992, 21.

life and work, community historians like Imam Talib Abdul-Rashid and Muhammad Al-Ahari have done a great deal to document the legacy of this important Black Muslim dynamic duo. In more recent years, influential voices from the Muslim American community like Sherman Jackson, Dr. Umar Farooq Abdullah and Imam Suhaib Webb have stressed the importance for their religious community to develop greater cultural capital, something Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah seemed to have grasped since the 1930s. Black American Muslims have become increasingly interested in the history of Islam on the African continent and the various Sufi orders associated with that history. Shaykh Daoud's approach to Islamic orthodoxy anticipated this turn as well. Excavating the history of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's community reveals a great deal about the development and impact of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism. In many ways, the story of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism *is* their story, as it is their community that served as its incubator and early proliferator. The following sections trace the evolution of their community from its origins in 1920s and 1930s Harlem, followed by an examination of the makeup of the Islamic Mission of America/State Street mosque in Brooklyn, and an exploration of the artistic and cultural expressions produced by a few of the many Black Muslim artists that made State Street mosque their spiritual home. The final section of this chapter examines Shaykh Daoud's discursive impact on the Black Muslim leaders and communities that came after him, who continued his pursuit of self-determination for his community and echoed his calls for human rights.

### **Black Internationalist Origins: The Harlem Years**

When Shaykh Daoud arrived in Harlem in 1913, he encountered a thriving Black Mecca that had an indelible impact on his development. Three years later, Marcus Garvey made it his home. During the 1920s, Garvey's followers paraded down Lenox Avenue from around 140th Street to as far South as 110<sup>th</sup> Street. Members of his UNIA operated various businesses throughout the neighborhood, including the Universal Steam Laundry and Universal Tailoring and Dress Making Department at 62 West 142<sup>nd</sup> Street, just two blocks from the apartment where Shaykh Daoud spent his first three years in the US. In 1922, the year after Shaykh Daoud and his wife moved into his brother Festus' Harlem brownstone, Garvey proclaimed Prophet Muhammad's Blackness to a Harlem audience at Liberty Hall and informed his followers of Islam's place in the African Diaspora stating, "everybody knows that Mohammed was a Negro... Negroes on this side of the river had accepted Christ, while on the other side, many of them had accepted Mohammed... He was a colored man, anyhow."<sup>195</sup> Another Festus, the renowned poet and novelist Festus Claude McKay was also living and writing in Harlem at the time. 1921 saw the publication of McKay's landmark book of poetry *Harlem Shadows*. His later works, in particular his final novel *Amiable with Big Teeth* set in the 1930s, portray a lively Harlem political scene of which Black American Muslims, labor activists, and East African immigrants were all a visible part.<sup>196</sup> These three elements of Harlem community life would prove particularly influential for Shaykh Daoud during his time there.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, Black urban communities in American port cities were vibrant centers that facilitated cultural exchanges between Black Americans, many

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<sup>195</sup> Imam Al-Hajj Talib Abdur-Rashid, "A Brief History of the Afro-Islamic Presence in New York," *Souls* 12, no. 1 (March 2, 2010): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999940903571270>.

<sup>196</sup> Notably, McKay himself developed a personal interest in the Muslim faith during his time in Harlem before ultimately converting to Catholicism in the 1940s.

of whom were migrants from the American South, and immigrants from various African and Asian nations throughout the global South. These exchanges gave rise to internationalist sentiments and anti-colonial solidarities among Black intellectuals, activists, and religious communities. During the late 1950s, a young Black American Muslim musician named Haroon moved to New York from Boston and became Shaykh Daoud's student, friend, and personal secretary. *Hajj* Haroon would later achieve considerable renown as a prominent jazz musician, an educator, and a historian.<sup>197</sup> After serving on the Board of Directors of The Islamic Mission of America, he went on to serve as an active member of several Muslim communities in Texas and North Carolina, holding leadership positions and making various intellectual contributions. While interviewing Hajj Haroon, he not only provided me with valuable information about Shaykh Daoud, Mother Khadijah, and the mosque they built together at 143 State Street, but also offered an illuminating account of the cultural climate of Black communities in cities like New York during this era. Reflecting on the diversity found in such communities, he remarks,

“[t]he black community, as most people have got to understand, is a multifaceted community that contains much more than most people have given any (credit to) these black communities for. It was rich in culture of all kinds. The Diaspora is huge, is huge! And you found men there who not only could relate, because they were black and they were Africans, with (other) blacks and Africans throughout the diaspora (and) from Africa, but could .... (also) articulate on a higher level with Middle Eastern people. Alright? And Indians that were there. Okay? So I mean it begins to snowball outwardly.”<sup>198</sup>

Born in Boston in 1934, Hajj Haroon sold newspapers and shined shoes in downtown Boston as a nine-year-old boy during the Second World War. Already having an interest

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<sup>197</sup> The title *Hajj* is used customarily as a marker of respect for some who has completed the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. For more on Hajj Daoud A. Haroon's life, see Daoud Haroon, “Biography,” *Mancebo Mosaic* (blog), n.d., <http://mancebomosaic.com/historical/biography/>.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC, 30 July, 2016.

in Islam by that young age, he recalls it being fueled as he interfaced with Muslims from around the world.

“We had soldiers and sailors from all the world there. I mean, it was from all over the world. India, Africa, you had everybody there. Ships with being rebuilt. It Was a rich environment, a very worldly environment. And I was aware of Muslims and (their) activities because I met a lot of Muslim military (officers) from different countries on my knees, shining shoes. From all over the world. And when they found out that I had an interest (in Islam) and I knew how to greet them (in Arabic) and so forth and so on, they would share. They were very compassionate, very. I'm talking about from Bhutan, from Nepal, from India. Senegalese troops that came over. You name it. Turkish troops. They were all in Boston.”<sup>199</sup>

Commenting further on the similarity between Boston and other port cities, he continues,

“New York must have been the same. Brooklyn must've been the very same because they had a big .... ship base right there. So I'm saying Philadelphia must've been very much like this. Los Angeles must've been like this. Baltimore must've been like this ... New Orleans must've been maybe to a lesser degree cause that's Gulf coast. But Major Atlantic sea ports would probably have had this richness. And this is where you find these communities of people.”<sup>200</sup>

Vivek Bald's account of early twentieth century South Asian immigrants to the U.S. in *Bengali Harlem* confirms Haroon's observation, as these cities did indeed facilitate the development of multicultural, cosmopolitan environments that were often centered in Black communities, as most Asian and African immigrants were denied access to white neighborhoods.<sup>201</sup>

Particularly important in Shaykh Daoud's life, and within the history of Islam in New York City, was the East African presence in Harlem. As mentioned above, it is purported that an important teacher and mentor for Shaykh Daoud was the Sudanese organizer and promoter of Islam Shaykh Satti Majid. Perhaps as a result of their close

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

relationship during the 1920s, there continued to be a visible Sudanese presence in Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's Brooklyn based community even many years later.<sup>202</sup> Even more numerous in Harlem were the Somalis. During the 1930s, a community of Somali immigrants began to form that went on to form part of the foundation of the International Moslem Society when it was established in the early 1940s. The mosque, which was attended by a diverse group of Muslims including South Asians, West Africans, Afro Caribbean immigrants, and even Chinese Muslims seems to have been established by Somalian and Black American (probably of Afro Caribbean origin) Muslims and influenced later congregations in city.<sup>203</sup> The Imam of IMS until the late 1950s was a Somali man named Ibrahim Guled. Guled was member of a network of Somalis spread out in major cities including New York, London, Boston, and Chicago who participated in the Somali resistance movement against Italian occupation.<sup>204</sup> Another prominent member of this network was Hassan Dhrepaulezz who owned a popular restaurant in Greenwich Village called Café Aladdin during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>205</sup> Prior to moving to Harlem, Dhrepaulezz lived in London working in the photography department for the London Times Newspaper.<sup>206</sup> Another member of this network was Hussein Ali bin Musa who hailed from the Jijiga, a city in the Somali region of Ethiopia today. Musa lived in Boston and provided Hajj Haroon with his introduction to the Muslim faith during his youth. Hajj Haroon recounts,

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<sup>202</sup> Bowen, "Satti Majid," 194-209; Abusharaf, *Wanderings*, 17-32; Abu Shouk, Hunwick & O'Fahey, "A Sudanese Missionary to the United States," 140-145.

<sup>203</sup> See Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 2*, 408-409; Haroon, "A Tribute to Shaikh Daoud Faisal."

<sup>204</sup> "Flow of Baraka," n.d., <http://mancebomosaic.com/writing/flow-of-baraka/>; Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC, 30 July, 2016.

<sup>205</sup> Karen Mamone, "Rebel With a Sauce," *The Hartford Courant*, September 26, 1999; "Flow of Baraka," n.d., <http://mancebomosaic.com/writing/flow-of-baraka/>.

<sup>206</sup> "Flow of Baraka," n.d., <http://mancebomosaic.com/writing/flow-of-baraka/>.

“[t]here were many Habashi, or Ethiopian people, who fled or who were sent out of the country by the elders of their communities to raise money with which to buy material to fight against Mussolini. And it was my luck that one of these men or (rather) two of these men jumped ship in Boston harbor during the depression. One whose name was Ali Musa. And this is the man ... he was like mother's milk for me. He was a Somali, Ethiopian Somali, who came from Jijiga and who came to the United States, barely speaking English, very strong Muslim. He's the one that set the tone of my life. And people ask me, how did you accept (Islam)? How did you convert? Did you come through the Nation? I say, no, Allah sent it straight to my house in 1934, 1935.”<sup>207</sup>

Haroon spent significant time with Hussein Ali bin Musa, who had befriended Haroon's father during the mid-1930s, around roughly the year of Haroon's birth. Musa visited the home of Haroon's family frequently, as well as the homes of other Black American families in Boston who had been impacted by the Great Depression, delivering food. Haroon remembers Musa comforting him as a small child, and sternly instructing his mother to prepare the food he delivered without pork. During the early 1940s, Musa would take the very young Haroon to the park and have him count money that was sent to him from a man in Chicago named Charlie Brown. Haroon would then send the money, in his own name, to London. In a written account, Hajj Haroon recalls meeting and befriending Dhrepaulezz and working at Café Aladin for a time. He also recounts Dhrepaulezz's tearful astonishment upon realizing that Haroon had been the young boy from whom he received money that was sent to Musa by other Somalian resistance supporters living the US.<sup>208</sup>

In this manner, Hajj Haroon had been connected to Shaykh Daoud, who befriended Dhrepaulezz and Ibrahim Guled in Harlem, long before he moved in with the Shaykh around 1959. Shaykh Daoud maintained a close relationship with Ibrahim Guled

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<sup>207</sup> Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC, 30 July, 2016.

<sup>208</sup> For a written account of Haroon's experiences with Musa, Dhrepaulezz, and other Somali Muslims in the US, see Daoud Haroon, "Flow of Baraka," n.d., <http://mancebomosaic.com/writing/flow-of-baraka/>.

until the latter's passing. He also remained close with Dhrepaulezz, whose Black American wife had been a student of Mother Khadijah. The example of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's relationship with Somali Muslims in Harlem, and Hajj Haroon's relationship with them in Harlem and Boston, provides a glimpse of the kinds of familial relationships that Black American Muslims built with their coreligionists who immigrated to New York and several other U.S. cities from places like Somalia, Yemen, and India prior to the 1960s.<sup>209</sup> In *Amiable wit Big Teeth*, Claude McKay depicts Ethiopian immigrants in Harlem who similarly fought Italy's occupation of their country. Hajj Haroon also commented on the close relationships formed between Muslim, Christian, and Communist immigrants from Ethiopia, Somalia, and what would become Eritrea living in the US during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. The Harlem of Shaykh Daoud's era was a space that facilitated interaction and cooperation between people from throughout the African Diaspora. While both men and women came to Harlem from all over the Americas, the vast majority of those who came from the African continent were single men, many of whom worked on British ships as merchant seamen. In Harlem, they often married Black American women and worshiped at mosques that Black American Muslims helped to establish. Shaykh Daoud, himself an Afro-Caribbean immigrant embraced this diversity and was shaped by it. Sometime prior to 1936, Shaykh Daoud collaborated with a West African immigrant named Daouda Camara to write a play about the famous African anti-colonial Muslim figure Samori Toure.<sup>210</sup> That he would choose to write a play about a West African Muslim celebrated for fighting French colonizers is telling. Several West African immigrants would go on to attend IMS during the 1960s,

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<sup>209</sup> Abusharaf, *Wanderings*; Bald, *Bengali Harlem*; Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*.

<sup>210</sup> 'Kumba' to Newark," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 5, 1936, 8.

and a huge influx of West African Muslims would relocate to Harlem in the 1980s and 90s. However, during the late 1930s, New York City's West African population was tiny, making Shaykh Daoud's collaboration with Camara that much more remarkable.

Prior to Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's move to Brooklyn, their Islamic Propagation Center of America was probably one of Harlem's most prominent gathering spaces for this exceedingly diverse community of Muslims.<sup>211</sup> In the years directly following their relocation, two new Harlem mosques developed with which the Shaykh maintained strong relationships. The aforementioned International Moslem Society or '303', located at 303 W 125<sup>th</sup> Street, would go on to become Harlem's most visible mosque after its founding in the 1940s, and remained such until the emergence of the Nation of Islam in Harlem during the late 1950s. Members of Shaykh Daoud's Brooklyn-based community would often visit 303, led by Shaykh Daoud's Somali friend Ibrahim Guled, and the two mosques seemed to have maintained a collaborative relationship.<sup>212</sup> The second was the Academy of Islam, located at 105 W 112<sup>th</sup> Street and founded around 1939 by Black American and South Asian immigrant Muslims. While it is difficult to determine the exact nature of Shaykh Daoud's relationship with the Academy of Islam, his ties to it must have been rather strong, as some observers like Robert Dannin have even identified him with that community.<sup>213</sup>

Mosques like these two in Harlem and the State Street Mosque in Brooklyn, all of which Black American Muslims helped to initiate and attended in significant numbers,

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<sup>211</sup> Another was the Universal Holy Temple of Tranquility founded by the Black Muslim labor union leader and community organizer Sufi Abdul-Hamid in the 1930s. See Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming*, 252-253.

<sup>212</sup> Tellingly, Haroon refers to Shaykh Daoud "as one of the founding fathers of The International Muslim Society." See Haroon, "A Tribute to Shaikh Daoud Faisal."

<sup>213</sup> Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 62.

were also attended by East African, South Asian, and Arab Muslims along with smaller contingents from other regions including Albania and Tatars from Russia. These demographics reveal a great deal about the nature of New York City's broader Muslim community prior to the 1960s, and the character of Black American orthodox Islam in particular. Much has been made of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's engagement with Arab immigrant Muslims. Indeed, Shaykh Daoud worked to build alliances with institutions and governments from majority-Muslim countries. As noted earlier, he served, for a time, as a UN representative for the Kingdom of Morocco. It is also rumored that Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah received their last name from the then-Crown Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia.<sup>214</sup> However, this aspect of Shaykh Daoud's work has often been misunderstood due to political contestations that would dominate debates between competing communities of Black Muslims during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. These debates have been examined in the works of Edward Curtis IV and Sherman Jackson.<sup>215</sup> They revolve around tensions that arose between Black Nationalist articulations of the Muslim faith and the presumed universalism of orthodox Islam. As we will see in the next chapter, concerns about the need for self-determination among Black Muslims in the U.S. were at the center of intra-communal debates and tensions from the 1960s onward. However, Shaykh Daoud was the product of an earlier era, when Black *Internationalism* was a major cultural and political force in New York City's Black American community in general, and among Black American Muslim in particular.

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<sup>214</sup> McCloud, *African American Islam*, 22, 10; Juan Eduardo Campo and Melton Gordon, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2009), 181-182.

<sup>215</sup> Curtis, "Islamism and Its African American Muslim Critics", 683-709; Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 131-170.

### 143 State Street – The Islamic Mission of America

The spiritual and cultural community that Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah built together in Brooklyn was as diverse and inclusive as the one in Harlem. They established the Islamic Mission of America at 143 State Street in their own home, a four-story brownstone with a classroom and eating area on the first floor, a *musalla* or prayer area on the second floor where religious services were held, a third floor reception area for special guests and dignitaries, and a fourth floor where the Shaykh and his wife resided.<sup>216</sup> Sadia Abdul-Hakim, who grew up in the State Street Mosque congregation, reflected on what she refers to as the cosmopolitan nature of the mosque.

“We (were) always around people who were musicians, or artists, or people who traveled, or people who taught.... We were always, I guess, cosmopolitan. It was very cosmopolitan. Very. The Muslims at 143 State Street were diverse, so, that was normal for us.”

As Sadia’s reflections indicate, the worshipers at the State Street mosque utilized music, art, and education to craft a community of faith that celebrated cultural diversity. The congregation attracted significant numbers of both Black Americans and immigrants. Unskilled immigrant laborers and merchant seaman accounted for the bulk of immigrant worshipers during the 1940s and 50s. But the mosque also attracted diplomats, international students, and foreign dignitaries, including those visiting the United Nations. Subsequently, more prestigious immigrant Muslims like these would become a more visible contingent at the mosque. Still, Shaykh Daoud maintained a decidedly Black Internationalist orientation, which colored his strategies to ‘propagate’ Islam. In his writings, he categorized Islam as a religion that could unite African and Asiatic people

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Sadia Abdul Hakim, Brooklyn, NY, 31 March 2014.

(i.e. people of color) who suffered under the associated evils of colonization and American chattel slavery. On the other hand, he offered a critique of Christianity that, much like that offered by the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam, depicted it as a religion that all too often endorsed white supremacy. In a 1953 publication, Shaykh Daoud proclaimed,

“The Christian Crusade that was bent on destroying Islam and the Muslim people have failed. Praise be to Allah the Lord of the words. The days of Christian adventure, colonialism, subjugation and exploitation of the weak and the helpless are over. When all Christian Europe had but one objective and that was to conquer, exploit and enslave the African, the Arabian, the Asiatic and other people and nations who were not members of the Christian society. Conquest, subjugation, suppression, oppression and exploitation, jointly with wonton murder and whole sale slaver for their unfortunate victims whom they had conquered was the religion of Christian Europe at that time. Have they changed their religion? Do they still believe in white supremacy and the inequality of man?”<sup>217</sup>

The space at 143 State Street held approximately 300 people, making it by far the largest mosque in the city at least until 1957, when the Islamic Cultural Center of New York City began operating out of a four-story building on 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan with a comparable capacity. Estimating the mosque’s total number of attendees is difficult. At the time, many of the city’s Muslims attended *salatul jummuah*, the Muslim communal prayer held on Friday afternoons, irregularly due to work restraints and a general lack of awareness on the part of their employers. As a result, the total number of Muslims who attended the mosque occasionally may have been considerably higher than the space’s 300-person capacity. Funding for the mosque came, initially, from Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s personal finances. Shaykh Daoud continued to work for the local railway. As Marc Ferris writes, “Faisal’s labors on behalf of Islam were even more remarkable because, after he left State Street at 5 P.M., the Imam worked full time for the

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<sup>217</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 104.

federal government as an Amtrak official.”<sup>218</sup> Community members have speculated that much of Shaykh Daoud’s income went to supporting the mosque, as did much of his pension after he retired. One of the community elders I interviewed, Sister Layla Abdul-Wahhab, who began attending the State Street mosque as a little girl along with her mother and stepfather during the 1940s, remembers Shaykh Daoud asking that she accompany him to the bank as a youth. She recalls watching him leverage his personal charisma and track record of altruism to secure a sizable loan.<sup>219</sup> It is likely that mosque attendees, especially among his early Black American followers, donated funds as well. And during the latter part of his life, Shaykh Daoud may have obtained some additional funding through his contacts with foreign businessmen and diplomats. However, Shaykh Daoud was able to maintain autonomy as a religious leader largely because of his general financial independence.

In spite of the large immigrant presence, the backbone of the community at 143 State Street in its early stages was made up largely of Black American Muslims, many of whom were artists, and their families. This familial component was significant, as it facilitated the community’s survival over the course of two generations. Many of the Black American Muslims I interviewed were born, during 1950s and 60s, into families that attended the mosque. This dynamic helped to shape the community as well. Many of the Black American Muslim communities that emerged during the 1960s and 70s tended to have a large number of single men. The political trends of that later era also produced Black Muslim communities that sought to create and sustain large scale, national movements where their religious sensibilities served as the engine for social

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<sup>218</sup> Ferris, “To ‘Achieve the Pleasure of Allah,’” 213.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Layla Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA, 10 April 2015.

transformation. These communities, like many of that era's Black political movements, often struggled to produce stable structures conducive to family life. By contrast, the Islamic Mission of America was, at its core, a community of Black families. Education was highly valued, and several community members worked in the New York City school system. Men in the community were expected to maintain gainful employment, and Shaykh Daoud railed against those that seemed reluctant to work.<sup>220</sup>

Women were a visible part of the State Street community and occupied positions of formal and informal leadership. While the position of Imam was reserved for men, in keeping with normative Islamic legal dictates, women oversaw many other community affairs. Mother Khadijah served as a model for women's community leadership acting as, among other things, the Mission's Secretary treasurer and a religious educator for women and girls. Other women, like Mama Rahkiah Abdurrahman and Sister Layla Abdul-Wahhab developed and implemented programing for the mosque and the broader Brooklyn community. Their work ranged from planning *Eid* celebrations at the mosque to staging large-scale cultural events including concerts, lectures, and fashion shows. Mama Rahkiah, for example, became a major cultural ambassador in Brooklyn. More will be said about her work in the section below. She also served as the Secretary of the Mission for a time. Young women in the community (like Mama Rahkiah's daughter Zainab and Sister Layla's daughter Sadia) were encouraged to pursue educational and professional opportunities.<sup>221</sup> Several of the women I interviewed lamented that the roles of Black Muslim women in their religious communities began to change during the late 1960s and 70s. They cited increased immigrant influence as a major contributor to this

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<sup>220</sup> Interview with Sadia Abdul-Hakim, Brooklyn, NY, 31 March 2014.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with Rahkiah and Zainab Abdurrahman, Brooklyn, NY, 11 April 2014; Interview with Sadia Abdul-Hakim, Brooklyn, NY, 31 March 2014.

shift. As a result, New York City's mosques became much more conservative as they attempted to emulate the gender dynamics of Arab and South Asian societies. Black political activism also took a hypermasculine turn during that era, and many Black activist, religious, and cultural institutions followed suit.<sup>222</sup> New York City's Black Muslim communities were no different.<sup>223</sup> Still, women of the State Street community like Mother Khadjiah, Mama Rahkiah, and several others left a legacy that inspired activism, organizing, cultural programming and institution building on the part of Muslim women in New York City from the 1970s until today.<sup>224</sup>

One of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's primary goals was to establish an unprecedented degree of institutional legitimacy for Islam and Muslims in New York City. In 1944, he and Mother Khadijah incorporated the Islamic Mission of America with the State of New York, purchasing the brownstone from which they operated in 1947.<sup>225</sup> In Shaykh Daoud's writings, he emphasized both the religious and legal legitimacy of his organization, stating that it was founded, "in accordance with the Sacred laws of Islam, and in accordance with the constitutional laws of the government of the United States." He further clarified that, "[i]t is incorporated according to the religious corporation laws of the United States" and asserts the Mission's right "to exercise full religious rites, in every respect. Marriages, burials, birth, religious schooling, divorces, etc. within the laws of Islam and in conformity with the laws of the State of New York and elsewhere are

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<sup>222</sup> Ashley D. Farmer, "The African Woman, 1965–1975," in *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 11

<sup>223</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>224</sup> These organizations included Sisters in Islam, Women in Islam, and several others. Interview with Hajja Kareemah Abdul-Kareem, New York, NY. 14 April 2014; Interview with Aisha al-Adawiyyah, New York, NY. 8 March 2014.

<sup>225</sup> Ferris, "To 'Achieve the Pleasure of Allah,'" 212.

performed”.<sup>226</sup> Oral accounts affirm that Shaykh Daoud did indeed perform such services as one of few Muslim religious leaders with the legal authority to do so.<sup>227</sup> In an attempt to render his position as Muslim religious leader legible within an early twentieth century American context, he sometimes adopted the title Reverend, being referred to as ‘Rev. Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal’ in a number of newspaper articles from the 1950s.<sup>228</sup>

Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah also built relationships with religious and political authorities from various Muslim countries. They were helped with this effort by Imam Mohamed Kabbaj. Kabbaj immigrated to New York from Morocco in 1949 and, beginning in 1950, was drafted by the couple to assist with the community’s daily affairs.<sup>229</sup> This allowed the State Street mosque to operate more regularly, since Shaykh Daoud’s job would have made it difficult for him to lead the five daily Muslim prayers in congregation. Imam Kabbaj was also appointed by Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah to oversee the Institute of the Islamic Mission of America, which provided “daily, two-hour-long, year-round Islamic and Arabic classes for children and adults” from 1950 to 1965.<sup>230</sup> Imam Kabbaj seems to have played a major role in building strong ties between the State Street mosque and various majority Muslim governments. Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah also employed the services of Maqbul Ilahi, a Pakistani Qur’an teacher and *hafiz* (one who has memorized the entire Qur’an).<sup>231</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 60s,

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<sup>226</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 185.

<sup>227</sup> A number of the Black Muslim elders I encountered, including several that I formally interviewed, mentioned that Shaykh Daoud had performed their marriages. Others recalled Shaykh Daoud or Mother Khadijah performing funerary rights for their loved ones. Others recounted receiving formative religious instruction at the mosque.

<sup>228</sup> *The Daily Review*, February 8, 1956, 29; Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal, “Calls Both Wrong,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 18, 1958, 6.

<sup>229</sup> Ferris, “To ‘Achieve the Pleasure of Allah,’” 213.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Curtis, “Urban Muslims,” 62; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 66-67. Here, Dannin refers to Hafiz Maqbul as “Hafis Mahbub.”

Hafiz Maqbul, as he was known in the community, served as the most active, if not only, hafiz of Qur'an providing instruction to Black American Muslims in New York City. In addition to Hafiz Maqbul, the Institute offered religious instruction from itinerant Muslim scholars and lecturers who occasionally passed through New York City. Imam Kabbaj continued to work with Mother Khadijah for roughly a decade after Shaykh Daoud's death, serving as the mosque's Imam and assisting with its administration.

Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's Islamic orientation was shaped by their commitment to Islamic Orthodoxy. Scholars have sometimes questioned Shaykh Daoud's level of Islamic religious learning. However, a review of his writings reveals a rather high-level of literacy, if not scholarship, with regard to the Islamic religious tradition.<sup>232</sup> His primary work *Al-Islam, the Religion of Humanity* initially published in 1950 and revised with a slightly different title in 1965 covers a host of subjects including basic Islamic theology, Islamic rules for purification and personal grooming, Quranic critiques of other faiths, and Muslim notions of justice and morality. In his writings, Shaykh Daoud spells out the aims and objectives of his Islamic Mission of America. He writes,

“The Purpose of the Islamic Mission of America, Incorporated, is to establish places for the worship of Allah; schools for teaching the religion of Islam and Arabic, the language in which the revelations of Almighty Allah were revealed to the various Prophets, according to the Holy Qur'an revealed unto the last prophet of our Lord – Muhammad (peace be upon him), for the universal governance and guidance of humanity.”<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> The aforementioned work, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity* is a collection of the Shaykh's three major works, originally published in 1950, 1953, and 1965 respectively, as well as various pamphlets, letters, community documents, and addresses that he penned. It is to this collection that I refer here.

<sup>233</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 185.

This passage emphasizes his commitment to the Qur'an as the ultimate source of Islamic religious authority, as well as his subscription to the orthodox Islamic doctrine that holds the Prophet Muhammad to be God's final and universal apostle.

While the community that Mother Khadijah and Shaykh Daoud built was firmly rooted in Islamic orthodoxy, it also allowed for a considerable degree of diversity with regard to religious thought and practice. The State Street mosque, like other mosques established during this period, did not promote a particular Muslim legal or theological school, but simply encouraged its members to stay within the rather broad confines of orthodox Islam. There does not seem to have been any rhetoric decrying the Shi'a tradition among the city's Muslims prior to the 1980s, although most community leaders tended to engage the Sunni tradition more substantively.<sup>234</sup> Hajj Haroon comments on the resulting diversity of religious praxis among worshipers at the Mission, as well as most Muslim worship spaces during the period. He remarks,

“It was such a beautiful thing to see all these people, Chinese, Uzbeks, Afghans, all these different people praying in the mosque together and their hands in different positions. And between the time of the *takbir* to the *ruku'* a lot of different things would be happening in that time space. It was not regimented!”<sup>235</sup>

When Hajj Haroon refers to the space between the *takbir* and *ruku'*, he is referencing positions of the Muslim ritual prayer. While there is parity among the vast majority of Muslims with regard to the general form of the prayer, which includes the two positions that Hajj Haroon mentions, there is a wide divergence among Muslims with regard to the specific formulas for praising God that one utters while observing those movements – even within the same legal school of thought. By highlighting the diversity within

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<sup>234</sup> After 1979's Islamic Revolution in Iran, Muslim in the America began to become more familiar with the distinctions between the Sunni and Shi'a traditions of Islam. Many became influenced by anti-Shi'a propaganda, while others sympathized with, and even embraced, Shi'ism.

<sup>235</sup> Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC, 30 July 2016.

orthodox mosques like State Street during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, Hajj Haroon contrasts them with mosques established in American cities during the later part of the century – many of which endorsed a particular ritual orientation, sometimes rather rigidly. He continues,

“It didn't matter whether you were folding your arm, and brothers walking up to you adjusting where your arm is on your chest. (There were) some brothers with their arms down and no, they weren't Shia, they were Maliks. Or they were other groups of people from all over the world. So we saw this in the 1940s. Brothers were standing there with their arms done. Wasn't nobody saying 'astaghfirullah, brother', And going through it with this *Wahabi* type attitude. Which is very disturbing by the way. It's really disturbed the waters.”<sup>236</sup>

Here, Hajj Haroon is more direct about the causes of this shift. He laments, like many of the elders I interviewed, the rising influence of what he identifies as the Wahabi movement among Muslims in America. Named for its association with Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab, the eighteenth-century Muslim cleric from the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula, the Wahhabi movement subsequently left a major imprint on the ideological character of the Saudi Arabian religious establishment. Both Wahabism – through the direct influence of the Saudi Arabian government – and the related, though not identical movement known as Salafism came to exercise great sway over American Muslim communities especially during the 1990s. Hajj Haroon specifically mentions the issue of the placement of one's hands while conducting the ritual prayer for a number of reasons. First, the placing of ones' hands to the side during the ritual prayer is sometimes a marker of Shi'a Muslim practice, which Wahabis and Salafis often vilify. Second, while Hajj Haroon himself holds the Shi'a tradition in high esteem, he points out that the Muslim Americans he encountered praying in this manner during the 1950s were *Malikis*, meaning they subscribed to the Sunni legal school named after the eighth century

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

Muslim jurist Imam Malik ibn Anas. By declaring that Malikis were present in the State Street mosque, Hajj Haroon may be subtly asserting that there was a strong West African presence in the mosque, since that is the region where the Maliki school is most popular. Alternatively, he may be pointing to the community's high level of ideological sophistication, as most Muslims outside of West Africa tend not to be familiar with the Maliki school. In either case his overall argument is clear: the orthodox Muslims who worshiped at State Street and other mosques during this early period were diverse and tolerant.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Shaykh Daoud's thought that has garnered little attention is his embrace of the *tasawuf* tradition or Sufism. One reason for this is that the Shaykh himself tended not to be very pronounced about his connection to a *tariqa* or Sufi order. A number of the elders that I spoke with from Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's community speculated that Shaykh Daoud was likely knowledgeable about Sufism and was receptive to it but were unaware of Shaykh Daoud or Mother Khadijah having any actual affiliation with a Sufi Shaykh or order. Hajj Haroon, on the other hand, asserted that Shaykh Daoud was a *muqaddam* or representative of the 'Alawiyyah Sufi order.<sup>237</sup> Founded by the famed Shaykh Ahmed al-'Alawi of Mostaganem, Algeria, the 'Alawiyyah order spread throughout North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East during the earlier part of the twentieth century.<sup>238</sup> Many of the order's followers who helped spread the movement globally were African and Arab merchant seaman, the same demographic that formed a large contingent of the Muslims in Harlem

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<sup>237</sup> A number of Sufi orders may be referred to by the name 'Alawiyyah. Here I intend the order of Shaykh Ahmed al-'Alawiyyah, which is itself a branch of the *Shadhiliyyah* order named after the thirteenth century Morocco Sufi Shaykh Abu'l Hassan Shadhili.

<sup>238</sup> For more on Shaykh Ahmed al-'Alawi, see Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi: His Spiritual Heritage & Legacy*, 3rd ed (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

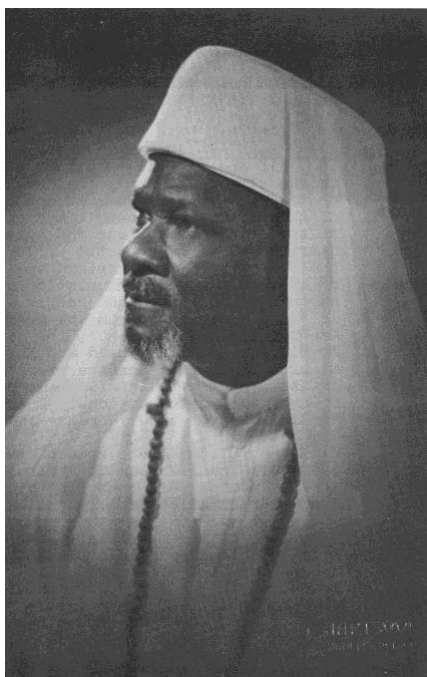
during the 1920s and 30s, and of Brooklyn's State Street mosque. Ghalib Muhammad, a merchant seaman from Yemen, was also a member of the 'Alawiyyah order.<sup>239</sup> A close friend of Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah, Ghalib served as a pillar of the State Street mosque community. Hajj Haroon speculates that he may have been the person that connected Shaykh Daoud to the Algerian Shaykh Ahmed al- 'Alawi.

Shaykh Daoud's silence to most of the mosque's attendees, including some of his close supporters, regarding his adherence to a Sufi path may have stemmed from a fear of overwhelming a community comprised largely of recent converts. Hajj Haroon and others have commented on both Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's emphasis on community members mastering the fundamentals of the religion. Indeed, various elements of Sufism are widely held by Muslim scholars and clerics from various backgrounds as inappropriate for the layman. In fact, Hajj Haroon listed for me a small handful of studious young Muslims, including several who ultimately traveled abroad to study their religion, who would have been "sharp enough" to discuss elements of the Sufi tradition. He and another community elder I interviewed, Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam contended that Harlem's International Moslem Society was also attended by several South Asian and African Muslim immigrants who were affiliated with Sufi orders and may have inducted one or two Black American Muslims who frequented that mosque. Hajj Haroon recounts that, to those few with whom he elected to share his Sufi affiliation, Shaykh Daoud would present a piece of paper bearing an *ijazah*, a document of religious authorization, that he kept in a leather pouch under his *kufi* or cap. While Hajj Haroon's account awaits additional corroboration, it is interesting to note that Shaykh Daoud adopted an aesthetic that was very similar to that of Shaykh al- 'Alawi, characterized by a

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<sup>239</sup> Interview with Hajj Daoud A. Haroon, Durham, NC. 30 July 2016.

distinct, hooded Moroccan style *jalaba* or robe, a *tasbih* or Muslim rosary around his neck, and a kufi similar to the one that Shaykh al- ‘Alawi is often pictured wearing. Further, it is purported that Shaykh al- ‘Alawi’s Moroccan successors have reported that Shaykh Daoud’s name is included in a ledger of Shaykh al- ‘Alawi’s muqaddams around the world.<sup>240</sup> In light of Shaykh ‘Alawi’s passing in 1934, this also suggests that Shaykh Daoud’s affiliation with the Shaykh began during his Harlem years prior to the founding of the State Street mosque. However, it is alternatively possible that Shaykh Daoud received his authorization from one of Shaykh- ‘Alawi’s successors after his passing.



**Figure 2: Shaykh Daoud wearing his signature *kufi* and *tasbih* around his neck, in a style reminiscent of Shaykh Ahmed al-‘Alawi and his followers.**  
Source: theislamicmission.com.



**Figure 3: Shaykh Ahmed al-‘Alawi**

<sup>240</sup> This information was shared with me by a young Muslim American cleric and member of the order who became interested in Shaykh Daoud after learning of his inclusion in the register from one of today’s most prominent representatives of the ‘Alawiyyah order while studying with him in Morocco.



Figure 4: Shaykh Daoud wearing a classic Moroccan style hooded *jalaba* similar to the one worn by Shaykh Ahmed al-'Alawi in the picture above. Here he sits next to a young Imam Mohamed Kabbaj during a session at the United Nations. Source: [theislamicmission.com](http://theislamicmission.com).

### Art, Culture, and Africanity at 143 State Street

The mosque that Sheikh Daoud and Mother Khadijah established gave rise to a thriving community of artists and creators of culture. Both accomplished artists themselves, the couple attracted several well-known Black Muslim jazz artists, including percussionist Bilal Abdul Rahman, trombonist Daoud Haroon, and bassist Ahmed Abdul Malik. Another artist who attended the State Street mosque was Brother Rajab Abdul-Wahhab. Born in 1928 in Richmond, Virginia, Rajab moved to Brooklyn at the age of 9, and embraced Islam at the age of 18. Also an active member of Brooklyn's renowned musical scene, he performed as a jazz and Latin trumpet player with a number of prominent artists when they played in the area, including the legendary Ahmad Jamal. Brother Rajab remembers several other professional jazz musicians who were Muslim, including the famed vocalist Dakota Staton, frequenting the mosque at 143 State Street, and even credits the local jazz scene for introducing him and many others to Islam. He

shared a story chronicling his initial exposure to the faith involving the bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik, who was born Jonathan Tim Jr.

“Through music, I met other people (that were Muslim). We were at a (place) on Fulton Street and Classon Avenue in Brooklyn. This place called (unclear.) And we used to go hear the other musicians practice and rehearse. So, one day I was talking to my friend and I (pointed and) said: ‘that’s Tim’! Tim had graduated from, we (both) had graduated from the same public school, P.S. number 3 in Brooklyn. And he had a Fez on. And I said “Tim’! I kept hollering. He turned around and said ‘my name is not Tim, my name is Ahmed. I’m Muslim.’ So (I said to myself) ‘Ahmed? He’s Muslim?’ ... So (later) I asked Tim some questions. That’s when I (asked what he meant by) Muslim and Islam. Then as we went along, we’d go to Harlem and listen to big time musicians. I met Idris Suleiman the trumpet player, Sahib Shihab, Abdullah ibn Buhaina (Art Blakey), a whole lot of them. And we were eager. They were older than us and more efficient on their horns than us. And we (began to ask) ‘why ya’ll gotta change ya’ll names? Blah blah blah.’ Then the bits and pieces began to filter in about this Islam.”<sup>241</sup>

Brother Rajab encountered Islam in New York City as a young man during the mid 1940s. He recounts his gradual introduction to a new cultural world defined, in part, by the emerging jazz aesthetic of bebop and the growing numbers of Black, mostly male, musicians who identified with Islam. These artists simultaneously explored African, Near Eastern, and South Asian music and culture. It is through this network of Black Muslim jazz musicians that Brother Rajab heard about the mosque at 143 State Street — the community that would become his long time spiritual home. As these observations might indicate, the realm of cultural expression would play a leading role in the construction of the community’s religious identity.

The story of Ahmed Abdul-Malik, who Brother Rajab mentions above, reveals a great deal about the cultural perspective that the State Street community cultivated. During the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the Brooklyn based jazz bassist made a name for himself by experimenting with Middle Eastern and African musical forms. In addition to

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<sup>241</sup> Interview with Rajab Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 9 April 2014.

collaborating and performing with well-known jazz artists like Art Blakey, Randy Weston, John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk, Ahmed Abdul-Malik served as the band leader for a number of recordings that broke new ground with their innovative blends of American jazz and “Eastern” musical traditions. The mystique of Abdul-Malik’s music was augmented by his identity, as he was purported to be of Sudanese ancestry. However, in truth Abdul Malik was born Jonathan Tim Jr. to Afro-Caribbean parents, who immigrated to Brooklyn from St. Vincent in the British West Indies around 1924, three years before he was born. In his book *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, the historian Robin D. G. Kelley devotes an entire chapter to Ahmed Abdul-Malik, and contends that “[v]irtually every one of his critics and fans has come to accept this story of his origins.”<sup>242</sup> Kelly explains that Abdul-Malik’s father had told him of his African ancestry, but that “for Abdul-Malik, the claim of heritage was more direct: ‘My father came from Sudan and migrated here to the United States.’” Kelley, with his keen understand of the racial dynamics of Black intellectuals of the era, does not disparage Abdul-Malik’s self-ascription. With insight and sensitivity, he charges that “Abdul-Malik’s steadfast assertion of his Sudanese heritage tells us a great deal about the power and importance of Africa in the black imagination during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s”. Indeed, Ahmed Abdul-Malik’s characterizations about his heritage resemble those of other Black American Muslims like Noble Drew Ali, Professor Muhammad Ezzaldeen, and of course, the Imam of his own mosque, Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal. Like Shaykh Daoud, Abdul-Malik chose an identity construct that not only connected him to the Arabic speaking Muslim world, but also foregrounded sub-Saharan Africa – the region identified as

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<sup>242</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 92.

‘Bilad-as-Sudan’ in classical Arabic literature. A few other prominent Black American Muslim converts during this period followed a similar course.<sup>243</sup>

The art produced by members of the State Street community often reflected a distinct approach to questions of race and the value of Africanity. In keeping with much of the radical Black activism of the 1950s and beyond, members of the community often articulated their critiques of white supremacy through a passion for African-centered historical investigation and Afrocentric artistic expression. One such example is Rahkiah Abdur-Rahman, who began attending the Mosque during the late 1940s. Mama Rahkiah went on to become something of a legend in Brooklyn due to her long time artistic and cultural contributions, including to notable organizations like the Brooklyn Academy of Music. She has been recognized as a pioneer among Black American Muslim women due to her community leadership, activism, and cultural work.<sup>244</sup> As mentioned in chapter 1, when asked about her earliest encounter with Islam and Muslims, she recalled that it came through her interaction with members of the Garvey movement.

**Mama Rahkiah:** “When I first heard about (Islam) it was in New York. These people (pause) it was one of the first, I guess you’d say, pioneers trying to wake up the Black people. I can’t think of his name.....

**R.M.:** Was it Garvey?

**Mama Rahkiah:** Garvey, yea!. And, you know, he was organizing then. And a lot of the people who were interested in *history*, they were, sort of, following him.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Hajj Hesham Jaber, the influential Muslim religious leader mentioned in the previous chapter, was also known to inform people of his Sudanese ancestry, despite being an American born convert. During the 1970s another former attendee of the State Street mosque named Dwight York would also claim to be Sudanese. While founding the Ansar Allah movement in Bushwick, Brooklyn, York changed his name to Imam Isa al Hadi al Mahdi, and went so far as to claim descent from the historical Mahdi Muhammad Ahmed of Sudan.

<sup>244</sup> Su'ad Abdul Khabeer (@DrSuadDrSuad), Twitter status, March 18, 2019, <https://twitter.com/DrSuad/status/1107836752834646021>.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Rahkiah Abdurrahman, Brooklyn, NY, 11 April 2014. (I include this same transcription from an excerpt of my interview with Rahkiah Abdurrahman in Chapter 1. I have reproduced it here so that the reader need not refer to the earlier passage.)

It is interesting to note her depiction of those subscribing to Marcus Garvey's Pan-African ideology as people who were "interested in history". It is also revealing that she recalls being interested in hearing their remarks about Islam because of her own fascination with history. This interest in history on her part motivated her interest in Garvey's followers as a young woman, and it ultimately rendered the Muslim faith attractive to her. She recalls that these interactions with Garveyites came when she was too young to attend a UNIA meeting, and that her family was not involved with UNIA activism. In fact, Mama Rahkiah gives no indication that she or her family enjoyed any substantive relationship with the Garvey movement. However, these presumably sparse encounters occupy a significant space in her reconstruction of the past, and the journey that led her to embrace the Muslim faith.

Mama Rahkiah would later learn more about Islam through her husband, Bilal Abdur-Rahman, who became an accomplished jazz precisionist and educator. Bilal was actively learning about Islam when they met, and the two ultimately decided to embrace the faith. Bilal's interest in Islam, along with the Black Hebrew tradition, prompted me to ask if he had been a member of the UNIA. She informed me that he was not, and instead attributed his initial interest in Islam to his interest in history – specifically *African* history. Mama Rahkiah's reflections about her and her husband's initial interest in Islam gave me an indication of the role that Africa and its history might have played in her construction of her identity as an American-born Muslim of African descent. This was further elucidated by her description of her and her husband's sustained engagements with African art and culture through her religious community life, as well as their efforts

to promote a greater degree of awareness and literacy about Islam within the broader Black American community in New York City.

In addition to being an accomplished musician, Bilal Abdurrahman served as an educator in Brooklyn, New York for many years. In this capacity, Bilal introduced members of the broader Brooklyn community to the music and culture of West Africa. Beginning in 1972, Rahkiah accompanied Bilal on a series of trips throughout West Africa to learn more about the instruments and musical forms of the region. During these trips, the two formed lasting relationships with West African Muslim communities. The knowledge and exposure facilitated by these experiences greatly informed their contributions to the community in which they lived. The couple became fixtures in the community, known for their simultaneous efforts to introduce the community to the religion of Islam and African culture. Bilal, already a regular part of the local jazz scene, recorded albums to serve as educational aides and conducted demonstrations at libraries and community centers to introduce young people to African musical instruments.<sup>246</sup> Mama Rahkiah and Bilal also established a restaurant called The African Quarter, which showcased music from the African continent and works by African-oriented jazz musicians like the ones who frequented the State Street mosque, as well as served African cuisine. They also started Ethnomodes Folkloric Workshop — a non-profit community organization that organized educational and cultural events that simultaneously promoted Islam and African culture.

**Zainab:** “We used to do African cultural shows, and (we) talked about Africa (and) Islam. And it was one way of introducing Islam and the African culture to people. Because, you know, at certain times in our cultural life, no one wanted to be African, let alone be Muslim”.

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<sup>246</sup> *New York Magazine*, February 10, 1992, 118.

**R.M.:** “Who would come to these Cultural Shows”?

**Zainab:** “Everybody!”

**Zainab:** “When my father started a workshop called Ethno-Modes Folkloric Workshop, along with my mom and, again, Aunt Doria, Ayub’s wife, they would sew, and we would have shows that (would last) for about three hours (chuckles).<sup>247</sup> So you could imagine the amount of sewing that they did”. “People weren’t used to pantaloons... Whatever clothes we wore were worn full or, you know, Islamically appropriate. So, my mother would always make pantaloons for us.”<sup>248</sup>

Mama Rahkiah and Bilal’s daughter Zainab remember the impact of the African Cultural Shows that her parents and other members of the State Street spiritual community planned. Zainab refers to her parents’ collaborator as her uncles and aunts, signifying the familial nature of the relationships forged between worshipers who attended State Street. That this was a communal affair, with several members of the State Street congregation contributing, gives the impression that there was significant buy-in from members of the faith community. Reflecting on that time “in our cultural life”, Zainab further recalls, “No one wanted to be African, let alone be Muslim.” Through her memory, we learn that one of the goals of these cultural events was to cultivate a positive image of Islam and Africanity within the broader Black American community. She remembers that performances lasted roughly three hours and were well-attended by a diverse group of individuals from the greater community, indicating that her parents and their collaborators found some success in using this venue as a tool for outreach. The “cultural show” would normally include a fashion show segment, featuring African attire that conformed to Muslim conventions of modesty, and musical performances that

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<sup>247</sup> Ayyub Abdullah and Doria Jones were also prominent members of the community. Ayyub was also an accomplished percussionist who played with Bilal Abdurrahman on occasion. Ayyub was instrumental in the early stages of my research.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Rahkiah and Zainab Abdurrahman, Brooklyn, NY. 11 April 2014.

featured African instruments. Again, we see indications that, for these Black American Sunni Muslims, African heritage and Islamic faith were connected.

The efforts of Zainab's parents to cultivate an African-centered Islamic aesthetic were particularly fruitful in inculcating a positive Islamic identity within their daughter. When describing the African cultural shows that her parents and surrogate aunts and uncles collaborated to plan, Zainab spoke at length about the fashion component — remembering with fondness and appreciation the amount of work that went into the clothes her mother produced. She similarly recalls her mother's labor of love in creating clothing for her every *Eid* — the major Islamic holiday that falls twice a year.

**Sister Rahkiah:** “They had to have something new every Eid. That was my tradition”.

**Zainab:** “See that made it for us. Because there were no other Muslims where we went to school. When we got together at the masjid...all the families, we laughed, we enjoyed ourselves. But after the Eid, we all went separate ways. We came back to one section of Brooklyn. Another family went to a different section of Brooklyn. One went down to Coney Island. One went to Staten Island. So in our schools, (the only Muslims) were just my sisters and myself. So for the Eids...they made it festive. So we were, in fact, very, you know, kind of... cocky. (We said to classmates and teachers) ‘Oh no, tomorrow’s our *EEEID!*’. Or (we) were absent a day and came back (saying) ‘yeah, we were absent yesterday because yesterday was our *EEEID!* Our Holiday!’ So it made it palatable for us.”<sup>249</sup>

The above clip reveals the degree to which Bilal and Rahkiah's efforts to construct an Afrocentric Muslim culture that could resonate with Black Americans resulted in their daughter's positive association with the Muslim faith. Similarly, Sadia Abdul Hakim reflects on the consciousness that her experience with Sheikh Daoud, Mother Khadijah, and the State Street community cultivated with regard to her sense of identity.

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<sup>249</sup> Interview with Rahkiah and Zainab Abdurrahman, Brooklyn, NY. 11 April 2014.

## Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism at Work

From the reflections of these women, who grew up in the community that Sheikh Daoud and Mother Khadijah created and led, and who continued to practice Islam and embrace the African-centered Islamic aesthetic that their parents promoted into their adult life, we can begin to understand the impact of the cultural consciousness that helped to define this congregation. This unique religio-cultural orientation is at the heart of what I refer to as Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism, and is part of a Black American Sunni Muslim tradition that connects the community of worshipers who attended the mosque at 143 State Street to many of the Black American Muslim congregations that emerged in its wake. In a final clip, Rajab Abdul Wahhab reflects on why he remained a regular attendee of the State Street Mosque over the course of many years, even as new Muslim houses of worship began to open throughout the city. After referring to State Street as the hub of religious activity for Muslims in New York City, he alludes to the significance of Sheikh Daoud's own racial identity for him as a Black American Muslim. Simply put, Brother Rajab felt at home at 143 State Street because its spiritual leader, Sheikh Daoud Ahmed Faisal, was a Black man.

**Brother Rajab:** "I always stayed with the hub. That's what I (stammers)...I'm not flamboyant in that way. My way, if (you) got my loyalty, you got my loyalty. I mean, alright, *alhamdulillah* (praise God)! Subhanallah (glory be to God), build a masjid. All (of them), if they say *la ilaaha ill Allah* (there is no god other than Allah) I'll come there when I can or whatever whatever; (to) that one (or) that one. But I remained faithful to State Street because I would say, as far as Islam go, that was my birthplace! Not the (Islamic) Academy, not this (other) one, not (mumbles). And no ... ok, you may call me (pauses), well here it is, Sheikh Daoud looked like me"<sup>250</sup>

## The Politics of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism

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<sup>250</sup> Interview with Rajab Abdul-Wahhab, Atlanta, GA. 9 April 2014.

While Shaykh Daoud may have promoted a certain ideological openness with regard to differing approaches to Islam, this legal and theological tolerance had its limits. As a proponent of Islamic orthodoxy, Shaykh Daoud developed a reputation for his vocal critiques of heterodox Muslims groups in general, and the Nation of Islam in particular<sup>251</sup>. Along with his rejection of the Nation of Islam's theology, he found its Black Nationalist political perspective to be at odds with both his internationalism and his investment in the notion that Islam could serve all humanity. For example, he writes that his intended audience for the book he penned includes "all truth seeking humanity...regardless of color of skin, nationality, or race. We are all from one and the same male and female (Adam and his God given wife Eve)."<sup>252</sup> This has led some scholars to overemphasize Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's commitment to universalism, even to the extent of associating his views with the ideological rhetoric of political Islam.<sup>253</sup> This reflects a tendency among authors in the field to perceive a false dichotomy between 'Black Islam', which is imagined to be inherently nationalistic and heterodox, and 'immigrant Islam', which is conversely imagined to be orthodox and 'universalist'. In juxtaposing universalism with nationalism, these authors have attempted to make the claim that the culturally diverse nature of orthodox Muslim communities was usually incompatible with the kind of commitment to address the specific issues facing people of African descent that underscore the Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist discourses that influenced groups like the NOI and the MST. As a result, they have overlooked the interesting ways in which Black American orthodox Muslims celebrated their own Black American culture and African ancestry. What emerged from their

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<sup>251</sup> Bowen, *A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States*, Volume 2, 491.

<sup>252</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 113.

<sup>253</sup> Curtis, "Islamism and Its African American Muslim Critics," 683-709.

simultaneous engagements with Islamic orthodoxy, Black American culture, and Black political consciousness was a unique brand of Black Muslim cultural nationalism associated with Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism, and it would influence Black American Muslims for generations to come.

Even as an advocate of solidarity amongst Muslims across ethnic backgrounds, Shaykh Daoud maintained a focus on issues that impacted Black and Brown people. His works are replete with vehement condemnations of white supremacy. Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah's Black Internationalist cultural and political perspective have been discussed above. But a particular passage from Shaykh Daoud's writings outlining the purpose of the Mission highlights its commitment to addressing the plight of Black Americans in particular. He writes,

“We also strive for the enlightenment and liberation of the African and Asiatic people residing and born in the United States and in the Americas, and whose ancestors were brought to the shores of the Americas and enslaved, and who are now being unjustly, wickedly, insultingly, wrongly and falsely nick-named Negroes and are now treated by other elements who themselves came and found shelter, and Islam in this God blessed country, as tough they are inferior creatures, and who have been denied the human rights and privileges they themselves enjoy.”<sup>254</sup>

The implications of the above passage are significant. Firstly, it underscores Shaykh Daoud's willingness to engage, and even appropriate, aspects of the teachings of heterodox groups like the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam. While the Shaykh may have been critical of their theological positions, he clearly subscribed to a similar historiographical view. Like the NOI and the MST, he views Black American people as heirs to a heritage that is both African and 'Asiatic'. He was also similarly

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<sup>254</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 183.

critical of ‘Negro’ as a racial label.<sup>255</sup> Second, he appears especially convinced by the sacred history of the MST, which asserted that there had been an African Muslim (i.e. Moorish) presence in the Americas before the arrival of Columbus. This alternative historical narrative, which is backed up by at least some circumstantial evidence, continues to be popular among many American Muslims and Moorish Science Temple members today.<sup>256</sup>

This sociopolitical orientation also informed Shaykh Daoud’s efforts to provide institutional support for members of his community. Following the trend of both the MST and Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen, Shaykh Daoud issued identification cards for members. However, the organizational capital he was able to amass for the Mission allowed him to endow membership with institutional benefits. During the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, members of the community could obtain a ‘Muslim Certificate of Community Identification’, which confirmed their membership in the community in case their right to observe certain religious practices was impeded or denied. For Black American Muslims, the Mission offered a special ‘Certificate of Heritage’, which began by addressing in all capital letters, “ALL PERSONS OF AFRICA-ASIAN ORIGIN BORN IN THE UNITED STATES OF SLAVE ANCESTORS”, and advised them to “PLEASE TAKE NOTICE THAT THE ISLAMIC MISSION OF AMERICA INCORPORATED FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD AND FOR THE PORPAGATION OF ISLAM.....STANDS READY TO ASSIST YOU”. The document went on to offer Black American converts with assistance in undergoing legal name changes, but also included a telling rhetorical flourish that proclaimed Black Americans’ right to some form of reparations from the

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 115-116, 183.

<sup>256</sup> Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 185-275.

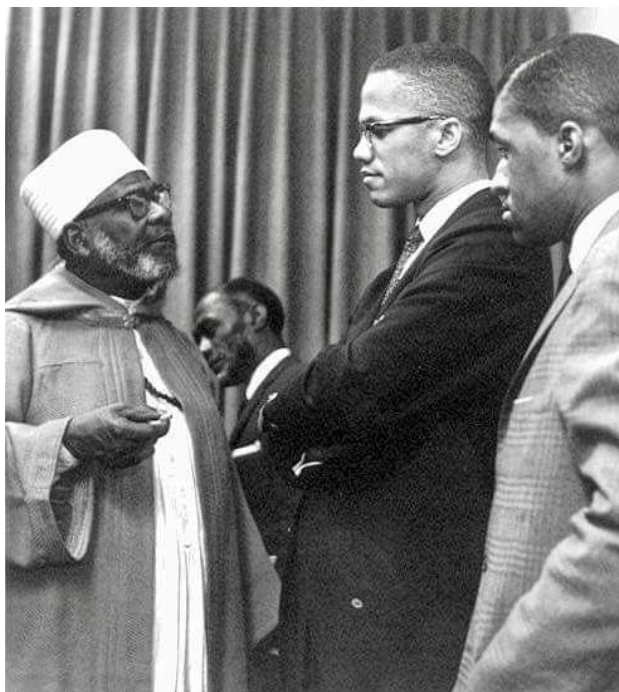
U.S. government “the government of the United States of America is still indebted to all people of slave ancestors.”

In light of their divergence from the Black Nationalism of the Nation of Islam, an alternative way of characterizing the politics of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism as embodied by Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s is through the concept of self-determination. Indeed, during the 1940s, the couple undertook an initiative to create a rural, intentional community of Muslims called Medina Salaam in East Fishkill New York. This effort resembled earlier efforts by Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen to create Jabal Arabia and Ezaldeen Village. Though ultimately unsuccessful, the vision of Medina Salaam reflects Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah’s desire to achieve a level of self-determination for their Muslim community. Tellingly, in articulating his critiques of white supremacy and European Christendom throughout his writings, Shaykh Daoud often invokes the related concept of human rights.<sup>257</sup> Notably, the language of human rights and self-determination would come to occupy a central place in the ideological articulations of New York City’s most famous Black American Muslim voice, Malcolm X in the years following his expulsion from the Nation. Yet another striking parallel can be found in Malcolm’s hope that Black Americans might obtain greater self-determination in the US by building and leveraging relationships with non-white nations and working with the UN. Such similarities have led some Black American orthodox Muslims to speculate that Malcolm may have looked to Shaykh Daoud for inspiration in crafting his post-Nation of Islam program. While there is no direct evidence for such an influence, there was at least one meeting between the two, which took place at the United Nations in 1963. In addition, Malcolm is known to have attended Bilal and Rahkiah

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<sup>257</sup> Faisal and al-Ahari, *Islam, The True Faith, the Religion of Humanity*, 82, 102, 113, 127, 134-136.

Abdurahman's African Quarter on at least one occasion while still a member of the Nation. Yet, though Malcolm comments a great deal about his encounters with Muslims in Africa and the Middle East and immigrant Muslims in the US, he is rather quiet about his meetings with Black American orthodox Muslims prior to his own embrace of Sunni Islam. We can only speculate as to why, but one contributing factor may be the often antagonistic approach that some Black orthodox Muslims took toward the Nation. Shaykh Daoud himself is remembered to have exhibited suspicion regarding the genuineness of Malcolm's espousal of orthodox Islam.<sup>258</sup> Perhaps this rendered any collaboration untenable.



**Figure 5: Malcolm X speaking with Shaykh Daoud at the United Nations in 1963. On Malcolm's left is Benjamin Karim, a representative of the Nation of Islam from Philadelphia's Mosque No. 12, and in the center background is Hajji Muqtar (now deceased), a prominent member of Harlem's International Moslem Society and a confidant of Shaykh Daoud. Source: [theislamicmission.com](http://theislamicmission.com).**

<sup>258</sup> Dr. Amir al-Islam, personal conversation with author, 14 July 2010; Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, personal conversations with author, 2 August 2010.

If engaging Shaykh Daoud may have been challenging for Malcolm X, it certainly was for many other young Black orthodox Muslims in New York City. In 1961, Shaykh Daoud turned 70. He seems to have grown increasingly impatient with a new generation of Muslims who sometimes found him rather abrasive. As products of a new era marked by more radical forms of activism, the priorities of younger Black Muslims began to diverge from that of the aging cleric. Shaykh Daoud, whose ideas had been forged during the Harlem Renaissance and the bebop era, focused on obtaining greater legitimacy and institutional recognition for Muslims. He and Mother Khadijah were Black internationalists dedicated to building solidarities with Muslim immigrants who were mostly working class. Their community was comprised largely of families who valued education and stability. The youth of his congregation on the other hand came of age witnessing violent white backlash against the Civil Rights movement in the South and the militancy of the Nation of Islam in urban areas of the North. They became increasingly skeptical of the establishment, and more nationalistic in their thinking. The immigrant Muslims they met were no longer merchant seaman, but skilled professionals. Their ranks became younger and increasingly male dominated. They were moved by the rhetoric of Minister Malcolm X in their very own city, even if they rejected his heterodox theology. As Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood observed, Malcolm made orthodox Muslims “take their *dawah* into the street.”<sup>259</sup> The ethos of Black

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<sup>259</sup> Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, personal conversations with author, 2 August 2010.

American Islam was changing. The focus was no longer on building a community, but on building a movement.

In 1962, three young men who attended the mosque at 143 State Street met to discuss the possibility of starting a new congregation. Their meeting resulted in the birth of the Dar ul Islam movement. While members of the Dar expressed great respect for Shaykh Daoud, they desired an alternative. To make matters worse, Shaykh Daoud began to suffer extreme senility. By the 1970s, much of his congregation was comprised of Arab immigrants. Numerous community members, both Black American and immigrant, recall Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah lobbying for younger Black Americans, or immigrants with close ties to them, to assume leadership. They also lament the attempts by more recent immigrants to take control of the mosque. Even in the midst of these shifting dynamics and his failing health, Shaykh Daoud continued to his own efforts on behalf of Black and Muslim communities. In December 1971, he along with several other faith leaders and community activists filed a class action law suit against Governor Nelson Rockefeller and a host of other State officials challenging the violence used to suppress the rebellion that took place at Attica State Prison in September of the same year. After his passing in 1980, Mother Khadijah continued her work as well, attempting to help facilitate a transfer of leadership to someone who would be faithful to her and her husband's vision for the mosque. In the end, the legacy of 143 State Street would live on through its influence on a number of communities that emerged during the final decades of Shaykh Daoud's life.

#### CHAPTER 4: BLACK MUSLIM POLITICAL ECONOMIES AND COMPETING INTERNATIONALISMS

By the 1960s and 70s, Islam had become a fixture in New York City's Black religious landscape. Black American Muslims attended several new mosques that began to operate in Manhattan and Brooklyn during that time. Now, with a few more places of worship to choose from, the city's Muslim population became more sophisticated and more divided along ideological lines. These decades also brought a number of tumultuous changes that dramatically impacted Black life in New York City. Black Muslim communities thus had to adapt to meet their changing needs in an era marked by urban decay, the war on poverty, and the subsequent war on drugs. Forced to contend with mounting economic and social problems, as well as harsher policing in the city's majority Black neighborhoods, some Black American orthodox Muslims began to embrace more militant approaches to community organizing. The success of the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Minister Malcolm X also inspired young Black American orthodox Muslims to adopt new strategies to achieve political economic power. The rise of new Black political organizations like the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), the Black Panther Party, and the Republic of New Africa, as well cultural organizations like The East also pushed Black Muslims toward a more radical direction. Amidst this backdrop, Black Muslim institutions in New York City engaged discourses of Black and Muslim Internationalisms as they attempted to find and craft articulations of their faith that were instructive for their efforts to address the challenges of the time.

The new communities that Black American orthodox Muslims formed during this period were also informed by the histories of their predecessors, and thus continued to

engage with the tradition of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism. However, they would take this tradition into new directions – finding new possibilities and testing their limitations. While these communities remained very much in conversation with one another, they did not always agree. The general spirit of collaboration between New York City mosques in the 1940s and 50s gave way to new debates, new solidarities, and new conflicts. The two largest and most influential Black American orthodox Muslim institutions that emerged in New York City during this period were the Dar ul Islam Movement and the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood. The former would adopt a cultural and political posture consistent with the construction of a Muslim proletariat class consciousness, though its members did not articulate their identity using this explicitly Marxist inspired language. It evolved into a highly successful national movement. The latter developed a similar political philosophy, but openly embraced Pan-Africanism and focused on building an “indigenous Muslim intelligentsia” that could provide direction to the greater community of Black and Latino orthodox Muslims.<sup>260</sup> The leaders of both these communities engaged global Muslim discourses and appropriated religious and political ideologies from the Muslim world but disagreed on the role of race in shaping how Black American orthodox Muslim identities should be conceptualized and articulated. To facilitate a better understanding of the important developments that occurred with New York City’s Black Muslims during this period, it is helpful to begin with a preliminary overview of the institutions that characterized their increasingly diverse religious community.

### **Immigrant-led mosques**

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<sup>260</sup> “Founding Imam,” *Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood* (blog), n.d., [http://www.mibnyc.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=53](http://www.mibnyc.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=53).

From 1940 to the late 1950s, the majority of Muslims in New York City attended three mosques: The State Street mosque in Brooklyn, the International Moslem Society in Harlem, and the Academy of Islam in Harlem. The next twenty years witnessed the appearance of several new Muslim communities and institutions. Two of them were led by immigrant Muslims. These were the Islamic Cultural Center of New York (ICC-NY) founded in Manhattan in the late 1950s, and Masjid Al-Farooq, founded in Brooklyn in the late 1970s. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Black American Muslims played a role in creating both of these communities, perhaps more so in the case of ICC-NY. However, they were both run by immigrant Muslims since their inception and continue to be presently. Still, Black American Muslims attended both mosques in significant numbers. This facilitated opportunities for Black Americans to engage religious discourses that were popular in the Arab world. ICC-NY employed a succession of religious scholars trained at the prestigious Al-Azhar University to serve as its Imam and director and maintained this policy until the 1990s. In 1964, it appointed Dr. Mahmoud Shawarbi to the position. Though both his writings and oral accounts betray a rather paternalistic attitude toward Black American Muslim converts, he is best known for providing assistance to Malcolm X in his attempt to perform the *Hajj* after his expulsion from the Nation.<sup>261</sup> During the late 1960s, Dr. Soliman Donia, another Egyptian scholar renowned for his expertise in a wide range of areas including jurisprudence, Sufism, and the works of eleventh century Muslim thinker Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, began a stint as Imam of ICC-NY that lasted roughly ten years, also providing classes in nearby Jersey

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<sup>261</sup> Maytha Alhassen, "Islam in America by Mahmoud Yousef Shawarbi," *Comparative American Studies An International Journal* 13, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 254–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775700.2015.1178951>; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 775.

City for a time. Throughout New York City and the surrounding area, Dr. Donia gained a reputation for his focus on serving the needs of Black American Muslims in particular, much to the chagrin of the local Arab Muslim community.<sup>262</sup> Despite this quality, many Black American Muslims were reluctant to regularly attend his or any other immigrant led mosque due to their strong commitment to supporting Black American or ‘indigenous’ Muslim leadership.<sup>263</sup> Undiscouraged, Dr. Donia is even purported to have provided private counsel to at least one of the era’s more prominent Black American Imams in secret. As a result of Dr. Donia’s stance, ICC-NY attracted a considerable number of Black Americans during his tenure. Some became his dedicated students and staunch supporters. Others took his mosque as a refuge after parting ways with either of the two more popular Black American-led Muslim movements of the time.

### **The Nation of Islam**

Prior to the 1950s, the numbers of Black American orthodox Muslims eclipsed those of the fledgling Nation of Islam on the East Coast, if not nation-wide. That started to change in the middle of the 1950s as the Nation’s prominence and popularity began to explode, steadily increasing until the death of its leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, in 1975. While the impressive organizing and oratory skills of the movement’s greatest ambassador Malcolm X certainly contributed to its rapid rise in

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<sup>262</sup> Unlike Shawarbi, whose unfavorable view of the NOI is discussed by Alhassen in the above cited work, Donia’s is remembered by a prominent student as having a rather sympathetic view of the Nation in light of the socioeconomic circumstances that faced Black Americans. Interview with Shaykh Ameen Abdul Awwal wal Akkir, New York City, 17 February 2014.

<sup>263</sup> I usage of the term indigenous here is in keeping with the practiced popularized by Sherman Jackson (see *Islam and the Black American*) and continued by scholars like Mukhtar Curtis. See, for example, “Urban Muslims: The Formation of the Dar ulIslam Movement,” in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 51–74.

popularity, there were other contributing factors as well. Malcolm was appointed a minister in the Nation on June 1953, less than a year after his parole from prison. He immediately set to work building temples up and down the East Coast. But the program he articulated, which had been crafted by Elijah Muhammad, became increasingly attractive to urban Black communities who were becoming more and more disillusioned with the lack of economic opportunity in the neighborhoods where they lived. The Nation provided a model for self-determined economic and social uplift. The cornerstone of that model was its unprecedented political economic program, which enabled the creation of jobs and the generation of businesses on a formidable scale. By the time of Elijah Muhammad's passing in 1975, the Nation employed over a thousand people, owned farmland valued at over \$6 million, and imported fish from Peru and Japan to its network of community-member-owned "Steak and Take" restaurants – an enterprise that grossed over \$22 million annually.<sup>264</sup>

In Harlem, where Malcolm X began serving as the head minister in 1954, the bustling area of 116<sup>th</sup> St. between Lenox Avenue (later renamed Malcolm X Boulevard) and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard became home not only to the Nation's Temple #7, but also a number of Nation-owned businesses including a popular restaurant, a bookstore, and a barbershop.<sup>265</sup> Its school, Muhammad's University of Islam, was probably the largest network of independent Black schools in the country at its height.<sup>266</sup> The Nation's newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, showcased the Nation's impressive strides.

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<sup>264</sup> Marable. *Malcolm X*, 1203; *The Final Call* online, accessed 18 July 2019, [http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Columns\\_4/article\\_103284.shtml](http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Columns_4/article_103284.shtml)

<sup>265</sup> Edward E. Curtis, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 103.

<sup>266</sup> Evanzz, *The Messenger*; Claude Andrew Clegg III, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St Martins Press, 1997).

With articles written by professional journalists covering a wide range of national and international topics, *Muhammad Speaks* built a readership that far outstripped the Nation's membership, becoming one of the most popular media outlets for Black Americans throughout the U.S.<sup>267</sup>

Another important aspect of the Nation's appeal was its aesthetic – particularly that of its male members. Though Black orthodox Muslims had been more successful than the Nation in winning followers prior to the 1950s, these communities by and large never developed a look that would be palatable to the average Black American observer. Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam reflects on this reality, noting the eccentric style of dress that marked many Black American orthodox Muslims at the time.

“Sunni Muslims looked strange (laughs). They looked like gypsies man! Except for the ones who just wore the red fez and regular clothes. But those other guys, man they'd have the high boots on, they looked weird. And some of them walked with a big staff like Moses. Looking like they came out of the desert.”<sup>268</sup>

The unconventional appearance of some Black American orthodox Muslims fueled perceptions of Islam as exotic – “too exotic for the average person” in Imam Sayed's words. Indeed, such associations were sometimes desirable for Black American artists and “holy men” who leveraged such perceptions for material gain.<sup>269</sup> Interestingly, Imam Sayed recalls that those Black orthodox Muslims who adopted the simple, Moorish Science Temple-inspired aesthetic that combined a western-style suit with a Fez were able to avoid the trap of looking especially unusual. He points out that “[t]hat's how the

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<sup>267</sup> Edward E. Curtis, ed., *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History*, Facts on File Library of American History (New York: Facts on File, 2010), 398.

<sup>268</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam, Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

<sup>269</sup> Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *To Be, or Not-- to Bop* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 291-293; Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 79; Susan Nance, “Respectability and Representation: The Moorish Science Temple, Morocco, and Black Public Culture in 1920s Chicago,” *American Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2002): 623–59.

Nation beat (the Sunni Muslims) out. Because the Nation came dressed in a suit and tie, clean." The Nation was particularly successful in capitalizing on the relatability of its aesthetic through the visibility of the Fruit of Islam (FOI). All male members of the Nation were (and still are) obligated to serve as members of the FOI, an association responsible for providing security for NOI mosque attendees and, in some cases, the broader community. Zain Abdullah has written insightfully about the role of the FOI in attracting both men and women to the Nation, as well as contributing to its overall positive perception within the Black community.<sup>270</sup>

While Black American orthodox Muslims found various aspects of the Nation's political economic program desirable, one particular facet of that program would prove to be iconic, capturing the militant ethos that defined Black Muslim community organizing during the late 1960s and 1970s. By mobilizing its human resources through the FOI, the Nation helped to pioneer an approach to community policing to address crime as well as the problems of police brutality and racial profiling in New York City's Black neighborhoods. The famous Johnson Hinton episode offers a powerful example of the Nation's impressive successes in this regard. In 1957, Hinton Johnson, a member of the Nation, was savagely brutalized and arrested after he and two other members of the Nation confronted two white police officers for beating a Black man in Harlem. Members of the FOI marched in an orderly fashion to the local police precinct, flanked on all sides by a crowd of roughly five hundred angry Harlemites who were informed about the situation. The incident resulted in Hinton being provided medical care and ultimately receiving the largest settlement for a police brutality lawsuit that New York City had ever

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<sup>270</sup> Zain Abdullah, "Narrating Muslim Masculinities: The Fruit of Islam and the Quest for Black Redemption," *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men* 1, no. 1 (2012): 141, <https://doi.org/10.2979/spectrum.1.1.141>.

seen up until that point. In response to the showing of force by the Muslims on the night of the beating, one NYPD officer famously commented to the *Amsterdam News*, in relation to Malcolm X, that “no one man should have that much power.”<sup>271</sup> Both the Nation of Islam’s run-in with the police and its ability to apply the necessary pressure to obtain greater justice for its member were indicative of the stance it would develop toward local law enforcement over the next decade and a half.

Another article from December of 1971 helps to capture the complicated relationship between the Nation and the NYPD by telling the story of Larry 12X Weir.<sup>272</sup> Weir was a member of the Nation of Islam and worked as an NYPD police officer. In 1961, he was jumped by two white officers who mistook his fair-skinned Black woman associate, also a cop, to be a white woman – something of which they did not approve. As a result of the encounter, Weir went on to found and head the Society of Afro-American Policemen, an organization that also allowed civilian members of the community to join. Weir attempted to build and leverage institutional power in order to counteract the ravages of anti-Black brutality.

The Nation’s attempts to counteract anti-Black violence on the part of the police was made more remarkable, or perhaps made possible, by the fact that it strictly prohibited its members from carrying weapons of any kind. Once Malcolm X left the Nation, he roundly rejected this policy and advocated for the creation of armed Black militias that could help ensure the safety of Black communities. Malcolm’s stance would directly influence that of younger, more militant Black radical organizations like RAM, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Liberation Army. It also left an indelible mark on

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<sup>271</sup> Marable, *Malcolm X*, 128.

<sup>272</sup> “Leonard 12X Weir aide to Black cops,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 25, 1971, C13.

Black orthodox Muslims in New York City and beyond. The local successes of the community policing strategies of the Nation of Islam combined with Malcolm X's promotion of armed self-defense during his final year inspired virtually every major Black American led Muslim congregation of the era to create its own paramilitary force. These forces in turn helped solidify public support for Black Muslims of all stripes within a broader Black community whose members felt increasingly under attack.

### **Smaller Muslim Meeting Places**

Black American Muslims also established a few smaller spaces to meet and worship as an alternative to formal mosques. While the women and men I interviewed made passing allusions to several such spaces, one that was mentioned with some frequency was Ansar House, run by Hajj Hassan and his wife Hajja Jamilah, which served as a meeting space for young Black American Muslims in Brooklyn including many who had grown up attending the State Street Mosque.<sup>273</sup> There were also a handful of *zawiyahs* associated with various Sufi orders that emerged during the late 1970s.<sup>274</sup> There is evidence that at least one such gathering space, affiliated with the Burhaniyyah Sufi order of Sudan, was in operation since the 1960s.<sup>275</sup> Spaces like these served as early iterations of what have come to be referred to in the Muslim American community as 'third spaces', a term derived from the 'third place' concept coined by the sociologist Ray Oldenburg to describe community spaces that are distinct from home and the work place.

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<sup>273</sup> Interview with Sadiya Abdul Hakim, Brooklyn, NY. 31 March 2014.

<sup>274</sup> The term *zawiyah* (literally "corner" in Arabic) is frequently used to refer to Muslim meeting places in North and West Africa. It is most often associated with Sufi communities in those regions.

<sup>275</sup> Shaykh Abdur Rasheed Al-Mukashfi, personal conversation with author, 14 August 2017; Kalimah Muhammad Reaves, personal conversation with author, 23 June 2019. Shaykh Abdur Rasheed and Kalimah Muhammad are two prominent Black American Muslims who were formerly affiliated with the Burhaniyyah.

Third spaces are places where Muslim regularly congregate that are, similarly, distinct from both the home and the mosque. The lack of institutional footprints left by such spaces makes them difficult to document. However, several of the people I interviewed described them as being important, well-known religious and cultural institutions that were frequented by Black American Muslims from around the city.<sup>276</sup>

Another important third space that has been document was established in Brooklyn in the year 1962 at 1964 Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. Like the others mentioned above, it did not host *Jumu'ah* prayer, but rather provided a space for like-minded Black American Muslims to gather after their Friday congregational worship and during the rest of the week. The space attracted many of the young Muslims who attended the State Street Mosque but desired an alternative to the community vision and leadership style offered by the aging Shaykh Daoud. They were younger, more ambitious, and more radical. Eventually they outgrew the small apartment on Atlantic Avenue and underwent a series of transformations that gave birth to the Dar ul Islam Movement, which would go on to define much of the character of Black American orthodox Islam throughout urban America.

### **An Era of New Challenges**

The early 1960's was a time of large-scale political and social unrest. Ethnically and economically diverse groups of young people participated in a number of protests movements. Black Americans expressed their frustration with structural racism,

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<sup>276</sup> Imam Talib mentions Ansar House in a piece Black American Sunni Muslims' support of Malcolm after his break with the Nation and upon his passing. For more, see Imam Al-Hajj Talib Abdur-Rashid, "The Sunni Islamic Training and Mission of El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz/Malcolm X," n.d., <http://siiasi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/THE-SUNNI-ISLAMIC-TRAINING-AND-MISSION-OF-ELHAJJ-MALIK-ELSHABAZZ.pdf>.

economic inequality, and urban blight through the Black Freedom movement in increasingly radical ways. The vile measures of COINTELPRO and the persistence of poverty and police brutality made matters worse – giving rise to a number of riots in cities across the country. Historians have tended to explain increased political rhetoric calling for harsher policing and putative policies during the 1970’s as a response to the social unrest of the previous decade. However, Julilly Kohler-Hausmann has pointed out that these explanations take at face value the justifications offered by the politicians who advocated such policy shifts without taking into account other possible motivations – such as the political dividends politicians stood to gain even if their policies proved to be ineffective.<sup>277</sup> Whatever the motivation, growing numbers of both conservative and liberal elected officials began to adopt a “get tough” stance on crime.<sup>278</sup>

This shift was accompanied by a growing public fear over the specter of increased crime in the wake of a massive spike in heroin use. On the one hand, heroin was becoming more and more of a problem in white suburbia, resulting in increased concern over the issue. However, drug addiction was depicted as the problem of poor Black and Latino men, fostering the image of the threatening, urban man of color who needed to be adequately policed. The Vietnam War made things worse as considerable numbers of veterans returned home having acquired a drug habit. President Richard Nixon declared drug abuse “public enemy #1” and infamously proclaimed the commencement of the “War on Drugs” in 1971. New York State, purported to have had one of the highest rates

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<sup>277</sup> Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, “‘The Attila the Hun Law’: New York’s Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Making of a Punitive State,” *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 1 (September 1, 2010): 71–95, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2010.0039>.

<sup>278</sup> For more on this, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012); James Forman, *Locking up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

of heroin use in the nation, stood at the heart of national debates about drug policy. In 1973, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller announced that he was advocating a drastic change in the way that New York state laws would handle drug offenses. Abandoning his previous support of policies that sought to rehabilitate drug offenders, he now “called on New York State to punish drug dealing more harshly than rape, kidnapping, and even murder.”<sup>279</sup> Months later, the New York legislature passed “the harshest narcotics laws in the nation,” the now-notorious Rockefeller Drug Laws.<sup>17</sup> Inner-city Black and Latino neighborhoods, disproportionately affected by poverty and racial inequity within every rung of the U.S. justice system, suffered the consequences. For the next two decades, these laws would wreak havoc on low-income communities of color throughout New York City.<sup>280</sup>

Black American Muslims were among those who attempted to devise strategies to counteract these adverse conditions. While conducting research for the present study, I was struck by the fact that a large number of the Black American Muslim men I interviewed who were born during the 1950s and thus came of age during the 1970s informed me of their personal history with substance abuse, demonstrating the degree of devastation caused by the influx of narcotics during the era. When asked what led to desolation of the very first iteration of the Dar ul Islam community, for example, one member of the Dar remarked candidly, “the early community combusted because of drugs.”<sup>281</sup> In some cases, interviewees described being exposed to the use of hard drugs,

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>280</sup> For more, see Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Forman, *Locking Up Our Own*; Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>281</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

particularly heroin, as early as their teenage years. For many of them, adopting the Muslim faith played a key role in helping them discontinue the use of psychoactive substances ranging from heroin to alcohol. In addition to increased personal discipline and spiritual strength, Islam offered them a newfound infrastructure for community support, sometimes in the form of a semi-structured drug rehabilitation program.<sup>282</sup> This was just one of the many social programs that Black American Muslims developed to serve their communities. In addition, by creating economic opportunities for members of their congregation, Black American Muslim institutions provided an alternative to participation in the drug trade and an answer to the despair caused by urban poverty. Among orthodox Muslims communities in New York City during the 1960s and 70s, the Dar ul Islam movement emerged as the most active and most successful in this regard.

### **The Birth of “the Dar”**

The evolution of the Dar ul-Islam movement is sometimes described as occurring in stages. The initial phase of the “First Dar” took place from the its founding in 1962, when Rajab Mahmud, Ishaq Abdush-Shaheed, and Yahya Abdul-Kareem, three young men who worshiped and attended classes at the State Street mosque, formulated the Dar ul Islam concept. Their vision was to “create a physical space in America where Muslims could practice (their) way of life in its totality.”<sup>283</sup> A related goal was to establish a paradigm where Muslims’ rights to observe their religious tradition with regard to family, in matters of marriage and divorce for example, “would be recognized by the dominant

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<sup>282</sup> Both the Nation of Islam and the Dar ul Islam movement provided assistance for drug rehabilitation, however my research did not yield details about a formal program.

<sup>283</sup> Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement: An American Odyssey Revisited* (United States: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), 40.

society as binding, in short, some measure of ‘Sovereignty.’”<sup>284</sup> In many ways, this was in keeping with Shaykh Daoud’s goal of attaining greater institutional power and legitimacy for New York City’s Muslims. However, these younger men felt that their faith tradition should more directly address the needs of impoverished Black and Latino communities.<sup>285</sup> In addition, the notion of self-determination had evolved within the Black community. In keeping with the rising interest in articulations of Black Nationalism during the Black Power era, Black Muslims became increasingly convinced of the need to separate from mainstream society. Much like the Nation of Islam, who sought to divest from white America, these Black orthodox Muslims attempted to disassociate, as much as possible, from the broader non-Muslim (and white) world. The name Dar ul-Islam, roughly translating to “the abode of Islam,” was meant to capture this idea. In the words of Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali, a community member who contributed greatly to the Dar’s periodical *Jihadul Akbar*, “[b]y its very name Dar-ul-Islam implied a world within a world, a receptacle, a repository, and a vessel insulated from the socio-political environment...constituting Dar-ul-Harb.”<sup>286</sup> By contrasting ‘Dar ul-Islam’ with ‘Dar-ul-Harb’ – the abode of war characterized by hostility against Islam and Muslims – the Dar ul Islam concept invoked an alternative geography that connected Muslims in America to majority Muslim countries around the world.

As a modest first step to actualizing this vision, the architects of the earliest iteration of the Dar ul Islam community, i.e. the first Dar, secured an apartment at 1964 Atlantic Avenue.<sup>287</sup> Here they could congregated with like-minded community members

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Curtis, “Urban Muslims,” 54.

<sup>286</sup> Kamal Hassan Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam: Principle, Praxis, Movement* (CreateSpace, 2010). XX.

<sup>287</sup> Curtis, “Urban Muslims,” 55.

and perform *Salaat*, the five daily prayers that Muslims are required to offer – with the exception of *Jumu'ah*, which they continued to perform at State Street. It is unclear whether or not they harbored ambitions to create a national movement at this time, but the first Dar's founders must have been encouraged by the appeal of the general concept of the Dar among young, working-class Black American orthodox Muslims. Due to its rapid growth in popularity, resulting in a need for more space, as well as the financial difficulty of maintaining rent payments over time, this first iteration of Dar ul Islam as a Muslim third space proceeded through a succession of locations. These included an apartment on Downing Street followed by another at 777 Saratoga Avenue in the Brownsville section of East New York during 1965. Ultimately, this group of Black American orthodox Muslims, almost all of whom were probably men, disbanded for a short time. It appears that the reason for the collapse of the First Dar had to do with drug usage on the part of some of its members.<sup>288</sup> At least some recent converts who frequented the Dar's spaces continued to engage in the consumption of alcohol, which is considered categorically illicit by most orthodox Muslims, and the impermissibility of marijuana was debated among Black American orthodox Muslims from various congregations at the time. However, the tribulations that plagued the first Dar likely involved the use of harder substances. Such challenges would not have been unique to the Dar, but rather were representative of problems facing the broader urban Black and Latino community throughout the city.

### **From Third Space to Independent Community**

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<sup>288</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

The hiatus did not last long. In 1967, a small group of Black orthodox Muslim men who attended State Street, including Yahya Abdul-Kareem who was among the founders of the first Dar, established a new community worship space. The group and the space were both tiny. As R. M. Mukhtar Curtis writes, “[f]ive to seven brothers ... prayed within a one-bedroom flat on Lewis Avenue in Brooklyn. It was a modest place; the tenants shared a bathroom and kitchen.”<sup>289</sup> What made this move significant, however, was that the group now convened for *Jumu’ah* prayer. This marked a shift away from a third space model, and the inauguration of a second phase in the development of the Dar – the era of the Dar ul-Islam *community*. A community member named Bilal Abd al-Rahman offered a portion of his four-room apartment in Ocean Hill to serve as a mosque space, followed by Jamil Abdur-Rahman who similarly donated space in his five-room apartment at 240 Sumpter Street.<sup>290</sup> Two of the five rooms were designated to serve as the Dar ul Islam’s mosque, and were used in that capacity until 1972.

In 1968, during this phase, a sixteen-year-old who lived in the Amsterdam Housing Project in Manhattan’s Upper West Side converted to Islam and joined the Dar ul-Islam community. The young man, Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim, made 240 Sumpter Street his home. His zeal as a new convert coupled with his militant attitude as a politicized youth brought him into conflict with his father. Bilal Abd al-Rahman, who was in his thirties, making him one of the older members of the Dar’s young community, suggested that Ibrahim move to the Dar’s space in Brooklyn, and personally promised Ibrahim’s father that he would ensure his attendance and completion of high school.

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<sup>289</sup> Curtis, “Urban Muslims,” 58.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 59.

Mahmoud then joined a small group of young men referred to as the *Ahlul-Suffa*.<sup>291</sup> Now, Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim reflects back on the experience recalling,

“So, we were *Suffa* brothers. That's what we did. We did all of the things. We had a brother named Jamil Abdur-Rahman who over saw our activities and he made sure that we were hygienically okay, made sure we washed our clothes, and that we took care of the Masjid. We took care of it physically and took care of it in every way you could possibly imagine. We cleaned it, we made, you know, uh, we made, we made a right for *Jumu'ah*. I mean, we, you know, we did all that. And we made sure that the five prayers were done.”<sup>292</sup>

During this stage of the Dar, according to Sheikh Mahmoud, the core of the community consisted of roughly 30 Black and Latino families who lived within a 10-block radius of the mosque, along with other regular attendees who lived further away. The mosque was active and enjoyed regular attendance, even for the *Fajr* Salaat – the early morning Muslim ritual prayer observed at the time of dawn. Sheikh Mahmoud recalls that “[t]he *Fajrs* would be packed” and “[the] five prayers were jumping!” Sheikh Mahmoud also went on to discuss the Dar’s relationship with the surrounding neighborhood.

Interesting in 1968, out of that window (of the mosque), we would play the *Adhan*<sup>293</sup> out of a loud speaker and we would play it five times a day. And that really bugged the residents, being woken up for *Fajr*. But...we (also) got up once or twice a week and we straightened up all the garbage cans. We swept the streets, we did all of this. Also, Bilal Abdur-Rahman, the brother that introduced me to Islam, was involved with a food co-op. So the community would buy food together.<sup>294</sup>

Sheikh Mahmoud relates how the Dar’s service to the neighborhood ultimately endeared the mosque community to its neighbors, offsetting an initial sense of annoyance due to the early morning wake up call for prayer. He further elaborates on these efforts.

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<sup>291</sup> The term *Ahlul-Suffa* was used among the members of the early Muslim community of Prophet Muhammad’s followers in Medina to refer to those members of the community devoid of material wealth who remained attached to the mosque and were financially supported by the community.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>293</sup> The *adhan* is a vocalized ‘call to prayer’ that marks the beginning of the period for each of the five daily Muslim ritual prayers.

<sup>294</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

Bilal, in terms of the food co-op, extended it to the greater community. So, it wasn't just Muslims buying from him. He would come in with a truck full of stuff (and) other folks that could get involved. And then everything that was left over, we would distribute to the elderly. We would find the elderly folk in the neighborhood and make sure that they had chicken, made sure they had (food). I mean, that's what we did! And that's, you know, that's how you (made people) fall in love with this *Deen*,<sup>295</sup> because you see what it does. You know what I mean?

Sheikh Mahmoud's reflections provide a snapshot of the daily activities of the Dar ul Islam community in the late 1960s. A primary objective of the Dar during this phase, and a central focus for the movement it would mature into during the 1970s, was to provide a place for *Salaat*. Many of the Muslim worship spaces of the time were unable to stay open throughout the day, as other Imams and their congregations yielded to the pressures of a conventional work schedule. The Dar, by contrast, saw its ability to maintain a space that was open for worshipers to offer prayer throughout the entire day as part and parcel to its mission of creating a *Dar-ul-Islam*. The brothers of the *Suffa*, therefore, served a dual purpose. They provided a wholesome, constructive environment for young men to support one another in an era characterized by heavy drug usage and gang activity, and those young men in turn provided the maintenance and security necessary to keep the community facility open all day. An important limitation of this model, however, was that it contributed to the construction of a worship space that was overwhelmingly male. Though the Dar ul Islam community included a significant number of women, attendees of the daily communal prayers were usually only men. Sheikh Mahmoud attributes this tendency wholly to limitations of space, and it is important to note that only men are required to make *Salaat* in congregation when they are able according to Muslim sacred law. Women, on the other hand, are exempted from this requirement – an exemption that is intended to alleviate hardship. It is also important

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<sup>295</sup> An Arabic term that is alternatively translated as 'way of life' or 'religion'.

to note that during the later phases of the Dar, a larger facility allowed for greater participation and visibility of women in the community. Still, the gender dynamics of the Dar's early worship space may be indicative of an ideological orientation toward the Indian subcontinent and the Arab world, where women are often less visible in public worship spaces. This may have contributed to the construction of gender roles in the Dar, which, as will be discussed below, has been criticized by some community members and outside observers.<sup>296</sup>

Sheikh Mahmoud's comments not only provide insight into the experience of members of the *Suffa* during this stage of the Dar, but also reveal a great deal about the nature of the Dar's political economic program. In addition to striving to achieve self-determination for their own religious community, their efforts ingratiated them with their Black and Latino neighbors. By facilitating participation in their food cooperative, delivering food to the elderly, and helping keep the neighborhood clean, the Dar was able to obtain community support. This followed the trend of the Nation of Islam, who were similarly able to render their presence desirable to those who lived adjacent to Temple #7 in Harlem and its satellite locations throughout the city. During the 1970s, the Dar built upon this strategy and created a robust political economic program that produced positive perceptions of Islam among people living in the inner city. This in turn would become a hallmark of urban Black American orthodox Muslim communities in cities all around the

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<sup>296</sup> Interview with Yasmeen Dawood, Durham, NC. 24 September 2016. For more on gender roles in the Dar, see Chapters 8 and 9 of Turiya S.A. Raheem, *Why We Chose This Way* (Xlibris Corporation, 2016) and Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, though Dannin's account strikes me as a bit sensational.

country who successfully created safe zones around mosques located in the middle of impoverished Black and Brown neighborhoods.<sup>297</sup>

### **The Launch of the Dar ul Islam Movement**

Several events transpired between 1968 and 1972 that facilitated the transition of Dar ul Islam from a local community of Black American orthodox Muslims in Brooklyn to an influential, national religious movement. All three of these events revolved around conflicts between community members and law enforcement. The first, which took place in 1968 possibly in the summer, involved two biological brothers from the Dar ul Islam community, Rajaab Abdul-Lateef and Mahammad Abdul-Lateef.<sup>298</sup> Their elderly father who lived with them also converted to the Muslim faith and, sometime thereafter, passed away. In accordance with their faith tradition and with the help of other men in the community, the two brothers washed and shrouded their father's body in preparation for burial. They hoped to follow the related Islamic tradition of placing the body of a deceased loved one in the ground expediently. However, according to Sheikh Mahmoud's account, their father's passing coincided with both a holiday – possibly Memorial Day or Labor Day – and a grave diggers' strike. In light of these impediments, community members resigned to bury the body themselves. However, after Rajaab and Muhammad attempted to acquire the necessary certificate of death from a medical examiner, the police arrived at the brothers' house demanding to take the body to the morgue where it would lie indefinitely until professional grave diggers became available.

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<sup>297</sup> For instance, during the 1980s, Imam Siraj Wahhaj and his congregation were instrumental in transforming the blocks surrounding Masjid at-Taqwa in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. During the 1990s, Imam Jamil al-Amin and his followers had a similar impact on the areas surrounding the West End Community Masjid in Atlanta.

<sup>298</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

The Muslim community took offense at the officers' lack of sensitivity, and insisted they be granted the right to retain the body and see to its burial on their own terms. The police responded with intimidating threats, which only made matters worse.

The police were saying, 'no, we're going to come get this body and we're going to, we're going to take this body to the morgue.' And we're saying, 'no, you're not taking this body to the morgue because we're going to bury this body.' And the police were selling wolf tickets as well.<sup>299</sup> You know, we have x amount of thousands of guys that are willing to, you know, to make sure that this thing happens. And the Brotherhood (i.e. members of the Dar), (our) position was articulated based on one of (our) traditions (laughs). A brother said (to the police), well listen, you know, we don't mind dying for what we believe in in terms of Allah. Like you guys don't mind drinking beer!<sup>300</sup>

After conferring with the two brothers who agreed that they did not wish to entrust their father's body to the police, members of the community began preparing for a potential standoff.

"So, the brothers lived on the top floor of a particular building. The younger brothers, we were going in and out all day trying to figure out what we were going to do. We're sitting there and we're making *dhikr* (supplications to God) ... The police are all outside and in the hallways, the Sisters are coming up and they're dropping off cakes and they're dropping off things (pauses). And they're dropping off guns ... Because the idea this is our religion that comes before everything else. And it's important to understand that (the Dar), we weren't out to overthrow anything. We weren't out to take over anything, but we wanted the right to practice this, our tradition ... (And that was something) brothers were really willing to put their lives on the line for. And the sisters were on board with this. The sisters were like, 'yes, all right, do what you need to do.' And they were helping facilitate whatever, what's going to happen."<sup>301</sup>

Sheikh Mahmoud relates that, ultimately, the conflict was settled when the medical examiners' office and the police department decided to allow the two brothers, along with

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<sup>299</sup> The expression "selling wolf tickets" indicates that the narrator believed that the police officers were making empty threats.

<sup>300</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

members of their religious community, to accompany the body to the morgue and remain with it until it could be buried.

Another adverse encounter with the police occurred later that same year and involved one of the same two brothers, Rajaab Abdul-Latif. This time, two federal agents dressed as telephone repairmen attempted to take Rajaab into custody on charges of draft evasion.<sup>302</sup> Members of the *Suffa*, realizing that Rajaab was in handcuffs, intervened. These young men from the *Suffa* were arrested as a result and, in the process, Rajaab escaped FBI custody. That evening and over the course of the following days, armed federal agents flooded the Brooklyn neighborhood around the mosque on 240 Sumpter Street searching houses throughout the entire neighborhood under the assumption that the whole enclave was Muslim. According to Sheikh Mahmoud's narrative, non-Muslim members of the community, choosing solidarity with their Muslim neighbors over cooperation with the authorities, hid brother Rajaab as well as members of the mosque leadership. FBI agents responded by ransacking the mosque, desecrating the worship space and the religious artifacts inside as well as brutalizing some of the members of the *Suffa* who resided there. This initiated a period of greater police harassment of the Muslim community. Members of the FBI pressured the landlord at 240 Sumpter Street to evict the Muslims. However, the landlord, like the mosque's neighbors, stood in solidarity with the Dar. He informed members of the community that the FBI would be visiting his house on a given day. Members of the mosque responded by sending a young Sheikh Mahmoud to clandestinely photograph agents going in and out of their landlord's house.

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<sup>302</sup> Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement*, 42-46; Curtis, "Urban Muslims," 59-60.

The feds show up, I run out, I take several pictures of them going in and, and actually more of them coming out. And when they see me coming out I ... run, hop in the van and the van pulls off. Now we're in another one of (the chase scenes from) the movies because they hop in their car and now they're after us. And the brothers who were (driving) the car had a gift. They were able to allude. I mean we're on the highway. We're in the extreme left lane going about 80 miles an hour and out of nowhere the brother pulls off across all the lanes. I don't know how he did that because there seemed to be, if I recall it, moderate traffic at least. And he goes off into an exit. When he pulls off into the exit, the feds behind him, they didn't (see) that that was going to happen like that. So now they're caught. They're caught on the highway. We've already exited.<sup>303</sup>

During the trial, the pictures obtained via the high-speed chase were used as leverage to demonstrate an attempt to use illegal means to harass this religious community.<sup>304</sup>

One final incident that helped facilitate the Dar's crystallization into a full-on movement came in 1969. The mosque on Sumpter Street was just one block away from the local headquarters of the Republic of New Africa (RNA), an influential Black nationalist organization that formed in 1968 and advocated reparations for descendants of American chattel slavery. The following year, members of the Dar were invited to attend the RNA's one-year anniversary conference at the historic New Bethel Church in Detroit pastored by Reverend C. L. Franklin, father of the famed singer Aretha Franklin and member of the SCLC. It was a large gathering that enjoyed the attendance of prominent Black Nationalists from around the country with whom a handful of members of the Dar, including Imam Yahya Abdul-Kareem and Hajj Hassan Ali Muhammad, engaged. The conference was also the target of a violent police raid that resulted in the death of one officer and the wounding of four RNA members.<sup>305</sup> In the aftermath, 140 attendees of the

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<sup>303</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. For a further discussion of how these photos were leveraged, see Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement*, 45-46.

<sup>305</sup> Dan Berger, "'Free the Land!': Fifty Years of the Republic of New Afrika," *Black Perspectives: African American Intellectual History Society* (blog), April 10, 2018, accessed 18 July 2019, <https://www.aaihs.org/free-the-land-fifty-years-of-the-republic-of-new-afrika/>.

conference, including the representatives from the Dar, were indiscriminately rounded up and jailed. The entire experience seems to have had an impact on the members of the Dar who attended. While they were not Black Nationalists, they began to find the ethos of nationhood compelling.<sup>306</sup> They returned to New York and set about the working of create a powerful national movement.

In the wake of these three incidents, the Dar ul Islam movement was thoroughly politicized, and had grown into a large community. Its leadership now set about creating a network of affiliated mosques around the country that shared a similar religious and political orientation. Members of the Dar met with representatives from Muslim communities in Cleveland and Philadelphia who joined the Dar ul Islam movement – becoming two of the earliest and largest chapters outside of New York. In the subsequent years, communities in other cities like Baltimore, Atlanta, Washington DC, and Los Angeles followed suit. While estimating an exact number of participants is difficult, the Dar ul Islam movement is generally held to have comprised, by far, the largest community of orthodox Muslims in the U.S. prior to mass conversion of Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam to the orthodox World Community of Al-Islam in the West under the leadership of his son, Imam W. D. Mohammed.<sup>307</sup> In New York, the Dar continued to utilize the property on Sumpter Street but moved its primary operation to a three-story factory building at 52 Herkimer Place in 1972. This was the home of Ya Sin Mosque, the headquarters of the Dar. Over the years, more and more Black American and

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<sup>306</sup> Interview with Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali, Westfield, MA. 4 June 2017; Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>307</sup> Al-Islam, “Sunni Islam in the African American Experience,” 126; Curtis, “Urban Muslims,” 61.

Latino Muslims<sup>308</sup> relocated to the area around the mosque, with multiple observers estimating community membership in the several hundreds.<sup>309</sup>

Ya Sin Mosque's new, higher profile brought with it significant recognition from the Saudi Arabian-based and funded *Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami* or 'Muslim World League'. Founded in 1962 under the guidance of then Crown Prince Faisal, who visited New York City and seemed to develop a positive opinion of the city's growing Black American Muslim population, the Muslim World League helped to provide at least some institutional and financial support for the Dar, including sponsoring a trip for Imam Yahya Abdul-Kareem and several of the Dar's leaders to travel to Mecca to perform the *Hajj* and meet with prominent Muslim leaders from around the globe.<sup>310</sup> This may have also led to the increased influence of reformist figures like Syed Abul A'la Maududi and Syed Qutb on the Dar. Such voices also struck a chord with the Dar's activist political sensibilities. These intellectual influences likely pushed the Dar into a more conservative direction. More significantly, they helped to popularize notions of Muslim Internationalism among members of the Dar, which challenged the Islamic legitimacy of competing discourses that theorized global solidarities based on race (Black Internationalism) or ancestry (Pan-Africanism). While, as we have seen, the rise in popularity of both Black and Muslim Internationalisms among Black American Muslims can be traced to the emergence of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism in ethnically diverse

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<sup>308</sup> While conducting research for this dissertation, I met several Latino Muslims who were active in the Dar ul Islam movement, only one of whom I formally interviewed. This study would have been significantly enhanced by a more substantive treatment of the contributions of Latino Muslims in building the majority-Black Muslim congregations, like the Dar ul Islam movement and the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood. I plan to expand my treatment of this subject in the future.

<sup>309</sup> Interview with Yasmeen Dawood, Durham, NC. 24 September 2016; Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali, Westfield, MA. 4 June 2017.

urban American spaces, these ideological developments contributed to a growing tension between the two during the 1970s.

### **Constructing a Black Muslim Proletariat Identity**

Some authors have depicted the Dar ul Islam movement as a congregation with Black nationalist leanings. While members of the Dar certainly engaged Black nationalist discourses, this portrayal is undermined by explicit rejections of Black nationalism by both its leaders and its rank and file.<sup>311</sup> In fact, the Dar would engage in an important ideological debate with another congregation, the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, over the compatibility of Black nationalism with orthodox Islam – taking the position that the two ideologies were in conflict. The Dar ul Islam movement has also been pathologized in some of the literature on Islam in America. Several authors have criticized the movement, sometimes implicitly, for fostering a culture of poverty among Black, inner-city Muslim communities.<sup>312</sup> In other words, as some members have lamented, the Dar has been depicted as a “thuggish” community whose members tended toward various forms of criminal behavior. Misrepresentations of the Dar’s political orientation by some writers stems from a general misunderstanding of the movement’s ideological character. Similarly, an understanding of the Dar’s political orientation helps to contextualize what is sometimes portrayed as a culture of criminality among members of the movement. First and foremost, the Dar was a religious movement. As Sheikh Mahmoud explains, much of the uncompromising stance that outsiders might decry as thuggery revolved

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<sup>311</sup> Interview with Yasmeen Dawood. Durham, NC. 24 September 2016; Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017; Interview with Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali, Westfield, MA. June 2017; Interview with Imam Al-Amin Abdul Latif, Long Island, NY. 6 September 2017.

<sup>312</sup> Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 67, 152-156; Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 52.

around members' commitment to fulfill what they understood to be their religious obligations – especially the *Salaat*. He recounts members of the Dar visiting another mosque, the ICC-NY on 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, and responding indignantly after being turned away because the mosque did not remain open throughout the day.<sup>313</sup> I found reflections like this, reminiscent of the Dar's abovementioned clash with police over the right to bury one of their dead, to be quite common among community members. While secondary literature on the Dar, sparse as it may be, seems accurate in depicting members of the movement as rather uncompromising, it would be misleading to attribute this stance to an investment in the secular political ideologies of Black radicalism or Black nationalism, though members of the Dar and members of Black nationalist organizations found common cause in their attempts to divest from the dominant white/non-Muslim society. For the Dar ul Islam movement, this anti-establishment ethos was largely the product of religious zeal, which was augmented by the community's youth – with most of its members probably falling under the age of 35 during the early 1970s.

Second, regarding the tendency of some authors to pathologize the Dar, it is important to understand the role of class consciousness among the architects of the movement and its rank and file. That the Dar engaged in a self-conscious project of class formation is evident in members' eschewal of dominant Western social norms including styles of dress, traditional employment, monogamous marriages, and other normative markers of American social status. In their place, the Dar valorized both alternative social norms associated with the Muslim world, like Arab, African, and South Asian styles of dress and an Islamically sanctioned form of polygyny, and shunned markers of middle-

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<sup>313</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

class status.<sup>314</sup> Several community members and authors have, for example, noted that members of the Dar often regarded Western education with mistrust, and valued the experience that members derived from their working-class backgrounds – as gang members, radical activists, formerly incarcerated people, or entrepreneurs form the underclass.<sup>315</sup> Thus, the rise of the Dar can be understood as the emergence of a kind of Black Muslim proletariat. Much like the emergent English working-class discussed by E. P. Thompson, Black American orthodox Muslims around the country who were attracted to the Dar crafted a class consciousness shaped by and reflective of their preexisting cultural traditions. Those cultural traditions were in turn informed by the Black Muslim cosmopolitanism that had been nurtured during the previous decades. As the Canadian sociologist David Camfield writes in an article discussing analytical tools for the study of historical class formations, “[c]lasses are formed out of preexisting social groups whose particular traditions, aspirations and cultural practices - modified by the devastating experience of proletarianization - will be those of an emergent proletariat.”<sup>316</sup>

It is important to note that members of the Dar did not necessarily explicitly articulate their own class identity using this language. However, it certainly reflects the movement’s antiestablishment political and cultural ethos. Here the cultural attitudes of members of the Dar, rather than a clearly articulated class analysis, are instructive. As Kamal Hassan Ali writes, “[I]f change in language, dress, diet, and culture represented revolutionary change then Dar-ul-Islam was the ultimate revolution.”<sup>317</sup> As we have seen

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<sup>314</sup> A similar phenomenon can be observed among Black American orthodox Muslims in Detroit. See Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 240-249 for a discussion of the Beys.

<sup>315</sup> Curtis, “Urban Muslims,” 64-65.

<sup>316</sup> David Camfield, “Re-Orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations,” *Science & Society* 68, no. 4 (Winter /2005 2004): 431.

<sup>317</sup> Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, xx.

in previous chapters, this propensity to appropriate an aesthetic associated with the people and histories of Africa and Asia was a persistent feature of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism. This Black Muslim proletariat consciousness made the Dar attractive, and legible, to Black leftwing radicals from groups like the Black Panther Party and SNCC. The most prominent example of one such radical activist to join the Dar is Imam Jamil Al-Amin, formerly known as H. Rap Brown, who occupied positions of leadership in both SNCC and the BPP. He was jailed in connection with his militant activism in 1973 and accepted Islam at the hands of members of the Dar while incarcerated. Upon his release in 1976, he became an active part of the Dar. Following the fracturing of the Dar in the early 1980s, Imam Jamil who become of the country's most visible Black American Imams.

While it is important to situate assessments of the Dar's community culture within a broader discussion about class consciousness, this does not mean that critiques of that culture are wholly unwarranted. Indeed, some community members did feel alienated at Brooklyn's Ya Sin Mosque due to their professional aspirations or because they came from middle-class backgrounds.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, the Dar's policy of self-adjudication could be abused in some instances, leaving segments of the community vulnerable. For women in the Dar, community life could be especially challenging. Several observers from both within and outside of the community criticized the Dar for fostering a culture of male chauvinism.<sup>319</sup> In this respect, the Dar was not unlike many of the radical Black religious and cultural movements that emerged during the late 60s and early 70s. However, this

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<sup>318</sup> A number of my interviewees expressed this sentiment, but desired to have their comments remain anonymous.

<sup>319</sup> Similar to the sentiment expressed in the previous footnote, this was expressed by several of the people I interviewed. The majority of these individuals preferred to have these specific comments remain anonymous.

was augmented by the continued influence of conservative intellectual voices from the Arab world and Indian subcontinent on the Dar's leadership with regard to notions of gender and propriety. As a result, there continued to be little to no opportunities for the kind of women's leadership that ultimately pushed groups like the Black Panther Party and Amiri Baraka's Congress of African Peoples in to a more progressive direction. At the same time, the Dar's expansive prison outreach program and its efforts to spread its message to some of society's most marginalized, combined with the debilitating effects of urban decay in the 1990s seems to have impacted the Dar's community culture over time. As a result, many families in the community faced mounting economic hardship, which negatively impacted the lived experiences of women in particular. A preponderance of polygyny within the community – often practiced by men who did not have the means to adequately provide for multiple households, certainly exacerbated the situation. In a memoir by Turiya S. A. Raheem, who attended a mosque affiliated with the Dar in Washington D.C., she recounts “[f]or the most part, women were treated fairly and with the utmost respect in our community, but later, the practice of polygamy caused a lot of pain, anxiety and jealousy amongst the sisterhood.”<sup>320</sup>

The personal grief caused by these limitations notwithstanding, the Dar managed to successfully create an alternative political economic infrastructure for its community. This allowed the Dar to pursue its own religious and cultural ideals with an impressive degree of autonomy. As a result of the Dar's success in the pursuit of self-determination, it has served as a model and a source of inspiration for Black and Latino orthodox Muslim communities around the country for over three decades and continues to do so today.

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<sup>320</sup> Raheem, *Why We Chose This Way*, 82.

## **Building a Black Muslim Political Economy: The Dar ul Islam Movement in Full Bloom**

At its height, the Dar ul Islam movement consisted of a network of mosques in 44 cities throughout the United States, with a few additional branches in Canada and the Caribbean. Ya Sin Mosque in Brooklyn served as its headquarters. In 1968, the New York Community voted to appoint Yahya Abdul-Kareem as the Imam. Now he was the head of a national network of urban Islamic institutions that attracted an eclectic mix of working-class Black and Latino Muslims whose backgrounds included local street gangs, various orthodox Muslim communities, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther Party. While attending the State Street mosque, Imam Yahya studied the Qur'an with Hafiz Maqbul. Thereafter, he continued pursuing his own Islamic education through personal erudition and studies with itinerate scholars including the Indian Muslim religious scholar Muhammad Fazlur Rahman Ansari who facilitated Imam Yahya's exposure to various Sufi texts and the *Qadiri* Sufi order.<sup>321</sup> Imam Yahya's familiarity with diverse currents of Islamic thought rendered him uniquely qualified to lead a large community with members from varied intellectual backgrounds. This coupled with his decidedly spiritual inclination, strong character, and impressive oratory and organizational skills made him a capable leader. His own background as a leader of a New York City street gang also made him particularly relatable to his distinctly working-class following. Along with Imam Yahya, the leadership structure of Ya Sin Mosque in Brooklyn included a *na'eeb* or assistant Imam who served as the mosque's second in command and an *Amirate* – an

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<sup>321</sup> Named after Abdul Qadir Gilani, an eleventh century Persian Muslim scholar, the *Qadiri* Sufi order is one of the older and more popular Sufi paths in the world today.

assembly of roughly nine male community members appointed to oversee various administrative areas pertinent to the maintenance of the community. The various departments headed by these *Amirs* (lit. commanders in Arabic) included Information, *Dawah* (calling others to the Muslim faith), Finance and Economic Development, Transportation, and Security among others.<sup>322</sup> This general structure was then exported to other communities of the Dar ul Islam network around the country.

A cornerstone of the Dar's efforts was its magazine, *Jihadul Akbar*. The title of the publication, an Arabic phrase usually translated at "The Greater Struggle," reflected the spiritual and political orientation of the movement. The phrase is often used in a Sufi context to refer to an inner spiritual struggle undertaken by a person to develop good character and greater awareness of God. In the case of the Dar, this likely invoked the spirituality of the movement's leader, who had been exposed to and promoted certain elements of Sufism, and those who found this religious orientation compelling. It also appealed to the political sensibilities of community members for whom Islamic identity was tied to activism and a critique of Western (i.e. white and non-Muslim) social and cultural norms. As Sheikh Mahmoud proclaims in his memoir *The Dar Ul Islam Movement: An American Odyssey Revisited*, "the over-riding philosophy was that to be Muslim was synonymous with being an activist."<sup>323</sup> As inheritors of the Black Muslim cosmopolitan cultural tradition and champions of a Muslim proletariat, members of the Dar were ever engaged in the Greater Struggle against a Western ideological hegemony. The architect of *Jihadul Akbar*, Hajj Hassan Ali Muhammad, has also been credited with playing a leading role in crafting the political direction of the movement. Citing his

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<sup>322</sup> Interview with Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali, Westfield, MA. 4 June 2017; Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 12; Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement*, 56-57.

<sup>323</sup> Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement*, 51.

background working with grassroots community organizations prior to serving as the Amir of Information for the Dar, Sheikh Mahmoud describes Hajj Muhammad in his memoir as “the driving political force of the movement,” and asserts that he connected “the philosophy of the movement to the everyday practice of the rank and file.”<sup>324</sup> To recruit additional staff members for the publication, Hajj Muhammad mined the community for “writers, photographers, type-setters and graphic artists.” Funding for the effort was provided by Saudi Arabia, adding to its quality, and demonstrating the Dar’s growing relationship with the Saudi monarchy and the Muslim World League. Issues of *Jihadul Akbar* were shipped to members of the Dar movement in cities like Cleveland, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Los Angeles, boosting the Dar’s influence and providing revenue.

Along with its magazine, several community-run businesses made up the Dar’s economic infrastructure. Umar Nurideen and Imam Taifa Abdullah from the Baltimore mosque affiliated with the Dar launched an incense factory and distribution enterprise called *Miska* in collaboration with the Amir of Finance.<sup>325</sup> The factory, located at 50 Herkimer Place right next to Ya Sin mosque, distributed its product throughout the country. In addition to providing additional funds for the movement, Miska served as a source of employment for men around the country who sold its products as street vendors. Such a livelihood was particularly attractive as it did not interfere with the imperative to make the five daily ritual prayers in congregation. It also made Black orthodox Muslim street vendors a fixture in urban communities where they can still be commonly found today selling imported incense and body oils along with their

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>325</sup> Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 32.

homegrown scent creations. The Dar also purchased a butcher shop, establishing its Halal meat store at 143 Court Street in downtown Brooklyn, which some have suggested was the first of its kind in the city.<sup>326</sup> According to multiple narrators, another lucrative, albeit brief, economic opportunity was presented to the community when the owner of a high-profile security firm converted and joined the Ya Sin Mosque congregation.<sup>327</sup> This event coincided with the completion of the Restoration Plaza complex by the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, a Brooklyn-based community development organization. Members of the Dar in Brooklyn who were eligible to work as armed security guards were recruited to provide security during the final years of the project, which was completed in 1972. Such an employment opportunity was especially compatible with the Dar's community culture where gun ownership was common.

Members of the Dar also created institutions that provided family services. Several women in the community including Tunura Abdulhabir and Aliyah Abdul Malikul-Mulk started a day care center at 1204 Bedford Avenue that served both Muslim and non-Muslim Brooklyn residents.<sup>328</sup> In 1974, this evolved into a full-time school called Madrassah tush-Shaheedain (lit. the school of the two martyrs), named in honor of two community members that had been killed while serving the community. At its height, the school enrolled 182 students – 89 boys and 93 girls – from pre-kindergarten to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Another contributor to the school effort was Amina Abdur Rahman, who previously served as Malcolm X's secretary.<sup>329</sup> An early member of the Dar, she is sometimes mentioned as one of the more prominent women members of the community.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Yasmeen Dawood, Durham, NC. 24 September 2016; Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>328</sup> Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement*, 48.

<sup>329</sup> Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 40; Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

As the two memoirs penned by former members of the Dar attest to, women did a great deal of the work of organizing the Dar's day-to-day affairs. However, the leadership roles that these women occupied were often informal. Members of the Dar also created two youth development organizations that provided life skills training. For girls ages 5 to 12, there was *Al-Binatul Mu'minun*, 'The Daughters of the Faithful'. Boys ages 8 to 16 could join *Jawwalah* Scouts, a Muslim rover scout troop. *Jawwalah* Scouts remained popular in several cities even after the Dar Ul Islam movement proper disbanded. For instance, Philadelphia is home to a particularly active chapter today.

One of the Dar's most iconic features was *Ra'd* (lit. thunder). The Dar's equivalent to the Nation's FOI, the *Ra'd* provided security at community events and for the surrounding neighborhood, and escorted women and children in the community through the rougher areas of Brooklyn. Among the Dar's ranks were military veterans who had served in Vietnam. They provided *Ra'd* with training in the use of firearms, drilling, and tactics. During weekly training exercises, *Ra'd* members marched through Brooklyn's Ridgewood Reservoir in fatigues and Palestinian-style *kufiyahs* chanting military cadences derived from Muslim praise formulas like *la ilaaha il Allah* (there is no god other than God).<sup>330</sup> They carried wooden replicas of M-16 rifles while doing so. While such activities likely drew the ire of local law enforcement, some community members reminisce about the response from Black, non-Muslim onlookers who cheered at the spectacle. *Ra'd* augmented the Dar's reputation for helping to provide security and repel drug activity, benefiting the neighborhoods that hosted their mosques, businesses, and educational facilities. By creating a paramilitary force, the Dar pursued a program of community policing that not only resembled that of the Nation, but also Black militant

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<sup>330</sup> Interview with Imam Shair Abdul-Mani, New York, NY. 14 March 2014.

and cultural nationalist groups like the Black Panther Party, the RNA, and Ron Karenga's US organization, as well as other Islamic communities like the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood and the Ansar Allah community.

One final Dar ul Islam initiative proved to be rather definitive of both the strengths and weaknesses of its overall political economic program. In 1970 under the direction of Isma'il Abdur-Raheem, the Dar developed a massively successful prison outreach program that, like many of its other initiatives, inspired other mosques in the Dar's national network to follow suit. Again, the Dar's efforts in this regard found a precursor in the Nation of Islam. Still, the level of success attained by the Dar's prison program may have been unparalleled, self-reportedly establishing a presence in "literally every jail and prison in the State of New York."<sup>331</sup> The Dar's prison program, which offered support to both incarcerated men and women, ultimately precipitated a major shift in U.S. prisons, generating a national network of Muslim prison chaplains. This systematic network of care and support was aimed at reducing recidivism and protecting inmates' rights to observe their faith. The influx of orthodox Muslim prison chaplains is also undoubtedly a contributing factor to the notable increase in the number of Muslim conversions in U.S. prisons, and perhaps prisons in other Western nations as well, though limitations of space and scope will not allow for a thorough examination of this phenomenon here.

Interestingly, despite its effectiveness, the prison program was initially met with trepidation from Imam Yahya Abdul-Kareem. For one, a focus on recruiting in prisons had the potential of altering the culture of the community. In addition, Imam Yahya was apprehensive, according to Sheikh Mahmoud, about the prison outreach committee

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<sup>331</sup> Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 14.

becoming professionalized, proclaiming “once you start getting paid by the State, the State becomes the ruler.” Imam Yahya proved prescient in both concerns. The Dar ul Islam movement’s political economic infrastructure was impressive. However, it appears it may not have been robust enough to accommodate the significant influx of formerly incarcerated men who joined the movement, at least in the case of New York’s Ya Sin Mosque. And it did alter the culture of the community. While the leadership of the Dar encouraged men in the community to provide for their families whether through entrepreneurship or gainful employment, some members began to seek financial sustenance through illicit means. Regarding the professionalizing of the prison outreach program, the State ultimately insisted on creating a paid Muslim chaplaincy position, which came with benefits and drawbacks.<sup>332</sup> It created economic opportunities and gave institutional support for Muslim prison services, but also undermined the Dar’s ability to provide care unfettered by the State’s whims.

### **Isolation and the Cost of Independence**

The Dar’s successes in working to build a semi-autonomous religious community for Black and Latino Muslims came with a price, especially for women in the movement. Some of the community members I interviewed cited the community’s isolation, the preponderance of formerly incarcerated men and women in the Dar’s Brooklyn mosque, and the Dar’s emergent counterculture as major contributors to the hardships faced by

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<sup>332</sup> Interview with Sheikh Ibrahim Abdul Aziz. New Jersey. 30 August 2017; Interview with Imam Al-Amin Abdul Latif, Long Island, NY. 6 September 2017; Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim, New York, NY. 13 August 2017; Al-Islam, “Sunni Islam in the African American Experience,” 92.

women in the community. One woman I interviewed, Sister Yasmeen Dawood, described the isolation that she and other women experienced in the Dar. She recalls,

Dar ul Islam was a bit isolationist. Which meant once you got into that community you kind of just stayed there. Especially if you took your *shahadah* there. Because you didn't know anything else, and you were a sister. So, you couldn't, as far as the brothers were concerned, you can't be flirting around to every community ... It was unseemly, because that is the way that the brothers kept you subjugated.<sup>333</sup>

After embracing Islam in 1973 during her twenties while attending school in Atlanta, GA, Sister Yasmeen was supported in the very beginning stages of her Islamic development by a diverse, local network of Muslim women in the area. However, having joined a mosque affiliated with the Dar in Atlanta, she recalls how the culture of her particular faith community alienated women from more middle-class backgrounds.

There were people who went to school at Georgia, University of Georgia, Georgia State, and they were more of...they did not get along with the people in Dar ul Islam. And I think they didn't get along because they felt like Dar ul Islam had more of a thug mentality.<sup>334</sup>

She further elaborates that this “thug mentality” she alludes to involved intimidation tactics and illicit activities on the part of the mosque’s Imam.

There was an Imam. He was from New York. He wanted everyone to be part of Dar ul Islam and he wanted to be the leader. That’s how he felt ... He (provoked) a lot of hatred against the Dar ul Islam Movement. That’s why they thought they were thugs. Because he beat up somebody. He beat up this brother because the brother said he did not want to be part of Dar ul Islam. So, they beat him up. And they beat him up really bad.<sup>335</sup>

This particular Imam’s inappropriate behavior, according to Yasmeen, also may have included the trafficking of marijuana, and she speculates that these illicit behaviors prompted the mosque in Atlanta to close. However, upon marrying a fellow member of

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<sup>333</sup> Interview with Yasmeen Dawood, Durham, NC. 24 September 2016.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

the Dar and moving with her husband to the community's hub in New York City, the challenges she faced only increased.

Sister Yasmeen remembers encountering a large community of roughly 600 or 700 Muslims, largely concentrated in an urban enclave around the Dar's flagship Ya Sin Mosque in Brooklyn by the time she moved there in 1974. She also describes the jarring experience of encountering the challenges of poverty in the inner city. "When I moved to New York, I was traumatized (by seeing) people live like this, because we weren't use to living like that in the South. I (also) wasn't used to people living with 10 or 15 families in one building." These challenges were intensified by the fact that so many members of the community lacked educational and professional opportunities. The difficulties of living in the Dar's urban enclave, plus the larger percentage of formerly incarcerated persons in the community seems to have played a role in limiting the participation of professionals in the movement. Other New York City congregations like the Nation of Islam and the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood cultivated a similar class consciousness, but also managed to attract significant numbers of educated and professional worshipers as well. The Dar seems to have been more extreme in its rhetoric against markers of social standing and middle classness. More than one of the men I interviewed who stayed with the Dar remembered forgoing certain opportunities to obtain advanced degrees due, in part, to the Dar's social pressure to avoid self-aggrandizement.

Sheikh Mahmoud also reflects on the problems created by the Dar's lack of women's leadership. He candidly laments the "machismo" orientation of the men in the Dar,

"[t]he sisters were not involved in leadership positions, and that was a major faux pas on the part of the Dar ul Islam Movement ... There were sisters that were very

involved in education. They set up schools...But, did they have leadership in terms of the direction of the movement? The answer is no. And that is, in my estimation a major, major problem. My feeling is, (looking back) now, that you can't have a successful movement for Black people in America (or) Muslims in America that don't include, in leadership roles...decision making roles, women. (If you don't) it will not work."<sup>336</sup>

Sheikh Mahmoud attributes this shortcoming to the gender dynamics that were common at the time, the rough backgrounds of many of the men who joined the Dar, and the tendency for the intellectuals in the Dar to look toward the Middle East for models of how a Muslim community should be structured. Sister Yasmeen also recalls the pressure that the Dar's culture of patriarchy placed on men to create households that conformed to pervading notions of gender hierarchy. When asked how her husband reacted to culture of male chauvinism in the community, she recounts, "(my husband) was a very gentle man. And he was very kind and kind hearted. So he did not get into (the chauvinism). And he would tell me ... that (other men in the Dar) were very hard on him."

In this manner, the problem of male chauvinism became systemic. Women like Sister Yasmeen who challenged the dominant culture of the Dar were branded as troublemakers and isolated from other women in the community for fear of their influence. Meanwhile, their husbands were chided for their inability to "control their women." Such an environment reinforced a culture that repelled many educated Muslim women. These trends within the Dar also starkly contrasted with the culture of early Black orthodox Muslim communities like the State Street Mosque, where women occupied visible leadership roles and were encouraged to pursue education and professional advancement. As a result, during the 1970s, Black Muslim women from

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<sup>336</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim. New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

more middle-class backgrounds, including those who admired the political and cultural orientation of the Dar, often opted to join other congregations like ICC-NY.

By the mid 1970s, the challenges facing the Dar had only increased. Sheikh Mahmoud, who joined the mosque in 1968 when it was a relatively small community, became increasingly dissatisfied with the community culture, ostensibly leaving the movement. His departure coincided with Sister Yasmeen's entry into the community. At that point, the practice of polygyny by men with little to no financial prospects had become common. Unwillingly to accept the new status quo, Sister Yasmeen decried, "When I got there, I was just like 'This is appalling! And why are ya'll doing this? And why is it that this brother has got four wives and (one of those wives) doesn't have a pair of shoes to put on?'"<sup>337</sup> The Dar ul Islam community in New York City had gained a dubious association with welfare fraud. Women in the community who were often married according to Islamic religious law only – without recourse to the laws of the state, would obtain welfare payments under the guise of not knowing their children's biological fathers. This practice was decried by many members of the community and its frequency is the subject of at least some dispute. Some observes like Sister Yasmeen recalls it being a primary source of income for Brooklyn members of the movement by that time. She also describes it as a source of humiliation for Black Muslim women in the community.

"All the sisters were on welfare. Every sister over there was on welfare. If the brother had four wives, all four of his wives were on welfare. They were all on human services...If you think about it, not only were they (women) subjugated by the state of New York because they were Muslim and they were having children and were telling these people that they did not know who the father was...Not only were they being looked at as promiscuous and crazy by the State of New

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<sup>337</sup> Interview with Yasmeen Dawood, Durham, NC. 24 September 2016.

York, but they were also (looking down on) themselves... They were also being pushed down and stepped on by their husbands.<sup>338</sup>

Imam Al Amin Abdul Latif, an active contributor to the success of the Dar's prison outreach and chaplaincy program related that Imam Yahya, for his part, urged men in the community to find jobs and provide for their families. However, many community members were likely unable to fully appreciate the degree to which being formerly incarcerated impeded one's employment prospects. The community thus faced a rather herculean task in creating a political economic infrastructure robust enough to provide adequate legal employment alternatives for its high number of formerly incarcerated members. Moreover, the pervading community culture that prioritized men's ability to dedicate daytime hours to worship and community service did not help. As a result, welfare fraud was common enough among attendees at Ya Sin Mosque that Muslims outside of the Dar, and some non-Muslims in the broader community, were also aware of it. The practice has also been cited as one of the possible reasons why, after the Dar split into two factions during the early 1980s, the leadership of the largest faction ordered members to relocate out of the city, effectively disbanding the Dar's Brooklyn community. However, this move would prove quite controversial.

### **The Breakup**

During the late 1970s, the Dar was going strong. Its presence in New York City might well be compared to other visible, religious minorities who achieved a similar semi-autonomous status. As Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali writes, the Dar had become "...a significant ideological community much like the Amish, Mormons, and Hasidic Jews in

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

that the belief system dictated how we acted within our world and how those outside of our world were viewed, related to and interacted with.”<sup>339</sup> Of course, the Dar faced an additional set of challenges as a community whose racial, class, and religious identities made them the victims of systemic racial and income inequality, police brutality, and illegal police surveillance. Still, the comparison that Dr. Kamal Hassan Ali makes is apt.

But in 1982, the community fractured. In the preceding years, several members of the community who were interested in further pursuing the Sufi tradition encountered a Pakistani Sufi Shaykh named Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani. Gilani is a follower of the *Qadiri* order and claims biological descent of the famous classical era Persian Muslim scholar and Sufi Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani. This likely added to his allure in light of Imam Yahya Abdul-Karim’s time with Muhammad Fazlur Rahman. Imam Yahya ultimately publicly announced that he embraced Shaykh Gilani’s leadership and become his *murid* (disciple), giving the rest of the Dar the option to follow suit. Many members of the Dar saw this as an opportunity to receive an even more fulfilling spiritual experience with their faith as well as a chance to gain increased access to Islamic education. The majority of the Dar, in turn, followed Imam Yahya’s example, also becoming followers of Shaykh Gilani.

However, a sizeable segment of the community did not. This contingent of the Dar saw the move as a direct violation of one of the Dar’s core philosophical tenets – the notion of *Imamakoom min koom*, meaning that a community’s Imam should be from amongst its own ranks. These members of the Dar saw Imam Yahya’s overt and explicit deference to a foreign cleric as an abdication of his responsibility to the movement. Moreover, Shaykh Gilani represented a charismatic brand of Sufism characterized by the

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<sup>339</sup> Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, xx.

witnessing of miracles, which some Black American Muslim critics found to be eccentric, impractical, and off putting. Disenchanted members of the Dar community began to regard Shaykh Gilani with even more suspicion when he began encouraging its members to abandon their urban enclaves and instead create new ones in remote, rural areas. While some community members of the Dar saw this as Shaykh Gilani's way of addressing the aforementioned challenges and limitations associated with inner-city life, others saw it as a complete dismantling of the impressive urban political economic infrastructure the Dar had built, effectively dealing a death blow to the movement. For their part, Shaykh Gilani's followers from among the Dar were said to have "ostracized" those who chose not to follow his leadership.

The community of American followers of Shaykh Gilani came to be known as *Jama't al-Fuqra* or the community of the poor. The Arabic term *Fuqra* or *Fuqara* in the name was intended as a reference to the Sufi imperative of humility before God rather than lack of material wealth, even though both can be said to have characterized the new community. In many ways, it appears the socioeconomic challenges faced by the Dar continued to plague the communities it birthed. In 1980, Shaykh Gilani and his community created Muslims of America Inc., which served as the official, institutional arm of the community. Through Muslims of America, members of the community have continued to pursue their own vision of self-determination by building several rural community enclaves. They have built more than 30 such intentional communities around the country, the two most visible being the town of Islamberg in the town of Hancock in upstate New York, and Holy Islamville in York County, South Carolina.<sup>340</sup> The former

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<sup>340</sup> Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience," 126; Ibrahim, *The Dar-Ul-Islam Movement*, 39; Curtis, "Urban Muslims," 61.

has been in the news in recent years as the intended victim of several terrorist plots planned by white, right wing extremists.

Those members of the Dar who did not feel compelled to accept Shaykh Gilani's leadership formed their own national network of communities and continued to pursue the Dar's vision of addressing the needs of urban Black and Brown communities through Muslim religious institutions. Like many Black political collectives organized in the wake of COINTELPRO, the group employed a looser organizational structure and referred to itself simply as the *Ummah* (lit. the community). Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, the former SNCC and Black Panther Party Leader, emerged as the leader of this group. Imam Jamil oversaw a national congregation that was headquartered in Atlanta. He successfully recreated some of the Dar's programs. Just as the Dar rehabilitated rough neighborhoods in other U.S. cities, Imam Jamil established a mosque in Atlanta's notorious West End, creating a safe zone in that community that benefited both Muslim and non-Muslim residents. Imam Jamil continued and expanded the *Riyaadah*, a Dar ul Islam initiative that brought together men and women community members from around the country to engage in various athletic competitions ranging from basketball, to track and field, to archery.

In 2001, Imam Jamil was convicted and sentenced to life in connection to the killing of a police officer. However, inconsistencies in the testimony of witnesses in the case and Imam Jamil's extraordinary history of radical activism led many observers to question the fairness of his trial and conviction.<sup>341</sup> In 2009, another Imam from the *Ummah*'s national network, Imam Luqman Abdullah of Detroit's Masjid al-Haqq was

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<sup>341</sup> Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 169-172.

killed by FBI agents in a raid. His killing was similarly decried by a large segment of the Muslim community as a targeted, unjustified murder at the hands of law enforcement officials. Still, amidst these continued setbacks, communities formerly affiliated with the Dar continue to push forward in cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Long Island, NY, and programs the *Jawalah* Scouts and the annual *Riyaadah* continue.<sup>342</sup>

### **The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood**

A second influential Black American orthodox Muslim congregation started during the 1970s in another part of the city – uptown. Harlem’s Mosque of Islam Brotherhood (MIB) became the primary Black American led orthodox Muslim institution in Manhattan. Unlike the Dar, the MIB focused on building a local community rather than a national movement. It nonetheless left its mark, providing an intellectual and cultural direction for Black American orthodox Islam that informed the vision of mosques as far away as Cleveland, Ohio and Los Angeles, California. Ideologically, MIB shared the Dar’s commitment to Islamic orthodoxy and serving the needs of urban Black and Latino communities from the underclass. However, the leadership of the MIB unapologetically championed the discourses of Black Internationalism and Pan-Africanism. While MIB and the Dar usually enjoyed cordial relations, these and other ideological differences fueled at least some degree of discord. These tensions were exacerbated the militant, territorial stance adopted by each community as they sought to enforce their respective regimes of community control. These factors brought the communities into conflict, prompting at least one violent exchange. After this, members

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<sup>342</sup> Rekia Mohammed-Jibrin, “Muslim and Arab American Groups,” in *Youth Cultures in America*, ed. Simon J. Bronner and Cindy Dell Clark (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2016), 503–8. 506. For more information on the annual *Riyaadah*, see <https://riyaadah.org/>.

of the two communities voiced mutual respect for one another, as well as disappointment over the clash. A smaller community that may have attracted more middle-class Muslims, artists, and college students than the Dar, the MIB was spared at least some of the challenges that confronted Ya Sin Mosque in Brooklyn. Unlike the Dar, the MIB continues to operate in Harlem to this day. However, like the Dar, the MIB also nurtured an emergent Black American Sufi congregation. Many members of the MIB opted to join a West African Sufi order rather than a South Asian one, and their doing so did not impede the integrity and continued operation of the mosque they once attended.

### **From MMI to MIB**

On March 12, 1964, four days after being effectively forced out of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X convened the first meeting of his new religious organization, the Muslim Mosque Inc. (MMI) at Harlem's historic Hotel Theresa. Months later, he would announce a companion organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), which he conceived as the primary vessel for his political activities. The OAAU attracted a host of young Black women and men activists, artists, and intellectuals from diverse religious and intellectual backgrounds. MMI, however, focused on religion, and provided a home a spiritual home for Malcolm's followers who shared his desire to practice the Muslim faith. The majority of its members were former members of the Nation of Islam who left following Malcolm's ousting, or were similarly shunned by their former religious community. There were some exceptions. Just like men who founded the Dar two years earlier, a number of Black American orthodox Muslims deeply admired Malcolm. Now, they had the opportunity to join Malcolm's new congregation, while

maintaining their adherence to Islamic orthodoxy. This is the context in which a young man name Khalid Ahmad Tawfiq joined the ranks of Malcolm X's followers.

According to his official biography and other secondary sources, Tawfiq was born in Newberry, South Carolina on September 20, 1936 and moved with his family to New York City when he was eight years old.<sup>343</sup> His parents were purported members of the Moorish Science Temple and informed their son that his among his ancestors was the great Seminole warrior Osceola – a heritage that would have been a special badge of honor for followers of Noble Drew Ali. Growing up in New York City during the 1940s in a family with Moorish Science ties, Tawfiq may well have been influenced by a broader cultural context in which Moorish Americans helped to nurture the city's emergent Black orthodox Muslim community. In his youth, Tawfiq excelled as a musician, playing both the French horn and the saxophone. Ever the renaissance man, he would also go on to become a proficient deep-sea diver. According to his own account, Tawfiq met a Pakistani merchant seaman during the early 1950s with whom he discussed the Muslim faith, and subsequently embraced Islamic orthodoxy. Tawfiq narrative is fascinating in that it connects him to several markers of pre-1950s Black Muslim cultural identity – including his Moorish background, his involvement in jazz, and his relationship with Muslim immigrant merchant seamen. As his personal narrative suggests, Tawfiq was likely familiar with, if not entrenched in, the world of orthodox Islam in New York City. Enamored with Malcolm X, he nonetheless became a regular attendee of the Minister's speeches at public rallies and at the Nation's Mosque #7. Upon Malcolm's

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<sup>343</sup> "Founding Imam," Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.mibnyc.com/index.php/founding-imam>; Dannin, *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, 68; Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience," 264; Interview with Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, New York, NY. 14 June 2011; Interview with Osman Karriem. New York, NY. 2 August 2010.

break with the Nation and embrace of orthodox Islam, Tawfiq joined both MMI and the OAAU. Already familiar with Arabic language, Tawfiq provided language instruction for Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz's daughters. Malcolm X recognized Tawfiq's unique potential to excel in formal study of Arabic and the classical Islamic tradition and facilitated an opportunity for him to travel to Egypt to further his education.

In 1964, Tawfiq began a stint in Cairo, Egypt that lasted just under four years. While abroad, he read the works of Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, and witnessed the execution of the influential intellectual and activist, Syed Qutb. He also enjoyed frequent meetings with Zainab al Ghazali, the founder of the Muslim Women's Association, and participated in political protests with members of the Muslim Brotherhood. His associations in Cairo included West African Muslim students and at least two Black Americans studying there along with him. One of these was Elijah Muhammad's youngest son Akbar Muhammad who began matriculating at al-Azhar University the same year that Tawfiq arrived.

In 1965, while Tawfiq was away in Egypt, Malcolm X was assassinated. In the wake of his untimely death, Malcolm's followers struggled to keep the MMI and the OAAU afloat. Prior to his passing, Malcolm signaled to some of his close followers that Tawfiq should occupy a position of leadership upon his return to the U.S., saying "[t]hings are getting hot right now. If anything happens to me, protect Tawfiq when he gets back."<sup>344</sup> When Tawfiq travelled back to the States in 1967, having been kicked out of Cairo by the Egyptian government along with up to two hundred other students for involvement in various protests, he discovered that the MMI was in significant turmoil. Embroiled in conflict with the Nation, the then-acting Imam of the MMI, Hajj Amin, had

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<sup>344</sup> Interview with Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid. New York, NY. 14 June 2011.

moved its headquarters to Boston near Malcolm's half sister Ella Collins. Hajj Amin, better known as Professor James Smalls, was another young intellectual who had been moved by the life and work of Malcolm X, and began working with both the MMI and OAAU shortly after Malcolm's assassination. He developed a close relationship with Collins and had served as the MMI's leader at her behest, along with that of Shaykh Hesham Jabber and Imam Kameil Wadud from New Jersey.<sup>345</sup> Collins' role in helping to lead Malcolm's organizations after his passing also presented a challenge. During his final year, Malcolm's attitudes on the issue of gender drastically departed from those he held during his time with the Nation. Having been deeply impacted and influenced by several women activists and intellectuals in the U.S. and during his travels abroad, he began appointing women to positions of authority. Ella Collins, who was known for her strong personality, was probably the woman who had the most impact on his development in this regard. She now also wielded the most power of any woman in the institutions he built. Without Malcolm to help guide them in this major shift, many of the men of the MMI found it difficult to deal with Collins' leadership style, and likely with women's leadership in general.<sup>346</sup> Most of these men came from working-class backgrounds and experienced the hardened realities of New York City street life prior to serving as committed followers of the Nation while Malcolm was its leading minister. These experiences left them ill prepared for the progressive direction that Malcolm attempted to set in his final year.<sup>347</sup> *Shaykh* Tawfiq, having earned scholarly distinction

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<sup>345</sup> Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience," 281; James Smalls, "November 2018 ASWAD Lecture" (November 2018).

<sup>346</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam. Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

<sup>347</sup> Ashley D. Farmer, "The Many Women Mentors of Malcolm X," *Remaking Black Power How Black Women Transformed An Era* (blog), May 3, 2016, <https://www.ashleydfarmer.com/blog/2016/5/3/the-many-women-mentors-of-malcolm-x>; Garrett Felber, "Women's Leadership in the Organization of Afro-

from his Black American Muslim peers due to his studies abroad, provided a model of religious leadership that was more in line with what they were accustomed to. As a result, as many of Malcolm's orthodox Muslim followers became drawn to Shaykh Tawfiq, the MMI gave way to the MIB.

Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, the current Imam of the MIB as of 2019, describes the phenomenon of “mother mosques” – older Black American orthodox Muslim institutions that gave rise to more recent ones – as providing a useful framework to understand continuities across generations. Just as the community Shaykh Daoud and Mother Khadijah built in Brooklyn set the stage for the rise of Ya Sin Mosque and the Dar ul Islam movement, MMI set the stage for the emergence of MIB. However, the International Moslem Society at 303 125<sup>th</sup> Street could also be described as one of MIB's parent communities. As the primary Black orthodox Muslim place of worship in Harlem during the preceding decades, 303 embodied the ethos of orthodox Islam in the 1940s and 50s. In fact, Shaykh Tawfiq began his career as a religious leader in New York City by giving the Friday *khutbah* (sermon) at 303.<sup>348</sup> There, he interacted with an ethnically diverse community that included African immigrants as well as Black American intellectuals. Shaykh Tawfiq and his followers established the MIB's headquarters in a two-bedroom apartment located at 562 Decatur Street in the Ocean Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn in 1967, then began meeting in the community room of an apartment complex at 260 Howard Avenue in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn later in the

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American Unity,” *Women, Gender and Pan-Africanism* (blog), October 27, 2016, <https://www.aaihs.org/womens-leadership-in-the-organization-of-afro-american-unity/>.

<sup>348</sup> Al-Islam, “Sunni Islam in the African American Experience,” 281.

year.<sup>349</sup> But the real goal of the MIB was to establish itself in Malcolm X's beloved Village of Harlem.

In the early 1970s, members of the MIB finally found a way to do just that. Shaykh Tawfiq and his small but dedicated group of followers created a nonprofit housing development corporation. This allowed them to take advantage of a federally funded, city-wide initiative that gave their corporation funding to provide low wage salaries to unemployed residents to do construction work rehabilitating abandoned buildings.<sup>350</sup> The MIB's nonprofit secured a mortgage to buy a property at 55 St. Nicholas Avenue in the heart of Harlem, and used the funds from the program to pay their community members to do the necessary construction work. They were then given the first right to rent one of the 14 apartments in the building they helped rehabilitate. One such community member was Sayed Abdus-Salaam, who would later be appointed Shaykh Tawfiq's *na'ib* (assistant Imam). He recalls that he and other members of the community would actually donate much, if not all, of their salaries back to the mosque in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the effort.<sup>351</sup> A New York Times article from November of 1976 lauded the MIB's strategy as a model for urban renewal that could be followed throughout the country. Shaykh Tawfiq was quoted in the article saying, "[w]e appreciate the honor of doing this work for ourselves," and adding "[w]e hope to inspire others to see how beautiful our neighborhood can be and to give our children a better environment." His words reveal the overlap between the interests of Black Muslims seeking self-determination and neoliberal policy makers who increasingly

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid, 282; Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam. Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

<sup>350</sup> Thomas A. Johnson, "A Housing Effort in Harlem is Seen As Model for U.S.," *New York Times*, November 24, 1976.

<sup>351</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam. Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

tasked marginalized communities with addressing the failures of urban public infrastructures on their own.

In addition to the funding and the labor, an additional resource was needed to establish the MIB in its Harlem home. While MIB did not create what might be called a “community militia” similar to *Ra’d* or even the FOI, it certainly embraced the overall philosophy of armed self-defense that characterized Black radical organizing during the era, and as advocated by its ideological founder Malcolm X. The property they acquired was located on the corner of St. Nicholas Avenue and 113<sup>th</sup> St. – in an area hit hard by heroin. As a result, a small group of Black American Muslim men – including some from the Nation and some from orthodox communities – was tasked to “clear out the block.” They provided armed community policing in the beginning stages of MIB’s Harlem mosque and created a community safe zone.<sup>352</sup> Green paint on the sidewalk in the area surrounding the mosque demarcated a radius in which criminal or drug activity would not be tolerated. Offenders would suffer physical consequences. One member of the initial team of enforcers was Abdul Azeem Shabazz, a Black American orthodox Muslim who had attended the Nation of Islam’s school in Harlem as a young man. Both he and Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam would go on to play important roles as pioneers of the Tijani Sufi community in New York, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Later, young men from MIB provided armed security to protect the community and travelled with the Imam when he lectured around the city.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Phone interview with Sheikh Abdul Azeem Shabazz, 2 April 2017.

<sup>353</sup> These details are commonly recounted and circulated in the oral narratives of Black American Muslims who were active during the 1970s. These details were mentioned to me in more than a dozen conversations with MIB community members and observers from other Black Muslim congregations.

Unlike the Dar, the backbone of the MIB community was a close-knit network of Black American orthodox Muslim families, along with the men who left the Nation with Malcolm.<sup>354</sup> The latter group, who would have been a little older than the rest of the congregation, could provide much needed experience from their time in the Nation. The MIB congregation quickly grew as other Black American Muslims were excited by the opportunity to study with a Black American who acquired classical Islamic and Arabic instruction in Egypt. Like the Dar, the MIB also attracted radical Black and Latino youth activists, particularly those from the Young Lords Party and from a more militant wing of the Black Panther Party.<sup>355</sup>

The MIB also set about to pursue its own agenda for achieving political economic power. While as a local community it never undertook building an infrastructure similar

in scale to that established by the

Dar, it did maintain several

successful businesses including a

health food store and a restaurant

called Banu Hilal, and also

developed a full-time school for

children of the same name (see

Figure 6 and Figure 7).<sup>356</sup> MIB's

newspaper *The Western Sunrise*

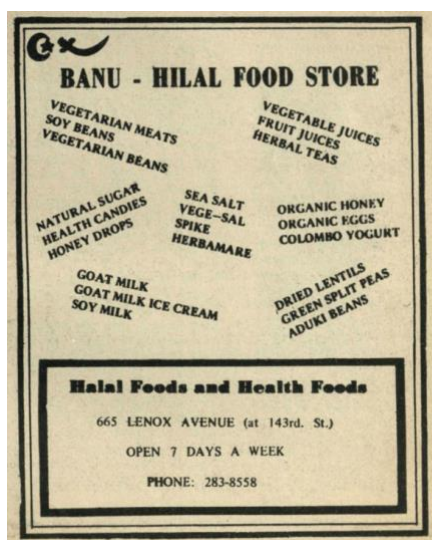


Figure 6: *The Western Sunrise*, Vol. II, No. 14, September-October 1973, 5.

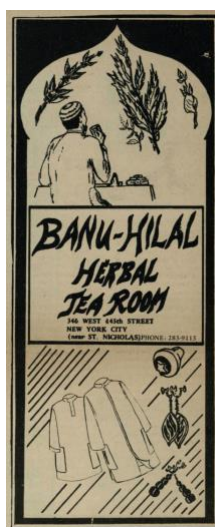


Figure 7: *The Western Sunrise*, Vol. II, No. 14, September-October 1973, 10.

<sup>354</sup> Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience," 283; Interview with Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid. New York, NY. 14 June 2011.

<sup>355</sup> Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience," 284; Ali, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, 283.

<sup>356</sup> Interview with Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid. New York, NY. 14 June 2011; Al-Islam, "Sunni Islam in the African American Experience," 295; Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam. Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

also enjoyed widespread popularity and is often mentioned alongside *Jihad Al-Akbar* as one of the most popular Muslim periodicals in the country during the 1970s.<sup>357</sup> Like the Dar, MIB also cultivated a counterculture that rejected certain Western norms. They developed their own aesthetic, which Muslims from both MIB and the Dar celebrated for being as once ‘Islamic’ and attractive to the average non-Muslim Black American observer.<sup>358</sup> Polygyny was not uncommon amongst the community, and even Shaykh Tawfiq had two wives.<sup>359</sup> However, the practice does not seem to have produced the kinds of social problems it did in the Dar, perhaps because the community did not face the same degree of economic hardship.

### **Building a Black Muslim Intelligentsia**

While its countercultural orientation resembled the Dar in many ways, MIB focused on developing an “indigenous Muslim intelligentsia.”<sup>360</sup> This difference was significant. While members of MIB articulated similar critiques of non-Muslim, white supremacist hegemony, MIB’s approach did not serve as a repellent to educated Muslims or professionals. Though it remained a working-class community, and continues to be today, it managed to attract a fair number of college students and professionals who added to the stability of the community. As a much smaller community in comparison to the Dar, MIB’s task of creating a self-sustaining political economy was far more manageable. In addition, as members of the Dar remarked, the MIB focused its *dawah*

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<sup>357</sup> The *Western Sunrise* issues that I cite have been digitally archived through the After Malcolm Digital Archive at the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University. Select other issues are accessible at Stanford University as well as in the personal collections of community members.

<sup>358</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam. Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014; Interview with Imam Shair Abdul-Mani. New York, NY. 14 March 2014;

<sup>359</sup> Interview with Dr. Halima Toure. New York, NY. 11 March 2014.

<sup>360</sup> Interview with Dr. Halima Toure. New York, NY. 11 March 2014.

efforts not in prisons, but on college campuses where Shaykh Tawfiq frequently lectured. This strategy led to a number of artists and activists influenced by the Black Arts Movement joining the MIB community and making skilled contributions. Two notable examples were the writers Askia Muhammad Toure and Dr. Halima Toure. As Amir Al-Islam writes, “[w]ithin (Shaykh Tawfiq’s) inner circle were Muslims like Dr. Halima Toure (who became his second wife in 1981) and her former husband Askia Toure. Both were scholars, poets, writers, and activists.”<sup>361</sup> Another example was a precocious young artist and student who embraced Islam in April 1971, taking the name Talib Abdur-Rashid.<sup>362</sup> After Shaykh Tawfiq’s passing in 1988, Talib became the Imam of the community.<sup>363</sup> Imam Talib has continued to uphold the intellectual and cultural legacy of his teacher ever since.

### **Black Muslim Journalism as a Site of Ideological Debate**

With the assistance of Askia Muhammad Toure and Dr. Halima Toure, MIB produced *The Western Sunrise*, which, as mentioned above, achieved considerable success. Black orthodox Muslims around the country were treated to Shaykh Tawfiq’s own translations of works in Arabic written by Hassan al-Banna and other important thinkers from the Muslim world. While readers of the *Western Sunrise* and attendees of MIB were undoubtedly exposed to the discourses of Muslim Internationalism or “political Islam,” these ideas were filtered through Shaykh Tawfiq’s decidedly Black Internationalist lens. The newspaper demonstrated the ways in which Shaykh Tawfiq made the Black experience central to his application and articulation of Islamic principles

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<sup>361</sup> Al-Islam, “Sunni Islam in the African American Experience,” 287-288.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 315.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 312.

and ideals. A reoccurring comic strip starring a character named Hiram offered critical commentaries on Black political activism and cultural life (see Figure 8 and 9).

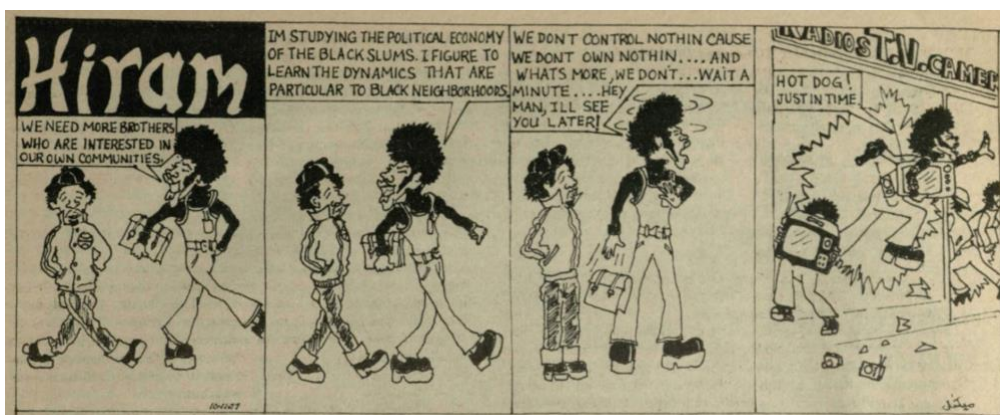


Figure 8: *The Western Sunrise*, Vol. VI, No. 1, September 1976-November 1977, 9.



Figure 9: *The Western Sunrise*, Vol. 8, No. 1, July 1979-October 1980, 7.

A 1979 issue featured a portrait of a Black man with a chain wrapped around his head and a caption that read, “Lincoln Freed Your Body, But Islam Frees Your Mind,” expressing the notion that Islam could serve as an antidote to the psychological effects of the American chattel slavery (see Figure 10). A third

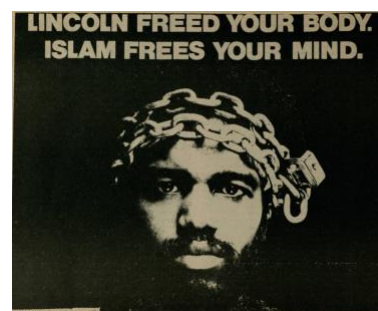


Figure 10: *The Western Sunrise*, Vol. 8, No. 1, July 1979-October 1980, 16.

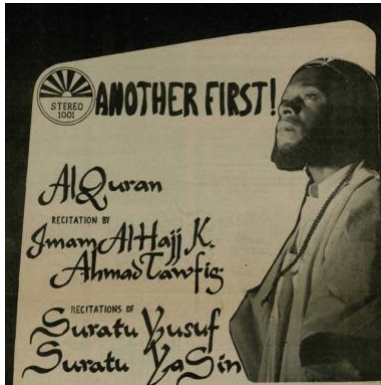


Figure 11: *The Western Sunrise*, Vol. 8, No. 1, July 1979-October 1980, 20.

entry featured a regal picture of MIB's Imam wearing distinctly West African Islamic attire (see Figure 11).

Two things served as iconic representations of MIB's commitment to a Black Internationalist historiography. The first was Shaykh Tawfiq's use of the word "Cushite" in MIB literature and articles in the *Western Sunrise*. Cushite was used to refer to Black

Americans as an identity marker and proclaimed a relationship between Black Americans and the ancient East African civilization of Cush. This was an alternative geography that, not unlike the ideologies articulated by Noble Drew Ali and Professor Muhamad Ezaldeen, connected Black Americans to a global history of race that celebrated



Figure 12: MIB Flag. Accessed July 19, 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156574795991443&set=g.304403276326809&type=1&theater&ifg=1>.

Africanity. The second was MIB's flag, which consisted of a black, red, and green background, the *kalimah shahadah*<sup>364</sup> or the standard Muslim proclamation of faith written in Arabic, a sword, and a star and crescent (see Figure 12).

The various symbols on the flag invoked the Pan-Africanism of Garvey, who adopted and popularized a flag made up of the same three base colors. MIB's flag also invoked the Pan-Islamism or Muslim Internationalism of the Muslim

<sup>364</sup> The phrase translates to "there is no God other than God (Allah)."

Brotherhood in Egypt, which also adopted the same three colors. The other three symbols have all been associated with Islam including the sword, which also served as a marker for the community's militant commitment to its faith and identity.

Members of Dar saw these symbols – the colors of the flag and the Cushite identity marker – as representative of a latent Black Nationalist stance on the part of MIB and were critical. Sheikh Mahmoud of the Dar explains,

“I think that the overall sentiment was that there was more emphasis placed on being black at MIB than there should have been. Now, on a personal note, I don't find that misguided given what I know today...Having some emphasis on being black. I think that was probably good. But the Dar didn't take that position.”<sup>365</sup>

These misgivings about Black Nationalism were almost certainly tied to a desire among Black American orthodox Muslim to distinguish themselves from the openly Nationalistic approach espoused by the Nation of Islam, which became more visible than the city's orthodox Muslim congregations during the late 1950s and 1960s. While MIB was challenged for aligning culturally and politically with Black Nationalism, it could just as easily have been labeled a Black Internationalist community. Both the Cushite civilization and the flag that MIB promoted were symbols of international histories and cultural identities to which Black Americans could lay claim. In this regard, Shaykh Tawfiq took his cues from his mentor Malcolm X, who adopted a Pan-African political orientation in the final year of his life. During the 1980s and 90s, MIB would cultivate a strong relationship with the city's burgeoning African immigrant community, serving as an incubator of New York's first West African mosque.<sup>366</sup> Moreover, it could be argued that Shaykh Tawfiq's ability to pursue a self-determined Black Muslim community in

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<sup>365</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim. New York, NY. 13 August 2017.

<sup>366</sup> Interview with Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid. New York, NY. 14 June 2011; Abdullah, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131-132.

Harlem while simultaneously engaging Muslim internationalist discourse made him an inheritor of the city's older Black Muslim cosmopolitan tradition.

However, the dynamics of the city had changed by the 1970s. Unlike their predecessors, immigrants who relocated to the U.S. during this period were not primarily unskilled laborers who were forced to cast their lot with Black and Latino communities. Instead, this new generation of predominantly highly educated and professionalized immigrants could build their own ethnic enclaves, and their economic interests no longer coincided with Black Americans'. Influenced by the works of immigrant Muslim intellectuals like Isma'il Faruqi, these communities built new organizations to serve their interests. These organizations included the Muslim Students Association (MSA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). At the same time, as resources continued to leave an urban inner-city terrain that became almost all Black and Latino, Black Muslim congregations like MIB became more explicit about their objective of building political economic power specifically for Black and Brown neighborhoods.

### **Familiar Limitations**

While the smaller size and greater socioeconomic and educational diversity enjoyed by MIB helped to offset some of the cultural challenges that the Dar struggled with during the mid 1970s and beyond, this does not mean that the MIB community totally escaped the social norms that defined working-class organizations during the era. During its early days, many of the men in the community certainly exhibited some of the hypermasculinist tendencies that were demonstrated by contemporary Muslim

congregations and Black organizations. Several of the community members I interviewed cited examples of this, and I did encounter at least some examples of women and professionals who opted to join other communities. However, unlike the Dar, the MIB afforded space for women in leadership – albeit by creating a separate organizational sphere for women in the community. The women leaders of the MIB Sisterhood, in turn, advised the Imam on community issues, providing a critical voice that helped that helped to mitigate the “macho” sensibilities of militant young Muslim men.

Still, possibly due to the indirect influence of the Nation on MIB’s culture and hierarchy, Shaykh Tawfiq was known to employ a leadership style that was even more regimented than that of Imam Yahya of the Dar. And his followers were no less prone to carry firearms.<sup>367</sup> Moreover, MIB adopted a rather territorial posture, possibly due to perceived encroachments by the already powerful Nation of Islam, and the Ansarullah community who at one time attempted to expand to Harlem but were actively repelled by members of MIB.<sup>368</sup> These three factors contributed the creation of an environment where violent clashes between communities were possible.

### **Clashes and Solidarities**

In light of the militarization of Black Muslim communities during the 1970s, it is not surprising that there were occasionally violent clashes between groups. As mentioned above, members of the MMI clashed with the Nation in its early days. A June 1973 article from the *Amsterdam News* with the headline “3 Held In Boro shooting” recounts the “brutal attack” carried out by a group identified as the “Islamic Brotherhood Inc.”

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<sup>367</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mahmoud Andrade Ibrahim. New York, NY. 13 August 2017; Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam. Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

<sup>368</sup> Al-Islam, “Sunni Islam in the African American Experience,” 301-302.

against “members of the Ansar Allah Muslims of Brooklyn.”<sup>369</sup> In addition, members of both the Dar and MIB clashed with members of the Ansarullah community on multiple occasions. But this was perhaps more understandable in light of that community’s perceived divergences from Islamic orthodoxy and allegations that its founder repeatedly engaged in the sexual exploitation of his followers. The Ansarullah community inflamed Black American orthodox Muslims throughout the city. Ultimately, the Ansarullah community’s leader would proclaim a new, openly syncretic, non-Islamic religious trajectory and would relocate to Georgia, perhaps in part due to sustained pressure from New York’s Black orthodox Muslims.

A more troubling incident occurred in 1974 when a spontaneous gun battle erupted at Ya Sin Mosque between members of the Dar and MIB. Despite the ideological differences discussed in this section, the two communities enjoyed an overall cordial relationship and even collaborated on occasion. Their goals and their constituencies were similar. According a number of accounts, Shaykh Tawfiq travelled to Brooklyn to meet with Imam Yahya to discuss an article published in *Jihadul Akbar* that took a jab at MIB for its perceived nationalism. In addition, there may have been additional animosity between the two communities as some international entity, perhaps the Muslim World League, considered providing significant funding to a coalition of New York City mosques, and these two – the largest – differed about how to proceed. Still, no one expected, or desired, for these ideological differences to lead to a violent exchange. By all reports offered by community members from Ya Seen Mosque and MIB, the conflict was not premeditated. Rather, it seems to have been triggered by a failure to follow standard security protocol. The misunderstanding proved lethal. An article in the

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<sup>369</sup> “3 Held in Boro Shooting,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 30, 1973.

*Amsterdam News* entitled “Muslim Funeral Is Held” recounts the attendance of over 300 people to the traditional Muslim funerary service in in Brooklyn that honored Muhammad Ahmad and Bilal Rahman, two widely respected members of the Dar ul Islam community who were killed in the conflict. The article reports that the two were “eulogized as fall(en) Black princes.”<sup>370</sup> The two rank-and-file members of MIB who were killed, Ataullah Muhammad Ayubi and Ta Ha Muhammad Abdullahi, were young men involved with the Peoples Health Collective, an initiative created by Black American and Latino activists to treat drug addiction through acupuncture as an alternative to government-sponsored methadone clinics. The tragedy left the relationship between the two communities strained for a number of years.

However, this clash was certainly an exception rather than a rule. And the political economic power building strategies that Black Muslims pioneered also won considerable gains. Like the Nation of Islam, both the Dar and MIB created safe havens around their mosques that were treasured by the broader community. Other Black American orthodox Muslim communities around the country followed suit, successfully implementing the same model. And sometimes, the Black Muslim communities united across ideological lines to pursue a common cause. On April 14 1972, an incident occurred in which a number of police officers stormed the Nation’s Mosque #7 in Harlem, and, in the ensuing melee, an NYPD officer was killed.<sup>371</sup> Police besieged the mosque and held approximately 300 to 500 members of the community inside. People from the neighborhood began to surround the building and formed an angry mob, estimated to be

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<sup>370</sup> “Muslim Funeral Is Held,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 9, 1974, A2.

<sup>371</sup> Anne Barnard, “Harlem Split on Plan to Honor Officer Killed in Mosque in ’72,” *New York Times*, May 11, 2012.

about 1,200 people (see Figure 13).<sup>372</sup> In spite of their history discord, worshipers from the nearby Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood rushed to the scene to ensure that the members of Mosque #7 were not harmed. Ultimately, all the white NYPD officers were ordered to leave the mosque by high-ranking police officials and, after hours of negotiation, the rest of the worshipers were allowed to exit.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Robert Daley, “The Untold Story Behind the Harlem Mosque Shooting,” *New York Magazine*, June 4, 1973, 36.

<sup>373</sup> In addition to the aforementioned written sources, the account I have reconstructed benefitted from substantial insight and corroboration from Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, in particular regarding the response from MIB community members. Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid, Facebook message to author, September 9, 2015.

Interview with Imam Talib Abdur-Rashid. New York, NY. 14 June 2011.

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The mob assembles: Minutes after the police received the 911 call from "Detective Thomas," a crowd, drawn by news reports of a possible shootout, swarms toward the mosque.



Figure 13: Robert Daley, "The Untold Story Behind the Harlem Mosque Shooting," *New York Magazine*, June 4, 1973, 36-37.

The 1972 incident was remarkable for two reasons. First, police officers did not follow proper procedure. On previous occasions of a similar nature, the police "requested and received permission to search both the 116<sup>th</sup> Street Mosque and the Mosque in Brooklyn", and as a result "[n]o such violence was necessary."<sup>374</sup> The policy had

<sup>374</sup> "Cops Invade Mosque: Editorial Invasion of Mosque No. 7," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 22, 1972, A1.

established a protocol for dealing with the Nation in a respectful manner, and the officers' failure to adhere to these procedures during the 1972 incident was a factor that contributed an officer's loss of life. The other component of the incident that was so extraordinary was the ability of Muslims of Mosque #7 to leverage the influence they had accumulated in order to address the situation. Although a police officer had been killed, charges were not brought against anyone from the mosque until two years later, and the subsequent trial resulted in an acquittal. Further, the Muslims demanded "an apology from the city and an all-Black police force for Harlem."<sup>375</sup> In one article, an *Amsterdam News* reporter criticized white liberal politicians like Senator George McGovern for failing to issue such an apology. The Muslims of Mosque #7 held a unity rally in protest the police department's actions. The event was well attended by members of the city's orthodox Muslim community, prompting an appearance by the world-renowned Egyptian scholar and Qu'ran reciter Sheikh Mahmoud Khalil al-Hussary. This incident demonstrated that Black Muslims throughout New York City were willing to put aside their religious and organizational differences and come together to oppose repressive policing. Another article from the *Amsterdam News* during the 1970s informs us of cooperative efforts between the orthodox Muslims, the Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, and the People's Liberation Army calling for prison reform.<sup>376</sup>

## **Aftermath: International Solidarities and the Resurgence of Black Muslim**

### **Cosmopolitanism**

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<sup>375</sup> Carlos Russell, "A funny thing happened," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 6, 1972, A5.

<sup>376</sup> "Nothing constructive on prison reforms," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 22, 197, A5.

During the 1980s, the two communities primarily highlighted in this chapter facilitated Black American orthodox Muslim participation in transnational Muslim Sufi networks. Former members of the Dar engaged new educational institutions by way of their relationship with Shaykh Mubarak Gilani and also imbibed Pakistani culture. Those that chose not to follow Shaykh Gilani often continued to pursue reformist articulations of Islam promoted by Middle Eastern and South Asian institutions. By the 1990s, young people from these communities enjoyed increased opportunities to travel and study in the Gulf, greatly altering the intellectual trajectory of Islam in urban America.

Members of the MIB, on the other hand, were introduced to the rich tradition of Islam in West Africa. A number of them became integral in fostering the emergence of one of the oldest and largest Black American Sufi communities – that associated with the Tijani order, which is especially popular on the African continent. In the case of MIB, this did not result in an ending or fracturing of the initial movement. Rather, it simply augmented Black Muslim access to African Muslim communities and discourses for those who were interested. They and other Black American orthodox Muslims who came from other communities found in the Tijani order an approach to Islam that combined religious orthodoxy, traditional Islamic spirituality, and an affirming cultural and political orientation consistent with their Black Internationalist sensibilities. The next chapter examines the Tijani orders rise and appeal among Black American orthodox Muslims.

## CHAPTER 5: WHEN THE DIVINE FLOOD REACHED NEW YORK: THE TIJANI SUFI ORDER AMONG BLACK AMERICAN MUSLIMS IN NEW YORK CITY

On Friday evenings, a small congregation of Muslims gathers for an intimate devotional service on the bottom floor of a brownstone in the Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. About a half hour before sunset, they sit in two adjacent circles, one for women and one for men. In unison, they repeat the Arabic phrase *La ilaaha il Allah*, which translates to “There is no god other than God.” This phrase comprises the most fundamental tenet of Islam.<sup>377</sup> They repeat it one thousand times, fulfilling one of the core devotional practices observed regularly by members of the Tijani Sufi Order (Ar. *tariqa*).<sup>378</sup> This ritual, known as *Dhikr-ul-Jumu‘a* (literally, “the Friday remembrance”) is done on a weekly basis and is completed by the time of sunset, when the congregation stands and performs one of the regular five daily ritual prayers required of all Muslims. They then return to the same formation as before and perform the *wazifa*, another devotional practice associated with the Tijani order that is comprised of the repetition of specific Arabic supplications for seeking God’s forgiveness and

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<sup>377</sup> The phrase makes a central part of several forms of Muslim ritual worship, including the proclamation of faith that marks formal entry into the Muslim faith. It is understood as an encapsulation of the Islamic concept of monotheism.

<sup>378</sup> Here I use the term *Sufi tariqa* to refer to any of the hundreds of traditional paths for spiritual cultivation and character development embraced by a significant percentage of the world’s Muslim population. *Tariqa* is an Arabic word that translates to ‘path’ or ‘road’. In the context of Sufism, it is often translated as ‘brotherhood’ or ‘fraternity’ because of the communal role it often plays in society. However, it does not share the gender exclusivity implied by these English renderings. I have opted here to use the original Arabic term, occasionally using the word ‘order’ as a substitute. For a further discussion of Sufism and the Sufi orders, see Carl Ernst’s *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala, 2011) and J. Spencer Trimingham’s *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). For more on the history and practices of the Tijani order specifically, see J. M. Abun-Nasr’s *The Tijaniyya*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), David Robinson’s *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the mid-Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and Fakhruddin Owaisi, Anwar Bayat-Cisse, and Sa’ad Ngamdu’s *The Divine Opening: A Handbook on the Rules & Etiquette’s of the Tariqa Tijaniyya* (Atlanta: Fayda Books, 2015).

invoking blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad, along with the aforementioned affirmation of God's sole divinity.

After these communal devotions are complete, the group enjoys home-cooked food and fellowship. As they eat, the congregation listens to the reflections of Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam, who hosts these weekly gatherings along with his wife, Najah Abdus-Salaam, in their home. Imam Sayed's reflections cover a wide range of topics, but three subjects are mentioned with particular frequency: the necessity for Tijanis to adhere to the *Shari'a*,<sup>379</sup> the sublime and cathartic character of *ma'rifa*,<sup>380</sup> a primary goal of the Sufi path, and the nature of the racial and social injustices faced by Muslim and communities of African descent in the US and around the globe.

These three specific areas of religious, spiritual, and political expression provide a useful lens through which to explore the character of the Tijani Sufi community in the United States. Members of this community have tended to adopt a more "sober" conception of Sufism—one that considers adherence to the tenets of Islamic orthodoxy as requisite for any legitimate claim to Sufi identity and for ultimate success along the Sufi path. *Ma'rifa* is a concept that holds great importance within the Sufi tradition, and occupies a central place in the writings and religious articulations of the major exponents of the Tijani order.<sup>381</sup> It refers to the beatific and transformative experience of one who has become utterly immersed in the awareness of, and submission to, the Divine.<sup>382</sup> These

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<sup>379</sup> The term Sharia refers broadly to the code of proper conduct for Muslims. In this context, the Imam's statement also serves as an assertion that adherence to the Tijani order, and the practice of Sufism generally, requires a recognition of orthodox Muslim belief and practice.

<sup>380</sup> This Arabic term is sometimes translated as 'gnosis', referring to an experiential knowledge of the Divine.

<sup>381</sup> William Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 39, 74.

<sup>382</sup> *Shari'a* and *ma'rifa* are sometimes understood to be in tensions with one another. Conceptions of Sufism deemed more 'sober' are often held to place a greater emphasis on the former. While Sufis who focus on the acquisition of the later are sometimes depicted as more ecstatic or 'drunk'. In reality, most

doctrinal and spiritual orientations, coupled with a keen interest in issues of social justice and African Diasporic identity characterizes this predominantly Black American Sufi community.

What made this particular iteration of Sufism compelling for Black American Muslims? What significance does affiliation with the Tijani order hold for them? By exploring the religious beliefs, spiritual aspirations, and sociopolitical perspectives of members of the Black American Tijani community, this chapter provides insights regarding how Sufism has come to be understood and practiced by members of what is likely the largest and oldest Black American Sufi congregation.<sup>383</sup>

To this end, this chapter draws upon oral life histories collected from several people who were instrumental in establishing the Tijani community in New York City. I examine their respective journeys through various New York City Muslim congregations and consider the factors that ultimately drew them to the Tijani spiritual path. New York City is home to one of the three largest contingents of American Tijanis.<sup>384</sup> It is also the city with the oldest Tijani presence in the country, dating back to Shaykh Hassan Cisse's initial visits during the mid 1970's.<sup>385386</sup> It therefore offers a unique opportunity to

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practitioners of Sufism maintain that the two are complimentary rather than mutually exclusive, seeking to achieve a balance between them. See Chittick, *Sufism*, 42.

<sup>383</sup> Virtually all Tijanis in the US who are not immigrants trace their spiritual lineage to the celebrated Senegalese Islamic scholar and Tijani representative Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse through his grandson, Shaykh Hassan Cisse (d. 2008). Many community members travel frequently to Medina Baye, the city established by Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse in Koalack, Senegal.

<sup>384</sup> The other two are located in Detroit and Atlanta.

<sup>385</sup> In keeping with the custom of the community under discussion, I refer to Shaykh Hassan Cisse simply as 'Shaykh Hassan' and add the titles "Sister" or 'Hajja" when referring to prominent women in the community as a show of respect.

<sup>386</sup> Ascertaining the size of the Tijani tariqa in the US is difficult due to the somewhat informal nature of community membership. In addition, the New York Tijani contingent is particularly decentralized. However, there appears to be little to no dispute that the Tijani tariqa enjoys the largest following of, and greatest influence on, African American Muslims among the various Sufi orders present in the US. This claim is supported by the presence of hundreds of African American children who have been sent to study the Qur'an in the Tijani stronghold of Medina Baye in Koalack, Senegal since the late 1970's, the presence

analyze the order's appeal at a time when there was little precedent for the phenomenon of Black Americans adopting a Sufi order in significant numbers.

### **Sufism Among Black American Muslims**

Since the early twentieth century, when significant numbers of Black Americans began to embrace various forms of Islamic identity, some among them demonstrated an interest in what they saw as the esoteric dimensions of an Islamic religious identity. The Moorish Science Temple's engagement with American and Eastern esoteric traditions is well documented.<sup>387</sup> Some important early twentieth century champions of orthodox Islam among Black Americans embraced Sufi orders.<sup>388</sup> This was true of Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal in Brooklyn, New York and possibly al-Hajj Wali Akram in Cleveland Ohio.<sup>389</sup> Others simply embraced elements of Sufism more broadly defined.<sup>390</sup> However, it was not until the 1970s that Black American Muslim communities emerged whose members adopted membership with specific Sufi orders en masse. During the later half of that decade some Black American Muslims began embracing the Tijani order, and some

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of African American Tijani congregations in more than a dozen states, the frequent mention of the order in works on African American Islam, and the respect enjoyed by members of the order by prominent African American Imams around the country — a fact that I found to be particularly true in New York City. For more on the African American Tijani community in the US, see Hajja Ashaki Taha-Cisse. "The Future of the Tariqa Tijaniyya in America." *The Tariqa Tijaniyya*. June 28, 2007. Accessed August 13, 2016. <http://www.tijani.org/tijani-future/>.

<sup>387</sup> Gomez, *Black Crescent*; Jacob S. Dorman, "'A True Moslem Is a True Spiritualist': Black Orientalism and Black Gods of the Metropolis," in *The New Black Gods: Arthur Huff Fauset and the Study of African American Religions*, ed. Edward Curtis and Danielle Brune Sigler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 116–44; Curtis, "Debating the Origins of the Moorish Science Temple."

<sup>388</sup> I use the term orthodoxy here, however contentious, in keeping with its vernacular usage among many Black American Muslims to distinguish between religious communities that insist on normative Islamic practice, especially *salaat* or ritual prayer, and groups like the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam who historically have not.

<sup>389</sup> On Shaykh Daoud's connection to the 'Alawi branch of the Shadhili based in Morocco, see Haroon, "A Tribute to Shaikh Daoud Faisal - Part Two." Substantial oral accounts hold that al-Hajj Wali Akram embraced the Chishti Sufi order at some point during his tenure as Imam of the First Cleveland Mosque.

<sup>390</sup> Sufi Abdul-Hamid, Professor Muhammad Ezaldeen, Shaykh Hisham Jaber

of the leadership of the Dar ul Islam movement adopted the Qadiri order.<sup>391</sup> This led to the formation of the first two major Black American Muslim Sufi communities with a nation-wide presence. During 1980s and 90s, increasing numbers of Black American Muslims exhibited a keen interest in Sufi orders that were prominent on the African continent. Some learned about the famed pre-colonial Nigerian scholar, political leader, and Sufi, Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio and embraced the leadership of Dan Fodio's descendants and spiritual heirs in Sudan, leading to the formation of the *Jumma 'at* of the Shehu.<sup>392</sup> Others joined the Sudanese based Burhaniyyah and Muskashfi orders, or the Muridiyyah order of Senegal. In recent years the Mustafawiyyah order, founded in Senegal during the twentieth century, has attracted a following in the rural town of Monks Corner, South Carolina. Some Black American Muslims encountered the Chishti order through relationship with South Asian Sufis in Boston and Chicago. During the 1980s and 90s, a number of Black Americans, primarily in the city of Chicago, embraced the branch of the Naqshabandi order led by Shaykh Nazim Haqqani. Black American members of this congregation are distinguished by the bright red turbans that many of them wear at the suggestion of their spiritual guide symbolizing the 'fiery' nature of Black spirituality.<sup>393</sup>

Several Sufi orders that I have not mentioned here became popular among White American Muslim converts and first generation American Muslim immigrants and some

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<sup>391</sup> Curtis, "Urban Muslims," 65; Abidin Chande, "Islam in the African American Community: Negotiating between Black Nationalism and Historical Islam" *Islamic Studies* 47 (2, 2008): 221-241, 226.

<sup>392</sup> The most visible and influential leader within this community is Shaykh Muhammad Shareef, a Black American Muslim who introduced many in the US to the work of Shaykh (or Shehu) Usman Dan Fodio through his prolific translations of the Shehu's works and his efforts to organize branches of the community throughout the country. Shaykh Muhammad Shareef is the founder of the Sankore Institute, and a sample from his massive catalogue of translations can be accessed at the institute's official website: <https://siiasi.org/>.

<sup>393</sup> Elizabeth Sirriyeh, "Sufi Thought and its Reconstruction" in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*. Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (eds.), 122.

Black American Muslims have, of course, found spiritual homes in these orders as well. However, the orders named above appear to be the most popular among Black American Muslims thus far. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of followers of any of these congregations. Even approximating their numbers proves challenging. However, the two oldest on this list, the Tijaniyyah and the Qadiriyyah,<sup>394</sup> are almost certainly the largest.<sup>395</sup> The Tijani order has also furthered its reach through the creation of the African American Islamic Institute Qur'an school in Senegal, which has provided instruction for hundreds of Black American Muslim children since the 1980s. Given the order's visible presence several major cities around the country, it is reasonable to conclude that it is probably the largest Black American Sufi community to date.

The Muridiyyah order in particular shares much in common with the Tijaniyyah. Together, they account for the lion's share of Sufi affiliation in Senegal, and both have been associated with a Pan-African cultural and political orientation. The iconic Senegalese city of Touba, which serves as the hub and primary pilgrimage site for the Muridiyyah order's large transnational network, enjoys frequent visits from Black American Muslim travelers. However, the Muridiyyah order seems to have not, as of yet, attracted nearly as many Black American adherents as the Tijaniyyah. This may be due simply to the long standing contact between Black American Muslims and the Tijani tariqa, dating back to Shaykh Hassan Cisse's first visit to the US in 1975. It may also be due to Shaykh Hassan's appointment of dozens of Black American Muslims to positions

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<sup>394</sup> Specifically, the *Fuqara Jama'at*, a community comprised of former members of the Dar ul Islam movement who, as noted above, subsequently became followers of the Pakistani Sufi Shaykh Mubarak Jilani.

<sup>395</sup> Sherman Jackson gives only passing consideration to Black American Muslims' interest in Sufism in *Islam in the Blackamerican*. He does, however, refer specifically to the Tijani order as the oldest and possibly the biggest among them. See Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 51.

of leadership, where as there seem to be only a handful who have received a similar distinction among the Muridiyyah.<sup>396</sup> Yet another possible explanation is that the Tijani order is perceived, among its Black American members, as promoting a greater emphasis on Islamic orthodoxy. Students of the Muridiyyah's long standing engagement with traditions of Islamic scholarship would have good reason to challenge such a claim. However this perception is significant, as it speaks to one of the important factors that has made the Tijani order attractive to Black American Muslims.

### **African Sufism as Islamic Orthodoxy**

Black American Tijanis engage a distinctly West African iteration of Sufism. As in other areas of the Muslim world, Sufism occupies a central role in the history of Islam in the region. The spread of Islam throughout West Africa was facilitated largely by the activities of scholars and religious teachers, who were sometimes also merchants, affiliated with indigenous Muslim clerical lineages like the Jakhanke and the Dyula. This produced clerical and commercial diasporas that spanned the region and connected it to intellectual, cultural, and commercial centers abroad.<sup>397</sup> Religious scholars associated with these lineages were immersed in the practices, doctrines, and global discourses associated with the Sufi tradition, though this immersion did not necessarily manifest in the form of affiliation with a particular Sufi tariqa.<sup>398</sup> Around roughly the eighteenth

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<sup>396</sup> Zain Abdullah, *Black Mecca*, 114. Abdullah actually makes the competing argument that the appointment of Shaykh Balozi Harvey, an African American Murid convert, to the position of president of the Murid Islamic Community of America indicates the Muridiyyah's exceptionality in its embrace of Black American leadership.

<sup>397</sup> For more on these clerical lineages and their role in spreading Islam throughout the region, see Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989).

<sup>398</sup> Rudolph T. Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 185-186.

century, on the eve of the colonial era, Sufi *turuq* began to emerge as important forms of social organization in the region, eventually becoming hallmarks of West African Muslim religious identity.

From about the eighteenth century onward, Sufi shaykhs and the *turuq* they represent have served as prominent representations of Islam West Africa, with historians usually organizing their works around the emergence of these religious scholars and their movements. These clerics were often the leaders of large-scale popular religious movements with major political and social implications, and were almost always affiliated with one of two Sufi orders — the Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah. One notable exception is the Muridiyyah order of Senegal, founded by Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba during the late nineteenth century who was himself formerly an adherent of both the Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah.<sup>399</sup> As a result of the persistent popularity of these Sufi orders in West Africa, Sufism in the region has managed to withstand at least some of the anti-Sufi sentiment associated with many of the Islamic reform movements that emerged in the Middle East and became popular globally in the post-colonial era.<sup>400</sup>

For Black Americans who embraced the Tijani *tariqa* in the 1970s and 80s, this characteristic was significant. William Chittick has explained the varying perceptions of Sufism in America. For some in the West, Sufism represents a kind of universalist spirituality with only an “accidental” relationship” to Islam.<sup>401</sup> This was the attitude of a significant number of American spiritual seekers who became interested in other

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<sup>399</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

<sup>400</sup> Ousman Murzik Kobo, *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Islamic Reforms* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics*; Ousmane Kane, *The Homeland Is the Arena: Religion, Transnationalism, and the Integration of Senegalese Immigrants in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>401</sup> Chittick, *Sufism*, 3.

iterations of Sufism over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>402</sup> However, Black American Tijanis who were introduced to Sufism through their interactions with African Muslims during the 1970s and 80s were attracted to the tariqa precisely because they believed it was congruent with their notions of Islamic orthodoxy. For them, the Tijani order represented a compelling confluence of normative Islamic belief and practice, a path to spiritual transformation through experiential knowledge of the Divine, and a form religious expression compatible with the social justice imperative and Pan-African worldview that often characterized Black American articulations of Islam. The Tijaniyyah thus served as an ‘orthodox’ iteration of Islam that was free of the perceived dogmatism, extreme textualism, and Arab chauvinism that some Black Americans associated with modern Muslim reformist movements like the Salafiyyah, which became increasingly popular among Black American Muslim during the final decades of the twentieth century.<sup>403</sup>

### **Shaykh Hassan Cisse and the appeal of an African Diasporic Islam**

The person primarily responsible for introducing the Tijani Sufi tariqa to Muslims in North America is Shaykh Hassan Aliyu Cisse (1945-2008), a celebrated Islamic scholar and humanitarian.<sup>404</sup> When Shaykh Hassan first traveled to New York City in 1976, it was already home for a small community of Ghanaian immigrants, a number of

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<sup>402</sup> Marcia Hermansen, “In the Garden of American Sufi Movements: Hybrids and Perennials,” in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (London: Luzac Oriental, 1997), 155–78.

<sup>403</sup> Shadee Elmasry, “The Salafis in America: The Rise, Decline and Prospects for a Sunni Muslim Movement among African-Americans,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 2 (June 2010): 217–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2010.494072>.

<sup>404</sup> For more on Shaykh Hassan, see Kane, *The Homeland is the Arena*, 98-99; Zachary Valentine Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niasse*. (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Zakary Wright. “Shaykh Imam Hassan Ali Cisse.” The Tariqa Tijaniyya. Accessed May 09, 2015. <http://www.tijani.org/shaykh-hassan-cisse/>.

who were Tijanis.<sup>405</sup> These Ghanaian Tijanis facilitated some early exchanges between African and African American Muslims. Perhaps the most prominent of these Ghanaian facilitators was al-Hajji Ahmad Dimson, an accomplished soccer player who migrated to New York City at the suggestion of Shaykh Hassan's grandfather, the famed Senegalese religious scholar Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse.<sup>406</sup> Al-Hajji Ahmed Dimson developed relationships with African American Muslims in the city, coming to view their struggles for liberation as interconnected with those of West Africans victimized by European colonization. He would later provide major support for Black American Tijanis, encouraging Shaykh Hassan Cisse to invest African Americans with positions of leadership within the order. Another Ghanaian Tijani named Yusuf Anas who worked at the United Nations wrote a letter inviting Shaykh Hassan Cisse to the US, helping the Shaykh to secure a visa for his first visit. The key role that these and other Ghanaian Tijanis played in establishing their Sufi order in the US and introducing it to Black American provides an example for how African Diasporic exchanges came to characterize this particular Sufi community in the US.

Black American Muslims who joined the Tijani tariqa often exhibited an interest in the history and culture of Africa and its Diaspora. As reflected in the stories I share below, many of them embraced a political orientation that could easily be characterized as Pan-African, in as much as they valued their unique history as people of African descent and sought to address the needs of African descended people in the US.

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<sup>405</sup> This was also the Shaykh's first visit to the US. In that same year, Shaykh Hassan had obtained a Master's degree in English from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, after which he began to travel to the US with greater frequency.

<sup>406</sup> Two monographs about Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse and the community he founded have recently been published: Wright's *Living Knowledge in West African Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) serves as an excellent account of the Shaykh's life and work and Rudiger Seeseman's *Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) provides an examination of the Shaykh writings and his intellectual trajectory in historical context.

Furthermore, all of the interviewees that I will mention in this chapter actively cultivated relationships with fellow Muslims born on the African continent — in some cases well before they themselves embraced the Tijani order. The creation of bonds of kinship and community between Black American and West African Muslims helped to introduce the order to its early Black American adherents. During his 1976 visit, Shaykh Hassan spent time with New York City's Ghanaian Tijani community, as well as a small group of Black American Muslims who gathered at the house of Sister Kareemah Abdul-Kareem.<sup>407</sup> She and her husband Jamil Abdul-Kareem had previously developed close relationships with Ghanaian Muslims who were members of the Niassene branch of the Tijani order. This transnational Sufi order, known as the *jama'at al faydah* or community of the flood of bountiful grace constitutes one of the largest religious communities in Africa.<sup>408</sup> During the 1980s and 90s, Shaykh Hassan Cisse emerged as Niassene Tijani's most prominent global representative since the passing of its eponym, his grandfather. Shaykh Hassan thus served as a living link to the rich historical legacy of West African Islam and modern day Pan-African religious community. This status, along with his personal charisma and extraordinary resume of scholarly achievements helped to fuel his success in propagating the Tijani tariqa among Black American Muslims.

### **Becoming Black Sufis: Sunni Islam as a Path to Sufism**

The vast majority of those who came to embrace Shaykh Hassan and the Tijani tariqa during the 1970's and 1980's had hitherto identified with Sunni Islam. This is significant as it helps to explain an aspect of the Tijani order's appeal for its early Black

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<sup>408</sup> Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 4; Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*, 2.

American adherents and a defining characteristic of the religious identities that Black American Tijanis constructed. Scholars like John Voll and Francis Robinson include the Tijaniyyah among what they refer to as ‘neo-Sufi’ orders—a fraught term meant to identify those orders that emphasize devotion to the Prophet rather than monistic mystical cosmology in the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, but that may also connote greater adherence to the *shari‘a*.<sup>409</sup> Some Black American Tijanis explicitly cite this quality of adhering to shari‘a norms as one of the reasons they found the Tijani order more appealing than some of the others they encountered. In addition, almost every Black American Tijani that I interviewed felt compelled to mention that the beliefs and practices of the order were compatible with the *shari‘a* and the conventions of Sunni Islam. Some recounted a saying attributed to Shaykh Ahmed Tijani himself, in which the eponym of the order instructed his followers, “If a statement is attributed to me, weigh it on the scale of the *sharia*. If it balances, take it. If it does not, leave it.”

#### Sister Kareemah Abdul-Kareem

Sister Kareemah Abdul-Kareem holds the distinction of being the first woman from the US to join the Tijani order. She embraced the Muslim faith in 1969 along with her husband, Jamil, and their children. Born in Harlem to parents who migrated from the South, Sister Kareemah remembers that reading about Malcolm X’s pilgrimage to Mecca played a role in her own decision to become Muslim. She has been instrumental in forming several Muslim women’s organizations, planning a variety of educational and

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<sup>409</sup> John Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 102; Francis Robinson, “The Islamic World: World System to ‘Religious International,’” in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, ed. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 114.

cultural events, and raising funds for Black American Muslim children studying Islam abroad. Prior to becoming Muslim, she remembers her husband's interest in Islam as a potential religion for their family – a prospect she found less than appealing due to her perception of the Nation of Islam. She recalls,

“So, he brought the idea home. And, to tell you the truth, I really wasn't excited about it because I just thought maybe it was more restrictive. And I didn't really know too much about it. And, at the time, the only group I knew about was the Nation. And I...I was a little skeptical about them because I... during that time I couldn't imagine why DuBois, Marcus Garvey, everybody was persecuted by the government here. They had to leave the country for whatever reason. And (laughs) [Elijah Muhammad] was still able to stay. So, in the meantime, I was fighting against [my husband], *sort of*. And then finally I, he went and brought some books. We started reading, so he told me to go...I found a mosque, the Islamic Center, on the back of one of the books that we had bought from 116<sup>th</sup> St.<sup>410</sup> And I said, ok, I would call them up for classes. So that's how we became Sunni Muslim. So we started going to the Mosque with the kids.”<sup>411</sup>

Ultimately it was Sunni Islam that Sister Kareemah found most compelling. Her grounding within the Sunni Muslim tradition was further cemented through her encounters with religious scholars at the Islamic Cultural Center of New York City, located on Manhattan's upper west side on the corner of 72<sup>nd</sup> Street at 1 Riverside Drive. The 72<sup>nd</sup> Street mosque, as it was referred to by those who attended it, was one of few mosques in the city at the time and was intended to be a hub for all of New York City's Sunni Muslim community, unlike other mosques that usually served specific, localized communities of Muslims.<sup>412</sup> Sustained, in part, through relationships with global Islamic institutions like the Muslim World League, the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street mosque's imams were, up until the 1980s, always recruited from Egypt's prestigious al-Azhar University, the long-standing bastion of Sunni Muslim scholarship.

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<sup>410</sup> The location of Mosque # 7

<sup>411</sup> Interview with Hajja Kareemah Abdul-Kareem, New York, NY. 14 April 2014.

<sup>412</sup> Abdur-Rauf, *History of the Islamic Center*.

While attending the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street mosque, Sister Kareemah was introduced to normative, orthodox Sunni practice under the instruction of two distinguished Al-Azhar professors. Dr. Muhammad Abdur-Rauf (d. 2004), who later served as the imam for the historic Islamic Center of Washington DC, aided in Sister Kareemah and Brother Jamil's conversion, which occurred once they declared the *shahada*<sup>413</sup> and changed their names. The second scholar she met at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street mosque was Dr. Suleiman Donia who served as the mosque's resident imam for about a decade. An expert in the subjects of Islamic theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence according to the *Maliki* school of thought. Dr. Donia relocated to the US from Egypt, against the advice of some of his colleagues at al-Azhar, with the explicit intention of supporting its burgeoning, mostly working class Black Muslim community.

Her time at the 72nd Street Mosque further inculcated in Sister Kareemah an 'orthodox' religious orientation — one that embraced the Qur'an, the sunna, and normative Muslim religious praxis. During this period, Sister Kareemah helped to form several Muslim women's groups who produced cultural events, lectures, fashion shows, luncheons, local and international conferences, and even scholarships for Black American Muslim children to study in West Africa. When she encountered the Tijani Sufi community during her travels to the African continent, she found the beliefs and practices its members espoused to be congruent with her own orthodox Sunni sensibilities. Upon meeting Shaykh Hassan Cisse in 1976, she became impressed with the unassuming young scholar's grasp of the primary sources for orthodox Muslim doctrine. After embracing the Tijani tariqa, she became one of its most important American representatives. She assisted Shaykh Hassan in his correspondence with Northwestern

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<sup>413</sup> The Muslim declaration of faith.

University, which ultimately led to his enrollment in a PhD program there.<sup>414</sup> Sister Kareemah further helped Shaykh Hassan to acclimate to life in America during his time studying in Chicago, and continued to support his efforts to build ties with the Black American Muslim community. In the 1980s, she played a vital role in the conception and creation of the African American Islamic Institute (AII) Qur'an School — a school Shaykh Hassan established to provide religious instruction to African and African American children. Sister Kareemah's daughter, Aminah Abdul-Kareemah went on to graduate from the school, becoming the first woman from the US known to have memorized the Qur'an in its entirety.

#### Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam

Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam's embrace of the Tijani order is the culmination of a journey through different iterations of Islam spanning several decades. At about 18 years of age, he joined the Nation of Islam, having already experienced a long and fascinating spiritual journey. Interestingly, it was through the Nation that he began to learn more about the beliefs and practices associated with orthodox Islam. He describes a sermon delivered at Mosque Number No. 7 around 1960 in which Malcolm X notified the congregation of a book available at the local Nation bookstore.

**I.S.:** Once again he's there (indistinct) speech and his...presentation, and he's going through the whole rhetoric. And then he just stopped in the middle of it and says, (holding up a book) "Brothers, brother Rueben has a book. He just got this book down in the bookstore. I recommend it for all the brothers. All the brothers should read it." Puts it down (putting the book down) and went back right into the rhetoric.

**R.M.:** And this is Malcolm?

**I.S.:** Malcolm, yea. I'm like, "Man! I gotta find out what that book is about," you know? He recommended it for all the brothers? I went down to the (indistinct)

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<sup>414</sup> In our interview, Sister Kareemah also recounted assisting Shaykh Hassan in the application process.

bookstore. That was the first...*Books and Things*.<sup>415</sup> Went down there and I got the book, and the book was this thick (demonstrates the book's size with his hands). And it was *The Religion of Islam* by Muhammad Ali.<sup>416</sup> Inside the book, I'm reading the book, and the book has got in there life after death, Salaat, *Zakaat*,<sup>417</sup> I mean the whole Sunni Muslim practice as according to Abu Hanifa. It's in there. *Rakaats*, everything! I'm like "Wow, what is this?"<sup>418</sup>

This anecdote challenges the notion that members of the Nation were not exposed to orthodox Muslim practices until Elijah Muhammad passed away in 1975. Sunni Islam had piqued Imam Sayed's interest while he was still in the Nation.

Having begun to question some of the Nation's rhetoric, Imam Sayed's doubts brought him to a crossroads when Malcolm X made public allegations of impropriety on the part of Elijah Muhammad. While Imam Sayed has since arrived at a more forgiving interpretation of Elijah Muhammad's actions, given orthodox Islam's allowance of polygyny, he felt disillusioned at the time with the apparent indiscretions of the man he had once accepted as an apostle of God. Following Malcolm, Imam Sayed departed from the Nation. He attended the first meeting of Malcolm X's newly formed Muslim Mosque Incorporated and gravitated closer to Sunni Islam. Eventually, Imam Sayed embraced the Qur'an and the sunna as the definitive sources for Islamic textual authority and began openly identifying as a Sunni Muslim. This shocked his friends from the Nation, some of whom cut him off completely. He remembers the shock of a very close friend when he informed him, "I'm not following Elijah no more...I'm a Sunni Muslim." He recalls his

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<sup>415</sup> The name of the Nation of Islam's local bookstore.

<sup>416</sup> The book's author, Maulana Muhammad Ali, was a scholar of the Ahmadiyyah Muslim community. This sect was pioneering in Islamic missionary activities in Africa and among Americans of African descent. While some of the doctrines of the Ahmadiyyah are viewed as heterodox by other Muslim groups, most of its practices are in accord with normative forms of Muslim worship. The association of Ahmadiyyah literature with orthodox Islam by Imam Sayed underscores the fact that orthodoxy in the American context is defined against a particular constellation of Islamic groups with roots in the Black American experience.

<sup>417</sup> A fixed rate of charitable giving required of all Muslims annually.

<sup>418</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam, Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

friend being so offended that it effectively severed their friendship. Imam Sayed explains, “We were like family. That broke us up.”<sup>419</sup>

After Malcolm X’s assassination, Mustafa Abdul-Azeem, a friend who had also left the Nation in favor of Sunni Islam informed Imam Sayed about Shaykh Ahmad K. Tawfiq. Shaykh Tawfiq was a young Sunni Muslim who became a follower and protégé of Malcolm upon the latter’s ousting from the Nation. In 1964, Malcolm arranged for Shaykh Tawfiq to travel to Egypt to study Arabic and the fundamentals of the faith. Upon returning in 1968, less than three years after Malcolm X’s assassination, Shaykh Tawfiq founded the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood (MIB) in Harlem with the support of members of Malcolm’s now defunct Muslim Mosque Incorporated. MIB is still active and stands as Harlem’s oldest Sunni Muslim mosque in operation. Impressed with Shaykh Tawfiq’s knowledge of Arabic and Qur’an, Imam Sayed became one of MIB’s founding members. By then, largely through personal erudition, Imam Sayed had developed a greater mastery of Sunni Muslim thought and practice than most of his peers and was appointed to serve as Shaykh Tawfiq’s *na’ib* (assistant Imam).

In his capacity as *na’ib*, Imam Sayed’s natural proclivities to assist in the spiritual development of the members of his community became more apparent. Having developed much of the MIB curriculum for religious instruction, he assisted new Muslims in learning the fundamental practices of their faith – facilitating the *shahada* for many, teaching them how to perform the obligatory rituals for prayer and, when Shaykh Tawfiq was unavailable, delivering the sermon preceding *jummu’ah*. However, Imam Sayed eventually reached a major point of contention with Shaykh Tawfiq over the issue of the community’s spiritual direction. He explains, “I would have debates with him

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

behind closed doors, closed-door conversations, that the community needed to go in a more spiritual direction. He just kept saying ‘They’re not ready for that’. So eventually, I had to go.”<sup>420</sup>

Imam Sayed left MIB on amicable terms. He presumed that he was “done with imaming”, thinking that his role as a formal Muslim religious leader had come to an end. However in 1977, about two years later, he met Shaykh Hassan Cisse. Shaykh Hassan’s stature as an accomplished scholar of both the Sunni tradition and Sufism, as well as an advocate for Pan-African solidarity appealed greatly to this Black Muslim spiritual seeker. Imam Sayed went on to become both the first male from the US to embrace the Tijani path, and the first to be granted a formal position of leadership. In the late 1970s, Shaykh Hassan appointed him as a *muqaddim*, a position in the tariqa that affords its possessor the authority to initiate new members into the community and to oversee their religious instruction.<sup>421</sup> In this capacity, Imam Sayed has promoted the tariqa in New York City for over thirty years, attracting and instructing new members of the order, while simultaneously providing instruction on the tenets and practices of Sunni Islam.

#### Hajjah Ashaki Taha-Cisse

Hajjah Ashaki Taha-Cisse embraced Islam in 1969. She was also born in Harlem and, like Sister Kareemah, her adoption of the Muslim faith was also a family affair that included her husband and children. She also was unconvinced by some aspects of the Nation’s ideology.

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<sup>420</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam, Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

<sup>421</sup> There are many prominent Black American Tijani *muqaddims* around the country. For example, another prominent muqaddim from New York named Shaykh Abdul Azim Shabazz became well known in the community, in part for his contributions in helping to established Tijani communities in other cities.

**R.M.:** So you said that your first introduction was through Malcolm to Islam but you had no attraction to the Nation of Islam?

**H.A.:** Not at all. Not At all.

**R.M.:** Why was that?

**H.A.:** Well...I...I just couldn't get with the program.

**R.M.:** Were there specific things about with the Nation of Islam taught or did that...

**H.A.:** It didn't ring true! It did not ring true. It did not resonate with me. The...the whole mythology. I mean, there were aspects of the Nation that I thought were very positive in terms of cleaning folks up, giving folks dignity, giving folks respect. That was fine. But the theology was flawed. The theology never resonated with me. And certainly when I read the Qu'ran, I knew that what was being taught was not valid.<sup>422</sup>

While Elijah Muhammad's teachings did not resonate with Hajjah Ashaki or her husband, both of them greatly admired his most recognizable representative, Malcolm X. She explains,

Malcolm's analysis and descriptions were accurate. What he was teaching in terms of the reality of being black in America, and white supremacy in America, and how it affected black people, was accurate. That was not what I had a problem. The problem was...the Asiatic black man. Dr. Yakub, or whatever his name was, the entire mythology of the Lost Found Nation, the tribe of Shabazz, none of that rang true to me.<sup>423</sup>

Her initial encounter with the Qur'an came through a friend who lent her and her husband a copy around 1964. Captivated by the reading, she and her family embraced a Muslim identity, even before formally converting. She remarked, "[t]he interesting thing was that, for at least two years prior to taking *shahada*, I think I...we probably considered ourselves Muslim." She further explained, "We were certainly not Christian, we were not eating pork, we were not drinking alcohol." Hajja Ashaki continued to explore the texts associated with Sunni Islam.

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<sup>422</sup> Phone interview with Hajja Ashaki Taha Cisse, 25 April 2015.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

I also had started reading about the Prophet Muhammad, *salallahu 'alaihi wa sallam*,<sup>424</sup> and his character, and his...you know, just, as I started to read the *sira*<sup>425</sup> and started to read some of the *hadith*, and I did this all before taking *shahada*. So by the time I did, I think I knew what I was really getting into.<sup>426</sup>

In 1969, roughly 5 years after first reading the Qur'an, Hajj Ashaki and her family decided to "make it official" by visiting a local, Black American Sunni mosque and proclaiming the *shahada*. Their affiliation with this particular mosque, however, did not last. Hajja Ashaki became disillusioned with the community's gender dynamics, and her husband grew concerned about violent conflicts that occurred between that mosque and another community of Muslims. While she may have found the mosque's more orthodox interpretation of Islam satisfying, this did not prevent her from being critical of a community culture she found to be misogynistic and incompatible with her own religious understanding. She explains,

**H.A:** And that's when my husband basically you know...pulled us out of there. He was not down with going to *jumu'ah* and having to be searched and, you know...brothers standing in the back with guns while we're making *salat* and all of that. He didn't feel like his family was safe there so he pulled us out and we never went back

**R.M.:** So in those few years while you were attending that mosque, what was it like? Did you feel comfortable in the community? You know, did you have any other issues? What was your experience like?

**H.A:** Oh I had issues. (laughs) I definitely had issues. It was one of the most misogynistic communities I have ever experienced.<sup>427</sup>

In particular, she felt that the leadership of the mosque promoted what she found to be a rather stifling approach to women's roles in the community. Unaffiliated with any particular mosque, and living in upstate New York at the time, away from the Muslim friends they had made, the family struggled to practice their religion without the support

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<sup>424</sup> A prayer usually said by Muslims after mentioning, or hearing the mention, of the Prophet Muhammad. It roughly translates to 'May God shower him with blessings and give him Peace'.

<sup>425</sup> A term referring generally to any biography of Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>426</sup> Phone interview with Hajja Ashaki Taha Cisse, 25 April 2015.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

and reinforcement of a religious community. Hajja Ashaki remembers this as a difficult time for her family, especially for her children.

In 1986, Hajja Ashaki was invited to a gathering where she first met Shaykh Hassan Cisse. It was a deeply cathartic experience that led her to embrace the Tijani tariqa shortly thereafter, becoming an exceedingly active member of the community. She would go on to assist Shaykh Hassan in the founding the African American Islamic Institute,<sup>428</sup> a United Nations-affiliated NGO that has served as the mechanism for the Shaykh's humanitarian initiatives. She has also served as the organization's Executive Director since its inception. In reflecting on the qualities that fueled her admiration for Shaykh Hassan, Hajja Ashaki remembers his religious learning and erudition. She remarks, "I loved the way, you know, he would...quote Qur'an and quote hadith and translate it and break it down and make it living and real and alive for you. I admired his scholarship, and his *nur*<sup>429</sup> and his compassion." Having spent years as a student of Shaykh Hassan, she has persevered in her pursuit of religious knowledge since the Shaykh's passing – going on to obtain an M.A. degree in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim relations from the Hartford Seminary. She serves as a major educational resource for Muslims throughout the United States – promoting the theology and practice of Sunni Islam and the merits of the Tijani tariqa as a path for spiritual cultivation and fulfillment for orthodox Muslims.

### **Heading the Call to Ma'rifa**

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<sup>428</sup> Though closely affiliated with Shaykh Hassan's school of the same name, the NGO functions as a separate entity.

<sup>429</sup> The Arabic word for light, also used to describe Godly qualities reflected by human beings who exhibit moral behavior.

*Ma'rifa* (often translated as ‘gnosis’) is a concept that has been written about extensively within the literature on Sufism. As mentioned above, it occupies a central place within the Tijani intellectual tradition. For members of the *jama'at al-faydah* it is closely connected with the notion of the *fayda* or flood — signifying an overflow of bountiful grace in the form of an outpouring of *ma'rifa*. The famous eleventh century Sufi and scholar al-Qushayri explained in his celebrated *Epistle on Sufism* that “[m]a'rifa is the attribute of one who is cognizant of God – praise be to Him – and His names and attributes, and of one who has put his trust in God Most High in his everyday behavior and who has rid himself of bad morals and transgressions.”<sup>430</sup> In an earlier section, he proclaims that “[t]he truth of certainty belongs to the people of *ma'rifa*.”<sup>431</sup> Al-Qushayri also recounts the response of Ruwaym, a tenth century Sufi master when asked about “the first duty that God ... imposed upon His creatures.” Ruwaym answered, “Knowledge, because God – may His name be exalted – said: ‘I have not created jinn and mankind except to worship Me.’”<sup>432</sup> In this quotation, Ruwaym goes on to cite the commentary of the Ibn Abbas, the well known companion of Prophet Muhammad famed for his intellectual prowess and spiritual insight who held that the phrase ‘to worship me’ in the above verse is an injunction to strive to *know* God.<sup>433</sup>

These aphorisms reveal the function of *ma'rifa* as an engine of religious conviction and an indicator of one’s personal relationship with God. In his commentary on Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse’s didactic poem *Ruh al-Adab*, Shaykh Hassan Cisse quotes the *hadith* in which God instructs the Prophet Muhammad, and by extension all of his

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<sup>430</sup> Abu 'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, trans. Alexander Knysh (London: Garnett Publishing, 2007), 320.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>432</sup> This is a quote from the 56th verse of the 51st chapter of the Qur'an.

<sup>433</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism*, 5.

followers, “Know Me before worshipping Me, for if you don't know Me then how do you worship Me.”<sup>434</sup> This divine call to for the worshiper to seek to *know* his or her creator fuels the Sufis’ assertion that *ma ‘rifa* is ‘the most important knowledge to seek.’<sup>435</sup> In the vignettes below, I explore just a handful of the profound spiritual experiences that the Black American Tijanis I interviewed recounted, indicating the role of *ma ‘rifa* in prompting or solidifying their confidence in the Tijani order as a spiritual path. Here I use the term *ma ‘rifa* rather broadly to refer to a wide range of transformative spiritual encounters that underscore the importance of suprarational and experiential knowledge for members of the order. Much of the literature associated with the order, and with Sufism in general, depicts *ma ‘rifa* as inexhaustible and ever-unfolding. These encounters, then, do not represent an end of the acquisition of *ma ‘rifa* for the women and men who experienced them but rather a beginning, providing confirmation for the direction of their subsequent spiritual journeys. By combining the promise of *ma ‘rifa* with an emphasis on shari’ah, the Tijani order offered these Black American Muslims with a compelling combination of Islamic religious orthodoxy and transcendent spirituality.

### **Experiential Spiritual Encounters**

Sister Kareemah first encountered the Tijani tariqa in Ghana in 1971. While there to explore the possibility of permanent relocation, her and her family deepened their relationships with Ghanaian Muslim friends who were members of the Tijani order. This introduced her to perhaps the most emblematic ritual practice associated with the order,

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<sup>434</sup> Shaykh Hasan Cisse, (transl.) *Spirit of Good Morals (Ruh al-Adab)* (Atlanta: African American Institute, 2000), 45.

<sup>435</sup> Shaykh Hasan Cisse, (transl.) *Spirit of Good Morals (Ruh al-Adab)* (Atlanta: African American Institute, 2000).

the Tijani *wazifa*. Many of the Black American Tijanis I interviewed expressed being deeply impacted when first encountering this practice. Hearing the melodic, group supplications that comprise the *wazifa*—seeking God’s forgiveness, invoking His blessings upon Prophet Muhammad, and testifying to God’s oneness — on a daily basis constitutes an essential part of Tijani community life. This became normalized for Sister Kareemah and her family while living abroad. After moving back to New York, they maintained their relationships with these Ghanaian Tijanis, and Sister Kareemah was asked to host a gathering at her house to introduce some of their Black American Muslims friends to Shaykh Hassan during his first US visit in 1975.

These experiences augmented Sister Kareemah’s already high regard for the role of spiritual cultivation in crafting an ideal mode of Muslim religious practice. In explaining her esteem for Dr. Rauf and Dr. Donia, Sister Kareemah described them as “very spiritual,” indicating their prior influence on her religious orientation.<sup>436</sup> While Dr. Donia did not openly promote any particular Sufi affiliation himself, it is telling that many of the Black American Muslims who embraced the Tijani order in New York, New Jersey, and Washington DC spent significant time with him prior to meeting Shaykh Hassan. Dr. Donia encouraged his leading American student, Shaykh Ameen Abdul-Awwal, to build a relationship with Black American Tijanis in New York City by serving as an educational resource for them at Shaykh Hassan’s behest – which ultimately led to Shaykh Ameen’s embrace of the order. This is indicative of the shared religious sensibilities of many of the Black Sunni Muslims who were drawn to the Tijani order.

In recounting the factors that prompted her to join the order, Sister Kareemah mentioned a number of personal, spiritual experiences. She remembers seeing a physical

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<sup>436</sup> Interview with Hajja Kareemah Abdul-Kareem, New York, NY. 14 April 2014.

luminosity in Shaykh Hassan's face during their first meeting—an experience that is commonly described by Sufi practitioners narrating their encounters with Sufi *Shaykhs* and *Shaykhas*. With a half smile she recalls, 'I had never seen a light in a person before.' Even more profound experiences followed, providing confirmation for her embrace and promotion of the Tijani path. For her, joining the Tijani order constituted a natural progression in, rather than a break from, her spiritual development within the Sunni Muslim tradition, offering an even more fulfilling spiritual experience.

Several of the Black American Tijanis I spoke with recounted experiences of this nature. A few reported seeing Shaykh Hassan or his grandfather, Shaykh Ibrahim, in visions prior to seeing their actual appearance. Brother Jabal Abdur-Rahman remembers that, while working in a darkroom as a photographer, he saw a vision of some of his friends sitting in a circle singing God's praises in the company of a man he had never seen before. He later met Shaykh Hassan, who describes as being identical to the man from his vision, as the Shaykh recited the *wazifa* in a congregation that included those same friends.

Hajja Ashaki's initial meeting with Shaykh Hassan provides yet another example of the kind of cathartic spiritual encounters that led Black American Tijanis to join the order. Upon meeting the Shaykh, she immediately began to weep uncontrollably. Later, as she left the gathering, Shaykh Hassan informed her, without prior knowledge of her family difficulties, that her relationship with her then estranged daughter would improve. A myriad of other such spiritually moving, and occasionally supra-rational experiences followed over the course of the next 23 years as she continued to learn from Shaykh

Hassan and support his efforts to serve Muslim communities both domestically and internationally.

Now, almost 30 years later, she observes a significant disparity between the depth of her experience of Muslim spirituality before and after she embraced the Tijani path. She began one of our interviews by informing me of her inability to obtain spiritual fulfillment by simply reading the works of famous Sufis prior to meeting Shaykh Hassan.

I just wanted to mention, you know, the complete failure of (chuckles) my efforts to grow closer to Allah and to know Allah through any intellectual activity. You know, reading *al-Ghazal*, reading *Ibn Arabi*, *Jilani*, *Nursi*<sup>437</sup>...and...the absolute realization that Allah may only be known *experientially* under the guidance of a *complete* Shaykh who has *finished himself in Allah*. And that, of course, was confirmed after the fact, not before. Before it was just frustration (laughs). And...so, the value of *tariqa* in that sense is...you can't even really, I can't really explain.<sup>438</sup>

Her reflection is quite representative of the attitudes of Tijani and Sufi practitioners generally regarding the decidedly experiential nature *ma'rifa*, which they maintain simply cannot be obtained through erudition alone.

Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam's journey as a spiritual seeker took him through a number of Black religious communities prior to his accepting Islam. His religious experimentation began as a teenager and included brief forays with a Harlem based Black Jewish group, and a community of Black American practitioners of Yoruba religion. Given his background, it is perhaps no surprise that Imam Sayed would gravitate toward an approach to Sunni Islam that prioritizes spiritual cultivation. His aforementioned disagreement with his former teacher, Shaykh Tawfiq, was in fact partially the result of his learning about Sufism through his studies of Sunni Islam. Through travel and study, both Imam Sayed and Shaykh Tawfiq had become aware of Sufism and its relationship to

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<sup>437</sup> Four famous classical Sufi authors from various periods.

<sup>438</sup> Phone interview with Hajja Ashaki Taha Cisse, 25 April 2015.

the broader Sunni tradition. While Shaykh Tawfiq conceded privately that Sufism had its merits, his focus publicly tended to be more on Islam's potential for political mobilization and sociocultural transformation.<sup>439</sup> Imam Sayed asserted that the health of the community required an increased focus on spiritual development, and found Shaykh Tawfiq's refusal to give significant, overt attention to it troubling and constricting.

An important influence on Imam Sayed's attitude regarding the place of spirituality in Islam came during the late 1960s when he moved to Guyana in search of a better environment to practice his religion. While living in Guyana, he encountered a Muslim that he now believes to have been affiliated with the *Qadiri* Sufi order. Witnessing a mode of Sunni Muslim practice that emphasized spiritual cultivation, and undergoing a number of suprarational experiences there seems to have contributed to his eventual dissatisfaction with religious life at MIB (Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood), and his receptiveness to the Tijani order.

In addition to Shaykh Hassan's personal character and charisma, perhaps the biggest draw for Imam Sayed to the Niassene branch of the Tijani order was its unique approach to spiritual development, centering around the concepts of *ma'rifa* and *tarbiya* (spiritual rearing).<sup>440</sup> This approach provided the "spiritual direction" that Imam Sayed sought during his years at MIB. His inclination to continue the pursuit of a deeper understanding of Islamic practice, even in the midst of his disillusionment with the Nation and later MIB speaks to his own tenacity as a spiritual speaker. This quality, which prompted his personal evolution through various iterations of Black religion, and ultimately Black American Islam, would continue to fuel his quest for spiritual growth

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<sup>439</sup> Which, of course, one could argue has a great deal of overlap with the Sufism's intended goals of spiritual transformation.

<sup>440</sup> Seesemann, *The Divine Flood*, 90-93.

and fulfillment. Many of the personal spiritual encounters he shared with me came after his spending decades as a vocal advocate and propagator for the Tijani order. However, to those who attend the weekly gatherings for the *wazifa* hosted by him and his wife, Sister Najah, he stresses that the goal of the Tijani path is not miracles or visions, but spiritual purification and moral rectitude, echoing the famous words of the great Moroccan Shadhili Sufi Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi (d. 1287): “the best *karama* (miracle) is *istiqama* (moral integrity).”

### **The Social Justice Imperative**

Among Sufi orders there is a great deal of variance regarding ideals about social engagement. Some orders encourage their members to be wary of excessive engagement with the wider world out of a sense of asceticism. The Tijani order falls closer to the opposite end of the spectrum, encouraging its members to work to foster positive social transformation. Shaykh Ahmed Tijani (d. 1815) himself became an active part of the social and political fabric of Fez during the later stages of his career as a scholar and spiritual guide. Since his time, many prominent Tijani Shaykhs have followed suit, particularly on the African continent.<sup>441</sup> Foremost among them is Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, whose community is often characterized by the particular social reforms he emphasized during his lifetime. These include, among others, his espousal of a Pan-African, anti-racist, political orientation and his insistence on women’s rights to education and forms of religious leadership. Shaykh Hassan Cisse would go on to embody and promote these

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<sup>441</sup> Prominent Tijani leaders who sought to bring about political and social change in West African societies include al-Hajj Umar Futi and Maba Diaxou Ba in Senegambia, Muhammad Sanusi in Northern Nigeria, and Muddaththir Ibrahim al-Hajjaz in Sudan, to name just a few. For more, see John Ralph Willis, *In the Path of Allah: The Passion of Al-Hajj ‘Umar: An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* (London: F. Cass, 1989); David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam*.

ideals as well, adding to the appeal that him and his movement held for the Black American Muslims who joined the order.

### **Promoting Gender Justice and Affirming Africanity**

One of the features that fostered Hajja Ashaki's commitment to the Tijani order was its promotion of a rather egalitarian stance on women's roles in religious life and education. Contrasting starkly with the gender dynamics at the first mosque she attended which describes as chauvinist, she explains that, "Shaykh Ibrahim's commitment that *women should compete with men for knowledge*"<sup>442</sup> was "one of the things that endeared me to the tariqa, and drew me to the tariqa." She goes on to compare attitudes among the Niaseene Tijanis with that of other orders.

[U]nlike other *turuq*, where women either were not permitted to join, or there was a limitation on what prayers they could do, what they were able to do, positions they were able to hold, etc., the tariqa *Tijaniyyah* had women *muqaddims*. You could go as high as you could go. You couldn't be *Qutb*<sup>443</sup>, (laughs) you know, but your value spiritually was no different from a man.<sup>444</sup>

In the subsequent years, Hajja Ashaki would herself be appointed to the position of *muqaddima*<sup>445</sup> and was encouraged by the Shaykh to provide instruction for Tijani community members of both genders.

As the executive director of Shaykh Hassan's NGO, Hajja Ashaki would spend the next two decades working closely with Shaykh Hassan to address health disparities for women, children, and communities at large on the African continent. In addition her

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<sup>442</sup> This is a reference to an often repeated pronouncement of Shaykh Hassan's grandfather, Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse that 'women should compete with men in knowledge', meant to affirm women's ability to surpass men in the acquisition of both sacred and secular learning.

<sup>443</sup> A mystical position described by some Sufi authorities as part of an invisible spiritual hierarchy. The Qutb is the one individual in all of creation at the top of the hierarchy. Many hold that the position is generally reserved for men.

<sup>444</sup> Phone interview with Hajja Ashaki Taha Cisse, 25 April 2015.

<sup>445</sup> The feminine equivalent of the word *muqaddim*.

professional career includes thirty years as a women's health advocate, women's health program director, and international health consultant with various organizations. She credits the Tijani tariqa with helping her to make meaningful connections between her work and her faith.

My work with women who had been physically and emotionally abused, who were substance users, who had HIV and AIDS, who survived rape and incest, was informed by my Islam – and an Islam that was intensified and magnified and illuminated by my understanding, an understanding that came through the tariqa.<sup>446</sup>

Another quality that made Shaykh Hassan Cisse an especially appealing figure of Muslim religious authority for Hajja Ashaki was his African origin. Prior to becoming Muslim, she had developed strong feelings about Africa and the relationship between African people and the people of the Diaspora – feelings reflective of the Black cultural and political awakening that typified the time. The close family friend who first gave her a copy the Qur'an "had a history with African American revolutionary organizations," linking her association with Harlem's radical Black and Pan-African circles and her introduction to Islam. Africa continued to occupy an important place in her personal sense of spirituality. She describes the opportunity to foster a tangible connection to the African continent as one of the draws of the tariqa.

So, the spiritual part was key and very important. But for me, also, the draw to the connection to the motherland, to Africa, to Senegal, to those people, to...to a restoration of something that had been taken from us as a people was also extremely important. Extremely important! And I don't think that...I have never explored any other *tariqa*, but I would say that it would be, you know, impossible I think for me for example to, you know, be connected to a *tariqa* whose Shaykh and history and everything was in Turkey (laugh). I just don't think that it would resonate with me culturally.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Phone interview with Hajja Ashaki Taha Cisse, 25 April 2015.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

She went on to describe the value that having “an African Shaykh” offered for Black American Muslims who adopted Shaykh Hassan as a teacher or religious example. For her, it was most appropriate for Black American Muslims to learn a version of Islam that, while grounded in orthodoxy, was “not a Pakistani version of our religion (and) not an Arab version of our religion.”<sup>448</sup> She went on to reflect that, in the eyes of many immigrant Muslims, Black American Muslims lacked authenticity because they lacked a connection to the Muslim world. In this regard, Hajja Ashaki estimates the impact of Shaykh Hassan on raising Black American Muslims’ self-esteem as “incalculable”.

### **Child Welfare and Educational Opportunity**

When Sister Kareemah joined the Tijani order, she and her husband Jamil were already known throughout New York City’s Black Muslim community for their community engagement and philanthropy. Sister Kareemah’s involvement with the order only increased this. After developing a close relationship with Shaykh Hassan, it became quite evident that the values of the Shaykh and the order he represented were quite compatible with her own. Thus, her membership in the order created further outlets for her organizing and altruism.

In the 1980’s, she helped to establish the AAI Qur’an School, founded by Shaykh Hassan. The school taught children how to read and recite the Qur’an, along with a few other subjects. She describes her role in its conception, starting with a letter in which she outlined her vision for the school.

I wrote (Shaykh Hassan) a letter. I was saying that, you know, we could start a school, we could have it like a boarding school. And, you know, we could bring kids from America. I said the parents could pay \$200 a month, which would be

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<sup>448</sup> Phone interview with Hajja Ashaki Taha Cisse, 25 April 2015.

for everything, which I thought was reasonable. And that's (indistinct) how we could manage with the kids and so forth. And, you know, they could learn Qur'an and what not, and the history. They could learn about the religion. So Shaykh Hassan agreed that it was a good idea. So I went...actually I was just gonna go over with [my daughter] Amina. But I felt that we should open it up for other kids.<sup>449</sup>

To date, the AAI Qur'an School has provided instruction for more than two hundred Black American Muslim children, along with students from countries throughout West Africa.<sup>450</sup> The school is located in Medina Baye, Koalack in Senegal. It continues to educate a diverse group of students from all over the African Diaspora and throughout the African continent. Sister Kareemah and Brother Jamil donated considerable money to help establish the school, and Sister Kareemah worked to create an environment that would be comfortable for American-born students spending extended time in a developing nation. She recounts,

**S.K.:** Medina is sort of like...Koalack is sub-Sahara. So there's a lot of dust. And...you know, it's a village. It's a sort of...there's wasn't a lot of stuff – put it that way. So I went and I got beds for everybody. I got fans in all the rooms, and painted...I mean it wasn't home, but at least you'd have your own little space.

**R.M.:** And you got the stuff from Senegal?

**S.K.:** Yeah, I had it made. I had it made. I had the beds made. I bought mattresses. So I told the parents, "Get the small trunks. Put their kid's clothes in a trunk, and bed linen, pillows." You know, the things that they would need.<sup>451</sup>

Sister Kareemah relocated to Senegal, initially to care for her own daughter during her time at the school, but ended up serving as the primary caregiver for the first wave of American children who studied there, addressing their general needs. She ensured their hygiene, administered medicine to those who became sick, and, upon returning to New York, raised money from the broader Muslim community to provide

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<sup>449</sup> Interview with Hajja Kareemah Abdul-Kareem, New York, NY. 14 April 2014.

<sup>450</sup> The AAI Qur'an school should not be confused with Shaykh Hassan's NGO of the same name. While both were established by the Shaykh and enjoy strong ties, they operate as distinct entities. For more on the African American Islamic Institute (NGO), see below.

<sup>451</sup> Interview with Hajja Kareemah Abdul-Kareem, New York, NY. 14 April 2014.

financial support for the school, as many of its students came from working class families who found it difficult to pay tuition, no matter how reasonable. Students came not only from the Tijani community, but also from other Black American Muslim communities as well. Some, like her daughter Amina, memorized the entire Qur'an, making a significant contribution to Black American Muslim religious authority.

Sister Kareemah's efforts underscore her long-held commitment to child welfare and increased opportunities for young people. Reflecting on this she admits, "I guess I always...you know I always was an advocate for kids". Before becoming Muslim, she and her husband own and operated Mother Blues, a jazz club located in the Bronx. During the Biafran war in Nigeria, Sister Kareemah planned a fundraiser at Mother Blues to raise money for children affected by the Biafran war. She remembers, "Well, I didn't know who was the good guys and who was the bad guys, because there was a lot of politics—I really didn't know who was who." She donated proceeds from the event went specifically to efforts aimed at addressing the needs of children citing that, "For me, the children were the innocent ones". Shaykh Hassan must have seemed something of a kindred spirit, having displayed a life long commitment to child welfare that earn him recognition from various international organizations including the World Health Organization, the UNICEF, the Senegalese Ministry of Health, and Rotary International. Their collaboration in building the AAll Qur'an school serves as a testament to their shared values.

### **Black Nationalism Begets Black Sufism**

Raised in Harlem and the Bronx, Imam Sayed's early encounters with Islam occurred in his teenage years during the late 1950s, at a time when Black Nationalism was popular in Harlem. Thus, his religious and political sensibilities were closely linked. He recalls, "We'd walk up and down 125<sup>th</sup> Street, which was, you know, like the Mecca of the place. And also, on 125<sup>th</sup> Street is where you could hear the orators, as they used to call them. The street speakers, talking about Africa and stuff like that."<sup>452</sup> He recounts the moment when he became captivated by Harlem's vibrant scene of Black political and cultural expression.

**I.S.:** One day, we came from the Bronx. We was going down to see some movies on 125<sup>th</sup> Street (indistinct). They had a...it was a RKO theatre, a big grand theater on 124<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. And we were going down to see a movie. We came from the Bronx to see this movie – I forgot what the movie was. And walking by...this is funny. This is weird. Walking by...we walked by, at that time, the street speakers! You had the guys on the ladders on 125<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> – both sides of the street – preaching about Black Nationalism. So we're walking by, and I'm listening to this guy talking, and its like, "Yea! This is...this is making sense," you know? So I'm stopped! And I'm listening, and they're telling me, "Come on, man! Come on, come on!" And I told them, (motions hands to signal to his friends they should continue with out him) "Yeah, yeah, Go ahead. Go ahead." So they went on in the movie house, and that's when I got hooked.

**R.M.:** You said they went on and did what?

**I.S.:** My friends, they went on into the movies, into the movie house. But I stood out there and listened to this guy talking about...going back to Africa, Marcus Garvey, Black Nationalism...it really caught a hold of me.<sup>453</sup>

The scene Imam Sayed describes occurred at Harlem's famed Africa Square, where numerous Black street orators, including Malcolm X, spoke to audiences as they passed by. Impressed with the speaker's appraisal of the problems facing Black people, Imam Sayed began to frequent the legendary Harlem corner. He reflects, "The next thing you know, I was, like, a Black Nationalist!"<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Interview with Imam Sayed Abdus-Salaam, Brooklyn, NY. 15 March 2014.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

This poignant moment occurred when Imam Sayed was only about 15 years old and prompted his experimentation with several Black American religious and political groups during the subsequent decades. Ultimately, in Shaykh Hassan, Imam Sayed found a convergence of the various elements that motivated and sustained his engagement with Islam. Shaykh Hassan's status as a representative of the African Islamic tradition spoke to Imam Sayed's pan-African political and cultural sensibilities. Imam Sayed frequently commemorates Shaykh Hassan's great-grandfather, Abdoulaye Niasse, for his anti-colonial jihad against the French. Shaykh Hassan's tendency to focus on a mostly working-class Black American population in his efforts to spread the Tijani tariqa in the US further affirmed Imam Sayed's own sociopolitical orientation. Furthermore, the AAI Qur'an School provided an opportunity for Imam Sayed to expose his family to Islam and African culture in a substantial way, with eight of his children spending their formative years in Medina Baye.

## **Conclusion**

The experiences of these pioneering members of the Tijani Sufi community in New York City speak to some of the community's defining characteristics. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the development of a uniquely American approach to the Tijani order informed by the specific context of Black American Sunni Islam. The resulting interplay between West African and Black American Muslim sensibilities elucidates the aspects of West African Islam that spoke to Black American Muslims' interests and concerns. Black American Muslims' awareness of the Tijani order was facilitated by their Diasporic exchanges with West African Muslims from Ghana and Senegal. The spread of

a decidedly American iteration of Tijani Sufism is especially noteworthy in light of more recent West African immigration to the US, which has led to the increased presence of African Tijani communities in the US as well. However, a comparative analysis of the differences between West African immigrant Tijani communities in the US and their Black American counterparts is beyond the scope of this chapter.

One way of exploring the contours of the Black American Tijani experience is through some of the religious considerations that made the Tijani order attractive to its first American adherents. In analyzing the oral life histories considered throughout this chapter, I attempted to ascertain the order's appeal to my narrators by examining the trajectory that led them to embrace the order after having participated in other New York City based Muslim communities. My exploration revealed several important trends. All three of my narrators sought an expression of Islam that was 1.) compatible with their previously held notions of Sunni Muslim orthodoxy, but that 2.) simultaneously offered the promise of a uniquely fulfilling, supra-rational experience of spiritual catharsis. Some of my narrators found this combination to have been elusive in their experiences with Muslim communities prior to meeting Shaykh Hassan Cisse. Each of my narrators also demonstrated a keen interest in engaging with a mode of Muslim practice that 3.) sought to address issues of social justice, particularly in relation to race, gender, and child welfare.

These concerns manifested themselves through the kinds of contributions my narrators made to the community they helped establish. Moreover, all of my narrators exhibited a deep investment in the project of African and African American unity, supporting the unique mechanism for cross cultural exchange provided by the AAI

Qur'an School. While this chapter has focused on the experiences of pioneering members of the community, it is worth mentioning that the Qur'an school has served as a powerful tool for perpetuating membership in the community across generations. Some of the Black American children who attended the school during the 1980s and 90s have since sent their own children to the school. This has contributed to the order's appeal among Black American Muslim youth, as graduates of the school serve as effective representatives to their peers who value visible Black Muslim leadership. These sociopolitical orientations, largely representative of the broader tradition of Islam among Black Americans during the twentieth century, played a major role in animating Black American Muslims' engagement with the Niassene branch of the Tijani order. Thus, a significant number of Black American Muslims found the Sufi practices and teachings offered by the Tijaniyya to be both affirming and compelling.

## CONCLUSION

For the duration of their time in the Americas, people of African descent have demonstrated a keen interest in the religious and cultural identities of their ancestors. As a result, Black Americans have found various ways to preserve the Diasporic histories that produced their Atlantic World communities. These histories included those of enslaved West African Muslims and the Islamic societies of Africa and the Middle East with which they were familiar. Knowledge of the relationship between Islam and the Black Atlantic World was preserved and popularized by a number of Black institutions. Chief among them were Prince Hall Freemasonry, Marcus Garvey's UNIA, and the Moorish Science Temple. From the beginning of the twentieth century, some Black Americans were inspired by these histories to identify with the Muslim faith. This resulted in the proliferation of Black Muslim religious communities in the urban North in the wake of the Great Migration.

In particular, many of these Black Americans who lived in and around New York City embraced a decidedly orthodox iteration of Islam beginning in the late 1920s. The influential Professor Muhammad Ezzadeen, who had lived and studied in the Muslim World undertook one of the earliest efforts to organize his fellow Black American orthodox Muslims and popularized an alternative moral geography that connected them to Arabic speaking Muslims around the world. Not only were these Black American orthodox Muslims bound by their shared identification with the Muslim faith, but also by a shared set of experiences, desires, and challenges. While they remained critical of certain approaches to Islam that they considered to be heterodox, they nonetheless shared a connection with those Black Americans who embraced a competing vision of Islam as well. This resulted in the emergence of a culture of Black Muslim cosmopolitanism, a

distinct Black American Muslim cultural perspective and intellectual tradition that was characterized by a consciousness that was markedly global. Over the course of the twentieth century, as Black American Muslims encountered and engaged various discourses from around the Muslim World, they processed these new ideas and debates through the lens of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism. For Black American orthodox Muslims, this cosmopolitan orientation was reinforced by exchanges with a diverse community of immigrant Muslims from around the world with whom they collaborated to build religious institutions during the 1930s, 40s and 50s.

A few mosques were established in New York City during this early period, and all of them embodied this cultural ethos. The largest and most visible among them was the Islamic Mission of America, or State Street Mosque, founded by Shaykh Daoud Ahmed Faisal and Mother Khadijah Faisal. As they worked to promote their faith and serve their community, this Black American Muslim husband and wife team created an ethnically diverse Islamic congregation that attracted prominent jazz artists, celebrated African culture, supported African, Arab, and Asian immigrants, and worked to achieve greater institutional recognition for Islam and Muslims in the U.S. Shaykh Daoud's investment in Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism enabled him to cultivate a spirit of cooperation with immigrant Muslims, while simultaneously challenging anti-Black racism. A product of 1920s Harlem, his engagement with Black Internationalism and anticolonialism impact the further development of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism during his tenure as its foremost representative in the city.

The 1960s and 70s were turbulent times for urban Black American communities. Faced with increased poverty, drug trafficking, and aggressive policing of Black and

Latino neighborhoods, Black American orthodox Muslims built new communities that focused on building political economic power in order to better address the needs of the broader community. These efforts were inspired by the rise of the Nation of Islam and informed by the strategies of radical Black and Latino political and cultural organizations. The Dar ul Islam Movement was the most successful in this regard, building a robust political economic infrastructure that was the cornerstone of a national Islamic religious movement. Though not as large, the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood adopted a similar approach and focused on cultivating a strong presence in its local Harlem community.

Despite their impressive successes, both of these communities struggled to navigate new problems that arose from their increased militarization, and the territorialism and isolation associated with their respective regimes of community control. Moreover, cultural trends of hypermasculinity and misogyny, along with youthful religious zeal made life in these communities difficult for some members. The Dar in particular fostered a counterculture that valorized working-class Black and Latino communities as it recruited more and more of its ranks from formerly incarcerated peoples. While this cultural orientation contributed greatly to the Dar's appeal, by the late 1970's it gave way to a denigration of markers of middle classness that alienated many educated and professional Muslims, thus adding to the difficulty of providing viable economic alternatives and employment opportunities for a growing national community whose ranks were drawn mostly from the underclass. Still, the Dar left an indelible mark on the urban religious landscape, as community-minded Muslims became a fixture of inner-city neighborhoods throughout the country. The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood,

on the other hand, focused on building an indigenous Muslim intelligentsia. Though it remained local, its influence was augmented by its impact on the Black Arts Movement and the success of its newspaper *The Western Sunrise*. This community periodical showcased MIB's ideological approach, which simultaneously promoted orthodox Islam and Black Internationalism. The Dar's paper, *Jihadul Akbar*, reflected a vision of orthodox Islam that was largely inspired by the works of reformist scholars from the Muslim world like Maududi and Qutb, albeit interpreted through a distinctly Black American lens.

By the late 1970s, some Black American Muslims were exhibiting greater interest in Sufism and the global networks associated with particular Sufi orders. This contributed to the breakup of the Dar during the early 1980s as a large contingent of its members embraced a Pakistani Sufi Shaykh. Other Black American orthodox Muslims engaged the West African Sufi tradition. The largest and most influential Black American Sufi order to emerge during this period was the Tijani Sufi order. Black American members of New York City congregations including the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood and the Islamic Cultural Center of New York were among the first followers and supporters of the Tijani order's most visible late twentieth century representative, the Senegalese Shaykh Hassan Cisse. However, the order soon spread to other urban centers like Detroit, Atlanta, and Washington D.C. Black American membership in this specific branch of the order based in Medina Baye, Senegal facilitated a partnership between West African and Black American Tijanis that resulted in the creation of a school, the African American Islamic Institute, which gave Black American orthodox Muslim youth from around the country the opportunity to pursue traditional Islamic education, primarily focused on the

memorization of the Qur'an, in Medina Baye. In 1989, Aminah Abdul-Kareem, a Black American youth who studied in Medina Baye, became the first documented American born woman to memorize the entire Qur'an.

Black American Muslims' increased engagement with African expressions of orthodox Islam, like that embodied by the Tijani Sufi order, occurred at precisely the same moment that conservative religious reform movements originating from the Middle East began to grow in popularity in the U.S., primarily on the East Coast. Such reform movements enjoyed the financial backing of Middle Eastern governments and institutions that became increasingly wealthy through oil revenue, as well as a relatively favorable U.S. foreign policy. In this context, Black American Muslims who embraced African expressions of Islam developed new ways to articulate their theological perspectives and sociopolitical orientations in an attempt to provide a compelling alternative. Thus, the emergence of the Black American Tijani community serves as a precursor to present day debates among Black American Muslims over the appropriate direction for their religious and racial communities moving forward into the twenty first century.

The history of Black American orthodox Muslim communities is characterized by a number of continuities. The various congregations I have discussed all engaged global Islamic discourses as they worked to meet the needs of their local community. Self-determination was an ideal that Black American Muslims of all stripes pursued through various means. Some envisioned their embrace of the Muslim faith and their adoption of non-Western cultural norms as their path to liberation. Others attempted to separate from the broader society, building isolated, intentional communities in rural areas where they could practice their religion unfettered. Still others pursued political economic power in

the context of the urban inner-city. Over the course of the twentieth century, as Black American Muslims encountered and engaged various discourses from around the Muslim World, they processed these new ideas and debates through the lens of Black Muslim Cosmopolitanism. For some, this meant emphasizing the perceived universalism of orthodox Islam as a potential antidote to racism in the U.S. For others, it meant reconciling orthodox Islam with the political sentiments of Black Nationalism or Black Internationalism. Some were drawn to the reformist ideologies of 'Islamist' ideologues. Others became part of global Sufi networks. For all of them, Islam served as a kind of passport to a broader world, whether tangibly or intellectually. Working-class Black Muslims remain extraordinary in this regard, finding ways to travel abroad, identifying international educational opportunities or, simply engaging working-class Muslim immigrant in American cities. By virtue of their faith, Black American orthodox Muslims were able to insert themselves into a global order despite the constraints placed upon them as working-class people of color in the urban U.S.

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