

BLACK PILGRIMAGE TO ISLAM



ROBERT DANNIN

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mad counterattacked by claiming that Talib Dawud had sold out to the “pale Arab.”

The Muslim engagement in Philadelphia produced immediate consequences. The notoriously antiblack police department viewed their activities with more than passive suspicion and considered the Muslim Brotherhood to be a subversive organization warranting constant surveillance, if not harassment and repression. In 1958 they went into action after the movement began to celebrate Lyn Hope’s recent hajj to Mecca by intensifying dawa in a series of public events with door-to-door pamphleteering and a poster campaign in downtown Philadelphia.

Sulaiman al-Hadi, then a young man who had joined the brotherhood while in prison, recalled being chased out of town “ducking the dog and dodging the gun” because the cops—led by the notoriously anti-Muslim police chief, Frank Rizzo—were trying to kill him. Muslims, al-Hadi asserted, were persecuted just for wearing the red fez because it threatened insurrection. At first, al-Hadi was arrested and paraded through the community in the sidecar of a police motorcycle. At the police station he was charged with “disturbing the peace and creating a public spectacle.” He alleged that around the same time the police killed another Muslim named Nuriddin just for making salat in the street. “They attacked him and went to take his Quran. There was a fight and two cops shot each other but Nuriddin got killed in the process. That was in 1958. It happened at Twenty-first and Diamond. Funny thing however. Within a month both of those cops were killed, one in an accident on the New Jersey Turnpike, the other in a fight with his wife. Allah u-akbar!”⁸

Both Sulaiman al-Hadi and Muhammad Salahuddin found the atmosphere more tolerant in New York, where myriad sources of Islamic knowledge existed among the diverse immigrant communities and several African-American scholars.

We got the idea that all the knowledge about Islam was in New York. So I moved here and began to study seriously. I never wanted to go overseas and I am not in Islam because of my color. A lot of people are, but not me. I converted because I know my Creator made all men and the only reason men are separated is because of the tongues of their parents. What hurts is when you see the children suffer from those divisions.⁹

Al-Hadi settled on Manhattan’s Lower East Side on Norfolk Street, where he found other young men who were studying uptown at the Academy of Islam with **Sheik Daoud Ahmed Faisal**, a Trinidadian immigrant. Eventually they followed **Sheik Daoud** across the Brooklyn Bridge to a mosque on **State Street** near Arabtown along Atlantic Avenue. By 1962 **Sheik Daoud’s Islamic Mission to America** had become Brooklyn’s first bona fide mosque. It served the indigenous converts from the Lower East Side and the adjacent Arab immigrant community.

What is known factually about **Sheik Daoud Faisal** cannot be separated

from the legend surrounding his celebrated reputation. By one account, he arrived to the United States in 1929 hoping for an audition as a symphony violinist. Consistent with his claim of a Moroccan birthright, it appears that he associated with the Moorish Science Temple, although he held a Trinidadian passport. The title “sheik” also points to a prior affiliation with the Ahmadiyyas, although there was no trace of heterodoxy in his strictly orthodox Sunnism. Others have alleged an association with Professor Ezaldeen’s AAUAA. His wife, Sayeda Khadija, came from Barbados. “Mother” Khadija is still remembered with great affection as the first woman of African descent to have a profound influence on the growth of Islam in New York. Her efforts resulted in a permanent network of Muslim women, mostly African-American converts, who spread dawa to their sisters in the poor neighborhoods of East New York and Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Sheik Daoud himself was deeply influenced by the grand history of Islamic civilization. He envisioned a spiritual reawakening spreading from the Middle East into the Western hemisphere and hoped to realize it by forging ties between American Muslims from all over the umma. He also saw himself as the individual best able to negotiate the difficult relationship between indigenous converts and recent Muslim immigrants. The USA had failed, he believed, because of the lingering influence of the Ahmadiyya Movement. From the perspective of Islamic civilization, the Ahmadiyyas were to him an irrelevant sect whose beliefs bordered on blasphemy. Their organization was further divided by internal power struggles undermining its legitimacy. As sincere as their dawa efforts might have been, they could never provide the kind of leadership necessary in America. There was a need for solid connections to orthodoxy such as the venerable authority that issued from Middle Eastern Islamic institutions like Cairo’s al-Azhar University and the Holy City of Mecca. The most accessible route to this legitimacy ran through the United Nations, where dozens of sympathetic delegates might be persuaded to assist the objectives and goal of his mission.

Deriving his logic as much from Franz Fanon’s anticolonialism as the literature of Islamic revivalism, **Sheik Daoud** argued that African Americans needed more than spiritual commitment according to the liberal model of religious plurality. They needed to totally transform themselves—their language, dress, customs, and even their daily interactions—in a ritual of purification that would cement them to the real foundations of the worldwide Islamic revival that was occurring across the Atlantic. Inherent in his theology was **Sheik Daoud’s** rejection of any symptoms of the “duality” that W. E. B. Du Bois had attributed to the life of African-Americans.

Apprehensive that others would distort his message, **Sheik Daoud** traveled indefatigably from city to city promoting his dawa in a pamphlet entitled “Al-Islam: The Religion of Humanity.” He tailored its message for those who had grown up in the Black Church, assuring them that Islam was the authentic religion of the prophet Abraham and all his descendants. Historically speaking, therefore, it was the “oldest” monotheism. He attacked both Judaism and Christianity, the former as a cultural practice associated with idol worship, the latter

as a social philosophy based on a false interpretation of Jesus as the son of God and the Holy Trinity. He preached the familiar sermon exhorting Black Americans to reject their fabricated, spiritless identities as Negroes by returning to their original religion and learning the sacred language of Arabic. They would never be accepted socially in the Christian society of "the self-styled superior man," he told them, because it was established to suppress, oppress and enslave them. "You are Muslims, not Negroes. There are no such people or nationality called Negroes. Your nationality is the country of your birth. Return and worship the one true God, in Islam, it will free you from the companionship of the devil, from sin and enslavement."¹⁰

Described by his followers as an overexcitable orator, **Sheik Daoud** was nonetheless a skilled diplomat and courageous spokesman for Islam. Years before Malcolm X suggested taking African-American problems to the floor of the U.N. General Assembly, **Sheik Daoud** successfully lobbied Arab delegates there to grant observer status to his Islamic Mission. In a statement presented at the U.N. General Assembly in October 1960, he proposed that the United Nations would realize its ideals only when "its entire activities [were] guided by the Laws and the Command of the Almighty God in Islam." Significantly, he campaigned against "godless" communism, asserting that Islamically guided economic and social policies would be preferable alternatives to socialism for the poor and oppressed black masses. His opposition to the influence of socialists and communists in the Civil Rights movement was vociferous. To him their doctrines were merely another form of slavery. Islam had its own political system and its own economic system. During the centuries that Islam prevailed in Europe, it provided solid economic and social foundations for a flourishing culture.

It is impossible to ignore the significance of **Daoud's** anticommunist remarks in the ultra conservative political atmosphere of the early 1960s. He rejected any hint of political subversion and cautioned his followers to avoid complications with the government and police. He exhorted them to obey the civil codes of the United States, especially in matters of marriage and name changes. He systematically recorded the vital statistics of his American-born converts and registered them at Brooklyn's Borough Hall.¹¹

Daoud took a paternal interest in every convert. One of those individuals was Akbar Muhammad, Elijah's youngest son, who had renounced Nation of Islam teachings while studying at al-Azhar University in Cairo. When the elder Muhammad abruptly cut his son's monthly stipend, leaving him feeling rejected and miserable, **Sheik Daoud**, who was traveling in Egypt, paid him a personal visit. "He encouraged me and told me to keep going on the right path," recalled Akbar, with evident filial respect.¹²

Talib Dawud and **Sheik Daoud** were key figures for the early Islamic revival in America. The Muslim Brotherhood USA and the **Islamic Mission to America** viewed the anticolonial struggles in North Africa and the Middle East as modern examples of jihad that indicated the reawakening of Islam as a global force. It seemed a third way for the emerging nations of the Third World, equidistant

from the godless ideologies of capitalism and communism. Their visions likewise encapsulated knowledge of those who had served in the armed forces or who had met North Africans and African Muslims. Others knew something of the religion by its nominal relationship to the Moors and Black Muslim movements, but generally their connection to Quranic scripture and the vast internationalist scope of Islam was nonexistent. Given these circumstances, the improbable construction of a revivalist Islamic movement, small though it was, owes much to these two men's personalities, particularly their abilities to construct a narrative whose central theme reflected the history of Islamic civilization as opposed to an exclusively African-American perspective.

Islamic revivalism was also a grassroots reaction to an era of political turmoil. It prospered by filling an ethnic vacuum for the African American. Conveyed through be-bop as a hieratic style adopted by a "brotherhood" of musicians committed to the modern art of improvisation, revivalism mapped out a possible itinerary for the exploration of one's tonal and rhythmic horizons through the contemplation of *tauhid*—the universal spirit of a rising humanity in the Third World. As a countercultural idiom, Islam symbolized more generally the revival of an Orientalism whose competing paradigms included the Buddhist and Hindu ideals that would nourish American politics and culture as the zeitgeist of the 1960s. As foundations of this vision, the Quran and conversion required literacy and a certain understanding of the modern historical dilemma. Unlike the nationalist catechisms of the Black Muslims and Moors, here was a new global context for the African American.

Responding to the challenge of orthodox revivalists, Elijah Muhammad promoted Malcolm X as national spokesman for the Nation of Islam. A young and persuasive orator, Malcolm X employed bravado and rhetorical pugilism to help bridge the gap between older Garveyite nationalists and the postwar generation of young black men who were excluded from the rising prosperity of white America. At a time when white policemen were unleashing water cannons and attack dogs on black Civil Rights marchers in the South, Malcolm's tough speeches about the manly way to fight racist brutality seemed more relevant than references to Islam and the Quran. By contrast, the anticolonial struggles championed by orthodox Muslims—the guerilla war against the French in Algeria, for example—were attractive topics for a more restricted community of African expatriates and Pan-Africanist cognoscenti. In the context of militant civil disobedience, even Martin Luther King Jr. was cautious about stressing the connections between his philosophy of nonviolence and that of Mahatma Gandhi in India. All eyes were focused on Little Rock, Selma, Birmingham, and Ole Miss.

FROM BROOKLYN HEIGHTS TO BED-STUY *Dar al-Islam* literally means "house of peace" and signifies the geographical division of the world into two competing spaces, one governed by Quranic holy law, sharia, the other im-

mersed in the darkness of unbelief or the “house of war” (*dar al-harb*). The emergence of an indigenous organization dedicated to this idea was a dramatic moment in American religious history. The rise of the Dar ul-Islam (DAR) with three other regional groups—the Islamic Revivalist Movement (IRM), the Muslim Islamic Brotherhood (MIB), and the Islamic Party (IPNA)—paralleled sociopolitical changes affecting unchurched African Americans and new developments in the Arab Muslim world. It was thus an expression of the dire and sometimes desperate economic conditions of ghetto America merging with the nationalist aspirations of the Arab world.

The revivalist odyssey began with social conflict at Brooklyn’s **Islamic Mission to America**. If Arab-Americans appreciated **Sheik Daoud Faisal**’s dawa efforts, they were even more grateful for his initiative in purchasing and renovating the fashionable townhouse on **State Street** that became their first permanent mosque in a respectable New York neighborhood. This was positive and could only enhance their quest for assimilation into a tolerant society. But the sight of a visibly marginal band of African Americans fumbling through their prayers troubled the immigrants and seemed to accentuate the chasm between blacks and whites in their newly adopted land. The converts’ enthusiasm was no compensation for the difficulties such an alliance might provoke. As the initial religious enthusiasm gradually evaporated, **State Street**’s fraternal atmosphere degenerated into two thinly disguised factions, the new Americans (Arab Muslim immigrants) and the new Muslims (African-American converts).

Sensing trouble and acknowledging his own limitations as a teacher, **Sheik Daoud** hired a Quran teacher in 1960 and assigned him the task of instructing the new Muslims in proper *adab* (etiquette) to bridge this risky cultural gulf with new Americans. Hafis Mahbub was a missionary affiliated to the *Tabligh Jamaat*, yet another Pakistani revivalist sect.¹³ With deep knowledge of the Quran and Hadith, a humble manner, and a very dark complexion, he quickly attracted a circle of dedicated young men around him, including Rijab Mahmud, Yahya Abdul Karim, Sulaiman al-Hadi, Muhammad Salahuddin, Hajj Muhammad, and Sheik Ismail Rahman. Hafis Mahbub became a cool and articulate foil for **Sheik Daoud**. Mahbub led the Americans in *fajr* prayer every morning and taught them Arabic directly from the Quran, patiently dispensing its wisdom. Just attending prayer at the mosque, even daily, fulfilled only a small part of the true believer’s obligations. Islam, he explained, was distinct from the Western idea of church religion, for it was a complete way of life. The struggle to achieve personal transformation (*jihad al-akhbar*) was synonymous with the struggle for total social reform. The Prophet Muhammad led his followers into exile in Medina (*hijra*) for precisely this reason: to establish a community that lived according to divine law. Under Allah’s guidance the small but devout Muslims gained strength, subdued their enemies, forged new alliances, and eventually grew to a position of wealth and power over their former oppressors in Mecca. This was only the prelude to the dissemination of the Holy Quran throughout the world and the development of multiple centers of Islamic culture, furthering

learning for the general enlightenment of humanity in the name of Allah. Within three years Hafis Mahbub had convinced his students to emulate the Prophet's hijra by establishing their own community in Brooklyn.

Led by Rijab Mahmud and Yahya Abdul Karim, the African Americans quit State Street for the nearby neighborhood of Brownsville, Brooklyn where they founded Yasin Mosque. Relying on Hafis Mahbub's scriptural counsel, they set out to build an urban community governed under the sharia. The Dar ul-Islam, or DAR, as they often called it, was an experiment conducted under exceedingly difficult conditions. Over the following decade, the small group migrated from one storefront to another in Brooklyn's poorest, most ravaged neighborhoods. Hostile street gangs viewed the turbanned Muslims warily as opponents in a turf battle. Churchgoing neighbors were astonished at their disciplined, military style and exotic clothes. Kids referred to them as "baldies" for their close-cropped heads, usually concealed by turbans. The DAR saw themselves as holy warriors. "It became a dynamic of life and death over our religious beliefs to secure our turf," asserted Sheik Sulaiman al-Hadi.

When a new Muslim was hacked to death by gangsters in 1965, a *jenaza* was performed over his unwashed body, showing his status as a *mujahid*, or militant martyr whose soul was destined for paradise. Afterward, word spread among Brooklyn's youth gangs that the Muslims were formidable enemies, emboldened and not frightened by death. Yasin Mosque moved to 777 Saratoga Avenue, where a *suffa* (dormitory) was established to accommodate homeless young men. Adab became a serious practice as the small community amplified the daily call to prayer (*adan*) to demarcate an acoustic space representing dar al-Islam. Visually, their unusual garb symbolized a conscious rejection of non-Muslim society while serving as a casual way to expose strangers to Islamic ideas.

Women donned head-coverings (*kemar*) and sometimes veiled their faces completely (*hijab*) in their enthusiasm to emulate Islamic culture by demonstrating the stark contrast to Western gender stereotypes. Some men initiated polygamous domestic arrangements. Although the implications were not always clear, plural marriage distinguished Muslims from other religious subcultures. A few small businesses were undertaken, but the movement's finances rested mainly on the family economy, dependent in turn on wages and welfare subsidies. After much hesitation, the DAR initiated a prison dawa program, partly to assist the burgeoning conversion movement inside the state penitentiary systems and partly to take advantage of a state prison bureau eager to purchase a religious alternative to dangerous political unrest. A self-defense army was organized and recruits were trained in the martial arts at the mosque and in firearms proficiency at a legal firing range in New Jersey. The DAR actively cultivated a reputation as urban *mujahideen*.

Members of the DAR now took advantage of their contacts at State Street, who were now more comfortable dealing with their new Muslim brothers at a distance. Dawa teams accompanied Sheik Daoud around the country with the goal of reproducing the Brooklyn hijra elsewhere. They concentrated on other

mosques where Muslim immigrants had attracted a few African-American converts to orthodox Islam. This strategy also helped to avoid direct conflict with the Nation of Islam since the dawa teams targeted primarily those individuals who already understood the difference between Islam and the Nation of Islam. They succeeded by gradually incorporating other loosely organized orthodox Muslims into a national organization. Important affiliates arose in Boston, Philadelphia, Columbus, Cleveland, Washington, Durham, Raleigh, Columbia, Atlanta, Dallas, San Antonio, Sacramento, San Diego, and Los Angeles. The objective was to consolidate a devout core of worshipers in various locales, anchor them to the national organization based in Brooklyn, and expand at the grassroots level through intimate community and family contacts.¹⁴

But the DAR was stymied in Harlem, for many years a stronghold of the NOI's Temple No. 7 and the scene of Malcolm X's martyrdom. Harlem had witnessed several iconoclastic attempts to establish Islamic orthodoxy, including the Academy of Islam. Until the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood was formed by Sheik Tawfiq, nothing seemed to approximate the sense of community and permanence embodied by the Dar ul-Islam. Tawfiq was a pioneering giant, whose light shone brilliantly though briefly. A Floridian of mixed African and Native American ancestry, Tawfiq was an educated and highly accomplished individual: a deep sea diver, distance swimmer, yachtsman, mountain climber, classical musician, and vocalist who made his own record of Quranic recitations. He originally studied Islam at New York's Islamic Center at Seventy-second Street and Riverside Drive before joining Muslim Mosques Inc., serving as its secretary until he received a scholarship to study at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. While studying Arabic there, Tawfiq became interested in the Ikwana al-Muslimun. It was rumored that the government expelled him for subversive activities in 1967, and he returned to the United States with English translations of Sayed Qutb's work, believing it strategic to Malcolm X's vision of cooperation between African Americans and the Muslim umma.

Acknowledging the universal character of "true" Islam, Tawfiq deployed sufficient "nationalist" rhetoric to appeal to a larger African-American audience. In so doing he made it clear that the Civil Rights movement in the United States occasioned a moral challenge to all Muslims.

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam, I am sure that you are familiar with the tradition which states that "the Muslims are like one body and like the human body, whenever any part is in pain, the whole body is in pain." Surely, Black people in North America are Muslims (though in the main unconscious of their Islamic heritage) who are in very great pain. Are you also in great pain? If not, then you should be.¹⁵

He founded the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood, upon return from Egypt in 1967. Its name was far from coincidental and was a measure of the inspira-

tion he drew from the Egyptian Ikwan. Tawfiq worked to develop an Islamic community around his mosque on East 113th Street. In 1971 he began publishing a newsletter, the *Western Sunrise*. He opened a health food store, a tea room, an Islamic Academy for Boys, a literacy program for adults, and Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts for Muslim children. In 1976 he set up the "Living Islamic Community" program with a housing development based on the city's sweat equity program for restoring blighted residential housing. He always urged the Muslim brothers to get involved politically, to run for the school boards and speak out at community board meetings. He developed Drug-Free Programs and Dawa Programs. The MIB had a prison program that influenced inmates at the sprawling Rikers Island complex in Queens. As the social architect of a community of approximately one hundred families at MIB, twenty percent of them Latinos, Tawfiq succeeded in attracting a few doctors, lawyers, and other well-educated middle-class people. One of his two wives, Sister Halima Tawfiq-Touré, a linguistics scholar, involved the mosque in a literacy (English) campaign. The Islamic dawa movement in North America suffered a terrible blow when the articulate and charismatic Sheik Tawfiq died in 1988 following a long illness.

Upon the heels of Tawfiq's revivalism came Yusuf Muzaffaruddin Hamid from the Caribbean island of Dominica. He had traveled extensively in the Muslim world from 1965 to 1969, visiting Turkey, Palestine, and Pakistan, where he observed revivalist Islam in action. In Lahore he met with Abul A'la Mawdudi, founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami.

"Islam, for us, was the divine answer to suffering peoples' problems," Hamid concluded, noting that upon his return to the United States in 1970 he set himself the goal of "contacting and organizing many brothers and sisters who were prepared to shoulder the responsibility of a fuller commitment to Islamic work—not merely coming to the mosque for prayer, but the organizing of dawa programs and institution of internal discipline where life beyond the mosque could be accounted for."¹⁶ According to what he had learned from Mawdudi, the idea of personal accountability was strategic for transforming the experience of religious awakening from a purely spiritual-individualistic dimension to a mass movement for social change.

In Washington, D.C., the IPNA made inroads into the black middle class when Hamid convinced university students to search for new formulas after the demise of the Black Power movement. Some questioned the Civil Rights model of activism and were attracted by Islamic dawa that emanated not only from the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) but also from various foreign embassies. In January 1971, Hamid founded the Community Mosque of Washington (Masjid al-Umma) based on spiritual devotion and communal living. The movement combined communal living with the spirit of hijra, the final goal being the establishment of an Islamic state or caliphate somewhere in North America.¹⁷ A regime of Islamic instruction and propagation was punctuated

by salaried labor as the young recruits manned a fleet of taxicabs twenty-four hours a day.

Like the DAR, the IPNA expanded its network beyond Washington to relatives, friends, and Muslims in other cities. In basing the local community around collective resources, Hamid and his followers could dispense quickly with financial problems to concentrate on building a national movement. Washington became a nexus for affiliates in Akron, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and New York. Different from the Dar ul-Islam, however, the Islamic Party hastened to become a national and international concern before even consolidating its community positions. Hamid called for action and immediate unity among the various indigenous groups. During an all-Muslim conference in Philadelphia in 1972 he promoted himself as the leader of this effort. Veering away from representations of power in racial and nationalistic terms, Hamid declared that the objectives of unity should be "purely ideological" (in favor of Islam). Sounding like Fanon, too, he warned against Arabism as a false doctrine of authenticity that was incapable of remedying the problems of social oppression. There was no genuine Islamic state anywhere in the world, he argued, implying that "our national leadership must never put itself in a position to compromise with, praise, or front for un-Islamic regimes or contemporary governments. . . . Such compromising positions will only work to our detriment. The national leadership must have no ties whatever with the political leadership of such regimes."¹⁸

Given his close association with the twin pillars of revivalism—the Jamaat and Ikwan, both dissident movements—Hamid generated an enthusiastic response from many youthful delegates. In one copy of his document, an anonymous hand wrote: "This is a proposal that Muzzafaruddin took to the conference. I wasn't there, but those I talked to said it blew everyone away! He did his homework." This refers no doubt to Hamid's erudite command of the Hadith, which he gleaned for supporting quotations in the best style of Maulana Mawdudi.

But the conference did not end harmoniously. Delegates from the DAR and MIB were reluctant to cede leadership of the movement to Hamid, whom they regarded suspiciously as a dangerous rival. The DAR was already riven by paranoia following a 1967 attack by FBI agents pursuing a draft resister. Hamid also had directly antagonized Sheik Tawfiq by charging that he secretly harbored sympathies for the Nation of Islam.

The inability of these small movements to manage crisis proved stronger than their Islamic fervor and was responsible for their ultimate demise. Their similarities notwithstanding, the three groups could not transcend the dissociative forces at the heart of ghetto society. Despite a common vision, they lacked an essential historical perspective of the past efforts of their predecessors and the causes of their failures. Revivalism was a singularly powerful attraction yet too weak to overcome a tendency toward dominant personalities and other causes of factionalism. Hamid proved less than skillful in the art of political negotiation. He attacked those who rejected his perspective (reasoned though it

may have been, according to Islamic jurisprudence) by questioning their beliefs and linking them to the Black Muslim heresy. After studying Sheik Tawfiq's publication *The Western Sunrise*, he concluded that it was generally nationalist in tone. He criticized its references to "Cushite" mythology, suggesting that they resembled the racialist formulations of the Nation of Islam. Furthermore, he insinuated that Tawfiq was too soft on the NOI, and for good measure he leveled the same charge against Mohamed Ra'uf, the Egyptian rector of the Washington, D.C., Islamic Center. Realizing that Ra'uf helped American Muslims obtain hajj visas from the Saudi embassy, Hamid portrayed his cordial but cool relations with Elijah Muhammad as anathema to all good Muslims and demanded his removal from the center. As shown by the following denunciation, compromise was impossible.

We believe that the [Islamic] Party has done right in the sight of Allah by coming out forthrightly against the hypocrite Elijah Poole, may the curse of Allah be upon him and may he have a violent death. From 1935 to 1955, Poole's jive organization was nothing until Allah decreed that Malcolm should join it and work for it. Malcolm built Poole's organization, and—in Malcolm's own words—the only result of this was that Elijah Poole became insanely jealous of him. . . . The Party has nothing to fear from Elijah Poole and any of his *mushrik* goons or hit men.¹⁹

For the moment, DAR and the MIB stood together against Hamid's invectives. Unity under his guidance was out of the question. It was not simply a matter of piety or ideological acumen but really an issue concerning who might legitimately claim to wear the red fez symbolic of uncontested leadership among African-American Muslims.

Imam Antar 'Abd-al Khabir of Masjid Talib, the Atlanta affiliate of the DAR, responded with a scathing attack on Hamid, calling him "arrogant" and taking him to task for disrespect toward both Sheik Tawfiq and Dr. Ra'uf. In a devastating blow to Hamid's national stature, 'Abd-al Khabir's statement circulated widely. He charged that the Islamic Party had used the Philadelphia conference as a ploy to "bully" the DAR into relinquishing its de facto leadership position and further complained that Hamid and the IPNA sought to dominate the DAR that was the larger organization, demographically speaking.

Except for the looming presence of the NOI and the FBI's vendetta for the DAR, these arguments were matters of perception more than facts. What bothered most people was the attack on their sense of authenticity and their profession of *taqwa* (faith). The suddenly volatile rhetoric meant that it was only a matter of time before real violence would erupt.

This happened in 1974. In the wake of Hamid's failure to consolidate his power, the two other revivalist personalities, Imam Yahya Abdul Karim (DAR) and Sheik Tawfiq (MIB), planned a meeting to resolve a series of conflicts involving their respective organizations. The two men were friendly and intended to

publicly settle a few misunderstandings with a view toward hammering out a treaty for a greater New York *majlis* (assembly). One particular bone of contention involved a satellite mosque that MIB was rumored to have sanctioned in Brooklyn. This unwelcome competition had led some in the DAR to repeat the IPNA's claims that Tawfiq was soft on Elijah Muhammad. Amidst this dispute, Tawfiq went to Brooklyn with an entourage that included several initiates. When voices were raised between the two imams inside the prayer hall, two men in the MIB detail drew guns and opened fire, killing two members of the DAR. After they were subdued and arrested, members at Yasin characterized it as an assassination plot against Imam Yahya. Mediation efforts ceased abruptly while the two sides continued to trade charges. The most serious allegations alleged that the MIB gunmen were infiltrators loyal to Elijah Muhammad, thus reinforcing the idea the MIB and the NOI were somehow allied.

Although unproven, the charges inflamed passions on all sides because the NOI was committed to intimidation and violence against orthodox Muslims. In some cities like Chicago, orthodox Muslims constantly feared infiltration and disruption by the Nation of Islam. In Philadelphia and Washington, on the other hand, there was intense pressure to confront the "enemy."

In Cleveland, however, there was a greater degree of mutual tolerance, fostered by Akram's age, his experience, and his stubborn refusal to fear anyone. This set the tone of the city's Islamic diversity among Moors, Ahmadiyyas, orthodox Sunni, Nation of Islam, and the immigrant community. The Islamic Revivalist Movement (IRM) centered in Masjid Mu'minim not far from the First Cleveland Mosque was the strongest link in Dar ul-Islam's entire national network. Under Imam Mutawif Abdul Shaheed, the IRM became a dominant force throughout Ohio. According to Shaheed, its national dawa program surpassed all others by converting four thousand individuals in a single year. The IRM pioneered orthodoxy in the Ohio state penitentiaries and also initiated a drug abuse awareness and detoxification program. They even rented interstate highway billboards to advertise Islam. Devout, reverent, and soft-spoken, Imam Mutawif gained his reputation as a conciliator who never wavered in his respect for Sheik Tawfiq, despite the troubles in New York. To describe the IRM as a mainstay of revivalist idealism embodying the spirit of Dar ul-Islam would not be inaccurate. In the overheated climates of New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, territorial imperatives and personal loyalties often made Islamic revivalists look like highly ideological street gangs. While the Nation of Islam contributed to the intercommunal problems, Elijah Muhammad was hardly a singular force when it came to the question of transforming spiritual fervor into physical aggression. The FBI was also profiling African-American Muslims, as were other individuals working on behalf of foreign Muslim consulates. In retrospect, revivalists compromised themselves by excessive posturing and an unwillingness to investigate the history of their unchurched brothers and sisters. By responding to provocation after provocation, their leaders soon exhausted the benevolence initially generated by the movement. There were

plenty of converts but also new problems engendered either by confusion or abuse of Islamic ideals. One stunning example was the mismanagement of polygamous marriage laws. Another was the failure to stabilize housing and labor according to an Islamic work ethic.

There was a dramatic reprieve for revivalism after Elijah Muhammad's death in 1976 when it became apparent that his son, Warith Deen, a confirmed orthodox Muslim himself, would take over the Nation. With approximately one hundred thousand members, it was the largest reservoir of unchurched African Americans. In terms of ritual, they retained only a vague idea of the Quran, the Hadith, and the Five Pillars of Islamic practice. Some old-timers knew nothing at all because they had been indoctrinated as mere cogs in the organization—working stiff who paid their dues and kept themselves morally upright, apolitical, and unquestionably receptive to the greater will of “the Nation.” If there were people familiar with the Holy Quran, they constituted a small elite who never abandoned their love for Malcolm X while remaining inside the NOI for personal reasons. There were a few, like Imam Siraj Wahaj of Masjid at-Taqwa in Brooklyn, who were close to revivalists and proclaimed their orthodoxy soon after the startling news of Elijah Muhammad's death.

The revivalists were instrumental in the great transformation of Black Muslims to orthodoxy. Despite their lingering hatred for Elijah Muhammad and his heretical doctrines, they patiently instructed many former Nation of Islam adepts in the *sunna*. Yet there were two reasons why they were unable to bring their dawa ideals to fruition. First, although he had pledged to lead his flock toward orthodoxy, Imam Warith Muhammad had no immediate plans to release them from the organizational scaffolding of the NOI, renamed the World Community of Muslims in the West and then the American Muslim Mission.²⁰ Second, the revivalists were overwhelmed at the prospect of so many new Muslims and sometimes unprepared to forgive the heresies committed under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. In the face of the impossible task of deprogramming thousands of individuals who believed in the divinity of Master Fard and conflated the Prophet Muhammad with Elijah Muhammad, there were too few capable leaders and their resources were too thin to accomplish this job without help.

Assistance came from the well-endowed transnational groups whose capacity for mass dawa had grown steadily since the rise of OPEC in 1973. In its role as the guardian of the holy shrines of Islam, Saudi diplomacy always had a part in granting visas for hajj to Mecca. With adequate funds to match growing interest in Islam, this authority expanded to encompass jurisdictional fiat over the lunar cycle of Muslim holidays, particularly Ramadan. Through the Muslim Students Association (MSA) and then the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), the Rabita al-Alam al-Islami (Saudi-sponsored World Muslim League) sought to institutionalize its authority and legitimacy over all American Muslims. They sponsored activities such as summer camps for children, imam training institutes, Islamic literature

booklists, a centralized speakers bureau, and, most important, cash grants and building funds.

Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Iranian government also made a play for sympathizers by emphasizing its commitment to Islamic independence. A report authored by one Muhammad Sa'id openly assessed the potential for *dawa* in North America. It criticized both the Nation of Islam and the orthodox Sunni Muslims, whose "insincerity" and adherence to Arab chauvinism had "temporarily derailed" the revivalist movement. Sa'id characterized "American Zionists"—Jews—as the worst enemies of Islam but not without attacking the Saudi influence over local African-American imams through the "trinitarian relationship" of the Rabita, MSA, and CIA. He implied an outright conspiracy to depoliticize the movement by playing on the personal vanities of indigenous imams, causing destructive rivalries among a group of individuals who had not yet overcome a predominantly Christian and apolitical view of religion. His indictment of "the senseless oppression forced upon our sisters in Islam" was an even more scathing comment about the erroneous directions pursued by Americans.²¹

While acknowledging the achievements of the revivalists during the 1960s and 1970s, Sa'id wrote that this momentum was interrupted by the intercommunal violence at Masjid Yasin, the Hanafi slaughter in Washington, and "the disgrace of the Islamic Party" caused by crimes of moral turpitude. He further accused Y. M. Hamid of squandering a three-million-dollar gift from Libya. The report concluded by calling for the Iranian mullahs to create and export more *dawa* literature to counter the false principles of Islam depicted in literature from Egypt and Pakistan. The report was Arabophobic in the extreme yet accurate with respect to historical facts, particularly its characterization of revivalism as a spent force by 1974. The only subsequent influence of Iranian revolutionaries on American Muslims was the assassination in Washington of an associate of the discredited regime of Shahpour Bakhtiar by an American Muslim who fled afterwards to Teheran, where he still resides.²²

THE SPECTER OF ISLAMISM The final blow to revivalism was the rise of al-Fuqra, a Sufi-mystical movement led by the Pakistani Sheik Syed Gilani. Beginning with his arrival at the Islamic Center in New Jersey in 1978, Gilani attracted a curious handful of indigenous Muslims who came Thursday evenings to participate in *zikhr* ceremonies. For those traumatized by years of street violence and paranoia, Sufism offered a more sedate, contemplative religious experience. It was also a welcome respite from what had become a dilemma about Islamic authenticity. As their attraction grew into infatuation, revivalists began secretly to pledge bayat to Sheik Gilani.

Some orthodox Muslims at Masjid Yasin viewed Sufism not as a passing infatuation but part of an elaborate plot to brainwash their colleagues and destroy the Dar ul-Islam. Sheik Sulaiman al-Hadi and a handful of the Yasin stalwarts

alleged that Gilani was a Pakistani intelligence operative assigned to destroy their movement. They had little tolerance for the esoteric zikhr, the Sufi practice of rhythmic chanting ("supplementary" practices, as Muslim jurists call them euphemistically). As Gilani began finding many enthusiasts wherever he preached, he therefore also provoked resistance and bitterness.

Across the country, seekers of a mystical communion left the fold one by one and then in larger groups until the orthodox congregations disintegrated from New York to California. Even the DAR's leaders, Yahya Abdul Karim and Rijab Mahmud, followed Sheik Gilani. Following a series of confrontations over their detour toward Sufism, both men quit the Dar ul-Islam to follow al-Fuqra, and subsequently Yasin Mosque splintered into two smaller orthodox mosques, Masjid Mu'minim moving to Atlantic Avenue and Masjid Ikwa to Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. Similar divisions plagued the DAR elsewhere. Those who rejected Sufism started new mosques aiming to preserve the spirit of revivalism in fact if not in the name of the Dar ul-Islam. Prominent among the orthodox refugees surviving the Sufi upheaval were Imam Daud Abdul Malik's Universal Islamic Brotherhood in Cleveland, Imam Jamil al-Amin's West End Community in Atlanta, and Muhammad Abdullah's Ta'if Tul Islam, a street ministry in South-Central Los Angeles.

One important reason for the DAR's resiliency was its penitentiary missions, which remained somewhat isolated from the Sufi epiphenomenon. Men coming from prison into the reformed DAR communities benefited from an environment that promoted, indeed necessitated, religious asceticism. Imams adopted the policy of extending bayat to men who were still incarcerated as a way of measuring their strength and keeping their congregations intact. On the outside, bayat functioned in much the same way to consolidate a geographically scattered group of believers into a community of believers. Subsequently, the imams who held these bayat chains organized themselves into a federation of North American Muslims. This system was supported by ISNA and Rabita, thus constituting a new attempt to realize the old dream of Muslim unity.

As for charges that Sheik Gilani deliberately subverted the DAR as part of a conspiracy to destroy the mass potential of revivalist Islam, there is some pertinent information. It concerns the activities of Y. M. Hamid just prior to the dissolution of the Islamic Party of North America. In late 1976, in the midst of the turbulence of intercommunal politics and the death of Elijah Muhammad, Hamid decided abruptly to relocate his party headquarters from Washington to Atlanta. The move, he said, reflected the growth of the party's national and international reputation and his desire not to be held back by preoccupation with local affairs.²³ Never explaining what this meant, Hamid took fourteen Muslim families with him to Conley, Georgia, in July 1977. Simultaneously he established branches of the Islamic Party in several Caribbean nations, including Trinidad, Guyana, Grenada, Dominica, and the Virgin Islands. Later that year, he journeyed back to Lahore, Pakistan, for meetings with Mawdudi and other officials of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Tabligh Jamaat groups. In November they

founded the International Islamic Education Institute with Pakistani Supreme Court justice Bardurazman Kaikus as chairman and "Branch Amir" Sheik Syed Gilani as secretary general. The institute's charter proclaimed:

Due to a great interest in Islam in the Western countries and the Americas in particular, our efforts are particularly designed to help the spread of Islam there. . . . As this institute is established by the untiring efforts of Yusuf Muzafarruddin Hamid, Chairman of the Islamic Party of North America, so it will extend special cooperation for preaching in North America.²⁴

Upon his return to the United States, Hamid dissolved the IPNA and went into virtual seclusion. Although Sheik Gilani arrived in early 1978 and resided among the immigrant Muslims in Jersey City, al-Fuqra was not organized until 1980. According to Sheik Sulaiman al-Hadi, it was the Tabligh Jamaat who covered Gilani's activities during this time, providing him with contacts and introductions to various communities around the nation. After news of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, he started to talk to people about jihad, playing on their sincerity as good Muslims. He suggested that Allah had inspired him to come to the United States to help organize support for the Afghan jihad against the communists. "So they were souped up by the teaching that they were doing their Islamic duty to fight the *kufir* in a foreign war."²⁵

By tying his mission to jihad, a sacred concept, Gilani conferred upon himself the authority to substitute the wars in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and Bosnia for the economic and social issues previously central to the American conversion movement. As a tendency to subordinate local issues to the geopolitical strategies of a few sponsoring states, the internationalist Muslim perspective gained such prominence during the period of this study that a majority of persons interviewed asserted that jihad was an issue of singular importance, even surpassing the fight to end apartheid in South Africa.

Although many followed Gilani into Sufism, only a few African-American Muslims enlisted to fight in Afghanistan as mujahideen. One of them, **Abdullah Rasheed Abdullah**, used his training as a hospital technician to become a field medic under the command of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezbi Islami (Islamic Party). In 1993 he was gravely wounded when he stepped on a land mine during a raid on the Soviet army. He received emergency treatment in the field, then stopped in Kuwait before returning to the United States for reconstructive surgery when his condition stabilized.

While recuperating in the same Brooklyn hospital where he once worked, Rasheed professed a desire to return to jihad as soon as possible. He recalled that both his parents had belonged to the Moorish Science Temple, predisposing him to Islam as an adult. An indefatigable good samaritan who dispensed free medical advice to his uninsured neighbors in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the bearded and serene Rasheed contrasted sharply with the image of a fiery holy

warrior. He never again reached Afghanistan but instead became embroiled in a plan to secure military-grade explosives for a secret munitions dump in rural Pennsylvania. Believing, inexplicably, that he was party to a training mission for CIA-sponsored mujahideen operations in Bosnia, Rasheed fell into the terrorist plot to attack the World Trade Center and other sites in New York. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison in 1995. There was only one other American-born Muslim among his seven codefendants, indicating at best a precarious link between the actual crimes and indigenous al-Fuqra Muslims. Rasheed's career is an apt demonstration of the dilemma facing any indigenous Muslim convert who confuses radical politics with religious ardor.²⁶

The police characterize al-Fuqra as a "violent . . . extremist sect" organized in a terrorist cell structure and committed to jihad against its perceived enemies, usually other minorities or other Muslims with whom they disagree. While conceding that members practice a sort of Sufi-mysticism combined with radical Islam, the same authorities have linked al-Fuqra members to a succession of villains, including a Pakistani intelligence official, and crimes, including the bombings of Shi'ite mosques, Hindu temples, and businesses; a 1991 plot to smuggle explosives and weapons into the United States from Canada, and the 1990 assassination of Imam Rashad Abdel Khalifa in Tucson, Arizona.²⁷

Al-Fuqra communities are located in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Tennessee, and Toronto. Two are rural educational centers or retreats known as the Quranic Open University. Some view the practice of Gilani's *Quranic Psychiatry* as a variant of al-Ghazali's Neoplatonism, a modern Islamic therapy for the psychologically distressed.²⁸ They call attention to parallels with Western psychotherapy in the relationship between a patient and his or her *murshid*, whose job is to reconstruct a healthy personality. Others see this bayat as a form of intense personal dependency and a prescription for mind control, making it easy for overzealous law enforcement agents and journalists alike to paint reclusive al-Fuqra Muslims as terrorists.

Despite such charges, those interviewed for this research eschewed violence and had dropped out of the DAR in favor of the peaceful life of contemplative Sufis. After many years of bitterness, Sufis and revivalists have begun a healing process and occasionally join together at 'id picnics.

The themes of fundamentalist violence and Sufism thus remain difficult to reconcile at first glance. This explains the confusion surrounding Sheik Gilani's legacy. Older revivalists like Sheik Sulaiman al-Hadi, now dead, were convinced of his affiliation to the intelligence community and its nefarious effects on the DAR. If Y. M. Hamid did play a conscious role in undermining Islamic revivalism by establishing an organizational base for Sheik Gilani, then it would be a tremendous irony, because his Islamic Party was founded on the principle of nonintervention and a desire to develop an autonomous Muslim space in the Western hemisphere. Before its dissolution, the IPNA had sponsored a speech by Sheik Hassan al-Turabi, the leader of Sudan's National Islamic Front. Al-Turabi

cautioned his American listeners against proceeding too quickly under the tutelage of foreigners.

Yet the sudden success of al-Fuqra indicated a continuing vulnerability to the influence of foreign missionaries. **The DAR began as an insular community, spun off from Sheik Daoud Faisal's State Street Mosque in a frenzy of idealist passion.** Recalling the rise of al-Fuqra, some have commented on Sheik Gilani's charisma, suggesting that his possession of "superior" knowledge seriously undermined the principle of Islamic unity among converts who were loaded with faith but sorely lacking in background and perspective. The Sufi way represented a detour from revival to gnosis. Its New Age appeal lay outside the dar al-Islam in a zone straddling the real and the spiritual where the believer communicates with saints and angels instead of other humans; where all mysteries are revealed; and where death is simply another place. Furthermore, mystical ideas and esoteric practices are transmitted orally, as is not the case in normative Islam, which is usually acquired through a program of rigorous study of written literature.

An apparent jihad surpassing any of the alleged al-Fuqra actions in its brutality was a failed coup d'état engineered by Imam Abu-Bakr in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. On 28 July 1990 he led one hundred followers of his Jamaat al-Muslimeen in a coordinated military assault on vital targets. They seized the government and communication headquarters and seriously wounded the nation's prime minister in the process of taking forty-one hostages. For a week Abu Bakr demanded the government's total capitulation while Port-of-Spain "became engulfed in widespread looting, plundering, and the burning of buildings. When the army sought to curb the violence, at least fifteen looters were killed."

As the result of mediation, Imam Abu Bakr and his rebels surrendered peacefully and were summarily incarcerated. Order was restored, and soon afterward an American Muslim, Louis Haneef, was arrested in southern Florida for supplying the weapons used in the coup. The prime minister, A. N. R. Robinson, revealed that Haneef's arms-smuggling activities had been under surveillance by U.S. intelligence services for at least a year and called on Washington to take responsibility for its alleged role in the uprising. Two years later, astonished Trinidadians watched Imam Abu Bakr and his rebels walk free when the Privy Council (Trinidad's supreme court) compelled the government to honor the negotiated amnesty that had been a key point leading to their surrender. The court even awarded seven hundred thousand dollars in damages to the Jamaat al-Muslimeen as compensation for the destruction of their commune at Mucurapo Center.

Abu Bakr was a former Trinidadian police officer who converted to Islam in Toronto in the 1960s. Returning home, he joined the Jamaat al-Muslimeen and succeeded in fusing radical Islamist ideology to militant black nationalism, itself a fixture of the nation's dissident politics. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that Abu Bakr's uprising attracted a degree of popular support, especially among impoverished Trinidadians. He alleged governmental corruption, espe-

take on another wife. That's her suggestion. Because she has to agree to it before you ever put the thought out there. You understand. She may find a second wife for you. Then it's a way of the woman keeping control of things. And keeping her husband and seeing that he has all that he needs. Physical needs, mental needs are important. And the only way a man has his needs attended to is by a woman. No other way.¹⁷

Mohammed Kabbaj, the Moroccan-born rector of the State Street Mosque in Brooklyn and a longtime observer of Islam in America, is more succinct.

We have big trouble here. It is tough for Americans. They are poor and they marry two wives and they can't even support one. Don't forget, in Islam if you buy one penny of something to one wife, then you have to take the second penny to the next wife. Otherwise you are in sin with God. And the Quran says if you are afraid you cannot be equal to both of them, then keep one. And it is not very easy to be equal. As a matter of fact it is impossible.¹⁸

When it comes to secular law, he urges strict compliance. In terms of Islamic practices, he feels that many customs sanctioned by the scriptures are being distorted. Like Hameeda Mansur, he bemoans the results—marital instability and disrespect for women. For him, any married Muslim intending to take a second or third wife is obliged to consult his first wife. Although she cannot stop him, her refusal is sufficient ground for divorce.

Muzaffar Zafr, a prominent African-American member of the Ahmadiyya Movement, explains his personal aversion to plural marriage by alluding to the punishment that, according to tradition, awaits an irresponsible husband.

I think most of us men shy away from it because when you read the Hadith and the punishment that comes when a man didn't deal fairly with the wives, I don't think I want to be raised up with one half of my body torn away on the day of resurrection. And I'm not going to run the risk. Unfortunately a lot of our brothers who practice polygamy here give a very bad image to it. Because they are tied up in one house sometimes, when each woman should have a house.¹⁹

Orthodox communities defend a literal interpretation of the scriptures when it comes to social policy. To forbid any marriages described as "acceptable" by the Quran, they feel, is shirk—blasphemy—because it shows a human challenge to the law commanded by Allah. Whether prescriptive or preferential, Muslims have no right to legislate in the Creator's place. Even practices that the Quran defines as merely "acceptable"—as opposed to "commendable" or "obligatory"—must not be tampered with or constrained by rules originated by