ISLAM IN BLACK DETROIT: A CASE STUDY

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on the beliefs and practices of African American Sunni Muslims at The Muslim Center: Mosque and Community Center in Detroit, Michigan. Through a case study, this project positions the cultural practices and the lived experiences of African American Muslims as central components of understanding their religiosity. I argue that the Muslim Center's congregants practice a unique version of Islam that is not Arab-centric, Afrocentric, or African-centered, but rather rooted in the particularities of their collective lived experiences in the United States. This center informs the belief system of this community and serves as a recreational place, a social space, an educational facility, and a political sphere. This research interrogates the intersections of Africana Studies and Islamic Studies and how Black Muslim beliefs and practices have been marginalized in both fields.

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PREFACE

My research explores the practice, features, and elements of Sunni Islam at The Muslim Center: Mosque and Community Center in Detroit, Michigan. A case study of Sunni Islam continues the work of notable scholars of African American Islam (Sherman Jackson, Edward Curtis, Sylvia Chan-Malik, Michael Gomez, Manning Marable, Aminah McCloud, and C. Eric Lincoln). They have written important discourses that center on Black Muslims' lived experiences by noting the centrality of Black identity politics in spiritual edification. In an era when Islam is in the national spotlight, and racial identity has become ever more defined, the need to demonstrate the convergence between sacred and secular identities has become even more critical. By looking at The Muslim Center as a principle, this research uncovers how The Muslim Center adopted, balanced, and transformed notions of African American identity in the religious sphere.

My research is important due to the shift in focus away from traditional discourse that centers Arab Muslims as prima facie representations of Muslims worldwide, often to the neglect of African American Muslims. This research in Detroit is unique because it (1) engages in a critical ethnography that examines the religious practices from the standpoint of its rank-and-file practitioners, (2) incorporates cultural aesthetics as a defining feature of religious practice, and (3) systematically interrogates from whence they derive religious authority. Three primary instruments were utilized to collect data—semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and archival records. I grounded this study in Africana Studies' Cultural Difference Paradigm, which asserts that the culture of Black people (and others) should be

considered in understanding their social conditions, behavior, and thinking (McDougal 2014, 34). In addition, my research engages critical ethnography, which uses qualitative methods to examine the research demographic and requires the researcher to be immersed in the culture to see them through their own eyes (McDougal 2014, 261).

My work seeks to add to the fabric of Africana Studies by highlighting the significance of epistemological knowledge in the Black religious tradition. The self-conscious act of highlighting African Americans' episteme is significant when one seeks to understand individual and collective spiritual practices of people of African descent. My work also highlights how African Americans have used collective knowledge to foster a belief system rooted in mental and physical liberation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 1985, at the intersection of West Davison Street and Woodrow Wilson Boulevard in Detroit, Michigan, The Muslim Center: Mosque and Community Center opened its doors to welcome a host of Muslims who resided in and around the Metro Detroit area. The Muslim Center offered a place to pray and a communal space of recreation, education, and community restoration. One of its earliest initiatives was to engage the community during Black history month by leveraging a cultural tradition of rap music. A Detroit Free Press article dated February 7, 1986, describes that initiative:

> "The Muslim Center is sponsoring a Black History Fact Day quiz competition, a Black Fact "Rap" Contest for junior high and high school students, and a Black History Coloring Contest for elementary school students. The Center is located at 1605 West Davison."

The Muslim Center sought to center African Americans' lives and legacies and rooted their outreach in an African American tradition from its inception. Since rap was becoming mainstream, this newspaper ad demonstrates that they were cutting edge of using culturally relevant programming as a powerful recruitment tool, inviting members of the community to become a member of this sacred space. This event signaled to Detroiters that The Muslim Center would be a welcoming space that welcomed Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Some Detroiters who came to attend this mosque were once members of the Nation of Islam, accepting a more traditional form of Islam under the leadership of Wallace Muhammad, son of the honorable Elijah Muhammad. After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, Wallace refuted the mythologies created under Elijah Muhammad, including the belief that God became

personified in the person of Wallace Fard (founder of the NOI), disputed his father's contention that he (Elijah Muhammad) was a messenger, and reorganized NOI adherents under the banner of Sunni Islam. In just ten years after the passing of Elijah Muhammad, his son Wallace had successfully guided Muslims to a new form of liberation, one that not only catered to the needs of African American Muslims but one that catered to *all* Muslims.

The NOI had been one of the leading Civil Rights/Black Power movements from the 1930s through the mid-1970s. Founded in the Black Bottom neighborhood in Detroit in 1930 by silk peddler and self-proclaimed Meccan descendent Wallace Fard, they boasted hundreds of followers by 1934; however, the Nation had yet to receive widespread acclaim and recognition until decades later. Thrust into the national spotlight with the television documentary entitled, "The Hate that Hate Produced" (1959), produced by two journalists Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax for News Beat, the Nation of Islam was able to capture the hearts and minds of countless African Americans. Although the documentary was seemingly objective (at least for the time it was produced), Wallace referred to the NOI as preaching a gospel of hate, thereby characterizing them as a Black Nationalist hate group. However, within weeks of the broadcast, and despite Wallace's assertions, NOI membership doubled.[1] At its peak during the 1960s, the NOI boasted some 100,000 members and expanded its religious enterprise to include business ventures, including owning stores, restaurants, and various real estate ventures, including buying, selling, and renting houses. By steeping their socio-political philosophy of racial uplift in African American religiosity's rhetoric, the NOI introduced many

[1] Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 197.

African Americans to Islam and provided the basis upon which the African American could turn for social and economic redemption.

The legacy of Islam in Black Detroit signaled the widespread acceptance of Islam among its African American residents and showcased African Americans' ability to craft their vision of Islam that could adequately respond to the nuances of African Americans' lives during that time in Detroit. As such, African Muslims in Detroit occupy a historic space with unique connections to the African American Muslim tradition that is premised on their ability to address the community's social and secular needs by encouraging its practitioners to maintain their secular identities. The Muslim Center follows in that tradition by providing a space of religious worship, social activism, and community uplift.

The 1980s was a period of social and economic turmoil for its African American Detroiters. Factory work, which had once pulled millions of southerners to Northern cities, began closing factories and laying off tens of thousands of workers. In *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996), Thomas Sugrue argues that between 1948-1967, 130,000 manufacturing jobs were lost, and this trend continued over the next few decades.[2] By the 1970s, nearly one in five African-American Detroiters were unemployed; by the 1980s, that figure was one in four.[3] Joblessness led to a pattern of poverty that drove many of the city's inhabitants to turn to an informal economy and engaging in illegal activities, such as committing robberies and selling the new illicit drug, crack cocaine. Disputes over territory led to an upsurge in violent crimes, especially murder, so much so that by the mid-1980s,

[2] Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 143.
[3] Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 262.

Detroit had the highest murder rate of any American metropolis.[4] Exacerbating this tumultuous period was Ronald Reagan's War on Drugs campaign that ensnared guilty and innocent people alike. The ensuing violence and the rates of incarceration worsened Detroit's African-American population's lives and led to a mass exodus of the city's population.

Families who could afford to flee left Detroit, heading for neighboring cities such as Warren, Oak Park, and Southfield. However, many were forced to cope with the city's poor and dangerous conditions. As a result, many turned to religion to cope with their living conditions. During this period, the Muslim Center opened its doors and sought to uplift the community they became a part of. Economically, the Muslim Center sought to grant a reprieve to their new neighbors by providing food and collecting money to distribute to those in need. They also provided a safe space away from the turmoil and offered help to those looking for work by collaborating with nearby mosques and churches. Today, the focus of the Muslim Center has remained relatively unchanged, and it provides community members with a safe haven to engage in practices geared towards the betterment of Detroit.

The Muslim Center boasts many programs that cater to the community's sacred and secular needs. This 5000 square-foot facility features a large prayer hall, a gymnasium, a multipurpose kitchen, several classrooms, and a halal jazz cafe. In addition, The Muslim Center provides services such as a clothing share, a soup kitchen, family counseling, job training, substance abuse programs, and a basketball team for the neighborhood youth while collaborating with other mosques and churches to meet community needs. The Muslim Center

[4] Scott Martelle, *Detroit: A Biography*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 231.

and its congregants, an integral part of the Black community for over three decades, is the site and subject of this inquiry.

The Muslim Center offers a unique opportunity to study a particular African American Muslim community's beliefs and practices in Detroit. In what follows, Muslims of this community are highlighted to present a nuanced understanding of how African Americans believe and practice Islam. To conduct this research, I used interviews, newspaper articles, observations, and fieldnotes to tell the story of this community while situating their experiences within the larger context of African-American Muslim practices. While these Muslims are part of a larger imagined community of believers, they occupy a unique niche in Islamic Detroit's legacy that has remained underexplored. In what follows, I argue that Islam's practices are rooted in African American Detroiters' particularisms and, unlike other Muslim practitioners, evolve to meet the needs of its adherents and the community at large.

In the following project, I present four main arguments. First, I argue that the Ahmadiyya Movement was integral in forming an Islamic consciousness among African Americans during the early twentieth century. Second, while African Americans Muslims views on Islamic jurisprudence (legal rulings) is premised on their acceptance of sacred texts (Quran and hadith) and reason (the scholarly consensus and reason), I argue that the emphasis placed on each source of sacred knowledge differs from adherent to adherent creating a unique understanding of Islam. The goal here is not simply to delineate African American Muslim beliefs from those of the larger Islamic community, but also to highlight *why* those beliefs and practices vary among its devotees. Third, I argue that Muslim women are not passive followers of the faith, but instead that they are leaders in this community. Finally, I argue that this

community situates its African and African-American cultural and diasporic traditions alongside its belief system, making it look wholly unique from its Muslim counterparts.

This work also challenges scholars' Arab-centric tendencies and those of the larger Islamic community who view immigrant Islam as legitimate and African American Islam as illegitimate or inauthentic. According to a Pew Research Poll article in January of 2019, African Americans account for one-fifth, or about twenty percent, of the Muslim population in the United States. However, the discourse surrounding what American Muslims want and believe typically centers on the narratives of those who are not African American. For example, Dr. Ihsan Bagby, an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Kentucky, conducted a survey of 12 mosques in the Detroit Metropolitan area in a 2004 study entitled "A Portrait of Detroit Mosques: Muslim Views on Policy and Religion." In this study, he asked about the importance of the Quran (sacred text in Islam) and the Sunnah (sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) to the participants' religious experience. He concluded that "virtually all mosque participants accept the sacred texts of Islam as obligatory and as the word of God."[5] His assessment highlights several problems that underline how the lived realities of African American Muslims can be obfuscated when their narratives are not centered. The first problem of his study states that two-thirds of the participants were immigrants, so it does not adequately reflect African-Americans' understanding of the Quran and Sunnah. A second problem presents itself when he put the Quran and Sunnah together, assuming that all Muslims hold both in the highest regard when some African American Muslims (and others for that

[5] Ihsan Bagby, "A Portrait of Detroit Mosques: Muslim Views on Policy and Religion," Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (August 31, 2004), 35. https://www.ispu.org/the-detroit-mosque-study-muslim-views-on-policy-and-religion/

matter) do not use hadith to inform their practices. This is problematic because it presents a unitary view of African American Muslims based on immigrant Muslims' experiences.

Another problematic feature of Bagby's study is the hasty generalizations that do not reflect African American realities. For example, he states that "the average participant is 34 years old, married with children, has a bachelor's degree and makes $75,000 per year." [6] This is not the case for many African-American Muslims, especially those at the Muslim Center in Detroit. This generalization assumes that the Muslims in the Metro Detroit area are financially stable when economic insecurity plays a significant role in shaping religious practice. However, many scholars such as Sherman Jackson, Ula Taylor, Bayyinah Jeffries, Edward Curtis, and countless others have produced works centered on African American Muslims' experiences. This work falls in the tradition of those scholars with the delineation of providing a case study to highlight one specific community.

Sherman Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (2011) centers on African American Muslims' experiences in America by examining them through three epochs that he refers to as "resurrections." The first resurrection refers to the introduction of Islam by the NOI and lasting through Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, the second to the period immediately following Muhammad's death when Imam W.D. Muhammad and Minister Louis Farrakhan battled over scriptural interpretation. The third resurrection refers to the current period in which mastery and appropriation of the Sunni tradition are critical to Islam's continued success in Black America.[7] Ula Taylor's *The Promise of Patriarchy:*

[6] Bagby, "A Portrait of Detroit Mosques: Muslim Views on Policy and Religion", 11.
[7] Sherman A Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5-6.

Women and the Nation of Islam (2017) and Bayyinah Jeffries' *A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self-Determination, 1950–1975* (2014) centers the experiences of African American Muslim women who were members of the NOI.[8] The former argues that while the NOI was pivotal in protecting its women, it was patriarchal in structure, while the latter argued that the NOI was, in fact, liberatory. Finally, Edward Curtis' *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora* (2014) centered on African American experiences by exploring how Islam has been practiced in the African diaspora.[9]

Research Questions

Several questions guided this research. The first question sought to understand how the legacy of Islam in Detroit informs their current practices. I uncover how social justice, race, and class ideas have converged to inform this existing community's current beliefs and practices. Additionally, I highlight how the history of Islamic acceptance among African Americans has resulted in the perception among some immigrants that African-American Muslims practice a version of Islam that deviates from traditional teachings. On the other hand, where religious pluralism in the United States has been accepted, inquiries into Islamic beliefs and practices has often been made by grouping all Muslim populations and presenting them as a monolithic community without delving into the nuances of particular community's nuances, often leading to the unwarranted assumption that all Muslims believe and practice in the same way. The

[8] Ula Y. Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Bayyinah Jeffries, *A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self-Determination, 1950-1975*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).
[9] Edward E. Curtis, *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 2014).

goal here is to show that although these congregants at the Muslim Center stand as one unified ummah (community), several historical links, associations, and traditions make each community member and, consequently, this community unique unlike any other. In what follows, I capture the uniqueness of this community while situating it with Detroit's larger historical narrative and the African American Sunni tradition.

The second research question provides a window into understanding African-American Muslim belief systems. On a basic level, I uncover how they perceive the universality of Islamic beliefs by asking: Is there one version is Islam that is more authentic than another? Are the laws of Islam malleable depend on the social context, or does it remain fixed wherever it is? What must its practitioners adhere to in order to remain in the fold of Islam? Uncovering individuals' answers to these questions situate their narrative within the more extensive historiography of African-American Islam. Also, uncovering these answers required me to discover where they derive their religious authority. How one understands religious authority directly relates to how one's belief system. While Muslims often agree upon the four primary sources of Islamic knowledge (Qur'an, hadith, the scholarly community, and reason), what differs is the significance of each according to each practitioner.

Interestingly, while it is almost unanimously agreed upon that the Quran ranks first in the jurisprudential hierarchy, what comes next is contested. Some of the Muslim Center congregants have stated that they only read Quran and do not follow any hadith. In contrast, others have noted that the Quran and reason go hand-and-hand and that everything else is secondary. Still, others contended that they rely on the scholarly community to interpret both.

Not only will this seek to explain how Muslims rank their religious authority, but it also explains how African American Muslims weigh the validity of jurisprudential rulings.

The third research question that guided this research asked: What is women's status in this community? The term "status" may be problematic to some scholars, such as Kecia Ali, who argues:

> "Muslim women are so diverse in terms of class, geography, ethnicity, age, marital history, and education that generalizations about our "status" are meaningless. Even if one limits the application of the term to the realm of ideals rather than women's lived experience, the presupposition of an idealized and uniform tradition dramatically oversimplifies a complex and heterogeneous intellectual and textual legacy that spans nearly a millennium and a half."[10]

Ali's assessment is warranted. However, the goal here is to highlight the experiences of African American Sunni women in this community. The following inquiry is designed to challenge preconceived notions of Muslim women's subservience and highlight their leadership role in the community and the domestic sphere. Giving voice to African American Sunni women serves to wrest control of the scholarship away from the male perspective and place women's experiences at the forefront.

The last research question examines how African and African American cultural practices have become manifest in this community and can be understood as diasporic traditions. In *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture* (2009), Patrick Manning argues

[10] Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, (London, England: Oneworld, 2013), xii.

that there are four cultural unifiers in the African diaspora: expressive culture, material culture, reflective culture, and societal culture, where expressive culture "includes visual art, music, literature, and other interpretations of feelings," material culture includes "dress, architecture, tools, and cuisine," reflective culture has "philosophy, knowledge, and belief," and societal culture includes "creation and modeling of family patterns, political culture, and rituals."[11] For this study, I examine how cultural unifiers are sustained and integrated into their religious experience.

To examine this phenomenon, I engage aspects of musicality and methods of dress to uncover the diasporic connections that link this community to other members of the African diaspora. By the African diaspora, I mean the "complex social and cultural communities created out of real and imagined genealogies and geographies (cultural, racial, ethnic, national, continental, transnational) of belonging, displacement, and recreation."[12] Understanding this community's formulation involves understanding why its regular attendees chose to become members of this community when several other mosques are nearby. For example, four miles away is Masjid al-Fallah, which has many Bengali Muslims. About five miles away is another mosque, Masjid Muath ibn Jebal, which has a large population of people of Yemeni descent, and just over a mile away is Masjid Wali Muhammad, which is almost entirely African American. Although there is a predominantly African American population at the Muslim Center, many other people account for its regular attendees. Accordingly, approximately 95% of the regular

[11] Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 21.
[12] Paul Zeleza, "The Challenges of Studying the African Diasporas" in *African Sociological Review*, 12, no. 2 (2008): 7.

attendees are African American, another 2% are from the African continent, while 3% are Yemeni or white Americans.

Research Significance and Literature Review

Writings that center the history of Islam in Detroit as practiced by African Americans gained a foothold with the publication "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit" (1938) by Erdmann D. Beynon and appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*.[13] This thirteen-page article sought, derogatorily, to explain Islam through the Nation of Islam's lens during the 1930s. This article provided the backdrop for future writings by being the first substantial piece published in any major American journal about "Black" Muslims. However, this article framed Black Muslims as being heretical and cult-like. Twenty-three years later, the first widespread publication to reach the masses was C. Eric Lincoln's *Black Muslims in America*, published in 1961. This publication was the beginning of what would become the rigorous production of examining Islam in an African-American context.[14]

Since Lincoln's publication, the body of work on Islam in African America has exploded. There are currently no fewer than one hundred monographs published on Islam in an African American context. However, many of these book-length works' primary focus is Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, and Louis Farrakhan. Few case studies exist on Sunni Muslims, and currently, no case studies on African-American Sunni Muslims in Detroit. This study fills the gap in existing scholarship by taking a micro approach to understanding Islam as practiced by African Americans by using a case study to highlight those practices. This work

[13] Erdmann Beynon, "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit", *American Journal of Sociology*, 43, no. 6, (1938), 894–907.
[14] C Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

contributes to the field of African American studies field by centering on marginalized voices, which is seldom occurs in the scholarship of Islam unless written by African-American authors. Similarly, this contributes to Islamic studies by highlighting this community's specific practices, which runs counter to most works that focus on the macro practices of African American Muslims.

This research highlights religious practices from its practitioners' standpoint by using interviews to center their narratives and provides a micro-history of African American Sunni Muslims in Detroit. Existing works either take a macro approach to understand Islam in America to neglect specific communities' practices, while others take a micro approach to communities but neglect African American voices. For example, Garbi Schmidt's *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (2004) centers on answering whether Islam is considered an "American" religion and if Muslims can be regarded as a unified community considering that they are comprised of more than sixty ethnic groups. Although Schmidt presents a micro-study that examines Muslims in one "urban" space in America, he surprisingly does not include African American Muslim voices. Instead, he focuses on immigrant Muslims, noting that his primary reason "for centering on the Muslim immigrant community is that it still behaves very much as a separate (yet diverse) community."[15]

Other works that examine Islam in the African American community through a micro lens are Michael Nash's *Islam Among Urban Blacks. Muslims in Newark, New Jersey: A Social History* (2008), Michael A. Gomez's "Africans, Culture, and Islam in the Lowcountry" (2011),

[15] Garbi Schmidt*, Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 10.

which examines Black Muslims in Georgia, Patrick D. Bowen's "The Search for 'Islam': African-American Islamic Groups in NYC, 1904-1954" (2012), and Christine Kolars' "Masjid ul-Mutkabir: The Portrait of an African American Orthodox Muslim Community" which appeared in *Muslim Communities in North America* (1994) and briefly highlighted a small community of Muslims in Poughkeepsie, New York. Other articles in this volume discuss Muslims in specific locales such as Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, New York, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Rochester, but none in Detroit. Victoria Lee's "The Mosque and Black Islam: Towards an Ethnographic Study of Islam in the Inner City" identifies "ongoing social, political, and economic problems faced by the black community in the inner city and to illuminate how religion in general and Islam, in particular, succeed or fail in creating community solidarity, stimulating community mobilization, and serving as a driving force for social change."[16] Here, Lee assesses the broad implications for Islam as a vehicle of social uplift. Lastly, Mohebbi, Linders, and Chifos article entitled "Community Immersion, Trust-Building, and Recruitment among Hard to Reach Populations: A Case Study of Muslim Women in Detroit Metro Area" (2018) discusses the best way to conduct qualitative research when studying Muslim Women in Detroit. While all of these works center on African American Islamic communities, none of these works present a comprehensive case study for examining African American Sunni Muslim beliefs and practices in Detroit.

In *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (2005), Michael Gomez discusses Muslims' presence in America from slavery until the present day and shows that the Muslim identities were not entirely obliterated by slavery. He examines

[16] Victoria J Lee, "The Mosque and Black Islam: Towards an Ethnographic Study of Islam in the Inner City" in *Ethnography* 11, no. 1 (2010): 145.

Muslims in the Caribbean and Brazil in the first half of this work. He dedicates the second half of his book to the development of Islam, particularly in North America, with an emphasis on how "communities transitioned from variation to orthodoxy and the adoption of the faith's five pillars."[17] While Gomez's work is a significant contribution to the historiography of Islam in the African diaspora, his narrative does not include the voices of actual practitioners, nor does he highlight any specific Sunni Muslims in any African American communities. Instead, Gomez's work provides a solid, yet broad overview of all African American Islamic traditions.

This case study creates a space for understanding the beliefs and practices of African American Muslims in Detroit. While many works have been produced demonstrating African American Muslims practice a unique brand of Islam, few have systematically approached the reason as to *why* they practice this unique brand of Islam, which ultimately sheds light on how they view Islamic legal rulings. For example, In *African American Islam* (1995), Aminah McCloud argues that what differentiates African American Muslims from other groups is their focus on asabiya (kinship) relationships rather than ummah (the community of Muslim believers at large). Ummah is more general and seeks to link all Muslims regardless of ethnic or cultural boundaries. McCloud states:

> "In contemporary Islamic discourse, this idea of ummah has been cast as something that is basically opposed to asabiya, such that a person or community must decide whether to make it priority the formation of 'asabiya or the experience of ummah. Understanding the tension between these two key

[17] Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ix.

> concepts is crucial to understanding the nature and development of African American Islam in this century. African American Islamic communities can be understood and differentiated largely by whether they grant priority to nation-building, on the one hand, or to experience of the ummah and participation in the world of Islamic community, on the other."[18]

Here, McCloud attempted to undertake a systematic study by examining the cause of the difference in African American Muslim practices. Although McCloud provided one helpful way to understand those differences, it only captured one aspect of African American religious experience.

Similarly, Sherman Jackson highlights the unique practices of Black Sunni Muslims in *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (2005). He argues that "the challenge… for Blackamerican Muslims has become how to negotiate a dignified, black, American existence without flouting the legitimate aspects of the agenda of Black Religion or vesting the latter with too much authority, and without falling victim to the ideological claims, prejudices, and false obsessions of Immigrant Islam."[19] Here, Jackson suggests that Black American Muslims are moving toward legitimization by gaining a mastery of the Sunni tradition and using that tradition to self-authenticate their own beliefs and practices. While this is true for some Muslims, many have never felt the need to "master" the Sunni tradition because they do not think it applies to their unique circumstances as African American Muslims. My intervention here is to examine how some consider Islam's essential elements to determine

[18] Aminah McCloud, *African American Islam*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4-5.
[19] Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5-6.

how they derive and rank their religious authority. For example, people who have adopted a "scripture only" approach to understanding the religion are generally more liberal in their approach to Islam.

This research also adds to the growing number of scholarships produced on African American Muslim women. Although much of the past scholarship has centered on the lives and legacies of Black Muslim men, a growing body of work is currently developing that focuses on the lived experiences of African American women. Although this growth signals a change in academicians' focus, there is still a considerable gap in the type of scholarship produced about African American Muslim women. Most books that center on Black Muslim women tend to focus on current or former NOI members. For example, three of the most widespread publications about the lives of African American Muslim women are *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (2017) by Ula Taylor, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (2014) by Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim, and *A Nation Can Rise No Higher Than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self-Determination, 1950–1975* (2014) by Bayyinah Jeffries. Of those three, only *Women of the Nation* addresses African American Sunni Muslim women's lives and experiences.

Gibson and Karim's work adds a unique dimension to Black Muslim women's study by studying Sunni women alongside women in the Nation of Islam. Not only does she interview many women about their experiences, but they also become the narrative's driving force. However, Gibson and Karim's work did not focus on all Sunni women. Instead, it focused on "the voices of ex-Nation women who… have left the NOI for Sunni Islam but describe the

Nation as an organization that bettered their lives."[20] Their goal was not to highlight all Sunni Muslim women and their experiences as Muslims but to examine only those Sunni women who were once a part of the NOI. Accordingly, they state that their book "explores how women have understood, experienced, and contributed to the Nation of Islam throughout its eighty-year history. It illuminates how women have interpreted and navigated the NOI's gender ideologies and practices considering their multilayered identities as women of ethnic minorities in America."[21] My intervention centers on African American Sunni women in Detroit, regardless of the previous affiliation with the Nation of Islam.

Works that focus on African American Sunni women are scarce. Jamillah Karim's 2009 book, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah* is primarily concerned with the relationship between African American Muslims and South Asian Muslim immigrants in Chicago and Atlanta, showing how the larger Islamic community creates a space for developing solidarity between these two groups by examining their shared struggle to overcome race, class, and gender inequality. Aminah McCloud's "African-American Muslim Women" (1991) explores an Islamic community in Philadelphia, but it primarily focuses on how Sunni women converted to Islam. Finally, Carolyn Rouse's *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam* (2004) offers an ethnographic study of Sunni women in Los Angeles. Rouse's primary concern is to explore issues of agency by exploring three avenues: (1) Quranic exegesis (interpretation), which requires knowledge of the Quran, Islamic history, Islamic jurisprudence, and Arabic, (2) adherence to the five pillars, (3) and personal growth

[20] Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah A. Karim, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*, (New York : NYU Press, 2014), 1.
[21] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam*, 1-2.

through increased self-awareness.[22] What separates my work from the works mentioned above is that it provides an ethnographic study of Sunni women in Detroit and highlights their leadership roles in the home and this community.

This study presents the Muslim Center and its practitioners as a community that maintains diasporic traditions and merges them with their sacred practices. I center the narratives of African Americans of different backgrounds and how their cultural heritage manifests in this community. As Edward Curtis notes in *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora,* "there is no one, single, definitive pattern of Islamic practice in the African diaspora beyond acknowledgment, sometimes more theoretical than practical, of what are called the five pillars of Islam" and understanding the maintenance of these traditions helps to illuminate the importance of maintaining cultural affinities.[23]

Although many studies have linked Islam to the African diaspora by examining music, most studies have examined how hip-hop has been incorporated into Islam (or how Islam has been incorporated into hip-hop). For example, H. Samy Alim, "Reinventing Islam with Unique Modern Tones" Muslim Hip Hop Artists as Verbal Mujahidin" (2006), Sara Hakeem Grewal, "Intra-and Interlingual Translation in Blackamerican Muslim Hip Hop" (2013), and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States* (2016) center the musical experiences of Black Muslims around hip-hop. While hip-hop is an African American invention, and these works are important because they show the African American musical

[22] Carolyn Rouse, *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.
[23] Edward E. Curtis, *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*, (Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 10.

tradition remains vibrant in Muslim communities, they do not discuss one of the earliest forms of African American musicality, jazz. My intervention, therefore, highlights the importance of jazz to the Muslim Center. Jazz represents the nexus of African and African American musical traditions in religious spaces. In addition, the improvisation that occurs in jazz music is symbolic of the improvisation that occurs in the historical traditions of African Americans.

Several other works center on hip-hop (Aidi, 2004 and 2014; Floyd-Thomas, 2003; Khabeer, 2007; McMurray, 2007; Sobral, 2012), few focus on the blues musical tradition (Curiel 2004; Shibli 2007), but only one has highlighted the connection between jazz and Islam. Christopher Chase's "Prophetics in the Key of Allah: Towards an Understanding of Islam in Jazz" (2010) shows how Islam shapes jazz discourses by examining the impact that Islam had on these jazz performers (158). His focus is on the performers and how they used Islam as an alternative approach to jazz music. This study, however, centers on the role that jazz plays in this Muslim community and how it connects members to a diasporic tradition of music. This chapter also demonstrates how Muslim community members maintain cultural affinities to African American and African traditions. I show how Air Jordan sneakers and Muslim headwraps have subtle, yet powerful linkages to African and African American diasporic traditions. The role that cultural aesthetics play in shaping religious spaces has not been examined in African American communities.

Methodology

This research is an essential component of situating this community's practices into the African American religious continuum while using its practitioners' voices to drive the narrative. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes

that the power of historical production "deals with the many ways in which the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."[24] Although Trouillot is referencing how historical knowledge production has been affected in the past, this unequal access to production power ultimately lends itself to unequal representation in much of the scholarship being produced today. According to Trouillot, those who can shape narratives by controlling production reinforce existing power structures, and ultimately, leave gaps in the literature. Scholars focusing on immigrant Muslim and immigrant communities are unwitting participants in producing skewed studies and silencing African-American voices. This study serves as a corrective to those narratives by placing the power of historical production in the hands of those who have been typically marginalized, African American Muslims.

As my concern is the restore the narrative voice to Muslims who attend The Muslim Center, it was necessary to engage in a critical ethnography. In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2012), D. Soyini Madison notes that the *critical* in critical ethnography refers to the ability of the ethnographer to "use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible - to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach."[25] As such, this ethnography includes semi-structured interviews to disrupt the power dynamic that has pervaded African American Islam in academic discourse. Instead of providing

[24] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), xxiii.
[25] D. S. Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2012), 6.

a broad overview of African American Muslims' beliefs, I offer community members a platform to speak about their lived realities.

This project is framed from the position of participant-observer. As a participant-observer, I participated in the Muslim Center's various activities while also occupying the role of observer. As a native Detroiter and a Muslim for over twenty years, my positionality allowed me to engage in religious functions and engage this space as a relative insider. This positionality gave me a deeper understanding of the place they reside, the people with whom they interact, and their community's social and economic dynamics. My goal was to highlight this community's practices, whether they be conceived of as good or bad, Islamic or un-Islamic, and place them within the context of African American Muslim practices. In addition to participant observation, I relied on interviews, conversations with congregants, and fieldnotes to drive the narrative.

Gaining entry into the Muslim Center was a difficult task. As a native Detroiter who grew up about a mile away from the Muslim Center, a practicing Muslim, and an African American, I assumed that my background would instantly allow me to access its congregants. Although I was greeted with open arms by nearly all congregants, presenting myself as a researcher seemed to alienate me from certain congregants who viewed me with an air of skepticism. Further, I asked Muslims to participate in a recorded interview, which further gave some congregants pause. The hesitation was understandable, given that I asked them to reveal details about themselves and their relationship with Allah and their fellow congregants. Although I wanted to acquire as much information as possible, I also remained mindful and

respected of those who did not wish to go on record. However, after spending several months at the center, I was able to gain access by serving as a volunteer in the soup kitchen.

Initially, I began attending a Muslim Center in February of 2019. I started observing the congregants of the community for a month or two before revealing that I wanted to research this community. I first spoke to the person who handles the day-to-day operations. From there, he introduced me to the soup kitchen staff and told them that I would begin volunteering there. I endeared myself to a handful of the Muslim Center's congregants from that initial introduction. In this volunteer position, I helped provide meals to people in need in the community and drove for the Meals on Wheels program. I also met members who volunteered for the soup kitchen periodically. From there, I became a relative insider, and community members began sharing their experiences and thoughts about Islam with me. However, the hesitancy remained about agreeing to a recorded interview.

I spent approximately eight months at the Muslim Center observing and talking to different congregants. During that time, I conducted seven interviews and had countless discussions with many community members. The interviews that I conducted ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the participants' responses. I interview participants at different locations - five of the interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, and two of the interviews were conducted at the Muslim Center. The number of interviews reveals both the reluctance of some individuals to go on record and the onset of Covid-19, which severely hampered by research progress. However, given the rich information and personal narratives shared by those I interviewed and formed relationships with, I constructed a narrative based on that data.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is composed of four chapters. Chapter one briefly sketches the contours for understanding Islam's development in Detroit and its acceptance among African Americans. I show how the Ahmadiyya's presence and focus on recruiting African-American people laid the foundations for massive acceptance of Islam. Rooting their philosophy of Islam in Black Nationalism, they capitalized on race relations in the United States and converted many African Americans to Islam. In addition, the Ahmadiyya also provided the first English translation of the Quran to the Nation of Islam, the very Quran that they used from their inception. As such, the Nation of Islam built upon the foundations of the Ahmadiyya movement by developing a sociopolitical philosophy rooted in religious mystique, offered a way for tens of thousands of African Americans to contend with the racism, and provided financial and institutional stability to its adherents. However, in 1975 the shift from racial separatism as the Nation of Islam's ideological bedrock changed when its leader converted NOI members to a more classical version of Islam, a transition that gave rise to The Muslim Center a decade later.

Chapter two seeks to uncover how members of this community rank religious authority. I examine whether community members believe that an “authentic” version of Islam exists or if Islam's laws change depending upon the believers' social context. This is foundational to determining this community’s views and their understanding of obligatory Islamic practices. In addition, I establish that there are a diverse set of beliefs among African American Muslims. Using the four key components of Islamic authority (Quran, hadith, the scholarly community, and reason), I uncover how African Americans rank those four sources of knowledge, and

ultimately, how they shape their views of Islam. Determining how each source is weighed against the others provides a window into how African American Muslims practice their faith.

Chapter three examine women's role in this community. I show that African American Muslim women have contributed to the various programming at the Muslim Center and in the community. I disrupt popular narratives of African American Muslim women as an oppressed group by highlighting the leadership roles they occupy within their homes and the Muslim Center. These women embrace empowerment, believe in equity between men and women, and are active agents in determining the trajectory of their own lives.

Chapter four argues that the practices of Muslim Center congregants link these community members to larger African and African American diasporic traditions. These cultural practices contribute to this community's richness by incorporating the African American musical tradition of jazz, wearing headwraps that connect them to practices on the African continent, and by drawing from African American youth cultural aesthetics of Jordan sneakers. Music has been pivotal in the lives of African Americans. From the negro spiritual “Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd” sang on plantations to help slaves escape to freedom, to Sam Cooke’s A Change Is Gonna Come (1965) that provided the soundtrack of the Civil Rights Movement, to James Brown’s “Say it Loud: I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968) which captured the essence of the Black Power era, music has provided the backdrop for the African American odyssey. This chapter traces that oddesey in Detroit while situating alongside other African American cultural traditions.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN DETROIT

This chapter assesses the broad historical contours for understanding African Americans' socioeconomic trajectory in Detroit from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. It examines the rise of the automobile industry in Detroit. It explores how the city's racialized practices had far-reaching consequences on urban Detroit's social, economic, and demographic layout. Detroit's social and political stratification resulted in residential discrimination and laid the groundwork for the quest for freedom and equality rooted in religious salvation. As Christianity failed to address the socioeconomic status of Black Detroiters, many answered the call to Islam. In *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*, Sally Howell notes that "in the early twentieth century, many blacks, who were outsiders already due to racist laws and customs, embraced Islam and syncretic movements like the NOI because these identifications offered them a firm step away from the religious mainstream rather than toward it."[26]

Islam became a means to cope with societal ills while also allowing them to spiritually and materially uplift themselves and their families. As such, this chapter examines the rise of Islam in Detroit as it relates to their lived experiences. While several scholars (Abdullah 2010; Berg 2009; Curtis 2014; Marable 2009; Jackson 2009) explore the Moorish American Science Temple as the necessary precursor for understanding the birth and acceptance of Islam in Detroit, I argue the Ahmadiyya Movement, which gained prominence in Punjab, India under

[26] Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 2014), 12.

founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, had the most enduring impact on shaping the religious identity of African Americans. The Ahmadiyya movement, recruited primarily African Americans, would also become targets of recruitment by the Nation of Islam. The influx of African Americans migrating North to urban communities such as Detroit during the early twentieth century provided the Ahmadis with a base to spread their religious philosophies while also providing answers and solutions to the social issues facing Black America. Black Detroiters' social and economic disposition and their engagement with Islam created a century-long dialogue that forged the path to creating an alternative religious philosophy. Their understanding of Islam was inextricably linked to their salvation physical and spiritual has manifested itself in the continuing tradition of following Islam rooted in their lived experiences. Islam became a vehicle by which African Americans understood their social plight and offered them a way to deal with it. We can see the experiences of race, class, and religious identity at the Muslim Center. The Muslim Center is a Moscone Community Center dad not only caters to the community's needs and helps with their religious identity. From its inception, the goal was to create a structure that could cater to African American people's needs.

* * *

In 1903, Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company (FMC) in Detroit, Michigan. Along with other pioneers such as the Dodge Brothers, James Ward Packard (Packard Motor Car Company, and Walter Chrysler, Ford would establish Detroit as the world's automotive capital during the early twentieth century. Ford quickly transformed the Ford Motor Company into a thriving enterprise that increased rapidly in profits. They recorded a profit of $36,957 (roughly 1.1 million dollars in 2020) from July to September in 1903. By the following year, their

earnings had risen to $246,000 (approximately 7.1 million dollars in 2020).[27] Profit margins continued to increase over the next few years, and by the 1910s, the FMC needed a labor force that could sustain its growth and production. Ford found a willing labor force with newly arrived European immigrants and African Americans who migrated north searching for employment in these northern industries. However, his company would not hire African Americans in the same numbers and for the same positions immigrants would eventually occupy. It was not until the 1920s that Ford began employing a significant number of African American workers. Before then, immigrants and whites worked the assembly, while African Americans occupied jobs as general laborers, excluding them from working on the assembly lines. The numbers reflect hiring practices at FMC; immigrants comprised roughly three-fourths of Ford's labor force by 1916, while the FMC employed only 50 Blacks at the same time.[28]

However, the perception that Ford was hiring African Americans for and paying them $5 a day, equal to their white counterparts, was the narrative that became grossly exaggerated as it made its way south. That exaggeration furthered the desire of African Americans to migrate North. Writing in 1920, Emmett J. Scott, private secretary to Booker T. Washington, secretary-treasurer Howard University and co-founder of the National Negro Business League, noted:

> "The questions of wages and privileges were grossly featured. Some men, on being questioned, supposed that it was possible for every common laborer to receive from $4 to $10 a day, and that $50 a week was not an unusual wage. The strength

[27] Ford Bryan, "The Birth of the Ford Motor Company" in the *Dearborn Historian Newsletter* (2003).
[28] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the rise of the UAW*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 6.

> of this belief has been remarked by several social agencies in the North which attempted to supply the immigrants with work. The actual wages paid, though much in excess of those they had been receiving, were often disappointing. Similarly in the matter of privilege and "rights" it was later revealed that unbounded liberty was not to be found in the North. The singular cases of misconduct, against which the more sober minded preached, possibly had their root in the beautiful and one-sided pictures of the North which came to the South.[29]

As such, the North became a destination point for many southerners who fled the South looking for economic opportunities created by these new industrial centers in northern enclaves. In Detroit, many African Americans were attracted to the auto industry because they offered better wages and were willing to employ both blacks and whites alike. The implementation of the five dollar-a-day wages in 1914 by the FMC signaled to Blacks that they too could have a better lifestyle.[30] However, the increase in wages was not particularly humanitarian but rather utilitarian; Ford presumed that if he paid workers livable wages, he could reduce turnover, reducing the need to train new employees constantly. Ford's motives also rested on the need "to impede the growth and effectiveness of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Communist Party." Both sought to thwart unmitigated capitalism by unionizing wage laborers while engaging in a revolutionary struggle that would eventually overthrow capitalism's exploitative system (Boyd 2017, 93). Nevertheless, the desire to move

[29] Emmett J. Scott, Negro Migration During the War, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1920), 3-4.
[30] Prior to the wage increase, workers earned an average of $2.34 per day.

north for more opportunities loomed large among the southern population.

The vision of a northern industrial center also offered African Americans a refuge from the drudgery of southern labor and an escape from overt violent acts of racism such as beatings, lynchings, and rape. These acts of violence, coupled with the denial of the most basic civil liberties, served as another catalyst encouraging Blacks to leave the south in search of better living conditions. On November 11, 1916, a publication appeared in the *Chicago Defender*, a Chicago-based online African-American newspaper founded in 1905, featuring a poem written by "Mr. Ward" that illustrated southern African Americans' plight the jubilance of escaping its tyranny. Here is a snippet of the poem:

Hasten on, my dark brother,

Duck the "Jim Crow" laws.

No "Crackers" north to slap your mother

Or knock you in the jaw.

No "Crackers" there to seduce your sister,

Nor hang you to a limb,

And you're not obliged to call them mister,

Nor show your teeth at them.

Now, why should I remain longer south,

To be kicked and dogged around?

"Crackers" to knock me in the mouth

And shoot my brother down.

No, I won't. I'm leaving today,

No longer can I wait.

If the recruiters fail to take me 'way,

I'm bound to catch a freight.

Another article by the *Chicago Defender* published on February 6th, 1920, urged Blacks to travel North for their safety:

> "If you can freeze to death in the North and be free, why freeze to death in the South and be a slave, where your mother, sister and daughter are raped and burned at the stake; where your father, brother and sons are treated with contempt and hung to a pole, riddled with bullets at the least mention that he does not like the way he is treated. Come North then, all you folks, both good and bad. If you don't behave yourselves up here, the jails will certainly make you wish you had. For the hard-working man there is plenty of work... if you really want it. The Defender says come"[31]

African American southerners saw the North as a Mecca -- a land of abundance that promised a better living standard, an increased likelihood that one would find steady employment with better living wages, and the greater likelihood that one could obtain some modicum of civil rights that were denied to them in southern locales. African Americans in the South answered the call. They traveled north in large numbers, as an estimated two million African Americans left the rural south and emigrated to large northern cities.[32] Darlene Clark Hines notes that "most migrants from the Carolinas and Virginia settled in Washington, D.C.,

[31] Chicago Defender, February 6, 1920..
[32] Lee 1996, 19

Philadelphia, and New York. Black people who left Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi tended to move to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit. Migrants from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas often rode the Illinois Central Railroad to Chicago."[33] As such, large northern cities saw New York's African American population grew by 66 percent, Chicago's by 148 percent, Philadelphia by 500 percent, and Detroit by 611 percent.[34] In Detroit, the population of African Americans grew from 5,741 in 1910 to 40,838 by 1920 and nearly tripled to 120,066 by 1930.[35] As evinced by the growing population numbers, Detroit had become a refuge for Black southerners. As the African American population grew in Detroit, fueled by the auto industry and the desire to escape southern tyranny, many an immigrant community was also growing in Highland Park, Michigan.

Highland Park is a city within a city, as Detroit borders it on all sides. Highland Park offered immigrants coming from Syria a home. They would also find their place among those coming to Detroit to take place in the industrial revolution and find work at Ford Motor Company. Incorporated as a city in 1920, Highland Park looked to avoid being absorbed by Detroit and had a large population of Syrian Muslims that settled there when Ford's factory was still under construction. These Syrians attracted more Syrians once the assembly line began to churn out Model-T automobiles.[36] The rise and the number of Muslims in Highland Park necessitated a religious shift that ushered in a wave of people who wanted to build a mosque in Highland Park to accommodate its immigrant population.

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[33] Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African-American Odyssey*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2011), 469.
[34] "The Great Migration" History Channel Documentary 3/4/10 https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration).
[35] Curtis 2002, 67.
[36] Howell, *Islam in Old Detroit*, 34.

The first mosque, named the Moslem Mosque of Highland Park, would eventually open in 1921 and was the brainchild of two Muslim immigrants, Kalil Bazzy and Hussien Karoub. Kalil Bazzy, who arrived in Highland Park in 1913 from Bint Ijbayl, Syria, quickly found work as an assembly line worker at The Ford Motor Company. Known as "a skilled practitioner of Muslim ritual," Bazzy "was singled out by others in the Syrian community for his piety" and "encouraged to master and maintain these fine distinctions on behalf of local Shi'a Muslim community, leading them in prayer, reciting the stories and poetry... and preparing the bodies of the Muslim dead for burial."[37] His efforts and piety garnered him the name *shaykh*, a Muslim community leader.

Hussien Karoub arrived in Highland Park in 1914 from Marj al Angar, Syria. Karoub was drawn to Detroit because he had heard "promising accounts of work in Henry Ford's factory, but they also knew that Detroit was becoming the center of Syrian Muslim life in the United States."[38] Upon his arrival, he also1 found work at the Ford Motor Company. However, he would not stay an employee at the company for long, as he became successful in real estate and raised enough money to quit the FMC. Howell notes that Karoub "made a sizeable fortune trading properties and eventually building apartment houses in Highland Park. By 1921 he was reported to be worth half a million dollars." In addition to his financial gains, Karoub had received formal religious training from Shaykh Bader Deen, one of the preeminent scholars in Syria during the early nineteenth century. As such, Karoub, "the only Muslim in greater Detroit with any formal religious education," was highly respected for his ability to recite the Quran

[37] Howell, *Islam in Old Detroit*, 40.
[38] Howell, Islam in Old Detroit, 41.

and “came to be recognized as imam to the city’s Muslims as a whole” although he was a Sunni Muslim.[39] His earnings from his real estate venture, coupled with his knowledge of Islam and the need for a mosque in the U.S., allowed him to forge a coalition with Kalil Bazzy and supply much of the money needed to get the mosque project underway.

Karoub pledged $50,000 to build a new mosque on Victor Avenue in Highland Park, which began construction in 1919. It eventually opened in 1921 and was almost immediately fraught with difficulties. In the *Encyclopedia of Muslim American History* (2010), Edward Curtis notes that the Highland Park mosque, “beset by financial difficulties and sectarian rifts almost from its inception, shut down within a year of its founding the building was eventually sold in 1927. After that, Muslims in Detroit prayed in groups that were more uniform in their sectarian teachings and ethnic-national makeup” (140). However, the fiasco surrounding the mosque's opening had the unintended consequence of bridging the divide between African-Americans Detroiters and the immigrant Muslim community through the charismatic Muslim missionary, Mufti Mohammed Sadiq.

Born in Bhera, India (present-day Pakistan), Mufti Mohammed Sadiq became the first Ahmadi Muslim missionary in the United States.[40] Arriving in Philadelphia in February of 1920 to invite people to Islam, he was immediately arrested and detained because the U.S. government believed that he would advocate for polygamy. Edward Curtis notes that “Mormons in the United States had practiced polygamy openly after 1852, and anti-Mormon campaigns of the late 19th century set the tone for suspicion toward any immigrants

[39] Howell, Islam in Old Detroit, 42.
[40] Herbert.Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 18.

associated, justly or not, with this practice. An immigration statute of 1891 banned the admission of anyone who practiced polygamy due to its 'moral turpitude.'"[41] After repeated appeals, he would be released two months later, in April 1920.

After his release, and immediately began "writing editorials for major newspapers and giving public lectures on Islam to a highly curious, if skeptical, American public," including writing for *The New York Times*.[42] The publicity Sadiq received garnered the attention of Kalil Bazzy and Hussien Karoub, who were in the process of building the mosque in Highland Park. They knew that the publicity he garnered as an immigrant Muslim would attract potential donors and put their mosque on the map. The two invited Sadiq to come to Highland Park. After accepting the invitation, Sadiq arrived to great fanfare of a welcoming dinner held for him and attended by "the mayor and the chief of police of Highland Park, the head of the Ford Motor Company's English School, the head of a local bank, the main Arabic language assistant in the Highland Park Schools, journalists from the English and Arabic press, and Syrian community leaders representing both the Muslim and Christian establishments in the city." [43] His arrival signaled the marriage between African Americans and Islam.

While in Highland park, he started a journal named *The Muslim Sunrise*, which sought to spread Islam to all non-Muslims of Islam and challenge misconceptions that appeared in the press. In addition, the Muslim Sunrise "included articles included short articles on basics of the Islamic faith; excerpts from the Qur'an and hadith, the reports of sayings and deeds of the prophet Muhammad and his companions, both in Arabic and in English transliteration; didactic

[41] Curtis, *Encyclopedia of Muslim American History*, 32.
[42] Curtis, *Encyclopedia of Muslim American History*, 33.
[43] Howell, Islam in Old Detroit, 49-50.

articles on when and how to pray; and stories and vignettes from the life of Ahmad. The magazine also featured testimonials from Ahmadi converts, defenses of Islam against Western polemics, and articles covering topics ranging from Islam and the consumption of alcohol to Islamic art."[44] Sadiq wanted to connect all Muslims of different groups while also recruiting new members to Islam. Accordingly, over 1000 converts to the Ahmadiyya Movement, most of whom were African Americans in Detroit.

A large number of African Americans converting to Islam was the result of his recruiting strategies. In *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, Herbert Berg notes that "the opposition from some white Christian churches led him [Sadiq] to focus his missionary activities more on African Americans."[45] In addition, Sadiq, like other Ahmadi missionaries, "carefully crafted their outreach to African Americans by aligning themselves with broader currents of African-American liberation ideologies."[46] (Curtis 34). Sadiq saw Islam's egalitarian properties as a means to deal with racism in America, that "it was Islam, not Christianity, that offered a solution to the color problem."[47] (GhaneaBassiri, 182). An article entitled "Crescent or Cross? A Negro May Aspire to Any Position Under Islam without Discrimination" appearing in an issue of the *Muslim Sunrise* in October of 1923, appealing to African Americans and even using the slogan of the garvey movement, *One God, One Aim, One Destiny*. Sadiq states:

> "Apart from a confederation of the African tribes or peoples of African origin, the possibility of which is an awful nightmare to the white man, he lives in

[44] Curtis, Encyclopedia of Muslim American History, 33.
[45] Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, 19.
[46] Curtis, Encyclopedia of Muslim American History, 34.
[47] Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 182.

> fear and trembling that El Islam may become the religion of the Negro. And why should it not be? "El Islam" would be a wonderful spiritual force in the life of the colored races, uniting us in a bond of common sympathy and interest. We could then add to our motto of one God, one aim, one destiny, the words one language, and that language would be Arabic. It could easily be made the universal language of Negroes and would remove the barriers which now face us in the intercommunication of the different tribes in Africa… In spite, however, of the desperate efforts being made by the "other fellow" to convert the African to Christianity in order to make his enslavement and exploitation easier and more secure, the African is slowly but surely realizing that under the Crescent he will be better able to reach the goal of his ambition than under the Cross… Unlike his Christian brother, who waits for the good white man to restore him his rights, the follower of the prophet is always ready to draw his sword in defense of sacred right and honor."

It should come as no surprise that Sadiq was an attendee and lecturer at UNIA gatherings of Marcus Garvey and recruited several organization members. In the UNIA, Sadiq "found a community that, though not of the gentry, had the respect of average African Americans. Within this community, he won not only converts but also 'intelligent and enthusiastic' persons whom he then appointed as leaders to varying congregations in the cities he visited."[48] Although his teachings were Islamically unorthodox, Sadiq's intellect and charismatic speaking abilities quickly established him as an intellectual and spiritual leader.

[48] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order*, 212.

While immigrant communities had a religious foundation in Highland Park, one of the critical differences rested in the Ahmadiyya's ability to articulate Islam in English, both written and spoken. Sadiq was able to speak to different audiences and garner support partially because he could speak English better than most immigrant Muslims. How notes that Sadiq "was a well-trained scholar of Islam who had spent several years in England addressing British audiences, who awarded him with several honorary degrees in response to his efforts in their country. He was also fluent in several languages and could communicate readily with most local Muslims in their native tongues. Finally, his English far surpassed that of Detroit's other clerics."[49] His ability to communicate effectively enabled him to address all audiences, especially African American audiences.

In addition, this movement made an English translation of the Quran, created by Mawlana Muhammad Ali in 1917, an ardent member of the Ahmadiyyah Movement, was made available to African Americans. This Quran was the same Quran that Fard Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, would present to his most ardent disciple, Elijah Muhammad. Edward Curtis notes that "it is telling that Elijah Muhammad… used an Ahmadi translation of the Qur'an. There is a plausible link between Ahmadi influence on the early Nation of Islam and its own doctrine of continuous prophecy in the figure of W. D. Fard, whom Elijah Muhammad considered to be a divine messenger sent by God."[50]

Mufti Muhammad Sadiq was successful in getting African American members to join Islam. Within the three years from his arrival in 1920, until he departed for India in 1923, he is

[49] Howell, *Islam in Old Detroit*, 51
[50] Curtis, Encyclopedia of Muslim American History, 46.

believed to have converted 700 Americans to Islam.[51] Hazrat Maulvi Muhammad Din, missionary successor and second editor of the *Muslim Sunrise*, continued what Sadiq had begun focusing on African Americans. Over time, however, there was a gradual shift away from African Americans' racial rhetoric. By the 1940s, the Ahmadiyya movement had shifted away from its focus on race and racial injustice and moved towards more general concerns plaguing Muslims as a whole.[52] However, while that shift ingratiated them to the larger Muslim community, toning down the racial rhetoric limited their ability to get Black converts in the way they had during Sadiq's time.

The foundation provided by Sadiq and subsequent missionaries allowed for the emergence of a new Islamic ideology promoted by the Nation of Islam. The NOI followed in the footsteps of the Sadiq by explicitly targeting African Americans, offering an Islamic ideology that was rooted in salvation through equality, Black Nationalist ideologies, white people as "others," Christianity as unable to address the ills of African Americans, and the idea of continuous prophecy, which the NOI also incorporated, Edward Curtis notes. In addition, having an English copy of the Quran allowed the NOI to root their understanding of Islam in English, not in Arabic.

* * *

The foundations laid by Ahmadi missionaries were codified under the Nation of Islam during Wallace Fard's leadership. In 1930, Fard appeared on the streets of Detroit selling silks door to door in the all-Black neighborhood of Black Bottom on Detriot's east side and bordered by Gratiot Avenue (north), Brush Street (west), Congress (south), and St. Aubin Street (east)

[51] Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 130.
[52] Turner *Islam in the African-American Experience*, 132.

with its principal commercial activity taking place on both Hastings and St. Antoine streets. As he sold his wares to the community's residents, he began to Teach members of the community that he was there to save them from the turmoil they were experiencing in North America. He stated that he was from Mecca and that Black people ruled their lands in Mecca. Echoing Mufti Sadiq's words, he told anyone that will listen that To return African Americans to glory, they had to return to their original religion, the religion of Islam. Because of his vehement criticism of racism and white people in the United States, he quickly gained a following within the Black community.

Although there is uncertainty concerning his place of origin, evidence suggests that Fard may have been Syrian or Lebanese. In *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (2000), Andrew Shryock and Nabeel Abraham note that by 1930, "there were nine thousand Arabic-speaking Detroiters: almost six thousand were Syrian."[53] In addition, the fact that he sold silks supports the belief that he was Syrian or Lebanese. Sally Howell notes that as early as 1897, "a small population of Syrian peddlers had settled in the city."[54] These peddlers carried packs of merchandise on their backs, peddling embroideries, laces, Holy Land souvenirs, and other trinkets for sale. In *Islam in Black America* (2002), Curtis notes that immigrant Arabs, especially around the turn of the century, often made their mark as peddlers by constructing themselves as exotic Orientals, selling everything from clothes to sweets and promoting the goods "as products of the 'Holy Land' – even though most of these Syrian immigrants had never been to

[53] Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 19.
[54] Howell, Islam in Old Detroit, 33.

Ottoman Palestine before."[55] Gilles Kepel stated that "peddlers and street vendors in American cities were usually Syrian or Lebanese; our man thus told his listeners that he came from the East and that his name was Fard (or Farrad, or Ford) and his first name Wallace, or in Arabic, 'Wali.'"[56] In an article entitled "Why Did They Leave? Reasons for Early Lebanese Migration" (2017) appearing in the newsletter for the Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies at North Carolina State University, Dr. Akram Khater notes that in in the early twentieth century, Lebanese people were leaving their home country bound for America in part because of the decline in the silk economy. He states:

> "The stagnation and then collapse of the silk economy of Mount Lebanon (which accounted for 60% of the GDP of Mount Lebanon by the beginning of the 20th century), and textile manufacturing in the hinterlands of Greater Syria forced many to seek better livelihoods in the prospering lands of the Americas. This process began as with other parts of the nineteenth century world, when the Eastern Mediterranean attracted European capitalists seeking markets for their manufactured goods and sources of raw material for their factories… After few decades of boon, the prices of silk cocoons and threads stagnated and then fell in the 1890s. Compounding this problem was a series of bad crop years in 1876, 1877, 1879, 1885, 1891, 1895 and as late as 1909 that bankrupted many a peasant who had taken out loans against the anticipated crop… By the early 1890s, as

[55] Edward E Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 70

[56] Kepel, Gilles. Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997.

> many silk factories were being shuttered, the decision to emigrate appeared as the most financially viable.

The evidence strongly suggests that Fard was Syrian or Lebanese. Regardless of his ethnic identity, what is certain is that he a version of Islam that was not much different from the Islam that was taught by Mufti Muhammad Sadiq. one of the ways that he was able to gain followers was by appealing to the problem of the racial hierarchy and offering Islam as a solution to those problems, in the same way Sadiq had done years earlier. In one of the earliest studies on the Nation of Islam conducted in 1938, University of Michigan professor Erdman Beynon highlighted its early teachings:

> The black men in North America are not Negroes, but members of the lost tribe of Shabazz, stolen by traders from the Holy City of Mecca 379 years ago. The prophet came to America to find and to bring back to life his long lost brethren, from whom the Caucasians had taken away their language, their nation and their religion. Here in America they were living other than them- selves. They must learn that they are the original-people, noblest of the nations of the earth. The Caucasians are the colored people, since they have lost their original color. The original people must regain their religion, which is Islam, their language, which is Arabic, and their culture, which is astronomy and higher mathematics, especially calculus. They must live according to the law of Allah, avoiding all meat of "[57]

His teachings were electrifying to his listeners, as word of mouth spread of this new religious leader who spoke of Black Gods and white devils. Shortly after that, he would begin

[57] Beynon, "Voodoo Cult", 900-901.

being invited to speak in people's homes to groups of people. One of the people in attendance for one of his lectures was Clara Poole, who migrated to Detroit from Cordele, Georgia, in 1923 with her husband Elijah Poole and their two children. After hearing Fard speak, Clara was convinced that her husband needed to hear Fard's philosophies. Fard underscored African Americans' problems and offered Islam as a solution to them.

The Poole's migration to Detroit was part of the Great Migration in the hopes that Elijah would find work in the thriving automobile industry, much like immigrants Kalil Bazzy and Hussein Karoub had done nearly ten years earlier. However, they soon learned the harsh reality that Detroit's utopian city did not provide the opportunities for them that they had envisioned. After arriving in Detroit in 1923, Elijah Poole that he needed a succession of jobs was the only way to survive in this urban landscape. Poole held several positions from 1923-1925, including brief stints at the American Nut Company, the American Copper and Brass Company, and Chevrolet Axle. Poole, like many others, could not find steady work. His experience was not unique, as it was often the case that many black migrants would suffer that same reality.

The shortage of jobs for African Americans reflected the reality of a racial divide that permeated Detroit's job and housing discrimination. Those who were able to find employment often suffered from harsh working conditions. In "Black Automobile Workers in Detroit" (1979), Joyce Peterson notes that "From the beginning black workers were concentrated in the most unskilled and unpleasant jobs in the auto industry. They were hired into those jobs that had the lowest pay scales, required the greatest physical exertion, had the highest accident rates, and

the largest number of health hazards."[58] In addition, they justified this placement of African Americans in the worst jobs by maintaining that they kept whites and Black workers separate on the grounds of preventing racial tension.[59] When coupled with their living conditions, those working conditions provide a vivid picture for African American Detroiters during the 1920s. Edward Curtis notes that "the harsh working conditions for blacks, who still faced discrimination in the workplace, often prompted them to use constant shuffling between jobs as one technique to preserve their own humanity… Because Detroit was segregated and little housing was available to the city's new residents, blacks lived in horribly overcrowded conditions and were charged excessively high rents in the city's burgeoning ghetto."[60] These living conditions, coupled with job insecurity, compounded Blacks' situation. The Poole's were no exception, and in 1929 when Elijah Muhammad lost his job, his wife was forced to find work, and the "distress of long-term unemployment led him to drink."[61]

However, After hearing Fard speak in 1931, Clara was not only inspired by his words, but she began to see Islam as a viable solution to their socioeconomic status. In addition, she was convinced that Fard was a prophet and invited Fard to dinner at the Poole home so that she could introduce her husband to his teachings. The choice to ask him to dinner was a good move, one that would have repercussions for the next four decades.

After listening to Fard speak about the religion of Islam, Poole was convinced that not only was Fard a prophet, but that he was the Mahdi (Redeemer) sent to redeem Black people

[58] Joyce Shaw Peterson, "Black Automobile Workers in Detroit, 1910-1930", in *The Journal of Negro History*, 64, no. 3 (1979), 179.
[59] Peterson, "Black Automobile Workers in Detroit", 181.
[60] Curtis, *Islam in Black America*, 68
[61] Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam*, 32

from the evil of the United States.[62] Poole believed in Islam's message and began to study under Fard's guidance. Poole admired Fard's command of religious ideas. Although they ran counter to the Christian teachings he learned as a child, it underscored the belief that Christianity was unable to deal with African Americans' issues. In addition, Islam offered Poole a religious identity rooted in his lived experiences. Sally Howell notes that religion "is an important, legally protected arena of identity formation in the United States, especially for ethnic and racial minorities whose political voice is otherwise stifled and whose value as citizens is not fully recognized."[63]

Poole would be given the last name Muhammad by Fard, and would become one of Fard's best students and would study closely under him for the next three years. In 1934, however, Fard vanished mysteriously, never to be seen or heard from again. His disappearance triggered a dispute about taking this newly formed group's reigns because no successor had been named. Elijah Muhammad, however, claimed that he was the rightful heir to the NOI legacy because he was privy to information that Fard had shared with him only and none of the other members. As noted by GhaneaBassiri, "Elijah did not succeed Fard. Rather, Fard came to be regarded in the Nation of Islam as God incarnate and Elijah Muhammad came to be known as his messenger."[64]

The success of the NOI in lifting African Americans from destitution is documented in the earliest account of the group. Writing in 1937, Erdman Beynon made this observation:

[62] The Mahdi in Islam refers to a spiritual leader who will rule the world, and rid it of evil and injustice by restoring religion and justice.
[63] Howell, Islam in Old Detroit, 60
[64] GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 224.

> At the time of their first contact with the prophet [Fard], practically all the members of the cult were recipients of public welfare, unemployed, and living in the most deteriorated areas of Negro settlement in Detroit. At the present time there is no known case of unemployment among these people. Practically all of them are working in the automobile and other factories. They live no longer in the slum section around Hastings Street [Black Bottom], but rent homes in some of the best economic areas in which Negroes have settled. They tend to purchase more expensive furniture, automobiles, and clothes than do their neighbors even in these areas of higher-class residence… Through the Nation of Islam they have gained a new status and a new confidence in themselves. When they meet Caucasians, they rejoice in the knowledge that they themselves are superiors meeting members of an inferior race.[65]

The success of the early NOI would be short-lived, however. By the late 1930s, membership was dwindling. With the disappearance of its founder, the subsequent contestations over who was the rightful heir to the NOI legacy, followed by Elijah Muhammad's imprisonment in 1942, the NOI was on the verge of becoming extinct. The release of Elijah Muhammad from prison in 1946, followed by the acceptance of Islam by Malcolm X, who became the spokesman for the movement, the Nation of Islam reemerged as one of the leading civil rights organizations until the death of Muhammad in 1975. However, what is significant about the NOI is how they rooted Islamic beliefs. The NOI received success by embedding their Black Nationalism in Islam, promoted social and political separation as an Islamic concept, and

[65] Beynon, Voodoo Cult, 905.

believed in economic determinism for African Americans. In addition, they disregarded two of the most widespread traditional Islamic beliefs by choosing to recognize Elijah Muhammad as the messenger of God, instead of Muhammad born in Mecca in 570, and the NOI's founder Wallace Fard, as God in the flesh. This version of Islam still impacts how African American Muslims are viewed by some in the immigrant community today, as examined in the next chapter.

The conversion of African Americans to more traditional views occurred under the leadership of Wallace D. Muhammad beginning in 1975. Within two months of assuming leadership in the Nation of Islam, Muhammad declared that there is no white Muslim nor black Muslim but that all Muslims are children of God, going against his father's racial separation ideology.[66] In addition, Imam Muhammad "began making radical changes in the structure of the organization and its beliefs by pushing the NOI toward Sunni Islam. He changed his name from Wallace Delaney Muhammad to Warithuddin ("inheritor of the faith") and then to W. D. Mohammed, which he said followed his father's original spelling of his surname."[67] (Curtis 17). Restructuring the organization began by Imam Muhammad disputing his fathers claim to being a messenger and denied claims that the NOI's founder was God. However, he did not initially relinquish the orientation that he father had started. He urged African Americans to label themselves "Bilalian" after the Muslim-African ancestor Bilal ibn Rabah (an enslaved Ethiopian and companion of the Prophet Muhammad), "paralleled other efforts in the era of black consciousness and ethnic revival to celebrate the African past of African Americans."[68] In

[66] Curtis, Encyclopedia, 17
[67] Curtis, *Encyclopedia*, 17.
[68] Curtis *Encyclopedia*, 377.

addition, he told his followers to adopt Muslim names and he began searching for a name to the group that would situate their practices alongside more traditional views of Islam. The nomenclature of the movement changed several times throughout his leadership becoming the World Community of al-Islam in the West (1976), the American Muslim Mission (1980), the Muslim American Society (1995), the American Muslim Society (2000), and the American Society of Muslims (2002). One of the most enduring effects of his leadership what that he "encouraged his followers to establish independent mosques."[69] In just a few short years, the Muslim Center opened its doors.

* * *

On the corner to Davison Freeway and Woodrow Wilson Boulevard, a sign reads "The Muslim Center: Mosque and Community Center. This mosque is the culmination of the Ahmadiyya Movement's foundations, the Nation of Islam, and Imam W.D. Muhammad. The 5000 square foot white building sits in the heart of an urban community. It has come to represent a religious institution and a building that serves the needs of the African American community. Community members merge the secular and the sacred, and it is just as common to be greeted with the Islamic words of *as-salamu-alaikum* as it is to be greeted with the colloquial "What up, fam?" This center welcomes both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For the entirety of its thirty-five-year history, this mosque has served as a site of refuge for African Americans in general and African American Muslims in particular.

The *musalla* (prayer hall) is lined with cream and beige walls, with wood paneling separating the colors. The *minbar* (pulpit) sits in the center of the room, a brown pulpit of

[69] Curtis, *Encyclopedia*, 17

three steps lined with green rails. In the front is the word Allah, written in Arabic calligraphy. The unevenness with which the pulpit's back is constructed demonstrates that it was hand carved, indicating that they were more concerned with its function than its aesthetics. The ornateness of the burgundy, green and white carpet adds to the building's lure. To the right of the pulpit are several copies of the Qur'an and books of hadith (sayings and actions attributed to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad). On Fridays, hundreds gather and greet one another the moments before the prayer. The *muezzin* (pray caller) turns on the microphone and gives the *adzan*, the call to prayer. *"Allahu Akbar!"* (God is Great!) he proclaims as congregants line up to complete the obligatory prayer. The call to prayer is also symbolic: African Americans have always answered the call to Islam because it has been seen as a vehicle for the uplift of African American people.

The Muslim Center engages the community by providing various programming to its attendees of specific interest to the African American Muslim population. They offer traditional classes, including Arabic and reading the Quran, and they also offer classes and workshops on survival, managing finances, building credit, business etiquette, and so on. In this way, the community center educates people and prepares them to engage in the workforce. They also offer family counseling services, job placement services, a health clinic, a soup kitchen, a coat drive, and meals on wheels for ill people and cannot make it to the center.

* * *

Although the Muslim Center did not officially open to the public until 1985, the space that it occupies has a storied history within the African American community. Initially, the building was a bank. Established in 1916, the Bank of the Commonwealth was headquartered

downtown, located at 719 Griswold Street in Detroit's Dime Building. This bank was one of the few banks that catered to African Americans.[70] By 1979, however, the Bank of the Commonwealth closed and agreed to sell to their competitor, Comerica Bank, in 1983. While several branches continued to operate in Detroit, the branch that is now the Muslim Center's home would not reopen as a Comerica branch.

After the building had been vacant for some time (no one is quite sure about how long the building was vacant), it was purchased by "George," a savvy businessman and underground economist who transformed it into an after-hours hangout spot and a gambling den. Abdullah, a long-time Detroit resident and founder of the Muslim Center, recounted the site's transformation: "[It was a] bank and then King George's place. He [George] was a number's man, and he had that place and had women in there [dancing]. And around the corner was the bar, and the bar was separate from the after-hours. Basically, it [King George's] was a gambling house"[71] After several years in operation, George too, was looking to sell the establishment, and he put it on sale for $15,000 (about $36,000 today with inflation).

As luck would have it, El-Amin, an African American Muslim, and student of Imam W. D. Muhammad, was looking for a site to open a new mosque. When asked how he chose the site, he stated,

> "I went there and told him [George] I saw a sign for sale... you know. And that is really how I got it because I saw the sign for sale and I went in there, [we] was going back and forth. He said, 'Abdullah, you want the building? I said 'Yeah, I

[70] Detroit Free Press, February 1978
[71] Abdullah El-Amin, interview by author, 8/27/19.

want the building!' 'He said, well claim it then!' I said 'Well I claim it then! So, we moved in there and started paying him rent."[72]

This site, among others, would come to represent the ideology of Imam Wallace D. Muhammad. By the mid-1980s, he believed that African American Muslims did not need a leader and that each mosque should operate autonomously. Part of the need to decentralize leadership rested in Muhammad's desire to get away from the "Black Muslim" label and just be identified as "Muslim."[73]

When El-Amin purchased the building, the Muslim Center was only about 1000 square feet, about one-fifth of the 5000 square foot building that exists today. For the next thirteen years, the building stayed relatively the same size while they focused on growing their congregation and engaging the Black community. From 1985 to 1998, the number of worshippers gradually increased, board members of the Muslim Center sought to expand the building to bring Black people into a communal space that was both sacred and secular. In 1998, board members of the Muslim Center began fundraising for just that purpose.

The year 1998 was one of optimism, as members of the board first broke ground on a construction project that would lead to the center's expansion. Imam El-Amin proudly recalls that they did not even have carpet in the old building and had to roll it out just for people to pray. He added, "We just did what we could," reminding me of the adage that Black people often have to "make a way out of no way." Construction lasted six years but would see the addition of a gymnasium, a larger *musalla* (prayer hall), several office spaces, two classrooms,

[72] Interview with Abdullah El-Amin.
[73] Detroit Free Press, May 4, 1985

and a jazz cafe, all of which having a communally oriented purpose. However, the gymnasium seemed to be one of the center's more significant focal points. While they were genuinely invested in having a prayer hall that could accommodate 800 people, the board's main focus was to create a recreational space that would be used by people who lived in this community, especially the neighborhood youth.

When I asked Imam El-Amin why he thought it necessary to incorporate a gymnasium, he stated: "Because we wanted kids. We wanted young people to play basketball, and I never got to it, but I wanted to have a tennis court in it [also]. It would have been the first mosque with a tennis court, so that the young boys and their girls could play tennis. And so... that thinking, that's what built it [The Muslim Center] up."[74] In his estimation, the gym would not only serve as a place for recreation, but a communal space that would allow young and older members of the community to forge relationships with one another and with their children. This shows that now only were they thinking about how best to engage the community, but also that that engagement was at the heart of this center from the very beginning.

Another addition to the Muslim Center established in 2012 was the Mel Wanzo Halal Jazz Cafe. The Jazz Cafe, the original mosque before the expansion, was being used for storage before 2012. However, converting that space into a jazz cafe would (re)connect African American Muslims to their musical artform. According to their original flyer, their mission was "To promote music education and provide community services to help keep the original American art form (Jazz) alive within the Metropolitan Detroit area," while also providing a space to fund music lessons for Detroit Public School students who were interested in learning

[74] Interview with El-Amin, 8/27/19.

the artform. In addition, the cafe was made available for rent for all occasions, including weddings, baby showers, and even funerals. The naming of the cafe had an important role: it showcased the historical importance of one musician, Melvin Wanzo.

Wanzo was a legend in the jazz scene. A nationally known trombonist, he worked with the Glen Miller Orchestra, the Woody Herman Swinging Heard in the 1960s. Most notably, he was the lead trombonist for the Count Basie Orchestra from 1969-1996. He spent 40 years traveling and recording with other musicians, including Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, and Sarah Vaughan. After retiring from Count Basie orchestra in 1996, he served as a mentor for Wayne State University's Trombone Ensemble from 1997-2002 and for the Jazz Lab I Band from 1996 until he died in 2005. While Wanzo is very much known for his musical talents, he was also known to the center members for his dedication to helping young African American musicians.

After converting to Islam, Wanzo became a regular attendee of the Muslim Center and was known to many as simply as an "all around good guy." He was so dedicated to helping African Americans in general, and Muslims in particular, that upon his death in 2005, he left half of his estate to the Muslim Center. His invaluable contribution to the uplift of the Black community led them to dedicate the jazz cafe to his memory. To date, the cafe walls are lined with posters and memorabilia from the various venues in which he performed throughout his career. The Jazz Cafe, to which we will return in a subsequent chapter, still holds jazz events that pay homage to the African American musical tradition and a musical legend who dedicated his life to teaching the craft to Detroiters.

While the structure provided the space for some extracurricular activities that would

become a regular feature of the Muslim Center, the center also had the goal of relieving the African American community of the social and economic hardships that resulted in the continuing economic downturn of Detroit. Part of their dedication lies in its original goal to not only be *in* the community but also to be *of* the community. To that end, the Muslim Center has always featured a board with job openings and has announcements at the end of each khutba (sermon) informing people of where they can find jobs and the types of jobs they should expect. While this practice has become common in the religious sphere, what separates the Muslim Center from other religious entities is that it also provides immediate financial relief to individuals who need it. For instance, Tia, a 40-year-old African American Muslim woman, described how the Muslim Center had helped her:

> "I went down there and asked for help, they gave it to me. [I] told them my story, they helped me. And I know some other sisters that have been in the same situation... I actually went yesterday and said, 'Hey, my bills are touching.' My husband, you know, my husband just came home [from prison] and Brother Lawrence said, 'What do you need that will help you today?' I said, 'I just need $75. That is all I need. That'll help me until payday, keep my son out my pocket, buy me some dinner, a pack of cigarettes, and I'm good.' I do believe, I've heard them help people with their rent, and with bills if needed. They helped me here. This house is owned by one of the board members. If we in a crunch, because he know my situation… I go over there and say, 'Hey, this is what we need.'"[75]

What Tia described above provides an insight into the inner workings of the center and its

[75] Tia, Interview by author, 8/5/19

dedication to helping the community. They helped her in this instance because she needed the money to pay bills. She was the only person working at the time because, as she states, her husband had yet to find employment. It was not for his lack of trying, though. It was because he was an African American male who had been disenfranchised because of his criminal history. Her comment "they know my situation" reflects the board member's understanding of the plight of African American families in Detroit, especially with those in which one family member has a criminal history.

Tia's statement not only reveals their willingness to help a struggling family economically, but it also highlights another initiative that the Muslim Center co-founded called "Dream of Detroit." Dream of Detroit originated in 2012, when members from the Muslim Center and another African American nearby mosque, Masjid Wali Muhammad, began purchasing houses on Waverly Street (although the Muslim Center's address is on Davison Avenue, the entrance is on Waverly Street) to fix them up and provide housing for community members. A philanthropic group named the Indus Community Action Network (ICAN), a group of Pakistani Muslims from Canton and Ann Arbor, found out about their work and decided to help financially. After completing their first renovation, Mark Crain, a board member of the Muslim Center, was appointed program director.

Dream of Detroit is headquarters in the upper level of a two-family flat. Dream of Detroit is a community-based initiative that seeks to revitalize the community around the Muslim Center with the hopes of expanding into other blocks and surrounding communities. They have successfully renovated ten homes, planted trees, and cleaned up the neighborhood to date. The Dream of Detroit initiative is a form of activism that centers on providing housing

for people who would have difficulty finding suitable accommodation. For instance, with Tia's husband having a criminal history, it would be hard for them to find housing, given that most homes and apartments do background checks and often exclude felons from applying.

The Muslim Center has sought to be about religious unity amongst African American Muslims from its inception. In addition, their programming has always been geared towards social justice and alleviating the social and economic ills facing the Black community at large. To date, many visitors come to the Muslim Center, including Christians, atheists, Moors, and members of the Nation of Islam. The center has been used for everything from weddings to funerals, from neighborhood basketball tournaments to political forums that hosted politicians like Detroit's Mayor Mike Duggan to the U.S. House of Representative Rashida Tlaib, continuing to serve the community with an unwavering dedication to racial, social, and economic uplift.

Despite their adherence to Sunni Islam and their social programs designed to make African Americans better, there still looms a specter of illegitimacy among immigrant populations who look at African American Muslims with an heir of skepticism their beliefs and practices as illegitimate. Those beliefs are rooted in the history of African Americans' acceptance of Islam through the Ahmadiyya Movement and the Nation of Islam and the early attempt by Imam Muhammad to identify his followers as Bilalian. Despite these various ways that African Americans have embraced Islam, the next chapter demonstrates that their beliefs and practices fall in line with many traditional Islamic schools of thought, incorporating African American traditions and root their understanding of the religion in their lived experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO EXAMINING BLACK MUSLIMS

This chapter examines how African American Muslims in Detroit systematically approached beliefs and practices in Islam and has broad implications for African American Muslims' practices as a whole. I argue that Black Muslims have adopted a version of Islam that is ordered in such a way as to situate their prior cultural practices rooted in the African-American experience alongside "traditional" Islamic beliefs. What follows is not an attempt to legitimize African American Muslim practices; it demonstrates that their beliefs and practices are legitimate to begin with. African American Muslims have not been but passive converts to the faith, shunning previous cultural traditions and practices after accepting Islam. While previous scholarship has captured African American Islam themes (Gomez 2015; Jackson 2005; McCloud 1995; Curtis 2014), most take a macro approach to understand African American Muslims' belief system. While this approach has excellent utility in discussing African American Islam's general nature, it runs the risk of essentializing all African American Muslim believers. There are currently no works dedicated to how African American Muslims in Detroit construct their religious identities. This is a paradox considering the proliferation of scholarship that highlights Detroit as the ideological starting point for introducing the vast majority of African Americans to Islam.

Their Islamic belief system's construction is rooted in their experiences as African Americans and Muslims. African American members of this community are generally guided by the four primary sources of Islamic knowledge agreed upon by most Muslims - the Quran, hadith, the consensus of the scholarly community, and reason. However, what makes their

practice of Islam unique is that the emphasis and importance placed on these authoritative sources differ from person to person. As a result, some outside this community may view their beliefs as an unwitting distortion of the Islamic traditions (at best) or the willful corruption of those traditions (at worse). However, I argue that African American Muslims take a systematic approach to understand Islam rooted in traditional Islamic discourse while also maintaining their cultural identities. This chapter begins with a brief description of what Islam is to those who practice it. I then discuss how Muslims discern religious truths based on the four principal tools for acquiring Islamic knowledge.

What is Islam?

Islam is a religion that has a base of 1.8 billion worldwide, according to a Pew Research study from 2017.[76] Of that population, about 3.45 million Muslims reside in the United States or just over 1% of the U.S. population. A research poll conducted by Pew two years later discovered that about one in four Muslims is African American, or approximately 800,000.[77] However, even with the strong presence of African Americans Muslims and in the United States and Detroit, there seems to be this notion that African Americans are inferior Muslims among some Muslim immigrant populations. To get that the root of this illegitimacy, I began by asking participants what Islam is to them and how they become members of this community?

When I began interviewing the Muslim Center congregants, I asked a simple question: What is Islam? All gave answers similar to what you might get from any other Muslim in the world. Omar, a 51-year-old attendee of the Muslim Center, described what Islam is to him:

[76] Pew Research Poll: "Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world" August 9, 2017
[77] Pew Research Poll: "Black Muslims account for a fifth of all U.S. Muslims, and about half are converts to Islam" January 17, 2019

"Islam is a way of life, actually. Most Muslims you ask will tell you that it is not a religion, it's a way of life… the reason why they say that is because Islam covers every aspect of life from eating to using the bathroom to relations with women to relations with your neighbors, your family and strangers."[78] Mohammad, who has been attending the Muslim Center for five years, but has been a Muslim for "many years" described Islam as "submitting to the will of God; finding a peace inside [oneself]."[79] Greg, the 31-year-old Muslim said that Islam is acceptance "because they accepted me when I got out [of prison] and treated me like family."[80] The common thread from countless individuals was that Islam made them better individuals. In addition, many of them stated that it provides them a sense of stability, as noted by Tia in the first chapter, and a sense of belonging. So how is it that this religion that makes so many individuals better a contested sphere? The answer lies in the fact of the troubled history that has followed Black Muslims going back to the Nation of Islam.

In discussing what led different congregants to Muslim Center, nearly every respondent answered that they did not feel a part of the community in immigrant mosques that they had attended in and around Detroit. Some suggested that the other Muslims looked down on them as a subordinate, even though they professed the same faith. A few even noted that there seems to be a genuine mistrust of African American Muslims' belief systems, leaving them to find a new place of worship at the Muslim Center. The disclosures were not shocking, as this phenomenon has been described in the works of scholars of Islam, including Sherman Jackson, Aminah McCloud, and Saeeh Khan.

[78] Omar, interviewed by author, 8/2/19
[79] Mohammad, Interview with author, 9/10/19.
[80] Greg in discussion with the author, October 2019.

In "African American and Immigrant Muslim Interaction: Past, Present and Future" (2014), Saeed Kahn provides a great observation to describe this phenomenon. He notes:

> "While issues of cultural and ideological difference are nothing new to Islamic societies, in the United States, Muslims of immigrant background often voice skepticism when African American Muslims independently interpret Islam according to their communal experiences and history—especially when that history involves the Nation of Islam. Faced with an expression and doctrine of Islam that was inherently foreign to them, many immigrant Muslims viewed African American Muslims with skepticism as to their credentials on matters of religion or even leadership in religious organizations. At the same time, with scant interaction with African Americans culturally or historically, immigrant Muslims saw their coreligionists primarily as a racial not an ideological "other" (5).

As noted by Kahn, not only is this skepticism rooted in African Americans' interpretation of scripture, but it also has a lot to do with immigrants' internalization of race, and more specifically, anti-Blackness. He further notes that "immigrant Muslims reflexively incline toward dominant (white) society while neglecting their black coreligionists and their particular concerns that arise from social, economic, and political marginalization" (8). Sherman Jackson echoes that sentiment and adds that initially, anti-Western sentiments seemed to reflect a shared historical experience between immigrants and African Americans; however, this relationship dissipated "under pressure of a mutually contradictory relationship to American whiteness."[81]

[81] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 4.

Aminah McCloud took it a step further in *African American Islam* (1995), stating that the "behavior of some members of the immigrant community is seen as… the behavior of imperialists and colonizers" (170). Here, McCloud roots her assessment in race, but she also highlights how some immigrant Muslims view African American Muslims as those who control the discourse on what the faith is. African American Muslims are viewed as distorting Islam, whereas immigrants are seen as maintainers of faith that practice *true* Islam. Jackson notes that Immigrant Islam "enshrines the historically informed expressions of Islam in the modern Muslim world as the standard of normativeness for Muslims everywhere… On this approach, 'true Islam' can only assume one form anywhere it goes. And in this process, Immigrant Islam's interpretations are effectively placed beyond critique via the tacit denial that they are in fact interpretations."[82]

The necessity of highlighting how Muslims construct the religious identity is vital given the specter of illegitimacy and the various ways that African Americans have accepted Islam. Jackson states that the basis of African American Islam before their conversion to Sunni Islam in the 1980s "had been the thoroughly American phenomenon of 'Black Religion,' essentially a pragmatic, folk-oriented, holy protest against anti-black racism"[83] However, even after accepting a traditional form of Islam, the presumption seems to be that African-American Muslims are still engaging in religious revisionism, following figures such as Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan. However, nearly all the Muslims at the Muslim Center identify as Sunni

[82] Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican*, 12.
[83] Jackson, Islam and the Blackamerican, 3-4.

Muslims. They approach the religion of Islam as other Sunni Muslims with a caveat: they embrace and follow Islam on their terms.

Islam in Practice

The Muslim Center caters to many Muslims throughout the community, with the primary congregants being African American. Although they represent a unified community, to capture one element of African American Sunni practices would be elusive given the varied approaches by individual congregants to understanding Islam. There are, however, certain commonalities that can provide a window into the nature of their beliefs and practices and how it serves to meet their individual and communal needs. In *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering (2009)*, scholar Sherman Jackson notes that African American Muslims, himself included, "have opted not to take the sola scriptura… as an interpretive right or preference, for several reasons" (7). However, a small contingent of congregants at the Muslim Center have opted to do just that.

Historically, Islam's practice has always followed a trajectory that centers around the Quran, hadith, ulama (scholarly community), and reason as the primary sources from which they derive knowledge. Of those four, the Qur'an is the most agreed upon source of infallible knowledge about Islam in all of the various sects of Islam, including Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi. The Qur'an is the sacred scripture in Islam and is believed by Muslims to be the word of God. Muslims believe that this book was verbally transmitted from God (Allah) to the Angel Gabriel, who then taught it to the Prophet Muhammad for 22 years (beginning in 610 CE and ending with the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 CE). The Quran consists of 114 suras (chapters) of varying lengths. It encompasses nearly every aspect of human life, including religious orders,

spousal relationships, social organizations, legislation, relationships among neighbors, and so on. Islamic adherents generally believe that the Quran is a complete text that provides meaning and answers to sacred and secular matters. Therefore, some Muslims believe that the Qur'an alone can provide all the knowledge necessary to live a life following Islamic traditions. This notion that the Qur'an can stand alone is a belief that is held by a handful of congregants at the Muslim Center. However, it is important to note that those who choose to use the Quran only are not associated with "Submitter" Muslims who call or eradicate hadith. [84] Muslims at the center do not take it this far, but some do not hold hadith in the same regard as they do the Quran.

Radwan, a 63-year-old Detroit native and attendee of the Muslim Center, stated that he only uses the Qur'an to derive religious meaning and understanding. He stated, "These so-called Muslims always walkin' 'round here talkin' 'bout what the Prophet Muhammad said. Well, Muhammad ain't here and I go by what the Quran says. Hell, I don't even read that half the time." [85] Another Muslim Center attendee, Ali, who overheard our conversation, nodded in agreement with Radwan. This reveals that some Black Muslims have adopted a scripture-only approach to learning and understanding Islam. In their estimation, the Quran is where they derive their religious authority. "Prophet Muhammad," Radwan would later say, "ain't from here [Detroit], so how some dude from Arabia hundreds of years ago gone tell me how to live my life when he ain't experienced what I experienced?"[86] His statement has three implications:

[84] In *Ḥadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam*, Aisha Musa notes that members of the "Submitter" Muslim movement promoted the belief that hadith were "Satanic inventions" that have nothing to do with the Prophet Muhammad, and that the adherence represented a flagrant disobedience of God and His final prophet" (87).
[85] Discussion with author, November 2019.
[86] Discussion with author, November 2019.

(1) It shows that some Black Muslims, even those who identify as Sunni, derive their religious authority solely from the Quran, (2) it underscores how African American Muslims root their spiritual understanding within the context of their lived experiences, and (3) it shows that what is written has a standard of authority that is higher than any other forms of knowledge.

Scripture only (*sola scriptura* in Latin) is a principle that dates back to the Protestant Reformation that Martin Luther sparked in 1517. Luther was a Catholic who challenged the pope's authority, and consequently the Catholic Church, over the notion of indulgences. Indulgences were payments made from individuals to the Catholic Church to save their loved ones from purgatory. Luther challenged the church, asking them to provide scriptural evidence that deceased souls could be spared using indulgences. After several trials, Martin Luther was excommunicated by the church and was later banished from Germany. What Martin Luther did was exceptional; he not only began interpreting the Bible for himself, but he also translated it into other languages so that others could interpret it for themselves. His actions ultimately wrested control of religious interpretations away from the Pope and the Catholic Church, the result of which would split Christianity into two camps, Catholics and Protestants.

For African Americans, sola scriptura has been a way of subverting hegemonic religious structures by shifting religious interpretations away from those in power and reinvesting them into rank-and-file practitioners. For African American Christians, Henry Louis Gates notes that the African American survival "can be traced directly to the miraculous ways that our ancestors reinvented the religion that their 'masters' thought would keep them subservient. Rather, that religion enabled them… to interpret and reinvent the world in which they were trapped… It also

gave them the moral authority to turn the mirror of religion back on their masters and to indict the nation for its original sin of allowing their enslavement."[87]

It means rejecting as infallible anything other than the Quran for African American Muslims. Doing so disrupts common assumptions about who is and who is not practicing a traditional brand of Islam by investing the latter with the same religious authority once invested in the former. This approach to Islam necessitates a paradigmatic shift that requires one to be familiar with the practitioners' lived experiences to understand their beliefs. Therefore, when Radwan stated, "If it ain't in the Quran…," not only was he referring to the phenomena being written explicitly in the Quran, but he was referring to the ways that other forms of knowledge comports with the Quran and is situated within the context of *his* lived experiences.

Members of the Muslim Center who have chosen to root their religious authority only in the Quran often cite a verse to substantiate their claim. In the Surah Al-Ma'idah, the Quran states: *This day have I perfected your religion, completed my favor on you, and chosen Islam as your religion* (Qur'an, 5:3). While this verse does not negate the use of extra-Quranic sources as a means towards understanding Islam, those who cite it imply that this verse proves that Islam as a religion is complete, the Quran is free from errors, and that it is either explicit or implicit about what one can(not) do. Implicit knowledge, they argue, is just as easy to understand once you understand the religion's general rules. They often cite the Qur'an in which Allah states that Islam "is made easy for you," but they omit the context in which this is said (Quran 2:185; 5:6).[88] In discussing implicit knowledge, Radwan gave the example of the

[87] Henry L. Gates, *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song*, (New York : Penguin Press, 2021), iv.
[88] Surah 2:185 states that if someone is sick or on a journey s/he does not have to fast, and Surah 5:6 states that if one is ill or on a journey and cannot find water, then s/he is permitted to cleanse oneself with the earth.

consumption of alcoholic beverages. He said that alcohol is prohibited in Islam because it is a mind-altering substance. Therefore, he can reasonably conclude that marijuana, mushrooms, and other mind-altering drugs, are also forbidden in Islam.

Upon observation, it seems that some Black Muslims have taken a scripture-only approach because this allows for Islam to be more malleable and lenient, allowing one to interpret it through his/her lens. With this, infallibility becomes subjective to one's own philosophical and theoretical leanings. If a verse is hard to interpret, one can inject his/her interpretations while still having it rooted in the Quran as proof. This is not to say that African American Muslims intentionally corrupt or use the scripture for mal-intended purposes. Still, it shows that some African Americans have chosen to use the scripture-only approach to understand the Quran as a living document, which has to be adjusted to deal with current circumstances. This is very important when one thinks about the utility and applicability of Black religiosity and how Black people, historically, have interpreted scripture through their lens by using it as a proto-liberation theology.

While figures like Martin Luther played a huge role in shaping modern-day Christianity, African American religious practitioners also sought to "reform" traditional religion by rooting their understanding of religion within the context of their own lived experiences. In Christianity, it allowed African Americans to recreate the religious experience that was more in line with their cultural traditions, leading to them forming distinct churches during the period of the Great Awakening of the 18th and 19th centuries:

> "From the start, white churches seated black people apart from white people, belying claims to spiritual equality. Black members took communion after white

> members. Masters also tried to use religion to instill in their chattels such self-serving Christian virtues as meekness, humility, and obedience. Consequently, when they could, African Americans established their own churches. Dancing, shouting, clapping, and singing became especially characteristic of their religious meetings."[89]

There was a large contingent of African American slaves who remained devoted to traditional African religions. Those who eventually converted to Christianity often retained the main parts of their African belief systems even after embracing their new faith. In addition, the notion of salvation as a Christian phenomenon resonated with enslaved people who saw the salvific properties of Christianity also applying to their social realities as an enslaved person:

> "Many slaves remained so devoted to their ancestral religions that Christianity did not attract them. With the Great Awakening, however, a process of general conversion began. African Americans did indeed link the spiritual equality preached by evangelical ministers with a hope for earthly equality. They tied salvation for the soul with liberation for the body. They recognized that the preaching style… evangelicals adopted had much in common with West African 'spirit possession.'"[90]

In addition, slaves often preferred semisecret churches to conduct themselves instead of services sponsored by masters. Accordingly, they often formed these churches "under the leadership of self-called, often illiterate black preachers who were little concerned with

[89] Hine, African American Odyssey, 74.
[90] Hine, African American Odyssey, 73.

consistent theology or Christian meekness… [and] mixed aspects of African culture into Christianity"[91] In forging these religious practices, preachers and lay persons alike often used interpretations of the Bible as a means to circumvent the system of slavery. No more is this evident than in the case of Denmark Vesey.

Denmark Vesey (c.1767-1822) was an African American preacher in Charleston, South Carolina. Vesey, a former slave who gained his freedom in 1799, was one of the African Methodist Episcopal Church's founders in Charleston. Vesey, an ardent Christian, believed that passages in the Bible about the enslavement of Hebrews in Egypt, and their subsequent deliverance from slavery, symbolized the position of the slaves and foreshadowed their eventual freedom (Hine, 206). In 1822, Vesey planned a slave revolt rooted in that belief to kill slaveholders, liberate those who were enslaved, starting an uprising, and then seek refuge in Haiti. The revolt was unsuccessful, and he, along with his co-conspirators, was captured and killed before the rebellion could get off the ground. While it is widely known that African American Christians often used biblical texts to speak to their own lived experiences, the same was also true for Muslims of African descent in the Americas.

As early as the sixteenth century's turn, African Muslims arrived from the West African Senegambia region and spanned the Gold Coast. Michael Gomez notes that from the fifteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries, "the Senegambian [slave] supply zone gradually became Islamized, more dramatically in the nineteenth than in earlier centuries, and during the nineteenth century the majority of the population became Muslim," further noting that the Senegambia region "was a principal supplier of slaves during the early phase of the Atlantic

[91] Hine, African American Odyssey, 168.

trade."[92] In addition, he notes that Muslim captives from the Gold Coast also constituted a percentage of those sold during the slave trade. Muslims brought with them a tradition of defiance rooted in the religion of Islam. Accordingly, "disobedience, rebellion… arrogance and sorcery - the colonists had to contend with a series of problems that the Muslims posed" (Diouf 148). In *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (1998), Sylviane A. Diouf notes that African Muslims "were not disposed to… accept their total subjugation by men they probably felt were morally inferior" (149). They often used the religious difference of their white counterparts to argue that they were spiritually and morally corrupt. Because of their moral deficiencies, Muslims believed that their enslavement was especially problematic. As such, Muslims engaged in jihad to fight back against their oppressors.

The notion of *struggle* in Islam's name is referred to as jihad. According to Mohammad Khalil, "Muslims generally understand jihad to be a noble 'struggle' or 'striving' for the sake of God. It comprises various actions, from fighting on the battlefield to endeavoring to attain inner peace in the prayer hall. It is, therefore, simplistic to define it – as many writers do – as 'holy war.' It is also problematic to insist – as many apologists do – that it has nothing to do with warfare. In fact, in the specific context of Islamic law, jihad typically denotes an armed struggle against outsiders."[93] When Muslims, their faith, or their territory are attacked, Islam permits Muslims to engage in military war to protect themselves and their beliefs. There are, however, restrictions for when one can wage jihad, including for self-defense, protecting one's faith (in the instance of being forcibly converted to another religion), or maintaining their freedom to

[92] Michael Gomez, "Muslims in Early America" in *The Journal of Southern History*, 60, no. 4 (1994), 52-53.
[93] Mohammad Khalil, *Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2.

practice their faith without restrictions. In two cases, the spirit of jihad was born in Saint-Domingue in 1791 and Bahia, Brazil, in 1835.

Boukman was a slave who launched a revolt in Saint-Domingue in 1791, the Haitian Revolution's first revolt. According to Sylviane Diouf, there is "compelling evidence" to suggest that Boukman was a Muslim and a marabout, a Muslim religious leader and teacher. She notes that "it is likely that Boukman was a Jamaican Muslim who had a Koran, and that he got his nickname [book man] from this."[94] CLR James, however, referred to Boukman as "a Papaloi or High Priest."[95] Boukman likely engaged in a religious syncretism of both religions, a practice common in West Africa. In *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (2005), Michael Gomez suggests that Boukman, like another key figure of the revolution (Macandal), had abandoned his Islamic orthodoxy (89-90). At any rate, Boukman denounced the God of the white people who seemed to ask for, and support grotesque behavior and treatment of African people, whereas the God of the slaves was a God who only wanted good. Boukman engaged in the concept of jihad to galvanize the masses of slaves into action against their oppressors. In a speech given by Boukman at Bois Caiman, the site of a meeting place for Black slaves planning the revolt, Boukman stated:

> "The Good Lord who created the sun which gives us light from above, who rouses the sea and makes the thunder roar–listen well, all of you–this god, hidden in the clouds, watches us. He sees all that the white people do. The god of the white people demands from them crimes; our god asks for good deeds.

[94] Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 153.
[95] C L. R James*, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 86.

> But this god who is so good demands vengeance! He will direct our hands; he will aid us. Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears, and listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us."[96]

The implications for engaging in jihad are also noted during the Male Revolt in Brazil in 1835. Muslims in Salvador, Bahia viewed their enslavement "as an indignity and an affront"; therefore, it was no surprise that Muslims "who already maintained their own enclaves and worked together to maximize their economic capacities, would also take up arms and fight for their interests."[97] The uprising against the government coincided with the end of Ramadan on January 25th, 1835. Although the rebellion was unsuccessful, the implication that Islam took center stage among the rebels is telling. In *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (1988), Joao Jose Reis notes that these Brazilian Muslims "fought in the streets wearing Muslim costumes to which the authorities referred as 'war garb.' Many had protective charms or papers with Muslim prayers around their necks and in their pockets" (126). During the subsequent investigation leading to their trial, Reis notes that "police found ritual garments, a banner, rings, 'four small books written in Arabic,' handwritten papers, and two sheep, probably for sacrificial purposes" indicating the role that Islam played in this revolt. (126).

These accounts illustrate that jihad has been appealed to respond to people of African descent's lived experience. By engaging in jihad, those who were enslaved saw their plight against their slave masters directly linked to their physical, mental, and spiritual freedoms as

[96] Arlene Tickner and David L. Blaney, "Black Redemption, Not (White) Abolition" in *Claiming the International,* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 147.
[97] Gomez, *Black Crescent*, 101.

enslaved Muslims were taken away. The matter is no different; African American Muslims at the Muslim Center see their plight as being inextricably linked to their religious salvation. When I asked Omar if he saw a relationship between Islam and his experiences as an African American man, he stated:

> "For sure because I'm one of those people who truly believes that the only other group of people that's been through what the African Americans been through was Moses' people, in many different ways. And I identify with that because, just like Moses' people, I believe that enough people prayed and God answered their prayers and took them out of bondage, and the first thing they did was worship something other than God. And that's what the African Americans have done too. That's why we are in the state that we are in, I believe.[98]

Omar's statement is telling because he sees a connection between the racial and social structures of oppression as rooted in their denial and worship of one God, Allah. Therefore, his way of fighting injustice as a Black man relies on his ability to follow God's law as he sees it, while also inviting other people to follow God's law. Presumably, this will help alleviate the problems of injustice wherever it exists in the world. It also shows that African American Muslims still examine their social plight through the lens of religion and religious philosophy and use religion as a means of dealing with social ills.

His reference to "Moses' people" is also telling. It shows that he identifies with Moses' story, much like African Americans have done throughout history. In "Exodus Politics: Civil Rights and Leadership in African American Literature and Culture" (2013), Robert Patterson

[98] Omar, interview with author, 8/2/19.

notes that “African Americans have long appropriated and typologically identified with this narrative to argue that their civil rights are God-given and divinely protected. Black freedom struggles, black leadership, and everyday black people historically have cited the Exodus narrative to argue that civil rights injustices contradict God’s will for freedom” (2). The history of using this narrative during slavery as “its message of deliverance became part of the slaves’ liberatory use of Christianity” (Kay 2008 27), even becoming a Negro spiritual “Go Down, Moses.”

* * *

While the Quran is believed to contain nearly all of the elements necessary to live by Islamic tradition, belief in the Quran is often coupled with actions, sayings, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad known as hadith (singular and plural). Since the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad to spread the faith, he is recognized as God’s prophet and messenger and believed to personify Islamic teachings. Therefore, the prophet becomes the living embodiment of the Quran, and his actions are examples for Muslim adherents to follow. The prophet’s way of life (teachings, actions, legal rulings, etc.) is collectively referred to as the sunnah. Therefore, anyone who follows the path (sunnah) of the prophet and, consequently, the Quran's teachings are referred to as Sunni (hence the term Sunni Muslim).

While hadith are considered secondary to the Qur’an, there are some Muslims at the Muslim Center who emphasize hadith more than they do on the Quran. Mohammad, for example, a 56-year-old attendee of the Muslim center, when asked where he ranks the Quran and hadith in terms of his understanding of Islam, he stated, “Well, from my understanding, I know that Allah know everything, and if Allah say it in the Quran… He (Allah) say listen to the

Prophet alayhee-salam (peace be with him)... So, even though I can read the Quran, I can't really understand if I'm not listening to the sunnah (hadith), so I think the sunnah is the most important... Know the hadith then you could kind of you can live it as the prophet did."[99] Mohammad's answer demonstrates that he emphasizes the hadith more than he does the Quran. This way of following the Quran, he reminded me, is rooted in the Quran itself, which states, "O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you…" (Quran, 4:59). In addition, several places in the Quran tells Muslims to follow Allah and Prophet Muhammad (Qur'an 8:20; 24:54; 3:132; 4:79; 59:7; 4:68; 4:63), and suggests that Prophet Muhammad is not only the embodiment of the Quran but also the expounder of its meaning as demonstrated by the following verse: "And We sent down to you the reminder so that you may explain to people what was revealed to them and so they may reflect" (Qur'an 16:44).

Muslims such as Mohammad believes that reading the Quran would not wholly provide the clarity necessary to engage in Islamic tenets fully. Hadith, then, become the leading interpreter by providing contextual evidence for Quranic passages by expanding upon the scripture. One example would be the necessity of using hadith to understand some of the ritualistic aspects of Islam, such as prayer (salat). Prayer is incumbent upon every Muslim five times a day. The performance of the Salat is mentioned in the Quran 78 times. However, there is no detailed account of *how* one is supposed to perform Salah. It is necessary to consult hadith to understand how to perform it thoroughly. For Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad provided an example of how to perform the prayer and taught it to his follows. As Mohammad suggested, without the extra-Quranic sources, the way that one would perform prayers would

[99] Interview with Mohammad, 9/10/19.

be open to interpretation. On another level, Mohammad's statement tells us a lot about African American Muslims both inside and outside the Muslim Center. Although he has little to no direct engagement with the Quran, his practices still fall under the prescribed notion of Islam. This shows a systematic interrogation of Islamic tradition by using extra-Quranic sources to understand the meanings behind Islamic knowledge's ultimate authority, the Quran. Another reason supporting his preference for the hadith more than the Quran is that the language used in the Quran can be difficult to understand without context. For example, the Quran does not mention the period that it comes into being besides discussing the Prophet Muhammad and Badr and Uhud's battles. Understanding the context in which the Quran and hadith were revealed is important to the religion because it allows one to situate certain things within a specific context, as noted by Omar:

> "I learned early on about hadith... A lot of time hadith, when you reading, you have to understand what the situation was at the time because some things were sent just for those [people] for a particular situation. And if you not versed in Islam you won't know that… You'll use the hadith in the wrong situation. You know what I mean? So it's well known to people that have been Muslim for a while that some hadith are what they call sahih, or strong or da'eef, it could be weak transmitted and you don't know in this day in age people write anything they want."[100]

Considering the importance of context in both sources is vital for several reasons. For example, the Quran states, "kill the disbelievers (non-Muslims) wherever you find them, capture them

[100] Interview with Omar, 8/2/19.

and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush ...” (Quran, 9:5). Without contextual knowledge and hadith, this verse could be interpreted as a justification to kill anyone who is not Muslim, when in actuality, this verse was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad during the height of Muslim persecution, and the next part of that verse, “...but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving” is often omitted when transmitted by those who have ill-intended purposes. When one understands that this verse came down during the height of Muslim persecution, then one understands that that verse was limited to that context.

* * *

While most Muslims have followed the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's sunnah as guiding their faith, there emerged different schools of thought in Islamic discourse and each school of thought, each Sunni, each equally authoritative in their interpretations of the Quran and sunna. The four Sunni schools of thought were the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools, named after their respective imams (leaders). Although they agreed in their general understanding of Islam, what differentiated these schools of thought was Islamic jurisprudence or how they interpreted the legalistic aspects of Islam. While Muslims at the Muslim Center do not follow one school of thought, their beliefs and practices fall into at least two traditions.

The Hanafi school of thought came into being in the 8th century AD and was named after the Persian scholar Abu Hanifa an-Nu’man ibn Thabit (c. 699 – 767 CE). Abu Hanifa was a generation removed from the Prophet Muhammad, and his school of thought began in modern-day Iraq. The Hanafi school used the Quran, hadith, the consensus of Islamic scholars, qiyas (analogical reasoning about Islamic law that is not covered in the Qur’an or sunna), and

urf (the general customs and practices of a given society).[101] In sum, the Hanafi school of jurisprudence is distinguished "by its rationalistic tendency and to some extent by its theoretical leanings in that it deals not only with actual issues but also with problems that are based on supposition... [and] emphasized personal liberty and maintained that neither the community nor the government is entitled to interfere with the liberty of the individual so long as the latter has not violated the law…"[102]

A Hanafi movement did gain traction among African Americans during the Civil Rights/Black Power era of the 1960s and 1970s. Founded by Hamaas Abdul Khaalis, the Hanafi move was a breakaway movement from the Nation of Islam that advocated for African Americans to embrace Sunni Islam. Khaalis had served as the secretary of the NOI's Temple No. 2 in Chicago, Illinois.[103] Basing his teachings on the Hanafi school, he dissented from the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. He taught African American people, including Kareem Abdul Jabber (who would later become disenchanted with Khaalis' cult of personality) and African American youth during his tenure with the Urban League. [104] After this, he moved to Washington D.C., establishing a mosque with about 2500 members, and had another one in New York with approximately 1500 members (Curtis, 325). However, the success of the movement would come to an end when in 1977, he and 12 others took over several buildings in Washington D.C., demanding the halting of the release of the film Mohammad, Messenger of God. He also wanted the government to hand over the men who killed his family, an attack he

[101] H P. Glenn, *Legal Traditions of the World: Sustainable Diversity in Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 201.
[102] Vincent J. Cornell, *Voices of Islam,* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 159.
[103] Curtis, *Encyclopedia*, 325
[104] (Goudsouzian, 2017 458)

believed to have been ordered by the Nation of Islam. After a 36-hour siege, he surrendered and was later convicted and sent to prison for over twenty years. This marked the end of the Hanifi Movement, as the siege's negative publicity drove many away from the movement, including Abdul-Jabbar.

The Maliki school of jurisprudence was named after the 8th-century scholar Malik ibn Anas (c. 711–795 CE). The Maliki school also relies on the Quran and hadith as primary sources for Islamic law, but Imam Malik also used the consensus of the people of Medina to be a valid source of Islamic law:

> "The Maliki school... advocated the notion of the ''Medina consensus'' (ijma' ahl al-Madina) as the only authoritative form of consensus…. Notwithstanding his leading position in the Traditionist camp, Imam Malik relied extensively on personal opinion (ra'y). Two of his important doctrines, public interest (istislah or maslaha) and blocking the means to mischief (sadd al-dhara'i), are rationalistic in their logic and rely mainly on the exercise of personal judgment. Maliki jurisprudence also attempted to forge a closer link with the practicalities of life in Medina and attached a greater weight to social custom."[105]

While he used scriptural evidence and relied on the sunnaic tradition, his decision to include the people's customs was compelling as long as they did not conflict with established edicts. It situates customary practices alongside the traditional belief system by allowing matters not clearly defined by the Quran and hadith to be decided by the people. An example of this

[105] Cornell, Voices of Islam, 160.

phenomenon is the same as in the United States; laws not explicit in the U.S. Constitution are reserved for the states so as long as they do not conflict with the Constitution.

The Maliki school of thought also falls in line with Africans on Africa's continent. In "Maliki Jurisprudence and Boko Haram: Ideology versus Nation Building" (2016), Ikenga Oraegbunam notes that the Maliki school is "almost the only school of Muslim law throughout West Africa and the Maghreb," further noting that it is "the only acceptable version operating in Nigerian Islam" (29). In "Excavating Arabic Sources for the History of Slavery in Western Africa" (2016), Ghislaine Lydon and Bruce Hall note that West African Muslims drew from three Maliki works - the Muwatta' (or "The Well-Trodden Path"), Malik b. Anas, at-Risata ("The treatise") by Ibn Abi Zayd (d. 996) and Mukhtacarft 't-fiqh 1ata madhhab at-Imãm Matik ("Compendium of jurisprudence of Imam Mäilk's legal doctrine") by Khalfl ibn Ishaq al-lundi (d. 1374) (21-22) and "referred to these sources while engaging in daily jurisprudence, answering the legal questions tailored to the particular circumstances of the day by writing legal opinions" (22). Given the propensity and the widespread acceptance of the Maliki doctrine among West African people, it is reasonable to conclude that some enslaved Africans transported to the Americas during the trans-Atlantic slave trade carried with them their beliefs into the new world. In addition, evidence also suggests that they participated in the slave trade. Using analyses drawn from the Maliki school of thought, slave traders believed that it was permissible to capture and sell slaves, and "was often justified as a punishment for unbelief and a rejection of Islam on the part of those enslaved, and slaves were often represented as the antithesis of Muslims, people who lacked personal honor and behaved in licentious ways" (32).

The Shafi'i school of thought was borne from Imam Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (767–820 CE). The Shafi'i school also relies on the Quran and hadith as fundamental drivers of the religion, and imam Shafi'i was one of the foremost scholars to contribute to Islamic jurisprudence. A student of Malik ibn Anas, he continued his predecessor's work on jurisprudential matters. However, he differed considerably from his teacher on the notion of the community's consensus in Medina, arguing that he placed "undue emphasis on the Medina consensus and the precedent of the Companions at the expense of the Sunna of the Prophet."[106] He sought to eliminate the community's consensus and instead focused on Islamic laws as explicit or implicit, thereby deemphasizing community practices as an essential component of Islamic jurisprudence. What that did was move away from customary practices and create a stricter version of Islam.

Similarly, the Hanbali school of thought, named after the Iraqi scholar Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), relied on the Quran and hadith to derive religious laws. However, just as the Shafi'i school, the Hanbali's deemphasized community practices. In the cases where there was no clear answer in the Quran or the hadith, the Hanbali school did not accept the jurists' discretion in a particular place, nor did they take customs of a community as a way to derive Islamic laws. This school of thought is viewed as a "traditional" school of thought in Sunni Islam.
African American Muslims fall in the tradition of both the Maliki and Hanafi schools of jurisprudence, which rely on the Quran and hadith as their primary authoritative sources, but also considers the general customs and practices of a given society (Hanafi school) and the consensus of the scholars (Maliki school) to be a good source of Islamic jurisprudence. By

[106] Cornell, Voices of Islam, 160-161.

falling into these two traditions, African American Muslims are better able to root their faith within the context of their living experiences. While each person often listed different components of how they derive religious authority, each person agreed that the community's consensus, the community of scholars in Detroit, is from where they derive their authority after conferring with the Quran Hadith. When I asked Omar if he relied on the scholarly community to understand Islam, he stated:

> "Well like the scholarly community is... There are so many well-versed Muslims in Detroit that there should be never reason for a person to pass on wrong information. It's just a matter of being true to yourself and asking yourself do you know what you are talking about.... That's when being Muslim really kick in, being able to have that in you to say to a person, 'I dont know that, but I can direct you to a person that can tell you. You know?"[107]

In addition to being true to oneself, there is a community of scholars who are formally trained in Islamic studies and equipped with the understanding of the lived experiences of the people in the community. According to Omar, there are "quite a few of them." For example, he described Imam Ceesay, the Imam at the Muslim Center as "a professional in Islam" who "translated the Quran into Wolof" and stated that "That's a big feat...because when you translate the Quran it be people from all parts of the world who look at how you translated it to make sure you ain't got nothing in there wrong." Although Imam Ceesay is from The Gambia, this does not seem to impact how Islam is practiced. All of the previous imams have been

[107] Omar, interviewed by author, 8/2/19

African American, and currently, another resident imam, imam Khalil Markham, is African American and delivers the majority of the Khutbahs.

These Muslims' scholarly community consists of the imam who gives the khutbah(sermon) on Fridays, such as Imam Ceesay and Imam Khalil. These two people are the sources of religious authority, and rightfully so. Not only are they the most learned in the community, but they also have the uncanny ability to incorporate relevant material into the khutbah that is rooted in Islamic teachings, situated within the lived experiences of their congregants, and presented in a way that is spiritually and culturally relevant. When I asked Imam Khalil how he chooses topics for his khutbah, he stated, "It just comes to me. Sometimes im just sitting at home and then it hits me."[108] Undoubtedly, though, the khutbahs are often rooted in something that speaks to the congregants' religiosity and cultural markers. Therefore, the Muslim Center people are getting a master theologian; they also get a cultural signifier who feeds their secular and the sacred selves.

An immense amount of trust is placed in these scholars' hands, so much so that there is a contingent of Muslims at the Muslim Center who do not read the Quran or hadith themselves but instead rely on the imams' authority. Greg, a congregant of the Muslim Center, stated, "I can't understand what be going on in the Quran, so I just go to the prayer and listen to the imam. You know what I'm saying?"[109] Greg, who converted to Islam in 2016 at the Muslim Center, shows the level of trust that Black Muslim leaders have and highlights the authority they command. Greg, like many others, takes an indirect approach to understand Islam by

[108] Discussion with author, January 2020.
[109] Greg, discussion with author, December 2020.

listening and applying what the Imam says to his everyday life. This way of acquiring knowledge through the spoken word has roots in Islam and the West African tradition.

The hadith's oral transmission is one of the most significant ways of transmitting information because it is how the life of Muhammad was initially maintained and passed down to subsequent generations. In addition, the memorization of the Quran and the verbal reproduction of it allowed "for a personal possession of the Word in the body, without requiring recourse to a written source external to the self… Islamic knowledge was embodied knowledge.[110] People who memorize the Quran by heart are referred to as *hafiz*, which means guardian or protector. That tradition of orality also played a considerable role in the griot's West African practice.

Acquiring knowledge through the spoken word has a huge role in West Africa. Griots are West African historians, storytellers, and poets who use orality to pass down knowledge and stories about past events and people. Those stories are then retold to future generations. Griots occupied a high status in West African societies as the maintainers and protectors of knowledge. Similarly, the imam, who is also entrusted with passing down spiritual knowledge and stories about the past, takes on the same role as the West African griots, especially for congregants like Greg. They prefer to receive scripture through the spoken word. By carrying on the tradition of oratory, Greg and others engage in a cultural practice that links their cultural identity to their religious one.

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[110] Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 49.

Of all the guides used to construct their religious beliefs and identity (Quran, hadith, and the scholarly community), attendees of the Muslim Center seem less concerned with philosophical reason nor deductive syllogisms as a means towards understanding Islam. No one described philosophical reason as one of the main factors in understanding Islam. In the African American religious tradition, the necessity of having a philosophically consistent theology is less important than having a spirituality that they can feel. That is not to say that Black Muslims' beliefs are incoherent, but instead, they do not think it is necessary to engage in philosophical inquiries to reconcile seeming inconsistencies. Part of that rests in the nature of spirituality itself. For Black Muslims, applying worldly philosophy principles to spiritual matters is incoherent because human beings' understanding is limited to this earthly realm. The indifference to philosophy is rooted in what Karanja Carroll refers to as the Afrikan Worldview. In "Africana Studies and Research Methodology: Revisiting the Centrality of the Afrikan Worldview" (2008), Karanja Carroll shows that African worldviews are different from European worldviews. This phenomenon explains why there is less emphasis on philosophical principles in religious matters. Logic, according to Carroll, is reasoning assessed by the principles of validity that includes methods of inductive and deductive argumentations to arrive at a conclusion. In an African worldview, and consequently, in the worldview of many African Americans at the Muslim Center, African Americans have a diunital worldview that can maintain seemingly contradictory viewpoints. Other worldviews, such as a Eurocentric worldview, use a dichotomous view which does not allow for the maintenance of seemingly contradictory worldviews and attempts to reconcile those conflicting views through philosophical reasoning.

An example would be the "omni" properties of God. Muslims believe that God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (all-good). In a Eurocentric worldview, the presence of evil in the world contradicts the presence of all of these qualities in God. They argue that if God is all-knowing, then he knows that evil exists; If he is all-powerful, then he has the power to stop evil from happening; and if he is all good, then he is obligated to stop evil from existing. Therefore, in a Eurocentric worldview of religion, God cannot have all of these qualities because they are inconsistent, leaving the person to reconcile those beliefs or give up one of God's divine attributes. However, in the African worldview, the need to give up one of God's attributes or reconcile this seeming inconsistency is unnecessary. They feel no need to negotiate these seemingly contradictory characteristics.

Instead of engaging in logical ways of knowing, African American Muslims place more of an emphasis on experiential knowledge as a means of knowing. Their epistemology is rooted in their experiences as African Americans and how they felt, spiritually, before and after their conversion to Islam. Members of the center found it hard to articulate just how they felt, but all described it as a phenomenon that made them *know* that Islam was the right path for them. Knowing what Islam is was just as important as it is felt for them. This contrasts with Eurocentric views, which seek to distance themselves from their feelings by being objective.

* * *

Regardless of however one chooses to reconcile their religious beliefs, all congregants at the Muslim Center are accepted as Muslim, irrespective of his/her actions. However, many of the congregants take a great deal of care to distinguish between Muslims and Mu'mins. A Muslim is anyone who takes the declaration of faith (shahadah), declaring his/her faith in Allah

and his Prophet Muhammad. The petitioner says: *I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is his prophet and messenger.* After one makes that declaration, s/he is considered a Muslim. A mu'min (believer), on the other hand, is a person whose actions conform to his/her beliefs. For them, a mu'min is one who not only makes the declaration of faith but one whose faith is represented in their actions. Their actions (including fasting, paying alms, performing hajj, etc.), they argue, demonstrate one's faith in the religion and separates him from a Muslim. According to Abdullah, every mu'min is a Muslim, but not every Muslim is a mu'min. This is an important distinction to make when thinking about the African American Islamic tradition. I asked Mohammad if a person could believe in Islam but not follow any of the Islamic rules, to which he replied, "That's impossible."[111] This reveals that while African American Muslims are inclusive and accepting of anyone who self-identifies as Muslim, there is a distinction made amongst them about who is a *true* believer.

In conclusion, this chapter examined how African American Muslims systematically approach their beliefs and practices. It demonstrates that Black Muslims practice Islam following "traditional" Islamic practices while also rooting it in their lived experiences. The idea that Islam in Black America is illegitimate shows limited to no community engagement, leading to stereotypes of Black Muslims distorting Islamic teachings. However, this chapter shows that their religiosity commands legitimacy, and they are just as "authentic" as any other Muslim group.

Black Muslims root their beliefs in practices in the Quran, hadith, and the scholarly community. With the Quran and the hadith as the principal instruments of guidance, they

[111] Mohammad, interview by author, 9/10/19

couple those with the advice of their scholars in the community and the community's customs. What makes Islam in the Black community unique is its ability to respond to its followers' spiritual and social needs. In contrast to some who believe that Islam is static and universal in its applicability, Black Muslims understand that part of Islam's dynamism and its appeal to Black people is how Islam can keep up with changing times and speak to all living conditions.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIM WOMEN

My first visit to the Muslim Center was a novel experience. I entered through the same doors as my Muslim sisters. We walked through the same hallway, greeted each other with *as-salamu-alaikum* as we walked by, and although we entered the prayer hall through different doors, we all eventually ended up in the same prayer room. This was a unique experience for me, as most mosques that I have attended in and around the Detroit area have separate entrances for men and women. Furthermore, once inside, there is often a wall that separates male from female congregants. The barrier acts as a deterrent to the male gaze. Traditionalists believe that men and women praying together would be a distraction for the men, as their focus would be on the women instead of on their prayers. However, the propensity for gender separation in mosques, and debates surrounding its requirement, is not rooted in the Islamic tradition considering "that even conservative exegetes acknowledge that separate spaces for men and women did not exist in the Prophet Muhammad's time."[112]

Debates withstanding, the prevalent practice of gender separation cannot be ignored and has become a significant discussion in Islamic discourse, especially in the historiography of women in Islam. In *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism* (2012), Juliane Hammer notes:

> "In many of the arguments about the necessity or legal permissibility of physical barriers or separations, the practice of the Prophet Muhammad is weighed

[112] Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More Than a Prayer*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 128.

against the danger of sexual temptation, which in turn would result in fitnah in the community. Those who reject the demand for joint prayer spaces cite arguments that revolve around conceptions of women's sexuality. To claim that men will be distracted by the presence of women is to describe women… as a sexual temptation" (129).

To believe that women's sexuality is a distraction for men is to blame women for being attractive and supposing that their sexuality harms men. Women should separate them because of it. However, Hammer fails to mention that gender separation is also premised on the belief that men have such a rapacious appetite for gazing at women that they cannot restrain themselves in their presence. This idea, too, is problematic because it assumes that men have no control over their libidos. Unsurprisingly, many communities still choose gender separation as the unchallenged norm at many mosques. The determination of whether or not a mosque should be gender-separated seems to hinge on the cultural traditions and religious understanding of particular congregants.

The permissibility of men and women praying together dates back to the eleventh century. In *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender Within the Ummah* (2009), Jamillah Karim states:

"Immigrant Muslims have carried over the practice of partition from the mosques in their native countries, and it is a practice that had become common in Muslim lands by the eleventh century. The legendary theologian jurist-Sufi Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111) declared that 'it is not proper for young women and men to sit in the mosque without an obstruction between

them' and cited the wife of the Prophet, 'Aisha, to prove his point… many made the partition obligatory in order to regulate mixed-gender interaction based on their interpretation of what the Prophet would have wanted" (172).

However, modern Islamic scholars view the partition as sitting outside of any legal ruling. In *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (2006), Amina Wadud notes that "there is nothing essentially Islamic about it. Gender separation is neither a matter of faith nor a principle of Islamic dogma and creed. It was never emphasized in the Qur'an, which instead recommends ways for women and men to observe modest limits while in each other's presence" further stating that "separation in congregational prayer usually relegates women to an inferior place, either behind the male prayer lines or invisible to them in the congregational setting" (175). Other scholars, such as Jamillah Karim, echo Wadud and state that "prayer spaces divided by a partition tend to be *separate and unequal spaces*" (173). However, Karim deviates from Wadud by stating that "many mosque participants support this practice," as it is reported in the sunnah. Wadud believes that the prevalence of this practice is rooted in a mosque's desire to be *authentic* in its practices, noting that "sometimes a mosque seems to prove itself genuine by increasing these rituals of separation" (174).

In *Muslims in the United States: The State of Research* (2003), Karen Leonard notes that "in 81 percent of immigrant mosques, women pray behind a curtain or in another room, but in only 30 percent of African-American mosques do women do this" (78), underscore Karim's observation that immigrant Muslims have carried over the practice of partition from the mosques in their native countries. In addition to having "separate and unequal spaces" as noted by Karim, gender separation disadvantages Muslim women because they have limited

access to their imams. Having limited access to one's religious leader is especially problematic because it puts Muslim women in the position to root their understanding of the religion in a male perspective, thereby limiting how they can engage in their beliefs and practices. On the other hand, men have unmitigated access to the imams and can ask them questions directly, enabling them to be fully involved in the learning process. In contrast, where gender separation occurs, women have to write down their questions and give them to men, who, in turn, pass those questions to the imam.

This arrangement may produce enmity in women who feel unequal access to power limits their religious life participation. This feeling was especially true for several women of the Muslim Center who stated that they did feel a part of the religious community when they visited other nearby mosques, including Masjid Al-Falah in Hamtramck (primarily Bengali Muslims) and Masjid Mu'ath Bin Jabal (primarily Yemeni Muslims). Both of these mosques use a partition to separate men from women, and as a result, several women stated that they did not feel like they were a part of the religious community. As a result, many women reported left to find a more inclusive mosque.

In contrast to immigrant Muslim mosques, African American Muslims have religious traditions by choosing to pray in desegregated spaces. By allowing men and women to occupy the same sacred space with equal access to the imam, the Muslim Center is a microcosm of the larger African American Muslim community that creates a sense of equality among its practitioners and fosters a sense of community. Doing so provides a sense of community among the male and female congregants, promotes equality within the religious sphere, and enables the *limited* intermingling of men and women. On a practical level, the intermingling

caters to the religious community, as Omar noted. He stated that the intermingling of men and women is one reason why he chose to make the Muslim Center his home. He said, "Most mosques that you go to, you don't even know that it's women in the mosque. The Muslim Center everybody mixes and mingles, which is a good thing because how you gone find a wife if you don't ever see one?" Thus, the Muslim Center caters to the African-American community's needs on a practical level by allowing its male and female congregants to intermingle.

However, it is worth noting that while male and female congregants at the Muslim Center pray in the same room as the men, gender separation does occur but on a different level, one that is rooted in the Islamic tradition. Men sit in the front of the prayer hall, and women sit behind the men. This arrangement does not seem to produce any feelings of hostility or exclusion on the part of its female members. Women do not feel limited in their participation nor their religious study. Women seem to welcome this seating arrangement. One woman, Sara, said jokingly, "I would rather pray behind the men. We praying and bending over in front of men, and men gone be men. But seriously, that is how the Prophet did it."[113] Her statement echoed Karim, who stated that "they view a separate women's section in the rear as the most logical gender arrangement. Instead of viewing women's position in the rear as a symbol of men's ontological supremacy over women, as many non-Muslim visitors interpret it, many Muslim women prefer this arrangement because it prevents men from gazing at their elevated rear parts when they prostrate" (171). In addition, in *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (2014), Dawn-Marie Gibson and Jamillah Karim state that women's sitting in the back does not signify inferiority "but rather practical logistics in a

[113] Discussion with author, October 2019.

worship context in which men and women need separation, otherwise women would be forced, as part of salat [prayer], to touch bodies with male strangers" (210).

In what follows, I demonstrate that not only are African-American Muslim women full participants in their religious experiences but that they are also leaders within this religious community. I disrupt popular discourse about African American Muslim women by showing that they are the equal counterparts of Muslim men and occupy leadership roles in secular and sacred spheres. Undoubtedly, these women serve on the Muslim Center board, view themselves as leaders in the home, and are considered by community members as its leaders.

The Women of the Muslim Center

A report entitled "The American Mosque 2011: Women and the American Mosque" (2011) by Sarah Sayeed notes that "African American mosques tend to be more women-friendly, in particular the mosques that follow the leadership of W. Deen Muhammad" (4). This article also states that African American women's participation in mosques is more significant than in immigrant mosques noting that 23% of the congregants in African American mosques are women, while only about 16% are in attendance in immigrant mosques (5). This report also shows that:

> "Comparisons by ethnicity show that African American mosques are more likely to actually have women serve on their mosque boards during the past 5 years (75%), and Arabs least likely (44%)... These differences across ethnicities could arise due to cultural expectations and norms that disfavor women in leadership roles in immigrant cultures compared to African American culture. There are also differences within the African American community, with the W. Deen

> Mohammed mosques more likely to allow women's board participation (98%) compared to other African American mosques (78%). W. Deen Mohammed mosques also had higher rates of women's actual involvement in governance in the past 5 years (91%) compared to other African American mosques (57%)" (12).

The differences by ethnicity are glaring, with African American communities scoring higher in being women-friendly spaces. Still, African American communities following W. D. Mohammed are more inclusive than any other African American communities, with 71% of W. Deen Mohammed mosques scoring either "excellent" or "good" (14). These numbers highlight the differences of mosques on a larger scale while also encompassing the Muslim Center. While these numbers show a higher involvement of African American women in the mosque, it also underscores women's leadership roles. Occupying leadership roles is one of the defining features of the Muslim Center.

W.D. Muhammad's mosques have been progressive in their inclusion of women in leadership roles, leading to these high percentages of women involvement. Within four months of the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, W.D. Muhammad appointed the first woman to head Harlem Temple No. 7.[114] In that same year, he also abolished the Muslim Girl Training (MGT), a feature of the Nation of Islam that taught domestic duties to women, including cooking, cleaning, sewing, personal hygiene, and women's roles in Muslim life and their communities. In addition, his belief in inclusion was also highlighted when he spoke at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta in 2008. Imam Muhammad stated:

[114] Allen 1996, 16

> "In the time of Muhammad the Prophet, women scholars were recognized, and many of the women scholars were the teachers of the imams. Aisha [a wife of the Prophet] was one of them, as the sister who asked me to respond knows. She wants me to tell you that women were respected for their education, for their knowledge, for their character, for their spirituality, for their moral excellence, etc. And the most pious religious leaders of the men respected Aisha so much that when she spoke, they would all remain quiet and they would listen for wisdom from her mouth."[115]

In essence, women of WD Muhammad's mosques have always been at the forefront of including women within the religious community by following the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad and taking queues from women within his community.

Muslim congregants unanimously agreed that the Muslim Center would not be as successful without its women's participation. When asked whether the center would be thriving without the involvement of women, Tia stated, "Oh most definitely not!"[116] Mohammad characterized the role of women at the center as "strong," saying that women "have a major role in keeping the Muslim Center going."[117] Omar stated, "when you look at Islam as a whole, as far as the African American experience of Muslims that I have seen in Detroit… the African American women always play a leadership role." The notion of leadership stood out to me; Omar followed up, stating, "I'm actually on the Shura Board here at the Muslim Center and

[115] Theological Center in Atlanta in 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG6kjh6yxZk).
[116] Tia, interviewed by author, 8/5/19.
[117] Kalil Interview.

have been for about 10-11 years now. Its three women on the board here. You know what I mean?... So they have equal share in making the rules around here."[118]

The shura board is the governing body that organizes the mosque's affairs. The term derives from *ash-shura,* an Arabic word that roughly means "consultation." The roots of having a governing body for a community of Muslims is in the Quran itself, which states: "Those who hearken to their Lord and establish regular Prayer, who *(conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation*…" (Quran 42:38). The point is to have a committee of people who meet, decide the mosque's direction, future programming, and day-to-day affairs with people most affected by those decisions. The committee's goal is to democratize the decision-making process by having a diverse group of people representing the larger congregation's best interest. Of the six total board members at the Muslim Center, three are African American women who ensure that women's issues remain a top priority. As such, The Muslim Center does not just afford women token roles on its governing body; it grants them an equal share of the governing body.

The inclusion of its Black female voices is palpable, even for those who are not regular attendees. During one of my interviews, Omar recounted a story that shows how leadership in this mosque seemed to challenge others' preconceived notions about women's leadership roles. He stated:

> "One of the reasons you'll see a lot of the men bypass the Muslim Center is because they used to call the Muslim Center 'the woman's mosque' because the women have a lot of input here as opposed to if you go to one of the other mosques. You don't see women having the type of input they have in here. So

[118] Omar, interviewed by author, 8/2/19.

women get an equal share of thinking around here. They aren't limited to 'you just a woman."[119]

While men are often the spokesmen for the establishment, women are recognized by community members as being true leaders. Khalil best described this phenomenon: "They [women] have a major role in keeping the Muslim center going, you know? We're more upfront where we are like the protectors, the providers. But the women, they are the ones you see behind the scenes…"[120] In addition to serving on the board, women are also leaders at the center because they are running nearly all of the programming, including teaching children the Quran, community outreach efforts, and running the soup kitchen. This community's strength and vitality can be attributed to this community of women.

Throughout African American history, women have always been at the forefront of uplifting African American communities through their sustained efforts. Women have contributed significantly to Black youth's education, the formation of social clubs, the creation and development of racial uplift programs, grassroots organizing, and the work of various publications. In the early 19th century, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois engaged in a public debate about the best type of education for Black people to attain racial and social justice. At the same time, Nannie Helen Burroughs implemented both ideologies in her National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, DC.[121] During Marcus Garvey's role as leader of the UNIA, he relied heavily on his wife, Amy Jacques Garvey. She was one of the main

[119] Omar interview
[120] Khalil, interviewed by author, 8/5/19.
[121] Sarah D. Bair, "Educating Black Girls in the Early 20th Century: The Pioneering Work of Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879–1961)" in *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 36, 9-35, (2008)

contributors to the successes of the movement. While the Montgomery Bus Boycott's success is often attributed to E.D. Nixon and Martin Luther King, Joann Robinson played an integral role in the campaign by circulating flyers and convincing women, the primary bus riders, to stay off the busses making the boycott successful. During the era of the Black Panther Party, the majority of its rank-and-file of the membership were women who contributed to the various programs and, in the absence of male leadership, stepped in to occupy those roles such as Elaine Brown, who led the organization in the absence of Huey P. Newton.[122] At present, the Black Lives Matter movement, a hashtag that became the rallying cry to draw attention to the killing of unarmed Black men, was created by three African American women - Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. Much of this movement's success can be attributed to Black women's participation, as noted by Barbara Ransby in *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century* (2018). She states, "Black feminist politics and sensibilities have been the intellectual lifeblood of this movement and its practices. This is the first time in the history of US social movements that Black feminist politics have defined the frame for a multi-issue, Black-led mass struggle that did not primarily or exclusively focus on women" (3).

The Black Lives Matter movement underscores women's contributions to African American people's collective struggle. Except for the Black Lives Matter movement, women did not represent the face of the activities mentioned above. However, their contributions to each movement warrant the honor and merit of being leaders in their own right. Many of these women were foundational for those organizations and movements' success while also being

[122] Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).

wives, raising children, and maintaining their households. However, what is different about these African American Muslim women is that they are not viewed as a supporting cast. They contribute significantly to this community's direction while also occupying other leadership roles such as managing the soup kitchen and the food pantry.

The soup kitchen and food pantry are open every Saturday from noon to 1:30 pm to serve hot meals to the community while also offering free groceries to people who need them. The food pantry consists of foods donated to the Muslim Center by Forgotten Harvest. This food rescue organization collects surplus foods from approximately 800 donors and then delivers surplus food to charities, food pantries, shelters, and soup kitchens in and around the Detroit area. The Muslim Center is one of the recipients of those food donations, allowing them to give out thousands of food items away each week, including canned goods, bread, beef, chicken, desserts, fruits, vegetables, and so on. After people have taken as many items as they can carry, they gather in the gymnasium to get a hot meal provided by the soup kitchen.

The soup kitchen serves anywhere from several dozen to over a hundred people in more recent times of the pandemic. The cooks, who are all women, prepare different hot meals, including fried chicken, spaghetti, whiting, yellow rice, salads, and glazed carrots, just to name a few. The women have a great deal of autonomy in choosing what they will prepare, and the success of the soup kitchen and the food pantry is in no small part due to Davine El-Amin's leadership.

El-Amin, who co-chairs the Muslim Center's food pantry and serves as the board secretary for the Muslim Center, takes an active role in determining the staff of the kitchen, what foods will be prepared, maintaining drivers for the Meals on Wheels program, and

choosing the most efficient routes for drivers. The delivery routes, which span from the Hamtramck to Westland, ensure that every person who cannot make the trek to the facility but is facing food insecurity will get a meal. When there is a shortage of drivers, El-Amin seeks out volunteers to fill the missing spots or make the trips herself. Anyone who cannot make the trek to the facility is eligible for this service, and El-Amin ensures that those who have requested meals begin getting deliveries. Her efficacy in leadership is in no small part due to her commanding disposition and her desire to make the community around her better.

The Marketplace

While the *jummah* prayer is the time for Muslim congregants to get together in worship, the time after the prayers serves the function of a marketplace. Congregants gather together in the gymnasium, situated right next to the prayer hall. Women, typically the same ones who run the soup kitchen, prepare meals on behalf of the Muslim Center to sell to the congregants to generate revenue. Others, primarily women, pay $10 a week to rent tables to sell their goods. Items for sale include books, newspapers, jewelry, lemonade, popcorn, hijabs, African-styled scarves, bean pies, scented oils, candles, and so on. The women who engage in the marketplace are leaders because they sell their goods to bring in much-needed revenue for their families. In addition, those who cook meals for the congregation provide an economic lifeline for the Muslim Center.

Delores Aldridge notes that for African American women, “to marry was not to become fully employed as a housewife as was the case for many white women. African-American women were expected to continue to work because, in a society that measured a black worker's worth as less than that of whites, it was necessary that both partners be employed to

make ends meet."[123] As such, women of this community become co-leaders of their family units by being wives and mothers while also using the money earned in the marketplace to contribute significantly to the household expenses. In Islam, the notion that the man is "head of household" is partially premised on believing that husbands should be their wives' sole providers.

The basis of the men as the breadwinners is rooted in the Quranic chapter An-Nisa which states, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means" (Quran 4:34). This verse implies that men are the leaders of their households, so long as they provide for women. Given the economic insecurity of some male congregants at the Muslim Center, women are often required by necessity to provide equal household measures. The necessity of women having to work and maintain their "duties" at home lends itself to most women understanding that they have an equal say in the family's economic direction. However, this belief does not seem to hamper widely-held views by members of this community that the man is in charge of his household.

Gender Roles: Patriarchy or Engaged Surrender?

Discussions of the Quran, hadith, and community were often discussed after the jummah prayer when congregants got together to socialize and catch up after the week. Another discussion, although less common, involved conversations on feminism, LGBTQ+ issues, and gender roles. On one occasion, I overheard the conversation between Sara and

[123] Delores Aldridge, "African-American Women in the Economic Marketplace: A Continuing Struggle" in *Journal of Black Studies*, 20, no. 2 (1989): 133-134.

another Muslim woman about feminism. A short time later, I told Sara that I overheard bits of their conversation and was curious to hear what she thought about feminism. Sara stated, "They're always talking about they don't need a man, and that's fine until they gotta move something heavy or their car breaks down. Who are the first people they call? Men! Ain't nothin wrong with wanting or needing a man." Sara's statement reflects the worldview of many women at the center. Women almost unanimously scowled when asked what they thought about feminism. Based on my observations and discussions with women of the community, their reactions to feminism has three implications: (1) They believe that feminism is inconsistent with their worldviews, (2) it underscores their belief that men and women have a different set of physical and psychological characteristics that complements the other, making them interdependent, and it (3) it shows that women of the center have accepted traditional gender roles.

The common belief of women of this community is that feminism is problematic because it creates tension between men and women, making it incompatible with Islam's teachings. Instead, women use Islam to guide their interactions with men in their quest for equity and equality. In *African American Islam* (1995), Amina McCloud notes that "African-American Muslim women who struggle against male dominance do so within a framework that does not mimic Western feminism. These women seek valid Quranic interpretation" (158). Women also refer to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings to maintain gender justice. In the last sermon given by the Prophet Muhammad, he states:

> "O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have right over you. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the

right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers."

Women leverage the Quran and sunnah tradition of Prophet Muhammad as a means to protect themselves against unfair treatment and to engage in the "politics of authenticity," which contests "prohibitions that are often Islamically legitimized, such as secluding women from society... [and] restricting their knowledge." It also shows that women are reflecting on their role in the religion and society as a whole and not merely accepting various dictates. They do not seek gender equality in a Western sense where men and women have equal responsibilities or share the same roles within the relationship. Instead, they believe in equitable gender roles in which each person has a different set of responsibilities within the relationship. In *Engaged Surrender* (2004), Carolyn Rouse explains this phenomenon:

> "Muslim women recognize Islam to be the first "feminist" monotheistic religion, and therefore when they choose to identify as Muslims, as opposed to a feminist, it is more for political reasons rather than any clear objections to women's equality as defined by the West. Most African American Muslims work, end troubled marriages, and work toward greater gender equality within their families and community. The difference is that African Americans acknowledge that there are alternative ways to view the importance of women, and that maybe the model of men and women performing the same roles is not the best way to organize a family or a society" (150).

Rouse's observation that Islam was the first "feminist" religion means that Islam is seen as the first religion to grant women rights not granted by other Abrahamic faiths in the seventh

century CE. For example, Muslim women had the right to keep their inheritance and own property (Quran 4:7), to keep gifts given to them by their ex-husbands in the case of divorce (Quran 4:20), to work and earn a living (Quran 3:195), to be treated kindly (Quran 4:19), to equality, where the only distinction between men and women is their faith (Quran 16:97), and the right to live, as female infanticide was a common practice in pre-Islamic Arabia (16:59-60). She also highlights that "men and women performing the same roles is not the best way to organize a family or a society," which underscores the African American Muslim women's belief in, and acceptance of, traditional gender roles. Rouse also highlights the importance of women exercising agency by defining the ideal social and religious structure best suited to fulfill their societal needs. To do otherwise would be to project a theory of oppression onto those who do not view themselves as oppressed. While Western feminism does not embody this community's beliefs, they seem to fall under two other traditions - Africana womanism and African feminism.

In "Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin" (2001), Clenora Hudson-Weems argues that Africana womanism is a better framework to engage Black women's struggles. The main difference between African womanism and feminism is that African womanism strives "for race empowerment; the feminists, no matter what form of feminism, strives for female empowerment" (139). This philosophy situates race and class as the primary means of liberating Black people and is more central to women's empowerment. In contrast, feminism situates gender issues as the predominant factor in achieving social justice. Hudson-Weems also highlights the roots of feminism as problematic for African American women. She notes feminism itself is rooted in the struggle of middle-class white women who were suppressed by

their husbands, whereas Black women are oppressed by society and not Black men. Hudson-Weems argues that Black women have more in common with Black men than white women. Therefore, the struggle for women's rights cannot be realized until all Black people's rights are recognized, thus prioritizing race and class issues over gender issues (140).

In addition to Africana womanism, African American Muslim women also fall in the tradition of African feminism, not to be confused with Western feminism. In "African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent" (1998), Diedre Badejo notes that African feminist ideology was "founded upon the principles of traditional African values that view gender roles as complementary, parallel, asymmetrical, and autonomously linked" (94). Eyayu Bayu states that "African feminists condemn western feminists for their anti-male stands" and "considers gender discrimination neither the sole nor perhaps the primary focus of the oppression" (55-56). They approach oppression and liberation as a collective struggle with men. Further, in *Research Methods in Africana Studies* (2014), Serie McDougal notes that African feminism "distinguishes itself by its emphasis on the agency and power of motherhood," highlighting the critical role that family plays in African feminist traditions (57).

The centrality of family and motherhood pride embodies how African American Muslim women at the center see themselves and their well-being as being inextricably linked to the family. The family takes precedence over the individual, which falls in line with West African cultural traditions that are communal. As such, women find a great deal of agency and respect in rearing children, maintaining the household, and allowing men to act as head of the family. The responsibility of teaching children moral and social responsibility was evident in the women that I talked to, and they had a particular pride in occupying the role of mother. Part of that

pride is rooted in the religion itself, which teaches that one's mother is more deserving of love and good treatment than one's father.

While there are several verses in the Quran that tells Muslims to be kind to their parents (17:23-24; 29:8; 31:14-15), it is explicit about the love and respect that should be accorded to one's mother because she is the one who "carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship" (Quran 46:15). This notion of respecting one's mother is also rooted in the prophetic tradition. One of the most often-cited hadith narrations that demonstrates that the mother, in Islam, is held in the highest esteem is as follows:

> "A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good treatment? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father" (Sahih Muslim Book 32, No. 6181).

Muslim women see this verse as evidence that they should be accorded more love and respect than any other person in the world. As such, women see their status as mothers as an essential contribution to religion and their family lives. In performing motherhood, they believe that a key complement to their role as mothers is having the father figure performing fatherhood and acting as the head of the household. However, while they allow men to perform the role of "leader," the women of this community see themselves as their households' real leaders. When I asked Tia, one of the interviewees for this study, what was the role of women in the home, she stated:

> The protector. Protect your home. Make it a place of peace for your husband if you have one or yourself first. That's not even just for Muslim women; that's for all women. Our responsibility is to keep our home together. Keep the peace.

I followed up this question by asking what she meant by "protector" of the home, and she stated:

> "Just see like, my husband being incarcerated and just coming home. You know? He has a lot going against him out here. So I try not to let that come inside the house even though I do because we go at it, but it's supposed to be a peaceful place. House supposed to be clean. Food is supposed to be prepared. Everything you need. He doesn't know what's needed in the house. He don't know if I need a corkscrew or a can opener. He doesn't even know when the vacuum cleaner break. The bills come, I opened them up and put them down like, 'here is what needs to be taken care of.' So a woman run the home."

Tia mentioned that her husband was incarcerated and that he just came home. As a result, she has taken on the role of "leader" in two ways: (1) in his absence, she took on the role of provider for herself and him by putting money on his books, and when he was released from prison, she had to take on the role of leader by nurturing her husband in a society that has been unforgiving to the formerly incarcerated. Tia's statements indicate that while she has accepted gender norms, she sees herself as the household leader. The role of "leader" in the home is not just limited to her observation, as some men also made the same statements regarding their wives. When I asked a male respondent what he thought the role of women in the home, he responded as follows:

> "The role of a woman in a home is to be... My wife, she's a great listener. She takes her time with the things she does. She's a great reminder of the things that I need to get done. Cooking is amazing. Very, very nurturing, and I can't stress that enough that she's very nurturing. Always easy on the eyes. She's very intellectual. She manages the money of the household. I'll give her money and she can manage everything that needs to be done. And she does it within the fold of Islam. And she follow the laws of Islam when it comes to what needs to be done first. You know, it says in Islam that the woman controls the home; she controls the affairs. When it comes to the man, the man makes the money, [but] the woman takes the money, and she puts it where it needs to go and that's what she does... I might have the money for the bills, but she pays the bills."

The women's role is also vital for establishing the household and African American community's values. Mohammad stated:

> "Well, you know, like with the kids, you know, just raising of the kids and the handling of the real important values of the community, the women kind of carry that. Yeah, the women carry our values."

Women in this community do not have a problem with gender roles, and they encourage it. Moreover, they do not see gender norms as patriarchal. Instead, they see gender roles as society's ideal structure. Within this framework, women are active agents who carve out leadership roles within the home and community spheres. This framework to an outsider looking in may seem to be oppressive, so I asked them to respond to their perceived oppression during the interviews.

I asked all the interviewees the following question: Muslim women, especially African American Muslim women, are often characterized as being an oppressed group. How do you respond to that criticism? Tia stated:

> "I don't think so. I compare myself to my Christian friends. I feel like I have more freedom, you know? Because there's an understanding with boundaries with what goes on what happens here in my household. So you know your boundaries. You don't cross them. Yeah, I don't feel any oppressed at all."

Her response is common for African American Muslim women at the center, which several have stated that they feel "freer" than their Christian counterparts. Carolyn Rouse notes that "Islamic exegesis for African American Muslims usually includes an analysis of the perceived failures of Christianity coupled with Western notions of 'freedom.' Christianity, they believe, has been used to promote racism and sexism, while Islam, they argue, balances the rights and responsibility of men and women." I asked Tia if she thought that that perceived oppression was due in part to her wearing hijab, and she stated:

> "Yeah. They always asking 'Are you hot?' No, I'm cool. I'm actually cooler than you are and you naked. And it draws the proper attention. When I'm out with, let's say if I just had on my little leggings and my tight shirt and my hair out. Oh, I get the 'Hey, ooh, hey, baby, babies.' When I dress modestly, I get 'hello, queen' and that same man is gonna run and open the door for me. It gives people more respect."

Her statement has another implication; it shows that she does not always don Islamic dress when out in public. While Tia was raised in a Muslim household, she did not always

practice Islam. Although she is currently married, she chooses to wear hijab when she prays but does not always wear it if she is not going to the mosque. This degree of freedom and autonomy in deciding what she wears is a right not afforded to most immigrant Muslims I have encountered over the years, especially if they were married. Another male interviewee responded to the question of Black Muslim women being an oppressed group answered as follows:

> "I will say that is painfully wrong. That is sadly wrong. Because in Islam, a woman is not only nurtured, she is protected. She's glorified as being one of the most beautiful creatures that Allah has ever created. You know, we respect our women. We love our women. We provide for our women. We protect our women. We control our tongues. We protect our chastity from other women. Our women are held to a high standard. We need to say as the Prophet of Allah Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam [peace be upon him] says. It says a man that is the most blessed is a man that's pious to his wife. So that's something that I always remember, and every man in Islam should always remember. It's the fact that, when they're dealing with their woman, to always be pious, you know?"

In response to the same question, Omar stated:

> "Anybody who think that all they have to do is come to the Muslim Center and they'll see that that's not the case. And every mosque I been to there's never been the case where the women are being oppressed. Matter of fact, in Islam, the woman is held in high esteem. You know what I'm saying? So thats just false information that people that have no idea about Islam pass about."

Mohammad stated:

> "Well, most of the women that I deal with who are strongly influenced by Islam. You have to be like, 'Wow, sister.' I respect her. You know? She has authority. She has an air about herself. You know? Confidence. And I see all that in there. She don't let no man push her around. Humdulilah [praise and thanks to God]. And, you know what? She don't have to worry, because she know her duties. You know she's our other half. Make us one. So, Humdulilah."

The notion of "protector" was a constant theme when discussing the center's women with various congregants. From an outside perspective, this would seem to echo Ula Taylor's work, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (2016), in which she argued that men committed to masculine roles promised women of the Nation of Islam protection when in actuality, they were offering patriarchy. However, that is not the case here, as the notion of protection was extended to mean guarding one's purity. The protection they discussed also offered physical and mental protection from all abuse types, even from one's husband. Omar stated:

> "I have been here when some women might be going through domestic violence and things like that and we went to the men and straightened him out and let him know that 'listen man, you can't be around here oppressing yo wife man. That ain't the way it go. We'll bring the sister in because we got a staff. They have the degree to deal with domestic violence and people that may have some mental issues going on. What we do is, when we're aware that there's a sister that might be going through something with somebody, we send 'em [the

abused] to them [the counselors], and we come up with a plan about how we're going to stop the abuse from going on."

As such, the center's men see themselves as being protectors of the women in an Islamic sense and a broader sense, and the protection offered is not used as a pseudonym for oppression. By choosing to embrace traditional gender roles, women are taking part in engaged surrender, which "involves an active consciousness in participation in our social lives, family lives, community lives, economic lives, and political lives, by the heart which is always open to the will of Allah, and which always gives precedent to Allah's will. The concept we have been inclined towards – submission – sometimes gives the idea that there is no will."

Women of the Muslim Center take an active role and engage the mosque and engage and the community. While some people may see traditional gender roles as problematic, women of the center have embraced conventional gender roles and carved out leadership roles for themselves within that space. As discussed, women serve on the board of the Muslim Center. They have regular input in the Muslim Center. They have equal access to the amount they are leaders within their family units. A leader's definition needs to be broadened to incorporate not just those who are spokespersons for an establishment but also those who work behind the scenes to promote the social, economic, spiritual, and political uplift of a community through their actions.

CHAPTER FOUR

JAZZ, JORDANS, AND HIJABS: CULTURAL AESTHETICS AND DIASPORIC TRADITIONS

In examining this African American Muslim community, it is essential to locate them within the larger tradition of African American cultural practices. In *Research Methods in Africana Studies* (2014), Serie McDougal asserts that in researching African American people, culture "should be considered in understanding their social conditions, behavior, and thinking" (34). This chapter highlights how cultural aesthetics and diasporic traditions have become a regular feature of the Muslim Center. While some may consider some of these traditions outside the pale of religious inquiry, I demonstrate the interconnectedness of this communities' spiritual experience and its culturally relevant secular practices. In doing so, I will place these practices in conversation with the larger Afro-diasporic traditions by examining them through the framework of expressive and material culture.

In *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture* (2009), Patrick Manning argues that the term *culture* must be subdivided into four microcultural practices, the *expressive culture,* which includes visual art, music, literature, and other interpretations of feelings; *material culture* consisting of physical manifestations of dress, architecture, tools, and cuisine; *reflective culture* which is philosophy, knowledge, and belief; and *societal culture* which is the creation and modeling of family patterns, political culture, and rituals (21). While reflective and societal culture are outside this chapter's scope, focusing on expressive and material culture provides a space for examining three seemingly disparate topics - jazz, Jordans, and hijabs - while examining their historical relevance to Black people.

On one level, the title of this chapter, “Jazz, Jordan’s and Hijabs” represents the physical layout of the Muslim Center. In the northeast corner of this building is the Halal Jazz Cafe, which represents the “jazz” portion of the title and welcomes visitors for different musical events. Jordan’s represent the gymnasium (which is a space for playing basketball and an area used for various leisure activities, including the marketplace) located between the jazz cafe and the prayer hall. Finally, “hijabs” represent the prayer hall, to which hundreds of congregants come for prayer each week. The spatial layout reveals the convergence of seemingly disparate cultural practices but locates them within a communal edifice, highlighting the various cultural aesthetics of this community. On another level, the title reflects African Americans' ingenuity to incorporate different aspects of their lived experiences into their religious experience.

In the first section, I show how having a jazz cafe connects members of the Muslim Center to a musical tradition that has a home in the United States but has influenced music in other parts of the diaspora in the Caribbean and West Africa. This musical art form is an outgrowth of various musical traditions that incorporated African and European traditions and shows how jazz has become part of this religious institution. By connecting this sacred space to cultural tradition, the Muslim Center and its members are connecting themselves to the larger African diaspora.

The second section discusses how Air Jordan sneakers have become a cultural identifier of African American youth and how youth culture has found a home in the Muslim Center. Many attendees choose to wear Air Jordans instead of dress shoes. On the surface, it reveals what African Americans believe to be an intrinsic part of their cultural identity. Also, it indicates that their cultural identity has become part of their religious experience as many have chosen

to wear these sneakers when they attend the Friday prayer. This is important to highlight because it is believed that one is supposed to wear his/her "Sunday's best" when one is approaching the almighty God. Wearing Jordans to a religious ceremony signals an ideological shift in which the wearer (sub)consciously redefines what "best" attire means. For him, an expensive pair of Jordans carries just as much status and warrants as much respectability as someone wearing a suit.

The last section examines hijabs, a veil worn in public (or in the company of men outside of their immediate family) by Muslim women, which usually covers their hair and chest and conforms to Islamic standards of modesty as defined in the Quran (24:31). This section demonstrates that African American women have their practice of wearing hijab rooted in their African and African American cultural and historical traditions. For example, many women at the Muslim Center have chosen to wear a gele, a type of head tie used in Nigeria, or a dhuku, a kind of head tie used in Ghana, instead of a hijab typically worn by Muslim women from the Middle Eastern countries. The decision to wear gele and dhuku instead of traditional hijabs reveals a cultural tie of affection that connects members of this community to the African Diaspora.

Jazz

The origins of jazz lie in African music "that accompanied the black slaves to the New World. Out of this background came blues, black folk music recounting traumas in the lives of these repressed people after their legal emancipation during the Civil War… At the same time popular ragtime provided another source for jazz, which emerged in New Orleans among

extraordinarily talented black musicians in the early years of the [twentieth] century."[124] Originating in Louisiana during the early twentieth century, the term jazz took on significant meaning. It was used to describe a new musical form that had come to fruition based on an earlier musical form, ragtime, which had become popular in Louisiana and found success in its improvisation. Jazz followed in the ragtime tradition by using the same improvisations techniques. According to Lewis Erenberg, a Professor of History at Loyola University, Black jazz musicians were "unconstrained by the clumsy and narrow and twisted conventions which… straight-jacketed classical music in the twentieth century."[125] This improvisation reflected the musical choices of the artists. It represented the lived experiences of Blacks throughout the country who were forced to improvise and make use of whatever was available to them to survive. In addition, jazz musicians combined African musical traditions with European musical traditions. With those two elements combined, along with the musician's ability to play to each audience, this new art form quickly went mainstream and could be heard in nightclubs all over the country. Jazz came to represent a sophisticated cultural expression of African American's lived experiences made manifest through music. That music eventually became part of America's larger cultural landscape that would lead to the development of other musical genres, including bebop, swing, rhythm and blues, and funk.

Jazz was rooted in the traditions of African Americans and one that reverberated throughout the diaspora. Jazz represented the circularity of Africana traditions: African Americans drew primarily from African traditions to create this music, which in turn went on to

[124] Cantor 1997, 74.
[125] Lewis Erenberg, *Swingin' the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), xiii.

influence other musicians throughout the world. Jazz would then become dispersed throughout the African diaspora and would come to be heard just as much on the African continent and in the Caribbean as it could be heard in Louisiana, New York, or Detroit. In West Africa, in places such as Ghana and Nigeria, a musical art form developed that was a "fusion of local dance melodies and rhythms and imported European brass, string, and woodwind instruments"[126] This style, known as Highlife Jazz, popularized by Nigerian musician Fela Kuti in the mid-twentieth century. According to Carole Boyce Davies, Highlife jazz was not simply a fusion of various art forms on the continent, but took much of its inspiration from "African American jazz, Caribbean calypso, and West African dance orchestra."[127] Much of Highlife Jazz in West Africa resulted from cultural exchanges between West African artists and U.S. artists such as Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker. Many highlife musicians recounted how Louis Armstrong's visit to Ghana in 1956 "enriched their music."[128]

The Caribbean was also influenced by American jazz music as well. Danzon (a music genre) developed with close associations to U.S. jazz in Cuba, and its early roots can be traced to New Orleans. Robin Moore notes that "analysis of scores and recordings demonstrated that in a stylistic sense danzon, ragtime, and early jazz composition shared many commonalities."[129] As Moore notes, part of this exchange is that New Orleans was a central trade hub with solid ties to the Caribbean region. There were many Latin American immigrants in New Orleans

[126] Tejumola Olaniyan, *Arrest the music!: Fela and his Rebel Art and Politics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 7.
[127] C. Boyce Davies, *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, (Santa Barbara, California, 2008) 525.
[128] Davies, *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, 525.
[129] Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*, (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 324.

collaborating with prominent U.S. jazz artists in the 1920s and 30s, such as Mario Bauza', Rafael Hernandez, Alberto Socarras, and Juan Tizol.[130] However, the transaction was not just one-sided, as Caribbean artists heavily influenced U.S. jazz musicians. For example, In *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age*, Lara Putnam states that the Caribbean ports "were not recipients of the musical fruit of some distant, metropolitan Jazz Age: they were part of the culturally contiguous space within which the Jazz Age and its deeply cosmopolitan music and dance were created" (157). While the historical tradition of jazz is evident in the United States and throughout the African diaspora, Detroit's thriving jazz scene also provided the foundations for the Halal Jazz Cafe's installment at the Muslim Center.

During the 1920s, syncopated jazz rhythms echoed down the corridors of Detroit's Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods, which housed Detroiters' largest African-American population. The Black Bottom neighborhood was framed by Gratiot Avenue (north), Congress (south), Brush Street (west), and St. Aubin Street (east). It has been suggested that the neighborhood got its name from the richness of the soil of the land, while others hold that the name is rooted in racial segregation. At any rate, what developed in this area, and the space to its north known as Paradise Valley, was the development of many black-owned businesses, social institutions, and nightclubs that would feature black jazz musicians.

The business district, Paradise Valley (which was located northwest of Black Bottom), was home to about 300 black-owned businesses, including drugstores, beauty salons, restaurants, nightclubs, bowling alleys with bars, theaters and mini-golf courses.[131] Notably,

[130] Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 327.
[131] Detroit Historical Society

the Paradise Valley theatre, known as The Paradise Theatre (now Orchestra Hall) offered the opportunity to hear jazz legends such as Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. This entertainment venue saw black patrons and white patrons as well, as Black music became the vogue for white visitors. Although these Black Bottom and Paradise Valley flourished for three decades (the 1920s-1950s), they eventually suffered from urban renewal programs whose neighborhoods were marked for renovation. In the case of Black Bottom, imminent domain played a role in the destruction of this community as its residents were cleared out to make room for freeway development of I-75 (Chrysler Freeway). However, despite the destruction of a once flourishing jazz scene, jazz remained a fixture in Detroit's public sphere as well as in the psyche of African Americans. Jazz not only came to symbolize the cultural landscape of the community, but it also became a site of remembrance of a time in which Black Detroiters owned businesses, lived together, and although economically challenged, found solace in cultural traditions that provided a way to cope with their realities. The jazz scene became a part of the historical memory of African American Detroiters, and one of the people who sought to keep the jazz spirit alive was Abdullah El-Amin. He created a jazz cafe in the Muslim Center to keep the jazz spirit alive.

The Halal Jazz Cafe is one of the defining features of the center. While it is dedicated to Mel Wanzo, the jazz artist and instructor discussed in the introduction, the decision to include a jazz cafe in the center was a difficult one for Imam El-Amin, a decision that he told me he "got a lot of flak for."[132] He wanted to convert that unused space into a jazz cafe to cater to the African American community in general and African American youth in particular. This was an

[132] Interview with El-Amin

important decision and not to be taken lightly because some Muslims, both of African descent and others, think that music is *haram* (forbidden) within the religion.

Muslims who believe that music is explicitly forbidden often point to a hadith collected by Sahih al-Bukhari. Bukhari, who is considered one of the most notable collectors of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad traditions, completed this voluminous work in the middle of the 9th century CE. Accordingly, Muslims view his work as the most trusted and most authentic source of the sunna of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. According to one of these traditions narrated by Muhammad's companion Abu Malik Al-Ash'ari, Muhammad stated: "From among my followers there will be some people who will consider illegal sexual intercourse, the wearing of silk, the drinking of alcoholic drinks and *the use of musical instruments, as lawful*." [emphasis added].[133] The phrase "will consider… as lawful" presupposes that music, or at least music accompanied by musical instruments, is unlawful. Of the four main Islamic schools of thought related to religious jurisprudence (Hanifi, Salafi, Maliki, and Hanbali), the ruling on the permissibility of music, in general, is unclear. According to Abu Bilal Mustafa Al-Kanad in *The Islamic Ruling on Music and Singing* (1998), Imam Abu Hanifa believed all music to be sinful, Imam Malik bin Anas believed that music could be allowed during certain celebrations such as holidays and weddings, Shafii found it forbidden, and Hanbali found it prohibited.[134] While the prohibition of music is still being debated, what seems to be generally agreeable among the four scholars is that musical instruments are prohibited.[135]

[133] Sahih al-Bukhari, 5590.Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol.7 Hadith No.5590
[134] Abu Bilal Mustafa, *The Islamic Ruling on Music and Singing*, 1998, 31-36
[135] Abu Bilal Mustafa Al-Kandi 1986, 36

The prohibition of musical instruments is not simply a result of the hadith mentioned above. The many reasons music and the use of instruments in music are believed to be prohibited are beyond this paper's scope. However, based on several conversations I have had with community members, some of the reasons for the prohibition of music were numerous. Most seem to believe that music, generally, is prohibited only if: (1) it distracts from worship and remembrance of the creator, (2) it reflects immoral values and practices such as drugs, money, violence, and fornication, (3) that it influences people to engage in other illicit or illegal activities that run counter to Islamic ideology. Because of that hadith, some Muslims believe that instruments are another determining factor of whether a specific type of music is forbidden.

Debates withstanding, El-Amin thought that this was a feature of the Muslim Center that must be added. El-Amin noted that his decision rested on the knowledge that African American people like jazz and that it is a significant component of our cultural identity. When I asked why he decided to create a jazz cafe, he stated, "Because I like jazz; *we* like jazz. Our people like jazz."[136] His statement demonstrates a collective tradition within the African American community, and its transmission from generation to generation is essential to the maintenance of our cultural traditions. As the center sought to cater to African American people's needs, he thought it was necessary to cater to their cultural specifics of that demographic. Although not as popular as it once was, he stated that jazz still held sway as a dominant art form among African Americans. He also noted that the jazz cafe had attracted those from immigrant Muslim communities. In our interview, he said that many other ethnic

[136] Abdullah El-Amin

groups who attend the Muslim Center like *our* music. He stated that "they like jazz, and they found out that it's okay to like jazz." This statement, "they found out it's okay to like jazz" is rooted in the notion of music being forbidden, but it is acceptable in that space. He has often stated that people cannot be separated from their culture and environment and that you cannot separate a person's religious experience from their milieu in which they were born.

Since the inception of the Halal Jazz Cafe in 2012, the Muslim Center has sponsored countless jazz events from many community members. The most recent jazz event took place in December of 2019 and featured Lu Fuki and Divine Providence, a band led by Lu Fuki and his wife Tazeen, who are regular Muslim Center attendees. Their band showcases a unique jazz sound reminiscent of the Black past, but they also combine classical and rock music elements to capture that unique sound. They have performed at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), Taking it to the Streets in Chicago, and the Hamtramck Music Festival. This latest performance captured the center's ability to make jazz a regular fixture in the lives of African American Muslims. Fuki states that the goal of the group is "to connect the hearts through sound and to promote solidarity, freedom, and social action by the use of sound. We want listeners to go through this spiritual and emotional journey with us as they listen and as we share."[137] At another time, he stated that "We reflect not only what's inside of us from what we see, feel, and hear, but we reflect the environment in which we live in through various mediums of instruments and sound." This last statement expressly links their musical tradition to their lived experiences.

While the center welcomes various jazz musicians, they have stayed true to their original purpose of creating a space for young musicians to develop their musical abilities. For

[137] Band's website: https://www.lufuki.org/bio

example, in 2020, the Jazz Cafe welcomed trumpeter Trunino Lowe, a twenty-two-year-old native Detroiter who is currently a bandleader, composer, and mentor to Detroit youth. Lowe carries on Detroit's jazz tradition by being mentored by jazz musicians such as Marion Hayden, a jazz bassist and lecturer in the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. Hayden's jazz mentor, Marcus Belgrave, an inductee into the National Rhythm & Blues Hall of Fame in Detroit, toured with Ray Charles, worked for Motown Records, and recorded with many musicians Max Roach, Sammy Davis Jr., Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, and The Temptations. Belgrave was also a faculty member at Stanford Jazz Workshop (within Stanford University) and was a visiting professor at Oberlin Conservatory of Music. This lineage is noteworthy because it shows a legacy of jazz greatness that has been passed down through generations and has even become a prominent fixture in secular spaces and religious spaces. While jazz's story as an African American tradition is palpable, jazz also has linkages to African American Muslims.

Ingrid Monson discusses the relationship between Islam and jazz in "Art Blakey's African Diaspora" (2003), stating that the 1940s "witnessed a peak of internationalism in the African American political consciousness and a growing interest in Islam, especially the multiracial version of the Muslim faith propagated by the Ahmadiyya movement. Art Blakey and several other jazz musicians, including Ahmad Jamal, Yusef Lateef, McCoy Tyner, Dakota Staton, Rudy Powell, and Sahib Shihab, were members of the Ahmadi community (325). In "Prophetics in the Key of Allah: Towards an Understanding of Islam in Jazz" (2010), Christopher Chase states that Ahmadiyya missionary Kahlil Abdul Nasir converted many African American Jazz musicians to Islam. He notes that the Ahmadiyya "found fertile ground in jazz musicians" who were first

exposed to music through the Black church, acknowledged Jesus as the 'prophet of firm resolve,' and believed that the prophetic salvation of Jesus "was in some ways compatible with many African Americans' experience of Protestant Christianity" (165). He further notes that after converting to Islam, musician Art Blakey's house "became known as a place of Quranic study, and he emerged as a leader for a rehearsal group of Muslim musicians called the 'Seventeen Messengers'" (166). The convergence of jazz and Islam was also featured in an *Ebony Magazine* article in April 1953 entitled, "Moslem Musicians: Mohammedan Religion has Great Appeal for many Talented Progressive Jazz Men." This article states that approximately 200 jazz musicians were Muslims and stated that the main reason why they accepted Islam was that "Islam breaks down racial barriers and endows its followers with purpose and dignity."[138] Other jazz musicians noted that they "were drawn to the faith out of a desire to assume a foreign name and religion and escape the stigma attached to their race by many whites"(107).

Jordans

In religious spaces such as synagogues, churches, and mosques, there is an unspoken expectation about what one should wear while in those spaces. In the Jewish tradition, male congregants typically wear black dress pants, a black suit jacket/sport coat, a white dress shirt, a black tie, and a yarmulke, while women often wear long black dresses and a tichel (pronounced tickle, this is the headwrap worn by Jewish women to cover their hair). In the church, men typically wear suits, while women wear various dresses, which are usually modest. In the mosque, men typically wear suits or thobes (ankle-length robes with long sleeves that

[138] "Moslem Musicians: Mohammedan Religion has Great Appeal for many Talented Progressive Jazz Men" in *Ebony Magazine*, April 1953,104.

were a tradition of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad), while women wear jilbabs (long robes) and hijabs. Although these clothes are not mandated to be worn for religious service, many choose to dress in their "Sunday's best" as a show of respect to their religious belief and fellow congregants. However, a new generation of Muslim congregants skirted perceived politics of respectability and instituted their own dress code methods that appeal to their cultural aesthetics and cultural context. This is most true at the Muslim Center.

In the Muslim Center, the clothing variety is palpable when one enters this space. Some opt to wear the prophet Muhammad's traditional garb, which consists of a turban and a long flowing gown, often white, which indicates that he is a participant in the way (Sunna) of the Prophet Muhammad. They choose to wear this type of clothing to indicate their nearness to God, and to another extent, to show their identification with the Islamic community. Others choose to wear western formal attire such as a business suit. However, another contingent of this population chooses to wear clothing that is specific to the African American experience; they wear jeans, hoodies, and Air Jordan sneakers. At first glance, this act may seem not to be of particular importance; however, the wearers of these shoes have decided to skirt the politics of respectability, locate themselves within African American youth culture tradition, and engage in the act of resistance within the Muslim community.

In 1984, Michael Jordan was drafted third in the NBA draft by the Chicago Bulls. The 21-year-old phenom would make quite a splash in the NBA during the 84-85 NBA season by leading the league in scoring, averaging 28.2 points, 6.5 rebounds, 5.9 assists, and 2.4 steals per game. He would also go on to win rookie of the year. His later accomplishments included winning six NBA championships (91-93 and 96-98), two consecutive dunk contests (1987 and 1988), and

five MVP awards, among other accolades. However, Jordan's legacy would extend beyond the court, and as he became a cultural icon, his shoes would represent Black youth culture and black cultural aesthetics. Michael Jordan's initial shoe deal with Nike in 1984 netted him 500,000 annually, plus royalties.[139] Not only was this deal the most lucrative shoe deal of its time, but it also helped to bolster the legendary sneaker to new heights and become a part of Black youth culture in many inner cities.

The Jordan sneaker came into existence with a great deal of controversy. When Michael Jordan stepped onto an NBA court wearing black and red shoes during an NBA preseason game in 1984, he defied the leagues' rule for proper shoe wear at the time. According to ESPN, "Historically, all sneakers on a team were restricted to being either 51 percent white or black, plus a minimal team color accent, depending on which team was hosting or visiting. During the 1984-85 season, Michael Jordan famously received a warning letter effectively banning his black-and-red Air Jordan 1 sneakers. Nike turned the ordeal into a marketing campaign for his debut signature shoe and never looked back"[140] The shoes that Jordan wore, however, were not Jordan's signature shoes; they were the black and red edition of the Nike Air Ships, shoes that closely resembled the Air Jordan 1s which were set to release months later. His shoes drew David Stern's attention, the NBA commissioner, who sent a letter to Jordan and Nike, stating that Jordan's shoes violated the league's proper shoe wear rules. According to Nike, Jordan was fined $5000 for every game that he wore the shoes, a price tag that they claimed to

[139] Kurt Badenhausen, "How Michael Jordan Will Make $145 Million In 2019" in *Forbes Magazine* August 28, 2019.
[140] Nick DePaula, "NBA Players Get Green Light to Wear Sneaker Color of Choice Throughout 2018-19" in *ESPN*, August 28, 2018.

have paid.[141] Nike was then able to capitalize off the shoe by promoting the Air Jordan 1s as the "banned" sneaker. Jordan's were an instant success, and Nike "sold $70 million worth of the shoes by May — just a month into the release — and… the Air Jordan brand had made Nike more than $100 million by the end of the year."[142] These shoes came to represent black youth's anti-establishment ideals and "allowed some sections of African-American communities, which identified with and represented street culture, to express their street-savvy difference from white, middle-class America" (Brace-Govan 2008, 102).

Michael Jordan's decision to wear shoes against the league's rules situated him within a long tradition of black youth rebellion in the United States. On one level, the 21-year-old Jordan recaptured his agency by defying the NBA's rule that dictated *proper* etiquette in terms of what was considered acceptable for one to wear. On another level, it was symbolic of the larger struggle of African American youth who were constantly at the forefront of challenging dominant power structures, redefining acceptable modes of behavior, and redefining respectability politics. Because these shoes were on Michael Jordan's feet, a man that was a cultural icon for African American youth, they were ultimately linked to Black youth culture and the culture of resistance.

Therefore, those who wear Jordans to the Muslim Center participate in a resistance tradition. While the center encourages people to come as they are, there seems to be an unwritten expectation that one should wear dress clothes among the elder members of the center. The majority of older members (forty years old and older) wear suits or thobes or casual

[141] Rachel Askinasi, "Rise and fall of Nike's iconic Air Jordan sneakers…" in *Business Insider* Dec 14, 2019
[142] Askinasi, 2019

dress slacks and a button-up shirt. However, the younger generation of Muslims can be seen wearing entire Jordan outfits, including the shoes. This indicates that the younger generation of Muslims are engaged, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in redefining respectability politics in this religious institution. For example, Abd-Malik, a 27-year-old African American man, was intentional about why he wore Jordans to the mosque. He stated, "I wear these [looking down at his shoes] because this is what I like to wear… I shouldn't have to dress up to come and pray, and some of the old heads don't get that. But what I wear is between me and Allah, not them."[143] He later told me that he had been approached by an older member of the mosque who said that he should dress respectably when coming to the mosque and not wear gym shoes (field note 10/12/19).

On the other hand, some wear Jordans because that is what they have worn over the years. When I asked Greg, a 30-year-old African American attendee of the Muslim Center, why he has opted to wear jeans and Jordan's to the mosque instead of a suit or thobe, he said, "Shit, man when I come to pray, I like to feel comfortable. You feel me? This [is] what I grew up wearing, so that's why I wear it."[144] Greg represents the other demographic of the center, those who wear the shoes because they have been wearing for most of their lives. While these shoes have roots in the culture of resistance, they have also become popular because of their rootedness in African American popular culture.

Historically, shoes have always been significant to one's cultural identity. Tunde M. Akinwumi, a scholar of African art history, notes that among the Yoruba of Nigeria, the way that

[143] Discussion with author, December 2019.
[144] Discussion, August 2019.

a person dressed was dependent on the "rules of age, gender, clan, religious affiliation, and occupation… each of which was characterized by dress codes" (Akinwumi 2006, 184). The way people dressed located them within a particular community with shared norms, values, and beliefs. Similarly, in *Feet and Footwear: A Cultural Encyclopedia* (2009), Margo DeMello argues that shoes "ultimately signify individual identity, group affiliation, and social position." Over time, Jordans have become inextricably linked to African American popular culture, where pop culture is defined as "words, sounds, spaces and identities… [that] offered young people a form of political expression."[145]

Jordan's have been one of the most enduring expressions of Black popular culture since their inception in the mid-1980s. Jordans allowed the wearer to simultaneously stand in and stand out, to identify oneself with a particular community while at the same time differentiating one's social standing within that community. By standing out, one identified himself as a purveyor of *cool*, not just to those who occupied the same space as s/he, but also to the rest of society who looked at Black culture as the very definition of cool. According to Michael Eric Dyson, the shoe "reflects at once the projection and stylization of black urban realities linked in our contemporary historical moment... [and] symbolizes the ingenious manner in which black cultural nuances of cool, hip, and chic have influenced the broader American cultural landscape."[146] Those who participate in Black cultural practices, then, "are not only enthusiastic consumers of sneakers but also the creators of "cool" on a broader

[145] Matthew Worley, Keith Gildart, Anna Gough-Yates, Siân Lincoln, and Bill Osgerby. *Youth Culture and Social Change: Making a Difference by Making a Noise*, (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 5
[146] Michael E. Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader*, (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 467

level"[147] The status of *cool* that is attached to sneakers rests, however, with the cultural icons - athletes and rappers, who through their artistic expressions, become role models for black youth. While Jordan's are one iteration of cultural expression of *cool* within African American communities, another shoe came to symbolize Black coolness among the urban youth in New York during the mid-1980s, Adidas.

In 1986, the song "My Adidas" by Run DMC popularized the shell-toe version of the shoe to new heights. Although the company was founded nearly four decades earlier in 1949, it was not until Run DMC's hit, and the unlaced style that they wore them, linked hip hop culture to shoes. One had to have these shoes to solidify his identity within the Black urban community and show how cool s/he was. But obtaining one pair was not enough. One had to have different colors to match the different outfits that were worn as an ultimate indicator of Black style and expression, as Run of Run DMC states:

Now the Adidas I possess for one man is rare

Myself homeboy got fifty pair

Got blue and black cause I like to chill

And yellow and green when it's time to get ill[148]

The shoe's burgeoning as an artistic form of cultural expression was then taken to new heights. Not only did Adidas come to represent cool, but they also became an escape route from poverty and invisibility. In the same way that Jordan's elevated the wearer's status, so too did the Adidas. But what is most important about this song is that it established a linkage between

[147] Brace Govan and H. Burgh-Woodman, "Sneakers and Street Culture: A Postcolonial Analysis of Marginalized Cultural Consumption" in *Journal of Consumption Markets & Culture*, 11, no. 2 (2008), 104.
[148] My Adidas

hip-hop culture and shoes. Not only were athletes' shoes sought after, but the shoes that hip hop artists wore were also sought after as well. Therefore, when hip hop artists chose to wear famous athletes' shoes, the marriage borne in the 1980s would continue until the present day.

The merger of hip hop and shoe culture was most evident when one examines records from the Many rap artists who wore the shoes in their album covers. Jordans were already popular, but having them worn by hip-hop artists made them all the more appealing. During the 1980s, several rappers wore Jordans on the cover of their album art, including LL Cool J, Heavy D and the Boyz, Kid and Play, Ice T. and Eazy E. The trend has continued to date, where you can find rappers wearing Jordans on the cover of their albums, including Wale's 2015 album "The Album About Nothing" which features the Air Jordan IV retros and J. Cole's 2014 "Forest Hills Drive" album which features the Air Jordan 1 retros.

Not only was wearing the shoes essential to hip hop artists' status but also talking about the shoes became a common feature of many rap lyrics. In his 2002 hit song, Air Force One's, Nelly's ode to Nike was reminiscent of My Adidas of the 1980s and showed the continuing linkage between hip hop culture and shoes. Countless other artists have since referenced the Jordan brand, including Jay-Z who was "Spillin Ace on my sick Js" in "Niggas in Paris," Nas saying that he "thought Jordans and a gold chain was living it up" in "Street Dreams," Trinidad James who raps that the "only souls I fuck with is my Jordan's and my mama" in "Givin' No Fucks," and Kanye West's "All Falls Down" lyrics which highlight the importance of the shoes to the African American youth:

"Sophomore three years, ain't picked a career

She like fuck it I'll just stay down here and do hair

Cause that's enough money to buy her a *few pairs of new Airs*

Cause her baby daddy don't really care"

Not only do these lyrics show the connection between hip hop and shoes, but they also indicate a connection between the shoes and Black culture. As such, Jordan's have become the embodiment of Black culture, which has spilled over every sector of society.

Those who wear Jordan's to the Muslim Center identify themselves as practitioners of Black American secular practices rooted in athletic icons, hip hop music, and cool culture. They are also engaging in a cultural renaissance where footwear challenges respectability politics and their social acceptability in a sacred sphere, the mosque. Jordans represent transcendence, one that elevates a person beyond the confines of their economic status and elevates the wearer beyond their peers' status.

Hijabs

A hijab is a veil worn by some Muslim women across the world. It typically covers the head, outer portion of the face, and the neck. Traditionally, hijabs are worn if a woman will be in the presence of a male outside of her immediate family. Muslim women choose to wear the hijab for several reasons, including modesty, to identify themselves as a member of the Islamic community, and most importantly, to show one's nearness to God. Wearing a hijab is a choice that rests with each practitioner. Some, however, have used the Qur'an to argue that women must wear it by pointing to this verse:

> And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their

> khimar over their breasts and not display their beauty except to their husband, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments (Quran 24:31)

While this verse seems to indicate that women are supposed to wear hijab, scholars such as Leila Ahmed argue that covering was not common during the prophet Muhammad's time, and therefore, women don't need to cover. In *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), she states:

> "Veiling was apparently not introduced into Arabia by Muhammad but already existed among some classes, particularly in the towns, though it was probably more prevalent in the countries that the Arabs had contact with, such as Syria and Palestine. In those areas, as in Arabia, it was connected with social status, as was its use among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Assyrians, all of whom practiced veiling to some degree. It is nowhere explicitly prescribed in the Quran… Throughout Muhammad's lifetime veiling… was observed only by his wives."[149]

Although the necessity of wearing hijab is still disputed, women at the Muslim Center have chosen to wear hijab in a way rooted in their experiences of African American women. Tia, a

[149] Ahmed 1992, 55-56

40-year-old African American attendee of the Muslim Center, decides to cover her hair, but does so not by wearing a traditional hijab, but a head covering closer to her identity as an African American woman. She stated,

> "I think what I noticed here [The Muslim Center and] when I go to the other mosques is [that] Black women, we cover different. And I gotta tell my husband 'cause he brought me this um, khimar.[150] I am not an Arab, I don't know, but I am not comfortable dressing like I'm in the desert. I still want to have a little flavor, you know? And it's like this (pointing toward her gele); its like I put the gele on today. I like the African heritage. I'm a little Afrocentric too."[151]

Tia reveals the need to differentiate herself as an African American Muslim woman. Still, she also desires to locate herself to the larger African diaspora by situating the practice of head wrapping within the African tradition. The following section demonstrates that the culture of head wrapping tradition has always had a particular significance for African Americans.

Head wrapping has a long tradition in the African diaspora. As noted earlier, it can be a symbol of modesty and a religious identifier. Still, it serves other purposes in African traditions, including an indicator of social status, wealth, and identity with a tribe, cultural tradition, and an aesthetically pleasing piece of clothing. The practice of head wrapping has been passed down through the generations. It has become part of the cultural identities of many women of African descent wherever they are in the diaspora.

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[150] It is important to note here that hijab and khimar are similar, but different in nature. *Hijab* refers to any type of covering that is used to cover the hair. A khimar, however, is a specific type of head covering that is meant specifically Muslim women.

[151] Tia, Interviewed by author, 8/5/19.

The Gele, mentioned by Tia, is considered a traditional Nigerian head wrap. The gele was traditionally worn during many occasions, including religious ceremonies, weddings, and other like occasions. The gele is typically made from heavy and or stiff fabric that can be molded into shape. The materials used range from old curtains to pants but are generally made of stiff fabric that can be easily manipulated into a specific shape or a fabric that is sprayed with starch to hold their shape. The most popular fabric in Nigerian is the aso-oke (ah-show-k), made from cotton or silk. The gele has taken on new meaning for many African American community members. It has become a symbol of cultural pride even for those not from Nigeria. As a result, the gele is worn for special occasions and as a symbol of West African heritage, as in the example of Tia.

The gele has long been a symbol of Nigerian cultural heritage. For example, Nana Asma'u Bint Usman 'dan Fodio, is often depicted wearing a gele. What is notable is that she was a Muslim woman who was covering her hair in a way that was particular to her Nigerian cultural heritage, not wearing a hijab as styled by a Middle Eastern Muslim woman. African traditional forms of dress have been passed down through the generations and have taken on new meaning, and some women at the center choose to wear headwraps following the African. Although two hundred years separates Asma'u Bint Usman 'dan Fodio and women of the Muslim Center, the similarities in style are striking and indicate that African traditions are very much a part of the center's culture.

At the Muslim Center, the gele is one of the most popular forms of head wrapping. Many choose this form of head wrapping because it connects them to their African identity. One such person is Zarinah, who has made head wrapping and head wrapping culture very

much a part of the Muslim Center annual tradition. Zarinah is a cultural anthropologist, lecturer, and founder of Beautifully Wrapped, an organization that "strives to promote cultural understanding and spiritual identity through exploring the art of head wrapping and its unique intersection of fashion, tradition and culture," whose work has been exhibited in community centers, universities, and international conferences in Bermuda, United Arab Emirates and Senegal.[152] Zarinah presents at various venues around the world. She is also responsible for creating a Headwrap Expo at the Muslim Center that has extended its reach to multiple locations in and around the Detroit area.

The Headwrap Expo is an annual event that centers on America's faith and culture. The main goal is to allow different groups to showcase their beauty of head wrapping, its spiritual nature, and how it is culturally relevant. She then uses that space to give demonstrations, discuss stereotypes and misconceptions, and allow for an open dialogue between the audience and the attendees.

The dhuku is another style of head wrapping that originates in African but has found its way into the landscape of African American women in the Muslim Center who have chosen to wear this instead of a traditional hijab. A'isha, a 32-year-old attendee of the Muslim Center, states that she often wears this style as a cultural tie of affection to her grandmother. Her grandmother, who was Zimbabwean, often wore the dhuku to remind herself of home after immigrating to the United States in the late 1950s. While A'isha was not aware of the cultural significance per se, she noted that some women did not accept how she covered her hair

[152] Website: https://www.beautifully-wrapped.com/

because it did not necessarily cover the hair as it should. But, she recalled, "I knew that it was common back home, so I started doing it when I got older."[153] Her reference of "back home" demonstrates a yearning to return to African cultural practices. Although she had never been to Zimbabwe, she still considered that to be her home because it was a voyage made by her grandmother decades earlier. The desire for her return took on new meaning as she adopted the headwrap of her lineage. By adopting a cultural signifier, she recreates home within this particular space.

The dhuku has a long history in African history. This particular headwrap, just like a traditional hijab, covers the hair and is held in place by tying the knots that are tied in the scarf close to the head. Although the headwrap originated in sub-Saharan Africa, it has served the purposes of both African and African American women. The style displays African women's aesthetic nature while also indicating their worldview. While it is common for many people worldwide to cover their hair with this basic headscarf, what makes it distinctly African is how the wearer chooses to wear it. For European women, the typical way to wear this simple wrap was to fold it in a triangle, tie it under the chin (with the styling similar to a bonnet), or tying it to the back of their neck. However, African women choose to fold the fabric into a rectangle rather than in a triangle, and they tend to tie it in a knot around the top of their heads. This makes the way that many African, and consequently many African American women, style their headscarves unique. Growing up in an inner-city, this seemed to be one of the most salient styles worn by African American women. While it appeared to be just a simple way to cover one's hair, it reflected the African homeland's cultural ties.

[153] Discussion with author, November, 2019.

In the United States, head wrapping culture evolved as a cultural carryover from African traditions and developed its own culture on the North American continent. In Louisiana, tignon (tee-yon) laws were enforced that required African descent women to cover their hair. Established by Louisiana's Governor Miro in 1786, these laws were developed to ensure that all African women could be readily identified as slaves or creole class members. It also served another purpose; it sought to limit Black women's attractiveness to white men. White men saw African women as attractive, which not only could potentially disrupt the slave-master relationship but also seemed to anger white women as they began viewing Black women as their competitors for white male attention. The law prohibited Creole women of color from displaying excessive attention to dress in New Orleans streets. This undue attention was not because of their clothes but because they chose to wear their hair in a way that attracted the white male gaze.

While the injunction sought to limit African/creole women's beauty, it backfired. Instead of just wearing a head wrap in any fashion, African women sought to enhance it by creatively styling their head wraps, using different colors, and adding jewels to them. Not only did this improve the beauty of the headwrap, but it also enhanced the beauty of the woman wearing them, which probably added to the attention they were getting from white males. The tignon styles were sometimes simple and sometimes elaborate, resembling high turbans. This showed African women's resilience and desire to maintain their beauty standards. These laws would stay in place until 1803 when the Louisiana Purchase occurred.

While the tignon came to be seen by African and creole women as a new standard of beauty, headwraps would come to be associated with the black mammy figure over time. The

headwrap had become a symbol of remembrance to the African homeland. As such, a simple headwrap was worn by enslaved women as a form of communal identity. However, after slavery, black women began discarding the wearing of headwraps, as it was often associated with slavery, lower class, and less beautiful. In addition, as Victorian standards of beauty became the standard by which many African women began to measure themselves, they embraced the culture of beauty that mirrored those standards. It was not until the advent of the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s that more people began the appreciate African aesthetics and return to those cultural practices.

Black women began adorning themselves with head wraps that recognized their African/African American ancestry. Artists such as Nina Simone, Lena Horne, and Eartha Kitt, and Aretha Franklin wore headwraps regularly to honor their African heritage. In more recent years, singers such as Erica Badu, Alicia Keys, and Beyoncé have furthered the popularity of head wraps by introducing them to a new generation of Black youth. Not only does their style have a significant impact on Black youth culture, but it is also affirming to see Black cultural icons celebrate their Blackness by culturally connecting themselves to the African diaspora.

This chapter examined the cultural practices of members of the Muslim Center and placed them in conversation with the larger African and African American traditions. Members of this community have embraced Islam while at the same time maintaining ties to their cultural heritage and cultural traditions. These ties make this community unique in the Islamic practices and cultural affinities that they intertwined with their religious identities. Jazz has played a considerable role and uplifting African American communities, and even though its permissibility is questioned, El-Amin thought it necessary to install it. By carrying on the

African-American diasporic tradition of jazz, members of the Muslim Center situate their cultural belief system alongside their religious belief system. Members of the Muslim Center who choose to wear Jordan sneakers to the mosque disrupt the politics of respectability by wearing what is most related to them and their cultural affinities. Women who choose to wear hijabs that connect them to their African heritage also locate themselves In African diasporic traditions.

CONCLUSION

This case study began by examining a brief history of Islam in Detroit and described how African American Muslims had accepted Islam. At the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans moved to Detroit as a part of the Great Migration. The goal, on one level, was to improve the lives of themselves and their families by earning a decent living wage that the Ford Motor Company offered. Simultaneously, while African Americans moved to Detroit, Syrians also moved to Detroit to take advantage of the livable wage. The convergence of these communities in Detroit and Highland Park set the stage for developing Islamic consciousness among African American Detroiters. Islam offered a viable alternative to the socioeconomic status of Black Detroiters at that time, and it was Ahmadiyya missionaries who leveraged their pain.

I credit the Ahmadiyya movement for providing the foundation necessary for the mass conversion of African American people that occurred under the Nation of Islam. By blending the secular with the sacred, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq presented African Americans a brand of Islamic philosophy that was closer to orthodoxy than those other movements while promoting the belief that Islam is an equality-based religion. Undoubtedly, the Moorish American Science Temple of Noble Drew Ali and the Universal Negro Improvement Associations contributed to the racially charged language and Black Nationalism, but when their leadership faltered, so did their organizations. By rooting their message in Islam, the Ahmadiyya ensured the survival of their message.

The Nation of Islam emerged on the heels of the Ahmadiyya movement's first push. The NOI borrowed from the Ahmadiyya movement’s focus on African Americans and did so through

the same framework that the Ahmadiyya movement had created. The NOI engaged in the idea of continuous prophecy as propagated by the Ahmadiyya; the NOI used the Quran that the Ahmadiyya movement had translated. In addition, the NOI's promotion of Islam as the ultimate purveyor of black nationalism and liberation was also rooted in the foundations provided by the Ahmadiyya movement. The Nation of Islam thrived for nearly four decades until Elijah Muhammad's death. His death changed the trajectory of the Nation of Islam and hastened the transition from the NOI's philosophy of Islam to a more widely accepted version of Islam propagated by W. D. Mohammed.

Elijah Muhammad's death resulted in the change the direction under the leadership of W.D. Mohammed, but it did not take away its practitioners' agentive qualities. Within months, Mohammed began dismantling the Nation of Islam's structure, including The Fruit of Islam and the Muslim Girl Training, and relaxed dress codes for members. He started installing women to the post of Minister. In some ways, what he did was not much different from what his father had done during the 1930s; he adapted his followers to deal with society's changing times. It was no longer necessary to engage in African American people's struggle when the perception was that everyone had equal rights. He thought it was the time to build coalitions with all people, including their former antagonists, white people. Muhammad's choice to decentralize power and allow imams to operate independently ensured a vibrant African American Muslim population's continued growth.

Shifting the focus to African American beliefs and practices, I examined how African Americans were constructed religious identity. They fall into the tradition of two of the four primary schools of Islamic thought to build their religious belief system, the Maliki and Hanbali

schools of thought. However, the perception of African-American Muslims is that they practice a version of Islam that is far removed from mainstream practices. Interestingly, the idea that African-American Muslims sit outside the purview of Islam is partially rooted in the lack of interaction between immigrant Muslims and African-American Muslims. Immigrant and African-American Muslim Communities tend to isolate themselves and worship at the mosque that most identifies with their ethnic background. Because the two seldom converge in the same place of prayer, African Americans are often viewed by their Muslim counterparts are an ideological other.

The othering of African-American Muslims is also rooted in racial difference, as discussed in chapter two. In addition, some immigrant Muslims believe that Islam is a universal phenomenon, that the application of the belief system and its practices should remain unchanged wherever they exist. Therefore, African American congregations that situate Islam's understanding within the purview of their lived experience are perceived to be distorting Islamic practices, that is, if it does not fall in line with widely-held immigrant views. However, as demonstrated earlier, they do not dismiss traditional Islamic discourse; instead, they understand that it is impossible to separate one's lived realities from religious beliefs.

The idea that a "universal" Islam applies anywhere and to everyone is rooted in a particular system that is subjective, as it relies on a translator from a specific set of circumstances. Those who interpret sacred texts are prone to preconceptions and dispositions, and they, too, interpret holy texts based on their lived experiences. To then project these universal claims onto others as "true" Islam universalizes the particular. To claim that their

interpretation is the only acceptable interpretation is to project their particularistic interpretation of Islam onto others.

As we have seen from this study, some Muslims derive their understanding of Islam based solely on the Quran. While those Muslims are few, it shows that some Muslims believe that it was necessary to rely on and interpret scripture for themselves. By doing so, Muslims reclaims control of the politics of authenticity by becoming interpreters of the faith for themselves. As discussed in chapter two, the idea of using scripture only not only occurs in Islam but has been a part of religious practice in the African-American community historically. During slavery, the Bible was used to justify the enslavement of African people. However, African Americans challenged those norms by engaging in biblical exegesis for themselves.

This study also highlights that while some take a scripture-only approach, most African American Muslims also engage with the sunna of the Prophet Muhammad. By engaging in the Quran and Sunna, they situate their practices alongside traditional Islamic rituals while rooting them within the context of their experiences in the United States. This shows that traditional forms of Islamic knowledge guide them in the same way their immigrant counterparts are taught. However, they understand that a religion that cannot adapt to changing circumstances and living conditions is not helpful for the larger African-American community.

Similarly, some engage with the Quran and the Sunnah indirectly by listening to their imams. They indirectly engage in Islamic knowledge by drawing on the concept of orality prevalent in both the Islamic and African-American traditions. This method allows them to better understand the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad by relying on their learned spiritual guides, such as imams, as interpreters of the faith. From the imam, they

acquire a good understanding of parts of the religion that may be difficult to understand or ambiguous.

Engaging in these texts through one's religious leader is no different from what people have done traditionally, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. They rely on the guidance of a leader who is trained as a theologian and scholar. The imam presents religious knowledge accurately and makes it palatable by simplifying the language and rooting it in the community's social, economic, and spiritual needs. For African Americans at the Muslim Center, their imams are considered part of the community, expounders of the faith, and better equipped to understand the community's unique circumstances.

The third chapter examined the status of women in Islam. The status of women is an important topic to discuss given today's climate where discussion of patriarchy and women's rights are at the forefront of discussions on freedom and equality. Muslim women are viewed as an oppressed group to many outsiders working within a Western framework of what freedom is for women. However, women in this community see themselves as being freer than other women in society. In addition, African American women have accepted traditional gender roles as the ideal structure of society and gender relations, believing that men and women occupying the same roles are not the ideal structure of society. They see traditional gender roles as complementary, as each one performs different roles but work towards a common goal, the betterment of the family. Consequently, they view feminism, whatever the form, as creating antagonism between men and women and hampering both their social and economic lives.

Viewing Muslim women and their rights through a feminist lens is problematic because it takes away the agency for them to define what women's rights and freedoms mean to them. Some scholars, such as Carolyn Rouse, posit that African-American Muslim women are feminists, even if they do not subscribe to a feminist ideology. This claim is problematic because it projects her ideological beliefs unto them even though they do not subscribe to that ideology. How one self-identifies is significant, as the ability to name oneself is both powerful and agentive.

Even though women of this community embrace gender roles, many occupy leadership roles. Women are not simply subservient to the religion nor their husbands, but they provide the stability necessary for the Muslim Center to run efficiently. They serve on decision-making boards, engage in day-to-day activities, and even take on the role of leader within the domestic sphere. As discussed in chapter three, women are viewed by community members as their *true* leaders. This is important to underscore become African American women, historically, have always contributed much to the advancement of the African-American community and often stand as its unsung heroes. However, many Muslim Center congregants openly acknowledge that the community would not be as successful without its women's leadership.

One of the things that immediately stands out at the Muslim Center is that it incorporates African and African American traditions. The Muslim Center is the only mosque globally with a jazz café within its walls, highlighting the importance of Afro-diasporic traditions to its congregants. By situating a jazz cafe just yards away from the prayer hall, they signify that the secular and the sacred traditions of African American people are important to maintaining one's cultural heritage. Given the contestation over the acceptance of music in Islam, this

speaks volumes to the importance of preserving diasporic cultural traditions. Jazz and their decision to include this Cafe demonstrate that they connect themselves to more extensive African American traditions.

Air Jordan sneakers as a cultural tradition is rooted in the African American youth culture. Michael Jordan represented a certain transcendence, as he obtained wealth and status that most African American youth could only dream. The person who wore his shoes. Also transcended the social structures that kept him or her at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The emergence of Jordan sneakers, and its convergence with hip hop culture, combined to form popular youth culture. Muslims in the Muslim Center not only have they decided to skirt the politics of respectability and wear Jordan sneakers to this sacred space, but they are consciously maintaining their ties to African American youth culture that represents status and cool.

Finally, we turned our attention to how their secular and sacred identities converged in the tradition of head wrapping. Women at the Muslim Center knowingly engage in African and African American practice of wrapping their heads, or wearing hijab, in a way that connects them to their African selves. Women consciously choose to wear a dhuku or gele as a symbolic marker of their ancestral homeland. Connecting oneself to Africa had been a part of the Black Consciousness and Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 70s to continental African practices. It shows that they understand themselves to be a larger part of a larger diaspora tradition.

This study presents a storied history of Islam in Detroit and reveals the complex relationship between Islamic orthodoxy, African Americans, and African-American cultural practices. It remains clear that African American Muslims will continue defining Islam on their

terms, adapting as the need and circumstances arise, and keeping engaging in the sacred texts to find comfort.

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