TRANSCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BRICOLAGE: HOW THE NATION OF ISLAM
(RE)CONSTRUCTED A RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the influence(s) that Sufism in general, and West African Sufism in particular, had on African American practitioners of Islam in North America as evidenced by the growth and development of the Nation of Islam (NOI). In what follows, I argue that African Americans created a distinctive cultural attribute of Black Islam that had yet to exist on the American continent. This distinctive way of examining Black Islam is neither Arabocentric nor Afrocentric, but rather it reveals a distinctive African Diasporic element of Black Islam whereby the NOI created a hybrid Islamic identity that (1) was rooted in the racial context of the United States during the early to mid-twentieth century, (2) aligned with West African Sufi Islamic practices, (3) retained and reinvented basic tenets of "traditional Islam," and (4) created mythologies in order circumvent white secular and sacred power structures, signaling both a cultural and religious transformation within the NOI. This social a religious transformation was created through *transcultural bricolage*, a hybridity of the cultural, religious, and abstract interpretations and inventions that allowed members of the NOI to practice a brand of Islam that was rooted in the particularities of the black experience. This study reveals how the Nation of Islam was forged through the processes of bricolage, a method of construction that involves using whatever is at hand, and transculturation, the process of using merging and converging cultures, to construct a religion that centered African Americans adherents.

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Chapter One

This study examines the influence(s) that Sufism in general, and West African Sufism in particular, had on African American practitioners of Islam in North America as evidenced by the growth and development of the Nation of Islam (NOI). In what follows, I argue that African Americans created a distinctive cultural attribute of Black Islam that had yet to exist on the American continent. This distinctive way of examining Black Islam is neither Arabocentric nor Afrocentric, but rather it reveals a distinctive African Diasporic element of Black Islam whereby the NOI created a hybrid Islamic identity that (1) was rooted in the racial context of the United States during the early to mid-twentieth century, (2) aligned with West African Sufi Islamic practices, (3) retained and reinvented basic tenets of "traditional Islam," and (4) created mythologies in order circumvent white secular and sacred power structures, signaling both a cultural and religious transformation within the NOI. This social a religious transformation was created through *transcultural bricolage*, a hybridity of the cultural, religious, and abstract interpretations and inventions that allowed members of the NOI to practice a brand of Islam that was rooted in the particularities of the black experience. This study reveals how the Nation of Islam was forged through the processes of bricolage, a method of construction that involves using whatever is at hand, and transculturation, the process of using merging and converging cultures, to construct a religion that centered African Americans adherents.

The NOI's distinct religiosity, while being borne in the Americas, was rooted in both the West African Sufi Islamic practices as well as the particular experiences of African Americans in the United States. The NOI experienced tremendous growth because of their religious sophistication that was mired in Islam, inscribed with traces of Christianity, and inundated with the imaginative ingenuity of founder Wallace D. Fard and his best student, the Honorable Elijah

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Muhammad.[1] One consequence of this religious amalgam was the perception that Elijah

Muhammad's teachings were foreign to Islam, thus prohibiting their brand of Islam to be

recognized by the worldwide Ummah (Muslim community) (Lincoln, 1994, p. 213). However,

what provided a glimmer of validity was that prior to the late 1950s, orthodox Muslims had

never consistently challenged the NOI's version of Islam, leaving many to suspect that the Black

Nationalist version of Islam was authentic. Still, as the NOI began to respond to its civil rights

opponents, many orthodox Muslims from outside and inside of the movement began to challenge

their nontraditional beliefs (Clegg, 2014, p. 131).

Islam is a religion that originates from the Abrahamic tradition of Judaism and

Christianity. Traditionally, it focuses on the core themes as described by the Quran and the

Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammed.[2] The goal of Islam is to redeem the soul through giving

charity, doing righteous works, continuous devotion, and constant prayer. The success of every

Muslim rests on five principles (also known as the five pillars of Islam): (1) The Shahada (the

declaration of faith stating that there is only one true God who is worthy of worship, asserts that

he acts alone without any helpers, partners, or intermediaries, and it recognizes Muhammad of

Arabia, 570-632 AD as the final prophet and messenger of Allah/God), (2) (S)he or must

establish Salat (five daily prayers), (3) (S)he must pay zakat (alms given annually, which is 2.5%

of one's accumulated wealth), (4) Perform hajj (the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca), and

(5) Fast during the month of Ramadan (Chittick, 2008, p. 5). These criteria are the beginning

point of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in "traditional" Islam. Here, they will serve as guideposts to

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[1] In The Black Muslims in America, C. Eric Lincoln estimates that during their greatest growth period,
from about the mid-1950s to 1964, and their membership "may have reached between 50,000 to 100,000"
(Lincoln, 1994, p. 218). Lincoln points out that exact numbers of their membership are almost impossible
to determine, as only members within the NOI's inner circle knows with certainty. What is known for
certain is that the NOI experienced their greatest numericalgrowth under the leadership of Malcolm X.
[2] Sunnah is best described as the "way" of the Prophet. Typically, it describes things that Prophet
Muhammad of Arabia (570-632 AD) did, said, or tacitly approved.

the discussion that follows about the nature of Islam in both a West African Sufi context and within the NOI context in the United States. These will provide a foundation that will allow us to see how the NOI's practices adhered to, and deviated from, what are considered traditional beliefs and practices of Islam.

Although the aforementioned may serve as a guide in examining Islam, it is important to avoid essentialism in Islamic studies. There is not, and cannot be any one normative definition of the Islamic tradition or its boundaries and limits. In most cases, scholars can identify competing definitions of Islam by examining the historical interpretations of Muslims themselves (Curtis, 2002, p. 4). The most visible tradition in the Euro-American study of Islam, which is sometimes mistakenly seen to represent all of "Islam," has been the discourse in which the Qur'an and the Sunna are treasured as paramount sources of divine authority (Curtis, 2002, p. 5). As a result, the study of African American Islam "has been too consumed with dismissing certain Muslims as cultists, heretics, and sectarians. All of these pejorative and unhelpful labels presume, by their comparison to 'orthodox' Muslims, a normative Islam that in no time and in no place has ever existed" (Curtis, 2002, p. 6).

In addition, centering the five pillars of the Islamic tradition "does not establish any common norms, values, or beliefs, other than the centrality of the Qur'an and the Sunna – which is not to say that other commonalities have not existed in Islamic history. But it does suggest that any tradition which is truly universal, as the Qur'an nearly to all self-identifying Muslims, is bound… to have no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete among themselves to temporarily give their particularisms a function of universal representation" (Curtis, 2002, p. 5). The point here is that any tradition, as in this case the Islamic tradition, is

shaped by human beings who operate in historical time (Curtis, 2002, p. 6). In this case, the actor who reigned over this particularistic brand of Islam was Elijah Muhammad.

To some, it may have seemed as if Elijah Muhammad was simply forging a belief system that was whimsical, unorganized, and philosophically unsound, one that was more about social and political autonomy than about exercising religious freedom. However, what clearly began to emerge was the recognition that Elijah Muhammad was (re)constructing a socio-political movement that was rooted in religion and the black experience, while also preparing to build an autonomous African American society. The identity of the Nation of Islam was forged through the processes of transcultural bricolage, which catered to African Americans economically, socially, psychologically, philosophically, and politically, while bringing a do-it-yourself mentally to Black communities throughout the United States. By examining the NOI's Islamic construction, which exemplifies a diasporic religion, we will be able to see how they successfully blended old ideologies with new realities.

Research Questions

There are several questions that will guide this research. The first will examine how the NOI constructed its particular brand of Islam. Before beginning this research, one of the questions that often plagued me was how the NOI was able to get African Americans to convert to this peculiar religion (by peculiar, I mean one that is foreign to Christian beliefs and practices), shun their old belief systems, and adopt Islam as a way of life.[3] Those who converted were not accepting a form of Islam that was known to the majority of Islamic adherents, and at

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[3] It is important to note here that Muslims have long been a fixture in American societies. In fact, Islam was first introduced to America by African slaves (Gomez, 1998, p. 59). These African slaves, many of whom were West African, arrived in significant numbers and made persistent efforts to maintain their Islamic identities, so much so that they may have converted other slaves to the faith (Gomez, 1998, p. 59).

times, its teachings appeared to be antithetical to traditionally held beliefs in Islam and a possible inhibitor of African American progress.

Another component of this research examines how West African religiosity (re)emerged in the segregated spaces of North America? While the NOI was founded in the United States, it (re)introduced African spiritual consciousness and philosophical precepts that have remained a part of the Black religious experience for centuries. It was the ability West African religious practitioners to accept and hold seemingly contrasting religious viewpoints without necessarily reconciling one belief over the other that allowed them to survive across time and space. For example, in Cuba, Santeria comes from the Yoruba tradition of West Africa and is a complex blend of divination, spirit possession, and sacrifice mixed with some Roman Catholic elements (Juergensmeyer and Anheier, 2012, p. 28). Vodú (Voodoo), another African religion, arrived in Haiti through trans-Atlantic slave trade, and allowed slaves to maintain their African identity. According to Gonzalez, traditions from the Fon, Yoruba, and Congo "intermingled and became the foundation of a new, African-derived religion… which also draws on Catholicism and indigenous religion" (Gonzalez, 2014, p. 108). Similarly, practitioners of Islam in North America also blended spiritual and secular beliefs into one coherent religion in the United States.

This research will also examine the nature of Sufism (Islamic spiritualism/mysticism), particularly West African Sufism, and how it influenced the Nation of Islam. Sufism is often described as a mystical order of Islam that focuses on the spiritual nature of its practitioners rather than focusing on its followers' observable practices. It is important to note that Sufism is not a "sect" of Islam, as most of its practitioners identify as either Sunni or Shi'ite, but rather it is the approach to the spiritual nature of Islam that is stressed. While Sufism does not encourage its practitioners to abandon fundamental Islamic beliefs and practices, many insist that the spiritual

aspects of Islam are more important than its outward manifestations of its five pillars of faith as stressed by Sunni and Shi'ite followers. This idea is important, as we shall see later, as it is this religious lenience (or flexibility) that allows its adherents to have very different practices.

The Nation of Islam is an African diaspora religion, as it derives in whole or in part from various African-based religious traditions (Juergensmeyer and Anheier, 2012, p. 28). As such, it is imperative to use an interdisciplinary framework for this study. In *A Critical Introduction to Religion in the Americas: Bridging the Liberation Theology and Religious Studies Divide*, Michelle A. Gonzalez notes that scholars "who focus on African diaspora religions in the Americas are forced to employ an interdisciplinary approach to study this complex religious landscape in order to truly account for its diversity" (Gonzalez, 2014, p. 121). Therefore, in undertaking this study, I use an interdisciplinary methodology to examine the NOI.
Using an interdisciplinary methodology to support this thesis, I examine the religious history, philosophy, and sociology of the NOI by examining primary documents and speeches of Elijah Muhammad, primary and secondary sources that delve into the nature of West African religiosity and Sufism, and primary and secondary sources that deal with the construction of the NOI's religious identity. I will also show that by using whatever was available to him, Elijah Muhammad engaged in a cultural and religious bricolage, one that he helped to create by using disparate pieces of religious ideologies in order to form a coherent whole. In addition, Muhammad was also involved in a transculturation that wedded African, African American, and American culture into one conglomerate.

While background information will be provided about the Nation of Islam's founder, Wallace D. Fard (who founded the Nation of Islam in Detroit and lead his followers from 1930 until his disappearance in 1934), this study will primarily focus on the NOI under leadership of

Elijah Muhammad, whose role as the prophet and head of the Nation of Islam spanned from 1934 until his death in 1975. Focusing on Elijah Muhammad instead of the Nation's founder was a critical choice, but one that did not come without careful consideration. As Elijah Muhammad ascended to the leadership position of the Nation of Islam, much of the teachings thereafter became blurred, so much so that many scholars cannot discern which of the Nation's teachings were products of Fard and which were products of Elijah Muhammad. In fact, it seems that to some extent, Fard introduced ideas and that Muhammad would later expand upon as time and circumstances necessitated. With that in mind, it seems that one can attribute many of Elijah Muhammad's teachings to his own understandings and interpretations of what Islam calls for, and what the nation of Black Americans needed.

Significance of this Research

The history of the Nation of Islam has been explored countlessly since C. Eric Lincoln's *Black Muslims in America* was published in 1961. This research is significant because it adds another dimension to the conversation about the Nation of Islam that has not been thoroughly studied. The significance of this research is threefold: it examines the history of a movement as an African diasporic religion, it examines how the NOI's theological modifications of traditional Islamic thought contained a combination of African, Christian, and cultural elements, and it examines how religious beliefs served as a vehicle of social, political, and economic mobility. In addition, this study is unique because it adds to the literature concerning the NOI and their relationship to the Sufi Ahmadiyya Movement.

While nearly every author who have written about the Nation of Islam mention the Ahmadiyya movement and their importance to the Nation of Islam (as they were among the first to spread widely circulate the Qur'an to African Americans in the US), very few gave specific

examples of how Sufi doctrine became part of the NOI's theology. In other words, they all give substantial historical accounts of the history of the Nation of Islam and of the Ahmadiyya Movement, but they do not provide a theological analysis of specific doctrine that shows how some aspects of the NOI's doctrine were derivatives of Ahmadi doctrine. In other texts, Sufism is mentioned passively or largely ignored, as those authors sought to show that the NOI was an outgrowth of other Black Nationalist groups such as the UNIA and the Moorish America Science Temple, as it was "the waning of these two groups… [that] left a void in Black religious political life at precisely the time such a channel was needed most" (Lee, 1996, p. 21). The NOI, then, filled the gap left behind by the fall of those earlier groups. While it may be argued that members of the Nation of Islam were also a part of these earlier groups, the NOI's identity was distinct from those groups.

This study also contributes to the body of knowledge that exists within African American and African studies. One component of this field involves an interdisciplinary approach to material. Although the NOI can be envisioned solely as a religious movement, it is also necessary to examine the context in which they gained prominence, how race relations shaped their ideologies, their hierarchical structure, the involvement of women, their posture on politics, and how they engaged in politics of respectability. All of these random and yet interrelated facets, can be comprehensibly examined by using the interdisciplinary framework of transcultural bricolage.

Chapter Two

The Nation of Islam

Much scholarship on the Nation of Islam has been produced since it gained widespread attention around the late 1950s. However, that scholarship has focused primarily on their practices and theories of liberation. More specifically, many scholars sought to examine the Nation of Islam as a radical wing of the Civil Rights Movement. Scholars such as C. Eric Lincoln, David Clegg, Michael Gomez, and others have often linked some of their beliefs and practices of these "Black Muslims" to various predecessors including Father Divine, Father Hurley, Marcus Garvey, and Noble Drew Ali of the Moorish Science Temple of America. However, while these figures were undoubtedly precursors to the development of the Nation of Islam, and many members of former organizations would later join and influence the NOI, the tradition of using Islamic beliefs and practices to navigate different spaces has long been alive in the West African Sufi tradition. Many scholars point to Noble Drew Ali and the Moorish American Science Temple as the starting point of the Nation of Islam, most likely because of their use of the Seven Circle Quran and their references to an all-powerful deity, Allah. However, Aminah McCloud contends that there is no evidence that the Moorish Science Temple of America had access to even the most basic tenets of Islam or Islamic texts, with the possible exception of the Qur'an (McCloud, 1995, p. 13). Given this truth, it seems evident that the NOI's version of Islam had roots in something other than the Moorish American Science Temple, one that had African traditions linked to that tradition.

The Nation of Islam rooted their belief system and their practices in the five pillars of faith that also grounded traditional Muslims: (1) The belief and worship of one God and acceptance of Muhammad as his prophet and messenger, (2) The five daily prayers, (3) fasting during the month of Ramadan, (4) Paying alms tax, and (5) performing a hajj to Mecca.

However, while the Nation of Islam followed the traditions of old in theory, what became evident was that the *way* they adhered to these traditions differed greatly from more orthodox understandings of Islam.   For example, the belief and worship of one God was maintained, although the God the NOI proclaimed to be the one true God was Wallace D. Fard ; the prophet Muhammad of Arabia (570-632 AD) was replaced with the NOI's prophet Elijah Muhammad; Ramadan was celebrated in December in the NOI as opposed to celebrating with the worldwide Muslim community during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; the NOI transcended traditional Islamic dietary laws by redefining what was haram (forbidden) and halal (permissible), and by limiting food intake to just one meal per day; the NOI denied the concept of the hereafter (heaven and hell); ascribed a racial identity to God; and described the devil (Shaytan) as one who was not a supernatural being, but was identified as white people on earth. These beliefs and practices mark a point of departure for the NOI from orthodoxy. The NOI thus advanced a variety of Islam that decentered Arab interpretations of Islam and centered the African American experience.

In *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought*, Edward E. Curtis labeled African American varieties of Islam as neither nationalist nor racialist, but particularistic (Curtis, 2002, p. 14). This means that each practitioner of Islam interprets it in a way that integrates his or her unique set of values and beliefs. However, Curtis also notes that tensions exist between the idea of Islam as a religion that is universally accepted on one hand, and on the other hand is the idea that religion is applicable to a particular group of people within a given context. The former is often a Eurocentric approach to a religious ideology in which one seeks total uniformity, without regard for the lived experiences of particular individuals or groups. The latter, which is found within an

African tradition, examines and expresses religious ideologies in part, or in totality, based off of their lived experiences (Curtis, 2002, p. 1). Elijah Muhammad attempted to rid African American Islam of any paradox or ambiguity by advancing an entirely particularistic interpretation of Islam (Curtis, 2002, p. 16).

African Americans Muslims were not only facing the issue of religious validity, but the more pressing issue of human survival. The notion of the "other" helps to inform us as to why African American Muslims were viewed in a negative light. The practice of Islam by an otherized black minority gave whites a new target, Islam. Not only were blacks un-American by their skin color, but also by their adoption of an un-American religion, since Islam stood outside of the accepted religions of Christianity and Catholicism. The problem of black Muslims, then, has always been twofold; first, they were black in a country that did not accept blacks as equal human beings, and the second, these "others" were practicing Islam. Where whites perceived both identities to be distinctly problematic, Elijah Muhammad saw them as being mutually reinforcing and empowering. As such, he did not make a distinction between being black and being Muslim; these identities were identical (Curtis, 2002, p. 63).

Another related theme in the history of African American Islamic thought is the struggle for black liberation (Curtis, 2002, p. 15). Because their theory of liberation involved separating from white society, Elijah Muhammad proclaims that the Nation of Islam was often credited with creating a separatist movement (Muhammad, 1993, p. 22). This led to claims that they were hindering the development of black progress by proposing a separatists' ideology, but in actuality, the Nation of Islam offered the chance to embrace a Black Nationalist identity and agenda that sought social and economic independence (Clegg, 2014, p. 41). C. Eric Lincoln noted that "all Black Nationalist movements have in common three characteristics: a

disparagement of whites and their culture, a repudiation of 'Negro' identity, and a concomitant search for and commitment to the black (African) heritage... The more influential black nationalist movements also seize on varying interests as focal points for group identification or as vehicles of counter-aggression against a white majority" (Lincoln, 1961, p. 47). While Lincoln's assessment of all Black Nationalist groups takes a universalist approach, thus essentializing all Black movements, these characteristics are embodied in the Nation of Islam and expands our understanding of liberation theology.

Black liberation theology has a long list of practitioners, including Muslims, Christians, and philosophers alike. Much of the scholarship, however, focuses on liberation theology from a Christian perspective and occurring within an American context. However, the NOI practiced Islam as a distinctive brand of liberation theology, one that follows a West African tradition of using Islam as a tool of resistance and liberation. In *A Study of the Influence of Islam in Northern Nigeria*, John E. Means notes that Islam has had the easier time transcending time and space in Africa because many of the practices of the tribes are in harmony with many tenets of, or rather not in conflict with, Muslim theology (Means, 1965, p. 72). Similarly, the many of the tenets of Islam, as presented by the Nation of Islam, were in line with many African American beliefs and practices.

Sufism

Sufism is an order that exists within Islam and not, contrary to popular belief, a sect of Islam. To highlight the difference between an order and a sect, a sect is a subgroup of a particular religious practice (in this case Islam) whose religious, political, and/or philosophical belief systems identifies with a certain ideology within a larger religious group. Hence, in Islam, Sunni is a sect that follows the Quran and the Sunnah of their Prophet Muhammad. Sunnis

regard themselves as those who emphasize the traditions of Muhammad and of the first four caliphs of the Muslim community after the death of their Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. Shi'a is a sect that focuses on the Quran and the Sunnah, but are also considered the "party of Ali," or those who believe that the first caliph after Prophet Muhammad's death should have been the prophet's son-in-law, Ali, and that all successive leaders of the Muslim state should be descendants of Prophet Muhammad. An order, in this case the Sufi order, does not identify themselves as a distinctive sect of Islam, but rather most identify as a specific group, usually within the Sunni or Shi'a traditions.

Sufis believe and follow many of the "traditional" tenets of Islam, but practice them in different ways, just as in the case of the NOI. In general, Sufis go beyond external requirements of Islam to seek a personal experience of God through forms of meditation and spiritual growth. According to Mbacké and Hunwick, Sufism "is a devotional practice which promotes the purification of the soul – a spiritual objective that lies at the very heart of Islam" (Mbacké and Hunwick, 2005, p. ix). Sufism is also characterized by the great importance it places on the spiritual education of disciples, partially due to the fact that any Sufi path is considered by its members to be the best way to attain perfection (ihsan) in Islam. This knowledge can only be transmitted through Sufi sheikhs, which, in general, "have looked upon themselves as those Muslims who take seriously God's call to perceive His presence both in the world and in the Self" (Chittick, 2000, p. 19).

Sufis are best described as mystics as opposed to ascetics. Asceticism refers to the piety that stresses obedience to a transcendent deity, while mysticism stresses communion with and immanent deity (Melchert, 2015, p. 14). For Sufis, "direct experience takes precedents over historical revelation, and from this derives… the law of mysticism (Trimingham, 1971, p. 137).

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Some Sufis trace their starting point to Ali, the fourth Caliph of the Muslim state after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, as he was believed to have received esoteric knowledge about the nature of Islam (Trimingham, 1971, p. 136). Others point to a suggestion of an extra-scriptural mystical teachings of the Qur'an as indicated by Prophet Muhammad's friend, Abu Hurayra (Dickson, 2015, p. 14), who legendarily stated, "I have memorized two kinds of knowledge from Allah's Apostle. I have propagated one of them to you and if I propagated the second, then my throat would be cut" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 3, No. 121). This hints at a type of esoteric knowledge that exists within Islam but it only known by few. Others who believed that there is an esoteric nature argue that the Prophet himself laid the foundations of Sufism (Mbacke and Hunwick, 2005, p. 1). In short, while traditional Islam places emphasis on the orthopraxy, Sufis place emphasis on the inner spiritual nature of Islam. In doing so, they have greater flexibility in external practices.

By the eight century, the term Sufi was applied to a group of people who differentiated themselves from other Muslims by stressing specific teachings of the Qur'an (Chittick, 2008, p. 22). This early Sufism was a natural expression of religion as a communal matter; it was the adherents right to pursue a relationship with God, as opposed to joining an institutionalized religion based on authority (Trimingham, 1998, p. 2). By the ninth century, a variety of approaches to Islam had developed and Sufis became known as anything from "knowers, ascetics, renouncers, and poor men" (Chittick, 2008, p. 22). However, although they had new names, their focus and interests of the Sufis were not new.

By the eleventh century, Sufi teachings had become standardized (Dickson, 2015, p. 14), partially due to the help of renowned scholar Al-Ghazali, who argued for the intellectual superiority of mystical knowledge (Keeler, 2006, p. 6). He argued that there were three kinds of

knowledge in society that could be divided into a hierarchy. At the bottom of his hierarchy were the common people, or those who believe in the truths of the religion without questioning it. Above them were elites who learned reasons for their beliefs, and at the top of the hierarchy were the elite of the elite, or the ones who directly experience religious truth, the Sufis (Keeler, 2006, p. 6). It was this third group, the elites of the elites who would carry the Sufism across the African continent. Manding speakers traveled across the Sahara, establishing networks with Muslims in the Maghreb (Curtis, 2014, p. 5). This contact is believed to have brought West Africans in contact with Sufis. In *Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community*, Sean Hanretta notes that "Sufism was one of the earliest forms of Islamic devotion in the region and an important source of religious power for holy men. One of the oldest pieces of writing is in West Africa, and perhaps the oldest direct source on Islam in Africa, is an eleventh century inscription with instructions for Qur'anic recitations used in Sufi mystical practices" (Hanretta, 2009, p. 33).

Another aspect of the growing prominence of Sufism during the 11th century was the development of the Sufi lodge, or khanaqah. From the eleventh century onward, khanaqahs provided meeting and resting places for Sufis, and allowed them to spread Sufism throughout the border of Northern Africa (Trimingham, 1998, p. 9). This rapid dispersion of Sufi ideas lead to changes in society, as Sufis began taking on more influential roles with those in power as well as with the common people (Keeler, 2006, p. 4). However, it was not until the twelfth century Sufi institutions did not begin to play a major role in Islamic history (Chittick, 2008, p. 24).

Before the twelfth century, Sufism was looked upon as outside of the fold of Islam. However, as more "respectable" people embraced Islam, such as Saladin and his lieutenants, those conversions made Sufi belief and associations respectable (Trimingham, 1998, p. 9). Sufis

then began their own development of Islam with its own leaders, hierarchy, and forms of worship, and by the thirteenth century, Sufi centers became the focal point for mystical schools and teaching centers (Trimingham, 1998, p. 10). From the thirteenth to the first half of fourteenth centuries, Sufi (Tijaniyyah) teachings were disseminated over the vast portions of the continent by both Maghreb and Egyptian brotherhoods, and in many cases, they served as conduits for conversion to Islam (Knysh, 1999, p. 253). Other Sufi groups, such as the Idrisis, began spreading from Libya into Chad into Kano in northern Nigeria during this period (Knysh, 1999, p. 255). As a result of the diasporic nature of Sufism, not only were ideas dispersed, but also the dispersal of black bodies throughout the West African continent that facilitated the spread of Islam. It was those Sufi masters who had special Islamic knowledge were key to spreading Islam throughout the Western region (Curtis, 2014, p. 5).

By the fourteenth century, Sufi orders were integral to the structure of Muslim societies, so much so that they became important symbols of political legitimacy (Dickson, 2015, p. 24). In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, Sufi orders provided a visible gathering place for demonstrating the practice of Islam and were instrumental in spreading Islam throughout the continent (Robinson, 2004, p. 19).

Theories of African Islam

Islam became a fixture on the African continent, developing both as a religious institution and as identity marker, especially in West Africa. However, the question of when Islam actually reached the continent seems to be a point of contention amongst scholars. While some maintain that Islam reached the continent of Africa in about the 7th century, coming first through Egypt by way of Arabic conquerors, others, such as Peter B. Clarke, argue that Islam made its first contacts with Africa around the eighth century, stating that it made its way across the trans-

Saharan trade routes from North to West Africa (Clarke, 1982, p. 1). Not long after Arab

conquerors had overrun North Africa did the rulers then begin to organize slave raids into

southern regions of Morocco, leading them as far south as Ghana (Clarke, 1982, pp. 9-10). The

next stage in the contact was between West Africans and Muslim merchants, who began trading

with West Africans in order to obtain supplies of gold. According to Clarke, "the realization that

West Africa was the 'land of gold' made it the focus of greater attention in North Africa,

attracting increasing numbers of Muslim traders to the commercial centers of the Sahara and

West Africa itself" (Clarke, 1982, p. 12).

According to John Mbiti, this contact between Islam and West Africa, the Senegambia

region to be exact, would not happen until about the eleventh century (Mbiti, 1990, p. 238-239).

It is important to note that by the time Islam reached the Western part of the continent, they were

practicing a version that was much different from the "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxy" as viewed

by its practitioners in the Arabian Peninsula. What made it distinctive was that they followed a

brand of Islam that not only followed "traditional" beliefs and practices, but one that also

incorporated indigenous African beliefs and practices as well. Many West Africans soon

embraced a unique brand of Islam, Sufism.

West African Sufi Muslims occupy a unique space in their tradition of practicing Islam.

As noted earlier, Sufi Islam is much different from "traditional" forms of Islam such as Sunni or

Shi'ite Islam. What also makes African Islam particularistic is their ability to incorporate their

own epistemologies and cosmologies into Islam, making Sufism, in a sense, distinctly African.

West African Islamic practices were based largely on their lived realities and experiences.

Therefore, it is wrong to say that West Africans deviated from orthodoxy, but rather it is more

appropriate to say that there exists a plurality of orthodoxies that are contingent upon one's own

spiritual realities. The idea of a multiplicity of orthodoxies can be summarized in the Sufi

dictum: "Water takes on the color of its container" (qtd. in Dickson, 2015, p. 14).

According to John E. Means in *A Study of the Influence of Islam in Northern Nigeria*, the

"high degree of flexibility and adaptability as well as the simplicity of the creed is the great

stimulus which gives greater success to Islam than Christianity" (Means, 1965, p. 73). While

Means was examining Islam in the context of Northern Nigeria, his statement also speaks to how

Islam has been practiced in the United States, particularly by the Nation of Islam. The

expectation of communion with God was a great point of discontinuity in orthodox circles,

which explains why Sufis were attacked by orthodox Muslims, which would be replicated by the

NOI and orthodox groups in the U.S. (Melchert, 2015, p. 17). Both groups were perceived as

deviants because they sought to redefine what it meant to be Muslim

In *Islam Outside the Arab World*, Westerlund and Svanberg note that in Senegal, as

elsewhere, Sufism is "largely mixed with local beliefs and practices. Belief in jinns (spirits

mentioned in the Quran) is combined with belief in the existence of local spirits. Regional cults

of saints, usually male marabouts, and faith in miracles characterize the orders, whose attitude

towards regional variations and local beliefs has been extremely flexible and tolerant in Senegal"

(Westerlund and Svanberg, 1999, p. 81). Lamin O. Sanneh, notes that the question of saints in

Islam, particularly in Sufi Islam, is of cardinal importance…" (Sanneh, 1997, p. 36), as it links

the living world to the spiritual world. The tradition of prayers at the graveside of Muslim saints

may not be connected with a saint guild in the technical sense of the term, but it is a part of the

phenomenon of saint veneration that is widely diffused in Muslim West Africa (Sanneh, 1997, p.

37).

In blending religious beliefs, Muslims in Northern Nigeria also introduce superstitious beliefs into Islam. For example, people living in rural areas in Northern Nigeria believe that meeting a blind man first thing in the morning denotes a bad omen, that the cry of a crow especially at dusk indicates death around the area, and that it is a taboo that a mother should not call her first child with his or her real name (Doi, 1984, p. 93). Further, many believe that when returning from the graveyard after having buried the dead person, one should not turn back or else (s)he too may die. Supposing a woman has been unfortunate enough to have lost about two husbands who died natural death, she will be feared; and she may not even get another husband (Doi, 1984, p. 94).

Among the Yoruba Muslims, singing and dancing feature predominantly both in their social and religious life (Doi, 1984, p. 153). Dreams play a significant role in clerical Muslim communities, similar to the role they played in the general Islamic Sufi tradition (Sanneh, 1997, p. 41). As a result, Sufis cultivate the practice of dream interpretation so much so that some of the Sufi leaders have said "that it is the pivot upon with the Sufi path rests" (Sanneh, 1997, p. 41). Among the Bambara, "the phrase bisimilay (Ar. Bismillah, "in the name of Allah") is used in sacramental invocations and magical incantations because it is believed to be a phrase of power, the word sadaqah (charity) is used for offerings to the Gods, and amulets are accepted from Muslim clerics, who also transmit other aspects of the material culture of Islam "without any observable shift of allegiance away from the pagan religious culture" (Sanneh, 1997, p. 42).

These examples show that Africans diverge from traditional Islamic beliefs by observing practices that would be considered by many in the Muslim community to be un-Islamic. According to traditional beliefs, Islam does not subscribe to any superstitious beliefs and man-made taboos. In fact, the entire efforts of the Prophet Muhammad were directed towards

removing all forms of superstitions from the society of Arabs, and arouse in them the belief in one and only one God (Doi, 1984, p. 94). However, West African Sufi Muslims believe that through these various "superstitious" beliefs, they are able to commune with God. By focusing more on communion with God, Sufis provide a space to introduce foreign practices that assist them in connecting with the creator.

Transculturation and Bricolage

"Bricolage is a mode of interpreting and adapting existing materials to new circumstances or needs. While the result may be a new or reformulated myth, tool, a house, a language, or a discourse, it is… an adaptive mode of being in the world" (Knepper, 2006, p. 71).

The term bricolage is used to define the assemblage of seemingly disparate pieces in order to create something anew. This term derived from the French verb bricoleur, which according to the Merriman-Webster dictionary means "the construction achieved by using whatever comes to hand." This term was first used by a French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *The Savage Mind* (1962) to describe mythical thought. In this book, Levi-Strauss notes that "the bricoleur addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors…" (Levi-Strauss, 1962, p. 19). Those "oddments" from human endeavors can constitute a wide variety of things, as the bricoleur uses any available material from the past in order to create something anew, and to solve new problems as they arise. Levi-Strauss popularized usage of the term in the 1960s, and it has since been used to describe any creation that uses various disparate sources to create something anew.

Bricolage can be used to define the process of creating music, art, and religion. For example, *Stomp: The Musical*, uses household and industrial items such as trash cans, brooms,

steel, paper, and anything else available in order to make music. In art, bricolage can be seen in the ready-made era of the early twentieth century in which artists took various objects, fastened them together, and created an artwork from those disparate pieces. A good example in modern art is Marcel Duchamp's *The Bicycle Wheel*, in which Duchamp uses an old bicycle wheel and a stool to create a modern piece of art. In religion, Veronque Altglas notes that "in contemporary society, individuals increasingly craft their religious life and identity by picking and mixing a wide range of religious traditions. This… designates activities of fabricating, repairing, and installing – something like 'DIY'" (Altglas, 2014, p. 2). In a religious context, people who choose to practice individualization and detraditionalization by breaking with tradition and historicity, choose to "consume, and combine religious resources of all kind in unique assortments, thereby elaborating personal, hence, unique, religious identities and systems" (Altglas, 2014, p. 5). As such, bricolage becomes a great way to examine the identity of the Nation of Islam.

Bricolage is a more appropriate term than others that describe the mixing of religious beliefs such as creolization or syncretism. The term *creolization*, for example, is often used to describe how various cultures combine to form a new culture. While the creolization process is one that is continually occurring in the African diaspora, it seems to focus more on culture and cultural production than it does on the spiritual nature of the natures under investigation. Similarly, *syncretism* suggests a process that involves mixing dissimilar traditions. However, syncretism focuses more on how dissimilar religious practices are reconciled, mixed, and recreated in new spaces. By focusing solely on religious practices, syncretism falls short. Bricolage, however, allows us to capture the uniqueness of the African American experience by allowing us to examine cultural varieties, political suasions, and religious philosophies posited

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by African peoples in the diaspora. By examining bricolage along with transculturation, we can capture the entire experience of African American Muslims.

In *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz described how various cultures come together to form a new, and yet still changing culture. He argued that while acculturation describes the process of transition from one culture to another, transculturation expresses "the highly varied phenomena that have come about as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place there [in Cuba]" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 98). Without understanding transculturation, Ortiz argues, it is impossible "to understand the evolution of the Cuban folk, either in the economic or in the institutional, legal, ethical, religious, artistic, linguistic, psychological, sexual, or other aspects of its life." His studies, although in Cuba, represent the same type of cultural changes and exchanges that happened in the United States. African, African American, and white culture blended to give life to the newly founded Nation of Islam. Without Situating Ortiz's theory of transculturation alongside the NOI, one cannot fully understand the movement that was the Nation of Islam, as their identity involved combining various cultural identities that remained in flux. In addition, transculturation involves the process of transitioning from one culture to another, which does not consist of acquiring a wholly new culture (acculturation), nor of wholly losing one's native culture (deculturation), but rather reconciling a multiplicity of cultural attributes that remain fluid (Ortiz, 1995, p. 98).

To summarize, we have examined various manifestations of Islam as well as introduced two terms, bricolage and transculturation. Collectively, these elements combine to reflect the Nation of Islam's ideologies. At the base of their beliefs is the fundamentalist approach to believing Islam, i.e. belief in Allah, prayer, fasting, taxes, and the hajj. These, were confounded by the belief that communion with God was possible (Sufism). In addition, the NOI's practice of

Islam introduced a high degree of flexibility and adaptability (West African Sufism). Moreover, NOI believers were able to use Islam as a tool to deconstruct white racial hegemony (liberation theology) by calling for the separation, both economically and socially, from white society. Moreover, the NOI was able to incorporate other aspects into their ideology that reflected their lived reality such as the politics of respectability, using religion to form extended kinship networks, and the imagination of Elijah Muhammad (bricolage). Finally, the NOI was able to blend Afro-American, Euro-American, and religious cultures to form a new culture (transculturation).

Chapter Three

The Nation of Islam has a rich history of mixing the religious and the secular. No movement since the NOI has been able to attract such a massive following of African Americans who all came together under the banner of freedom, religious harmony, social justice, political autonomy, and economic stability. While there have been other groups, both secular and sacred, who were dedicated to the uplift the African American people worldwide, many lacked the cohesion and explosive power of the Nation of Islam. This section will briefly sketch the history of the rise of Nation of Islam, provide a rough account of the Nation's founder, Wallace Fard Muhammad, and contextualize the rise of an institution that gave a voice to millions of African American people in the United States, and worldwide.

The 1920s saw booming markets and a time of revitalization. The "Roaring Twenties" was the period immediately following WWI that was characterized by an economic boom that saw an increase in jobs, higher wages, and an increase in revenue in both the public and private sectors of the economy. Jobs were plentiful especially in the North, so much so that the North was seen by many black southerners as being the land of abundance that held the promise of a better standard of living, employment, and equality (Lee, 1996, p. 19). As a result, northern cities saw a dramatic increase in population, as approximately 2,250,000 Blacks left the rural south and emigrated to large northern cities (Lee, 1996, p. 19). In Detroit, estimates showed that the black population of 5,741 in 1910 had swelled to 40,838 by 1920, and nearly tripled to 120,066 by 1930 (Curtis, 2002, p. 67). As evidenced by the growing population, Detroit, as well as many other norther cities, had become a refuge for many southerners looking for better economic opportunities.

Black emigrants from the south, however, would soon face the reality that the utopian North did not provide many opportunities for them. One such emigrant, Elijah Poole from Sandersville, Georgia (later Elijah Muhammad), would soon learn these harsh realities first hand after migrating to the Detroit in 1923. He worked several jobs from 1923-1925 including the American Nut Company, the American Copper and Brass Company, and Chevrolet Axle. Poole, like many others, could not find steady work. In addition to the shortage of jobs, blacks suffered horrible living conditions. Edward Curtis describes working and living conditions of Blacks in Detroit during the 1920s:

> "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. Moreover, migrants experience discrimination in health care, education, and nearly every other aspect of life. Detroit's Salvation Army even refused to give many Christmas baskets…" (Curtis, 2002, p. 68).

With the onset of the Great Depression, a result of the stock market crash of 1929, the problems faced by African Americans were exacerbated. According to Curtis, the Depression "saw the failure of several black banks and an inability among black institutions to cope with the enormity of the crisis," including the black church (Curtis, 2002, p. 68). However, what coincided with the crash of the stock market and the desperate conditions of African Americans was the rise of a prophet, a prophet that would deliver blacks from economic hardships.

One Nation, Under Fard

The life of the founder of the Nation is Islam, Wallace D. Fard (also known as Wallace Fard Muhammad), is chockfull of mystery and speculation. Many historians, religious scholars, and journalists have sought to disentangle the various strands of evidence that lies in his wake. What is certain, however, is that Fard arrived in Detroit, Michigan in 1930. From 1930 until his disappearance in 1934, he sparked one of the most successful black socio-religious organizations ever seen in Norther America. After his disappearance in 1934, his protégé and successor, Elijah Muhammad, continued to spread his message of black deliverance from the evils of white America for generations.

The history of the Nation of Islam has been explored countlessly since C. Eric Lincoln's *Black Muslims in America* was published in 1961. While nearly every author who has written about the Nation of Islam has described Fard's life, few have dedicated themselves to uncovering the truth of his lineage. Many are content with offering a myriad of possibilities without marrying themselves to any one conclusion. Some seem to construct their theories of Fard based upon scant evident that suggests that he was a member of other Black Nationalist organizations such as the UNIA, or religious organizations such as the Moorish American Science Temple without substantiating those claims. Today, many scholars have given up on the quest for his true identity. However, since his identity is one key element to understanding his life, it is necessary, here, to offer a snapshot of the available information.

Nearly every book that details the Nation of Islam or Elijah Muhammad mentions the founder, Fard. However, most scholars note that as a result of Fard's use of many aliases, and poor record keeping at the time, it is nearly impossible to reconstruct his life in any meaningful way. For instance, in The *Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora*, scholar Edward Curtis

does not attempt to reconstruct the life of Fard. Rather, he mentions him as being the founder of the Nation of Islam before moving to his successor, Elijah Muhammad.

Other scholars take definitive approaches to the scant material offering what they believe to be the correct view of Fard. Michael Gomez, for example, believes that Fard was born Wali Dodd Fard on February 25th 1891 in New Zealand (Gomez, 2005, p. 277-8). He states that his father was Zared Fard, an East Indian, and either Zared Fard or both of his parents came to New Zealand from what is now Pakistan. According to this account, Fard's mother, Beatrice, was a white Englishwoman living in New Zealand. Gomez states that Fard was born in either New Zealand or Portland Oregon to parents who were either Hawaiian or Polynesian and British. Further, Gomez asserts that Fard also took on the alias of George Farr, who was a member of the member of the Theosophical Society in San Francisco by 1921 and also a member of Garvey's UNIA. Similarly, Manning Marable's account of Fard in *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* confuses the various narratives by asserting many claims that have yet to be proven true, such as the belief that Fard's views represented the "anti-white views of the staunch Garveyite" without establishing a link between Fard and the Garvey movement (Marable, 2011, p.84).

Therefore, this reconstruction of Fard's life will rely on primary sources from Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, secondary source materials from leading scholars, and the FBI files. While Muhammad's accounts cannot be considered definitive, we can use some of what he says and combine it with what is factually known about Fard to reconstruct his life. In addition, the FBI files contain about 822 pages of text about Fard and his possible identities. This was an attempt by the FBI not only to locate the mysterious Fard, but also to discredit him and the NOI.

The official line in the Nation of Islam states that on July 4, 1930, a newcomer appeared on the streets of Detroit. As America celebrated its independence, this man, who would later became a God, appeared in the Paradise Valley Community of Detroit, Michigan. Wallace .D. Fard sold silks and other houseware goods door to door, claiming that the silks were from his home country of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. He claimed to be born on February 26, 1877 (Marsh, 1984, pp. 51-52). Selling household goods and silks allowed Fard a platform to teach a new and obscure religion Islam. What was new, however, was not the religion itself, as Islam had been introduced to African American communities in Detroit as early as 1921, but it was the way that Islam was introduced that gave it credibility. As such, Fard's religious teachings quickly began to garner belief and support from the residents of Paradise Valley residents. Fard sold goods and preached in the homes of black families, especially those who were recent migrants from the South. Fard began teaching his new religion by first using the bible, believing that his Message would be better received if he used the bible because his audience was more familiar with that tradition. Later, he incorporated the Qur'an into his teachings. According to Clifton E. Marsh, Fard believed that Christianity was the white man's religion that did not offer solutions to the social problems or development of the "Asiatic Nation," and that whites were inherently evil. Therefore, it was not in their [European] nature to accept Islam, nor was it in the interest African Americans to retain a religion that was designed by whites to maintain their high place in society while leaving blacks on the periphery (Marsh, 1984, p. 52).

Part of his allure was his claim that he was a foreigner as opposed to being African American; it lent certain credibility to his story because African American people who were downtrodden and accepting of beliefs of White America would not, or possibly could not, believe in a man who would take them away from their beliefs in God. This exhibits racial

undertones that were prevalent at the time. According to Clegg, "Fard's European features, despite the fact that he presented himself as a mulatto, perhaps made him and his message more palatable to his African American followers" (Clegg, 2014, p. 22).

The earliest account of the Nation of Islam comes from sociologist Erdmann D. Beynon in 1938, who published a first-hand account of the early Nation of Islam entitled "The Voodoo Cult among Negro Migrants in Detroit" in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1938). According to Beynon, in the early stage of his ministry, Fard "used the Bible as his textbook, since it was the only religious book with which the majority of his hearers were familiar. With growing prestige over a constantly increasing group, [Fard] became bolder in his denunciation of the Caucasians and began to attack the teachings of the Bible in such a way as to shock his hearers and bring them to an emotional crisis" (Beynon, 1938, p. 901). Fard's message soon spread throughout the black community, and attendance at meeting houses grew tremendously. These meeting houses were usually the living rooms and basements of residents of Paradise Valley, as most of the residents, and Fard himself, could not yet afford to rent a hall for the speaker.

Beynon transcribed some of Fard's early beliefs that were preached in the meeting houses and later echoed by Elijah Muhammad:

> "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 themselves. 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 "poison animals", hogs, ducks, geese, possums and catfish. They must give up completely the use of stimulants, especially liquor. They must clean themselves up – both their bodies and their houses. If in this way they obeyed Allah, he would take them back to the Paradise from which they had been stolen – the Holy City of Mecca" (Beynon, 1938, p. 901).

Eventually, numbers at these meeting houses grew so tremendously that the houses overflowed. As a result, they began renting a hall at 3408 Hastings Street to conduct his meetings and teachings. Between 1930 and 1933, Fard recruited 8,000 followers among Detroit blacks. By 1933 he was holding two back-to-back weekly meetings in a four-hundred-person capacity hall that was jam-packed (Magida, 1996), pp. 46-7).   Fard prepared supplementary texts that was prepare by Fard himself and expect to be memorized by each of his followers. Growing membership allowed Fard to open a school in 1931, the University of Islam, along with his most trusted student, Elijah Muhammad. The curriculum focused on Islamic instruction, math, science, and history math science, and history. The opening of this new school sparked controversy, especially as parents began pulling their children from Detroit Public Schools and enrolling them in the University of Islam.

Public school systems had been much a part of the American landscape. They served as an important site of assimilating people into the American values and systems of beliefs. The indoctrination process was to include all Americans; it was a Euro-centric system that sought to push White values on the American public. Fard saw the problematic aspects of having black

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children enrolled in public schools, and the police saw a problem with the exodus of a large number of African American students as their parents withdrew them from public institutions and enrolled them in the University of Islam. In addition to the school, he also established the Muslim Girls' Training school, which taught domestic duties like cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, and the Fruit of Islam, which was a paramilitary wing of the NOI that sought to defend the members of the NOI and all others.

In 1932, Fard was arrested and imprisoned for the sacrificial death of John J. Smith. Facing aiding and abetting in the Smith case, Fard agreed to leave Detroit on the condition that they drop the charge (Evanzz, 1999, p. 90). In May 1933, Fard resurfaced in Chicago, where again he was arrested for preaching on the corner under the pretext of disturbing the peace. Following that incident, Elijah Muhammad, offered Fard refuge in his home in Chicago. According to Clegg, sometimes the two would talk well into the night, cruising "across the poverty-afflicted landscape of black Detroit in Fard's Chevy coupe, parking on the outskirts of town to talk at length about the universe and the black man's place in it" (Clegg, 2014, p. 22). Elijah Muhammad would describe him as a trusted friend whom he gave his last dime while his family sat at home hungry (Clegg, 2014, p. 26). This friendship soon came to an abrupt end in 1934 when Fard disappeared for the last time. The official line of the Nation of Islam is that he left for Mecca.

Fard's Pre-NOI Identity

When Fard disappeared, Elijah Muhammad taught his followers that Fard was God in person, and his disappearance fortified the belief that Fard was God momentarily assuming a human form to alleviate the oppression suffered by African Americans. During his tenure as leader of the NOI, Fard made no claims to his own divinity (the only account that identifies him

as a God, or the Mahdi is that of Elijah Muhammad). In fact, if we accept Elijah Muhammad's

account, he was not God in the flesh, but perhaps a prophet. Beynon's account shows that in the

earliest times of the movement, Fard was considered a prophet initially, and then was deified by

Elijah after his disappearance:

> "The organization also is tending to become more amorphous. From
>
> among the larger group of Moslems there has sprung recently an even more
>
> militant branch than the Nation of Islam itself. This new movement, known as the
>
> Temple People, identifies the prophet, Mr. W. D. Fard, with the god Allah. To
>
> Mr. Fard alone do they offer prayer and sacrifice. Since Mr. Fard has been
>
> deified, the Temple People raise to the rank of prophet the former Minister of
>
> Islam, Rlijah [Elijah] Mohammed, now a resident of Chicago. He is always
>
> referred to reverently as the "Prophet Elijah in Chicago" (Beynon, 1938, p. 907).

As noted, by elevating the status of Fard from redeemer/prophet to God, Elijah Muhammed also

elevated his own status from minister to prophet. It stands to reason that if Fard was God, and

Elijah received revelation directly from God, then he must certainly be a prophet. By claiming

that he was a prophet of Allah, Elijah Muhammad was able to become a new leader to African

Americans in the United States.

The official line passed down from Elijah Muhammad was that Fard was half black and

half white (evidence that Elijah Muhammad said this). This story is recounted in the

Autobiography of Malcolm X as well as several other texts. According to their story, Fard was of

mixed ancestry, and he was created this way in order to allow him to be able to accepted by

black people so that he could lead them, but also move among white circles so that he could

remain undetectable to white people, so that he could understand and judge the enemy of black

people. As the story goes, Fard's jet-black father went into the mountains where Caucasians lived and married one of those women so that his son could "live more like this white civilization of whites so as to be able to get among them and they will not be able to distinguish them" (Magida, 1996, p. 45). In addition, according to the Nation of Islam's teachings, Fard held many names in order to protect him from both whites and blacks who may have sought his death.

Fard claimed that he was "from the East." However, some believed that the Mecca that he came from was not the exotic city of "East" of Arabia, but the "jazz-filled, zoot-suited, numbers-running Harlem, which was not only east of Detroit, but was widely considered to be the Mecca of black America" (Magida, 1996, p. 45). However, there are no records that indicate that Fard had ever traveled to New York neither in the FBI files nor any other primary or secondary sources. This argument can be credited to some who doubted his story of being from Mecca and thought that he was speaking of a location within the United States.

A few sources claim that Fard was educated at a British University for a diplomatic career, and later at the University of California, but that he abandoned his doctoral studies in order to bring "freedom, justice, and equality" to blacks who were living "in the wilderness of North America." However, Karl Evanzz debunked this myth. He researched the University of California students and graduates from 1913 to 1930 and found no record of anyone named Fard, Ford, or any other variation thereof. Although no proof exists that Fard had never been to the University of California, strong evidence suggests that he lived in California, including a World War I registration issued to Wallie Dodd Fard ("Ford" appears after Fard in parenthesis). When he filled out this card, he indicated that he was born in Shinka, Afghanistan in 1893. But given the fact that Fard was often misleading about his age and birthplace, more information is needed to substantiate that claim.

Fard's standard story was that he had been born in 1891 in New Zealand to a Polynesian mother and an Englishman who arrived in New Zealand on a schooner. Occasionally, he claimed he was born in Portland Oregon, and that his parents were Zared and Beatrice Ford, both of which had been born in Hawaii. According to Evanzz, Wallace D. Fard was in fact Wali Dodd Fard, an immigrant from New Zealand of mixed Afghani and British heritage (Evanzz, 1999, p. 73). This is a possibility, given the accounts that he used the Arabic Quran, which he translated and gave to his followers (Beynon, 1938, p. 900).

In *Islam in Black America*, Curtis notes that immigrant Arabs, especially around the turn of the century, often made their mark as peddlers. They constructed themselves as exotic Orientals, selling everything from clothes to sweets, by promoting the goods "as products of the 'Holy Land' – even though most of these Syrian immigrants had never been to Ottoman Palestine before" (Curtis, 2002, p. 70). Carrying packs of merchandise on their backs, or by horse and buggy, they traveled to the surrounding farms and small towns offering their embroideries, laces, Holy Land souvenirs, and other trinkets for sale (Walker, 2006, p. 266). In addition, some believe the story because there were approximately 9,000 Arabic-speakers were among the residents of Detroit in 1930, and of them, 6,000 were Syrians. The remainder included Iraqi Chaldeans, Yemenis, and Palestinians (Abraham and Shryock, 2000, pp. 18-19). Most of the immigrants, who called Detroit home early in the century, were illiterate or semi-literate, and ended up as peddlers. Dennis Walker notes that "many of the religious and ethnic institutions that Arabic immigrants built in Detroit and elsewhere were concerned to provide socialization so as to keep the ethnic group in existence, to foster mutual help, and to offer some Arab culture that would relieved the sense of exile and of having been uprooted (Walker, 2005, p. 256). Echoing Walker, 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" (Kepel,

1997, 15). However, as we unpack some of the FBI files, the evidence suggests that he was

neither Syrian nor Middle Eastern.

In order to construct a history of Fard using the FBI files, it is necessary to begin at his

latest arrest in Detroit, just before his disappearance, and work backwards from there. Fard was

arrested on May 25, 1933 under the named Wallace Farad in Detroit, Michigan and ordered to

leave town. At the time of his arrest, his ancestry was listed as "Arabian" and his occupation a

minister (FBI files, p. 136). This arrest record indicated that he was the same man as Wallei

Ford, who was arrested in the Los Angeles Police Department and released four years earlier.

From this we can glean that Fard was Wallei Ford from Los Angeles who had come to

Detroit after spending some time in California. According to the records of the Los Angeles

Police Department, Fard (using the alias of Ford in California), had been arrested three times

prior to his arrest in Detroit (FBI file# 100-43165-16). He was arrested on November 17, 1918

for assault with a deadly weapon and subsequently released. On January 20, 1926, he was

arrested again for violating the Woodwine Act (California prohibition law) for the possession

and sale of alcohol. For this charge, he was given a $1 fine or one day in jail for count 1, and a

$400 fine or 180 days in jail for count two. This record indicates that he was arrested again on

February 15, 1926 for violating of the State Poison Act. He was sentence to six months to six

years at San Quentin Penitentiary on June 12, 1926 and was released on May 27, 1929, after

serving nearly three years.

In his entrance interview for San Quentin Penitentiary, he told the authorities that he was

born in Portland Oregon in 1891 and lived there until 1913 when he moved to Los Angeles. He

also told them that he had lived in LA until he was arrested. Further, he told authorities that he had been married to a Hazel Barton in Los Angeles when he was 26 years old, and that they had one child together. In this same intake file, he also listed his father's occupation as "operator of Ford Bottling Works" in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Files kept on Fard while in prison indicates that he was telling partial truths during his intake. One FBI file indicates that while he was incarcerated from 1926-1929, he "received a letter from Hazel E. Osburne (Osborne), described as his former wife attesting to his character" (FBI files, p. 4). Hazel Osborne had been Hazel Barton, as she took on the name of her second husband. She had, in fact, married three times during her life, and by the time she spoke to authorities after Fard's final disappearance, she was on her third marriage. She reported that her full name was "Hazel Barton Ford Osborne Evelsizer" (FBI File# LA 105-4805). She explained that although she had not been legally married to Fard, she had adopted his name since they were living together. Further, she stated that her second husband, Osborne, had "died after only six months of marriage" and that Evelsizer was the name of her third husband. What is interesting is the reason she gave as to why she and Ford (Fard) never married.

Hazel stated that she moved in with Fard in 1919. He told her that he had been married, possibly in Oregon, she assumed, and that he and his previous wife had been through a bitter divorce (FBI File# LA 105-4805). One of the reasons why they could never get officially married, according to Hazel, was because he was already legally married in Oregon. She also stated that Ford had a baby as a result of his first marriage. She still continued the affair, however, and a year later, she would give birth to Ford's son, who was named after his father, Wallace Dodd Ford.

A birth certificate for Wallace Ford was issued to Wallace Ford and Hazel Barton on September 2, 1920. The birth certificate states that the child was born at MacDonald Sanitarium in Los Angeles at 4:30 PM. Ford (Fard) is identified as a 26-year-old white male, living in Los Angeles, but originally from New Zealand. He listed the year of birth in 1901, and his occupation is listed as a restaurant keeper (however, this age does not add up, mathematically, as he could not be 26 years old in 1920 if he was born in 1901). The mother of new infant is listed as Hazel Barton, a white woman of 25 years old from New York. Her occupation is listed as a housewife (FBI File p. 3, File# LA 100-44-993). She lived with Fard until 1921 or 1922, when she left him and took the child with her (FBI File# LA 105-4805).

Hazel also gave more compelling evidence to suggest that Ford and Fard were the same person, and that he probably had other aliases too. She stated that when she moved in with him in 1919, he told her that he had been operating a café in LA for about four or five years since he left Oregon. Besides that, he never told her anything about "his background, place of birth, parents, or siblings," but on one occasion, she found a letter addressed to Fred Dodd of Salem, Oregon. By reading the letter, she stated that she had no doubt that Ford and Dodd were the same person, but he only used the name Ford with her.

Hazel also reported that a woman who worked as a waitress in Ford's café told her that she used to help Ford write letters to his parents in New Zealand because Ford "had very little education and had trouble with his correspondence" (FBI File# LA 105-4805). According to Hazel, this unknown girl had lived with him before he met Hazel. From this account of this girl, and the birth certificate of his son, Hazel believed that he was indeed from New Zealand.

What further gives this story credence is that she stated that Ford had lived in California for four or five years before they met, and that he told her that he had been married before. She

was correct, because on December 30, 1957, the FBI located a marriage license between Fred Dodd and a Pearl Allen at Multnomah County Oregon. The date on the marriage license was May 9, 1914 (FBI files, p. 157). According to the FBI, Ford had been Fred Dodd and changed his name to Wallace Ford when leaving Oregon due to marital difficulties (FBI files, p. 230). The FBI could not locate any divorce action for Fred Dodd and Pearl Allen Dodd, so they were still legally married.

In an effort to find out where Fard was from, the FBI also looked into claims that he was the son of Zared and Beatrice Ford of Ford Bottling Works located in Honolulu. On a letter dated October 10, 1957, the Honolulu division of the FBI reported that it could not find any records of either a Wallie Ford, Zared Ford, or a Beatrice Ford. In addition, "three individuals who have been associated for a long time with the bottling industry advised that they had never heard of the Ford Bottling Company" (FBI files, p. 246). At the same time, Portland special agents also did not find any birth certificate for anyone named Ford around the years 1890, 1891, and 1892. The record keeper indicated that "around the time of the alleged birth in question, records were very poorly kept" (FBI files, p. 266). Also, they could not locate any records for anyone named Zared or Beatrice Ford for any of the years since they began keeping records.

The FBI files allow us to reconstruct the life of Fard. According to these files, Sometime around 1914, Fard married Pearl Allen at Multnomah County Oregon. After a bitter divorce, he left her and the child and moved to Los Angeles where he worked as a restaurant owner. In 1918, while operating his restaurant, he was arrested for beating a customer, R.W. Gilabrand, who refused to pay a two dollar deposit for a steak dinner he ordered. Ford responded by pulling a gun, chasing him out of the store, and beating him. The next year he met Hazel, who would become his common-law wife. They had a child together in 1920, and separated a year or two

later. After that, Fard kept operating his bar until he was arrested in 1926 and served a three year prison sentence. After he was released, he traveled to Chicago and then to Detroit, where he would lead one of the largest organizations to exist, the Nation of Islam.

After his disappearance from Detroit and Chicago, Hazel stated that he worked himself across the U.S. as a "traveling suit salesman for a mail order tailor until he eventually arrived in Los Angeles in the spring of 1934 "in a new car and wearing flowing white robes" (FBI file# 100-43165). He tried to work out a conciliation with her, but she did not agree. According to her, he would send her "considerable amounts of money from time to time" before his arrival, and once he arrived, he stayed in Los Angeles for about two weeks visiting his son. Then, he sold his car and boarded a ship bound for New Zealand where he said he would visit relatives. That was the last time she saw him. His son, would only see a few more years as well, as he was killed in Linhaven Roads, Virginia on August 3, 1942 while serving in the U.S. Coast Guard (FBI files, p. 136).

The most accurate account of Fard, to date, seems to come from a summary of the FBI files. In an effort to obtain information in order to subvert the authority of the Nation of Islam, the FBI engaged in preserving some important information about Fard. Without their information, all of his life would have been limited to just the few years that he was in Detroit and Chicago teaching Muslims.

Elijah's Nation

Following his disappearance in 1934, Elijah Muhammad, his closest follower and student, assumed the mantel of leader of the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad had been moved in the direction of Fard by his father, who suggested that Elijah hear the preaching of Abdul Muhammad, a former follower of Noble Drew Ali of the Moorish American Science Temple,

and a recent convert to the Nation of Islam (Lee, 1996, p. 23). Abdul Muhammad would eventually lead Elijah Muhammad to Fard, and Elijah would come to recognize Fard as the one prophesied in the bible who was a savior. When Fard disappeared, Elijah Muhammad taught his followers that Fard was God in person, and his disappearance fortified the belief that Fard was God momentarily assuming a human form to alleviate the oppression suffered by African Americans (Marsh, 1984, p. 54).

In addition to those beliefs, what attracted African Americans to the Nation of Islam were its theories of creation. They believed that a there was once a scientist by the name of Yakub, who grafted a race of people, white people. Elijah Muhammad taught that originally, there were many black Gods who existed. One of the Black Gods, Yakub, wanted to cause mischief in the land. What he then did was to create white people through the process of grafting; a process that sought to root out the black and brown germs from people and continually doing so until only the brown germ, which was now white in color remained. With this process, white people were created.

This was an important feature of their ideology; it provided a backdrop for a practice that in essence took pseudo-scientific racism and turned it on its head. It had long been the object of scientists, sociologists, and psychologists to prove that black people were genetically inferior, but instead the NOI used this same methodology, albeit from a religious standpoint, to argue that whites, in fact, were the ones who were biologically inferior because God made them that way. And, as theology goes, if God made them that way, then it was in their nature to be evil and "devilish." Therefore, if God created this race of people to be devilish, then blacks should abandon all practices associated with the "devil" race while also avoiding their company. From the NOI's perspective, it was nothing sort of genius to encourage separation on the basis of race

because it allowed them to reclaim their agency by arguing that they too, wanted separation from the white race just as much as they wanted separation from blacks.

The period immediately following the disappearance of Fard (1935 to 1946) represented difficult times in the development of the Nation of Islam. Membership dwindled, and nearly came to a halt when Elijah Muhammad was arrested and found guilty for refusing to comply with the Selective Service Act in 1942. He and several other Muslims were charged with evading the draft, influencing others to do so, and maintaining relations with the Japanese government (Marsh, 1984, p. 60). Muhammad served four years in prison before being released.

By the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement (roughly 1954 with the Brown v. Board of Education decision), the Nation of Islam was gaining more members under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad and his protégé and national spokesman, Malcolm X, and by 1960, they boasted a membership of at least 50,000 members. During this period, the Nation of Islam not only taught that one should be proud to be black, but that one should embrace his blackness so-much-so that he sees all white people as antagonists. In counter distinction to other civil rights activists at the time, Elijah Muhammad chose to avoid integration with racist whites. Muhammad also contributed to the racial history of the Nation by introducing something that was foreign; Muhammad's followers were not only equal to whites, but they were better in all respects. Muslims believed that African-Americans must free themselves physically (a separate state) and psychologically (Asiatics) from all oppressive forces (Marsh, 1984, p. 57).

From its very inception, the Nation of Islam rooted its religious teachings in the prevailing problem of the time, racism. By doing so, they not only created an environment which allowed blacks to turn away from their traditional beliefs and practices, but also provided members with a pride in themselves that had long been absent. It seems that their religious

epistemologies, which were rooted in the particular experiences of African Americans, came at

the right moment. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Nation of Islam under the Honorable Elijah

Muhammad provided a healthy alternative to the passive resistance tactics that were practiced by

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other Civil Rights leaders.

Chapter Four

Elijah Muhammad practiced a very different brand of Islam. In order to construct his notions of what Islam was, he followed both West African and Sufi religious traditions. Muhammad does not appear to follow any school of thought, other than that of Fard. However, there are striking similarities between the NOI's practices, beliefs, and hermeneutics, and other brands of Islam. This section will outline some of the ideas practices by the NOI that strictly falls within the West African and Sufi traditions. It will demonstrate how the NOI, through the process of transcultural bricolage, combined the sacred, secular, political, and economic state of affairs and melded them into one coherent whole by examining three themes of the NOI: (1) the nature of God in the NOI, (2) how they sought to reclaim the notion of prophethood, and (3) how they legitimized the Qur'an using biblical exegesis.

The Nature of God in the Nation of Islam

Elijah Muhammad believed and taught Nation of Islam adherents that God is manifest in his creation. This is an important component to unpack when examining the NOI's belief system as it shows that African spiritual consciousness remained a fixture in the United States long after the importation of slaves stopped. In *Our Savior Has Arrived* (1974), Elijah Muhammad discusses the nature of God as existing within his creation:

> All praise is due to Allah. Allah is all of us. But we have a Supreme One
> that we can throw this name 'Holy' upon. He is Allah, The One over all of us;
> The Most Supreme One, the Wisest One, the Mightiest One; The One that Sees
> and Hears that which we can't see and hear. That is He. He Is rooted in all of us.
> Every righteous person is a God. We are all God. When we say 'Allah' we mean
> every righteous person. Allah teaches me that He is a man – not something that is

other than man. The Holy Qur'an refers to Him in such pronouns as 'He' and as

'We' and as 'Us'" (Muhammad, 1974, p. 26).

This statement shows that he believed that God could appear in the flesh and commune with

man. This is important as it establishes that God is a man, a black man. This alone serves to

change the psyche of African Americans by asking them to rethink the way that they view the

creator. As most blacks were Christian, they were used to identifying Jesus (who some perceive

as God) as a white man with blue eyes. However, this challenged that assumption and granted

Elijah Muhammad authority and guardianship over the people whom he deemed lost.

A second and more important feature of Muhammad's statement is that it shows that a

direct relationship with God is possible. In Islamic and Christian theology, it is a commonly held

belief that God is in heaven (Christianity), or God is above the heavens (Islam). However, this

classic theology believes in a God who is unattainable, unreachable, and separated from his

creation. As such, classic theology leaves no room for interaction between creator and creation,

with the exception of petitionary prayers. For Muhammad, however, this God was not the

invisible, inaccessible, or "spooky" God of traditional Muslims (Muhammad constantly referred

to the unreachable, unknowable God as a "spooky" being), but one that he could commune with.

Muhammad validates this claim when he stated, "The coming of Allah in the Person of Master

Fard Muhammad, to Whom praises are due forever, was for the deliverance of the lost-and-found

people (Black) from a four-hundred year-old enemy who has never shown them anything but

evil, murder and death (Muhammad, 1973, p. 134). God was not only a part of people's lives in

a spiritual sense, but he was among them, in both a spiritual and physical sense.

This ideology bears a striking resemblance to West African Sufi traditions. West African

Sufis perceive natural objects as if they were inhabited by spiritual beings, i.e. they are living

beings. Therefore, all things, whether living or not, emanates God's essence. Therefore, in a West African context, when one appears to be worshipping inanimate objects, they are really worshipping God who becomes manifest in those things. These objects may be also considered as divinities and spirits, since they are under the authority of a Supreme Being. According to John Mbiti, this is a common belief amongst African societies, and he provides insight as to how the Supreme Being is perceived and how he relates to African communities:

> "According to African people, man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomenon and objects are intimately associated with God. They not only originate from Him but also bear witness to Him. Man's understanding of God is strongly coloured by the universe of which man is himself a part. Man sees in the universe not only the imprint but the reflection of God; and whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, the only image known in traditional African societies" (Mbiti, 1990, p. 48).

Further, in *Introduction to African Religion*, Mbiti states that Africans subscribe to "…the system of belief and practices based on the idea that objects and natural phenomenon is inhabited by spirits or souls. It is true that African peoples in their traditional setting acknowledge the existence of spirits, and that some of the spirits are thought to inhabit objects like trees, ponds, and rocks" (Mbiti, 1991, pp. 18-19).

Quranic hermeneutics also played a role in how Sufis, whether West African or not, believed in the creator. For example, other Sufis held a belief similar to that of West Africans in regard to God's immanence. Their belief was based on an interpretation of the Quran that differed from most Sunni scholars. Chittick states that it "was noted that the Sufi approach to explaining the Koran's message stresses the nearness, presence, and immanence of God rather

than His distance and transcendence. There are many Koranic verses to support this position, such as, 'And We are nearer to him than the jugular vein' (50:16) or 'And He is with you wherever you are'" (57:4) (Chittick, 2001, p. 34). Sufi orders were able to balance the transcendent aspects of God with his immanence, by embracing a philosophy of non-contradiction. God is both transcendent and immanent; he is transcendent in that his nature is beyond humans, but immanent in that man can commune with him. In *Sufi Orders in Islam*, J. Spencer Trimingham notes that for "those who became known as Sufis, direct communion with God was possible" (Trimingham, 1971, p. 133). This is important when one look at West African cosmologies and how that tradition was carried over by the Nation of Islam.

Reclaiming Prophethood

It is necessary to note the importance of the disappearance of Fard and the ascension of Elijah Muhammad. During his tenure as leader of the NOI, Fard made no claims to his own divinity (the only account that identifies him as a God, or *the* Mahdi is that of Elijah Muhammad), and those claims only appear after his disappearance. In fact, if we accept Elijah Muhammad's earlier accounts, Fard was not God in the flesh, but perhaps a prophet.

Beynon, also argued that in the earliest times of the movement, Fard was considered a prophet, only to become deified by Elijah after his disappearance:

> "The organization also is tending to become more amorphous. From among the larger group of Moslems there has sprung recently an even more militant branch than the Nation of Islam itself. This new movement, known as the Temple People, identifies the prophet, Mr. W. D. Fard, with the god Allah. To Mr. Fard alone do they offer prayer and sacrifice. Since Mr. Fard has been deified, the Temple People raise to the rank of prophet the former Minister of

Islam, Rlijah Mohammed, now a resident of Chicago. He is always referred to reverently as the "Prophet Elijah in Chicago... Thus continues the chain of these movements" (Beynon, 1938, p. 907).

As noted, by elevating the status of Fard from redeemer/prophet to God, Elijah Muhammed also elevated his own status from minister to prophet. It stands to reason that if Fard was God, and Elijah received revelation and instruction directly from God, then he must certainly be a prophet. By claiming that he was a prophet of Allah, Elijah Muhammad was able to introduce a new leader to African Americans in the United States. Unrestricted by Christian ideals of morality, and unhindered by traditional interpretations of Islam that stated that there would be no new prophets, Elijah was able to wrest control of a new religious ideology and reinterpret traditional beliefs to fit into the lived reality of African Americans.

Many in the Muslim community responded that Elijah could not be a prophet of God because, according to the Qur'an, prophethood was sealed with Prophet Muhammad of Arabia (570-632 AD). In response, Elijah stated, "Some of the Arab scholars say that the Holy One… refers to Muhammad – and they are right. But it does not refer to Muhammad of the past but to the One Muhammad prophesied of in the Sunnah who came from His family in His name under the title 'Mahdi (meaning the Guide, the Restorer of the Kingdom of Righteousness" (Our Savior, 1974, p. 70). The Nation of Islam challenged the authority of the "final" prophet of orthodox Islam by asserting that Master Fard, who appeared on the streets of Detroit in 1930, was God incarnated, and that Elijah Muhammad was a prophet since he received direct instruction from God.

This tradition of designating one's own prophet from his own people can be traced back to both West African practitioners of Islam as well as to the Sufi sect, the Ahmadis. In *Islam vs.*

Ahmadiyya in Nigeria, Ismail Balogun notes that "the Ahmadis, like other Muslims, actually believe that Muhammad is the last of all the Prophets, but they argue that it is the law-bearing prophethood that has ended. It is the end of the law from God to man, but not from man to man and occasionally follower prophets who do not bring any book will still arise" (Balogun, 1974, p. 13). Humphrey J. Fisher, writing in *Ahmadiyyah: A Study in Contemporary Islam on the West African Coast Divergence* also noted that amongst Sufis, prophethood continues. A favored verse taken to indicate Quranic foresight of later prophets is that which concludes "… and they are sure of the Hereafter" (Qur'an 2:4), in which they translate the "hereafter" to mean what is yet to come, i.e. further prophets (Fisher, 1963, p. 37).

This is an important aspect of West African Sufis concerning prophethood. As noted by Balogun and Fisher, Sufis in Nigeria redefined what it meant to be adherents to the faith. Similarly, the Ahmadiyyas used this reasoning to substantiate their claim that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a prophet who was sent to guide his people into salvation by following him and believing in his claims. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (c. 1839-1908) founded the Ahmadiyya Movement, a Sufi order of Islam in 1889 in Punjab, India. Ahmad claimed to be the appearance of the Messiah or, according to some sources, the manifestation of the Prophet Muhammad and the incarnation of Jesus. However, most Muslims, whether Sunni or Shia, believe that Muhammad of Arabia (570-632 A.D). The importance for Sufis, as well as with the Nation of Islam is that if Muslims settle their minds on the fact that Prophet Muhammad (570-632 AD) is the last and final prophet, then "orthodox" Muslims can close off the prophecy to other nations while consolidating power on what it means to be Muslim (Fisher, 1963, p. 22). If a prophet did, in fact, follow Muhammad of Arabia, then the adherents of the new prophet could claim legitimacy and authority within the religion.

Reimagining what it means to be a prophet of one's people can be seen as a strictly religious act, but imbedded in this is also the practice of bricolage. The bricoleur uses what is available to him, i.e. the Quran, grammar, and mysticism, to redefine not only religious, but also social hierarchical systems. This religious act is also an act of will that asserts one's agency in a religious realm, while also providing a sense of legitimacy to each prophetical follower. As evidenced above, the Nation of Islam needed to establish credibility in order to affect the masses. With a Black Prophet, one that was identifiable by Detroiters, they were able to build a strong religious foundation.

Legitimizing the Qur'an through Biblical Exegeses

In *Our Savior Has Arrived*, Muhammad states: "White Christianity has robbed and destroyed our peace and love for one another. It was white Christians who brought our fathers into slavery; it is white Christianity that is keeping you a subject people. They don't want you, nor do they like to see you go from them to your own. They fear your unity with your own" (Muhammad, 1974, 189). Here, Muhammad holds the bible responsible for the destruction of African Americans by stating that it was the religion of the enslaved, and that it Christianity was a form of social control keeping the majority of Black Christians docile and unable to "go from them to your own." The message was clear; leave Christianity which is under developing blacks and come to Islam that will provide freedom and salvation. However, although Elijah Muhammad viewed the Bible as a fallible tool of subjugation, he not only used the Bible in his speeches, but he often referenced the bible at least twice as much as he did the Qur'an. In Message to the Blackman, one of the Nation's canonical texts, he cites or refers to the Bible twice as often as he does the Quran (Berg, 2009, p. 59).

Not surprisingly, much of the Muslims original doctrine reflects the religious knowledge and experiences of the group. Although they purport to shun Christianity, many of their teachings were strongly linked to the Bible. Biblical myths were repeated with minor changes and used as references for various prophecies. While traditional Islam links the Old and New testaments with the Qur'an, the heavy emphasis that the NOI placed on the Christian documents is in part a consequence of the background of Fard, Elijah Muhammad, and their early followers (Lee, 1996, p. 27). Fard had long before realized that in order to have a good and successful Islamic campaign, it would require linkage with the Bible; he felt that it was necessary to connect the new teachings with something that many were already familiar with. Nonetheless, his teachings had a profound effect on Elijah Muhammad, who would also become gifted in destroying the Bible while at the same time using it to evince his teachings. Due to his familiarity with scripture, Elijah Muhammad was able to manipulate it for his own ends.

One of the techniques implore by Muhammad was to take the Bible literally and attack Jesus' character. According to Curtis, in one instance, he did both simultaneously. Taking the Gospels literally, Muhammad cited Jesus' own words as proof for his polemical stance: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother…" (Matt. 10:34-35). Muhammad used this to prove that Christianity was a divisive religion that had no intention of uniting black people. In addition, it also proved that Christianity was a violent religion, one that had no place in the lives of black people.

Similarly, the Ahmadiyyas took the same route when dealing with the Bible. According to Fisher, the Ahmadis held the Bible "to be contradictory, burdened by unreason and superstition, cruel and depraved," and yet they saw fit to "accept passages with which they may

attempt to besmirch Jesus's character" (Fisher, 1963, p. 76). In addition, they often used Biblical prophecy and various Biblical references to demonstrate the truth of Ahmadiyyah" (Fisher, 1963, p. 74). What is important to note also, is that in the Ahmadi tradition "the positive use of the Bible is balanced by outright rejection" (Fisher, 1963, p. 76), just as it had been done in the Nation of Islam.

Up to this point, we have seen that many of the practices of the Nation of Islam fall within the Ahmadiyya (Sufi) tradition. Although some may manifest in slightly different ways, the tradition of West African Sufism that is followed by the Nation of Islam is evident. Before turning to the next section, there is one that is worth noting about the Nation of Islam. In *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* (2009), Herbert Berg notes that: "Mr. Muhammad is thought to have drawn scriptural support for his racist theology from a mistranslated Ahmadiyyah Koran. Correctly written, a passage in the Koran states that God does not accept people with "blurred eyes," but the Ahmadiyyah version which Mr. Muhammad purportedly consulted says that God does not accept people with "blue eyes." (qtd. in Berg, 2009, p. 61). It is possible that he often consulted the mistranslated Ahmadiyyah Quran, but there is more evidence suggesting that he knew that some was misinterpreted and still chose that translation anyway.

The Ahmadiyyah Movement had a presence in Detroit, and even moreso in Chicago. Edward Curtis argued that "the Ahmadiyya are particularly important to the development of African-American Islamic thought, since… their theological orientation may have been one of the sources from which Elijah Muhammad fashioned his black Islamic thought (Curtis, 2002, p. 71). In addition, Curtis states that the Ahmadiyya were quick to focus on urban African Americans because they were ripe for conversion. He states:

In 1920, the Adjani faction sent Mufti Muhammad Sadiqi as a missionary to teach

in New York, he quickly moved from there to Chicago, then to Highland Park in

the greater metropolitan Detroit area, and finally back to the Windy City, where

he established a headquarters… While the Ahmadiyya both preached and

practiced racial cooperation and equality, Sadiq did not hesitate to use racialist

arguments to promote Islam among blacks. Through his speeches and the

Moslem Sunrise, Sadiq also associated white Christianity with slavery, which he

argued destroyed the African's original language, Arabic, and his religion,

Islam… Later, Sadiq's successor, Sufi Bengalee, also promoted Islam as the

inspiration behind the historical black achievements, including, for example, the

accomplishments of former slaves Bilal ibn Rabah and Zayd ibn Muhammad

under the banner of Islam (Curtis, 2002, p. 71).

This tactic of targeting a specific demographic of blacks was key to spreading the Elijah

Muhammad's Islam.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

In the last section, I attempted to show how the NOI fell within various traditions of practicing Islam. While one may classify this as merely a form of syncretism, what differentiates Elijah Muhammad's movement was the inclusion of various elements that sat both inside and outside of the religious purview. Muhammad was able to engage in a process that I termed transcultural bricolage, the act combining cultural elements and random assemblages of information to (re)construct a religious consciousness within the African American community.

By examining Elijah Muhammad's NOI through the lens of transcultural bricolage, we can begin to see how those various elements came together to form a unique whole. It is evident that he followed existing traditions, reshaping and refashioning those traditions as he deemed necessary for his cause. Other elements were simply add-ons that came with the imaginative power of Fard and Muhammad. However, in the quest to reformulate a religion that catered to blacks, he included what was other elements such as a theory of liberation and even engaged in the respectability politics. As we will see these various elements, constructed through a type of transcultural bricolage, were what made this movement a success.

It is widely known that Elijah Muhammad engaged in a liberation theology. It was his belief that salvation would only come to black people if there recognized that Islam was the natural religion of blacks and that Christianity was not only the religion of whites, but it offered no real help for the African American community. Elijah challenged white hegemonic power structures by calling for the separation of blacks from that society. He believed that true salvation could only come by separating physically by asking the government for a separate state for blacks, socially by demanding that his followers not associate with these devils, academically by

establishing schools where black children could attend, and economically by proposing an economic plan that rivaled Marcus Garvey's program.

Other practices that represent a type of bricolage became manifest with his views on respectability politics. The grouping of these various pieces, however, also extended to various aspects of their ideology as well as demonstrated a transcultural assemblage. Although they shunned white people as devils, it is also evident is that Muhammad did adopt some notions of European respectability, especially when defining how their adherents should dress. Muhammad often commented on African American peoples being "Asiatics" who had a duty to return to their original religion, language, and standards of dressing modestly. In essence, Muhammad called for African Americans to return to their "African-ness." However, while he did desire for them to return to their religion, he did not necessarily want them to return to Africa. Instead, he ordered his followers, both men and women, to dress respectably. Elijah Muhammad wanted Muslim men and women to dress in conservative attire, which meant that men were to dress in suits, while women wear long garments, covering themselves for the sake of God. This, in itself, is not problematic. What is problematic, however, was that Elijah Muhammad's ideas of modesty mirrored European notions of respectability. However, if Muhammad truly wanted to shed all aspects of Euro-American values, then why was it necessary to conform to their standards in regard to attire? It seems that he would instead order his followers to return to the African dress worn when blacks were Asiatics.

In addition, Elijah Muhammad ordered his followers to stop eating soul fool. These "slave foods," as he described them, were staples in many black households. He warned that these foods, including pork, collard greens, corn, and yams, were in fact the devils attempt at exploiting black people and weakening their health. He followed Islamic dietary laws but also

saw the need to transcend the limitations as set by traditional Islam. In *How to Eat to Live*, for example, Muhammed stressed that his followers would be healthier if they only ate one meal per day, that fasting would better serve Allah if they did so for days at a time, and that fasting continuously instead of eating at sundown with the world wide Muslim community would be more advantageous.

On one level, we can rationalize the dietary orders regarding soul food as being intended to move African Americans away from what he commonly referred to as the "slave mentality." However, we can also interrogate this another way: these foods were often what white people often referred to as "black people's food." Consuming these foods proved to many whites that blacks were a lower species because soul food was not respectable food (even though many whites also enjoyed eating these foods). Respectability politics is the reason why Elijah Muhammad instructed his followers to abstain from this food, and not merely for health reasons as he proclaimed.

This project was undertaken with the thought in mind to allow the reader to view the Nation of Islam in another lens. This has not been an exhaustive study on the various Islamic traditions that the Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam used at their disposal, nor is it complete in representing how West African Sufism in particular and Sufism in general, are almost mirror images of the way that Muhammad would come to practice Islam. This is, however, a good starting point for one who wishes to delve further into the construction of the NOI. Muhammad was successfully able to blend Christianity, African religious praxis, African American and liberation theology into one realm. It has always been a common practice for African Americans to use their religion as a way to escape the bounds of slavery, the era of Jim Crow, and de jure and de facto segregation.

One sect of Sufis, the Ahmadiyyah, seemed to have more of an influence on the Nation of Islam than I had previously expected. What is certain is that Fard gave Elijah Muhammad an Ahmadi translation of the Quran. What is not certain, however, is how much contact Elijah Muhammad may have had with Ahmadi missionaries, and also, how much of their mistranslated doctrine did he knowingly subscribe to. Herbert Berg, one of the premier scholars of the Nation of Islam, is one of few authors who recognized that Elijah Muhammad was using a misinterpreted Ahmadi Quran, stating that Muhammad was probably aware of its misinterpretations, but chose to use it anyway as those misinterpretations validated his points. Further research should explore how much of the Ahmadiyya (mis)interpretation of the Qur'an actually made its way into the practices of the Nation of Islam.

In order to do so, one would have to obtain an old Ahmadi copy of the Quran from the early twentieth century. It is known that missionaries arrived in the United States in 1917 with copies of their translated Ahmadi Quran, and that they specifically targeted African American Muslims for conversion. We also know that Fard was certainly aware of the misinterpretations when he gave the book to Elijah Muhammad because, as the reports go, Fard spoke and read the Qur'an in Arabic. Scholars do not currently know where Fard actually came from because of varying FBI accounts. In addition, existing police reports identify Fard with at least a half dozen different identities: British, Hawaiian, or Polynesian parents, a criminal who served jail time in San Quentin Palestinian, a Syrian, a black Jamaican whose father was a Syrian Muslim, a Turkish born Nazi, or a Turko-Persian (Curtis, 2002, p. 69). Therefore, if one is to fully understand how the Nation of Islam constructed their religious reality is to conduct further research on the Ahmadi translation of the Qur'an.

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