

The mutations of the Black American identity under the impact of Islam: Case study, Baltimore, Maryland

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Abstract: In this research, we aimed to study different African American Muslim communities in Baltimore City, Maryland. Throughout our readings, we have drawn several syntheses about Islam as a religion and as a nationalist ideology in the life of African Americans. The purpose of this fieldwork is to manage our theoretical results with reality.

Introduction

Our goal is to establish a close relationship with the African American Muslim community by limiting ourselves to a research framework defined by the difficulty of our study based on the mutations of the Black American identity under the influence of Islam. We were aware of the scope of the field and the obstacles we were addressing in our research, but we were inclined to limit ourselves to the crucial and revealing aspects of the Black American Muslim community, namely the religious, the family, and the social aspects.

I. Theoretical Structure

We mean by "theoretical structure"; the set of significant themes in the lives of Black American Muslims that serve to elucidate the crisis of identity in this community. We have classified these themes into four main areas:

- 1- Religious life.
- 2- Family life.
- 3- Education.
- 4- Social and associative life.

1.1 Religious life.

To fully understand the religious life of Black American Muslims, we chose to direct our investigations towards two dimensions, the institutional dimension, and the ideological dimension. Our starting point was the mosque. The interviews were an adequate system to understand the concept of religion and identity within this community. First, we asked a few questions: Why do Black Americans embrace Islam? How do they reconcile their diverse identities, American, African, and Muslim? How do their beliefs and practices of Islam differ from the rest of Muslims?

1.2 Family Life:

We have defined the family setting as one of the crucial environments where the power of Islam would be remarkable. The family dimension includes several other themes: marriage, the status of women, and gender relations. The notion of the family as defined by Muslim doctrine differs from that of African culture and American society. Islam introduces rigor in male/female relationships and the behavior system within the African American community. These relationships will be judged and measured by ethical criteria condemning promiscuity, adultery, and many offenses as serious as murder and suicide. The family defined by Islam is an ideal model that imposes a moral code to regulate the relationships between the sexes. In Islam, the family is sacred because it ensures the continuity of the religion. Family members are at the same time missionaries whose primary duty is to spread the word of God.

After studying the history of Black Americans, it becomes clear that the family has always been a crucial issue in their lives. During slavery, this institution underwent structural changes, namely the destruction of the patriarchal structure. The absence of the father coupled with the immaturity of a precocious mother is a real problem in the Black American community. The American family is known for encouraging individual

autonomy and independence. That context presents several family models we wanted to examine the new conception of the family among Black American Muslims. Will the idealism of Islam be adaptable to social reality? The Black American woman had been a slave laborer and a sexual prey for the "master." The repercussions of slavery have lasted without leading to emancipation from male power. Will Islam be able to give her back her dignity, her self-esteem as a woman, or, on the contrary, will it deepen her alienation? Islam recognizes her status as a woman and her merits as a fundamental element of the family structure as a mother, knowing that she is the source of procreation to guarantee the continuity of the religion. In this perspective, this new religion attracts her. However, Islam also recognizes polygamy, a "legitimate promiscuity" that bothers the black American woman. The black American woman embraces Islam to restore her racial and human pride. Also, she aspired to be recognized as a woman, a mother, and an educator.

1.3 Education:

One of the problems affecting the Black American community is the decline in knowledge due to school failure and difficulties of learning and education in general. The Black child is a child who lives in a family environment far from favorable to the development of intellectual abilities, characterized by dislocation, a child whose school career is always short and whose "socialization" is framed by the street and the ghetto. Currently, Islam insists on education and learning. It has two sources: the family and the Quoran. Islam gives a theological value to the family and an educational meaning to the holy book. Education in Islam stands in the first position in the lives of Muslims. Black Americans emphasized learning and knowledge as the source of power. In this regard, education has a nationalistic significance in that it serves as a weapon in the struggle for self-affirmation. How would Black American Muslims combine the nationalistic role of learning with the theological meaning of knowledge defined by Islam?

1.4 Social Life:

In addition to the individual and family dimensions, another aspect of researching the impact of Islam has to do with group structure. Our goal is to study the place of Islam in the interaction of Black American Muslims with each other and with the social environment. We observed the behavior of this population in their religious, social, and humanitarian activities.

As a result of the reflections that the study of the different versions of Islam in the Black American Muslim communities has inspired in a general way, we have managed to define the fundamental manifestations of the new identity of these communities:

- The conversion to Islam.
- The conception of the new life and the new identity.
- The different versions of Islam, religious practice, and daily life.
- Islamic education.
- Family structure.
- The status of the Black American Muslim woman (polygamy, marriage).
- Socio-religious and economic activities of the group (Da'awa, charity, trade, associations).
- Interaction with the "outside" world:
 - * Non-African American.
 - * Non-Muslim.
 - * Non-Black American Muslim.
- Forms of leadership.
- Prospects for the future of the Black American Muslim community.

II. Hypotheses.

Through our readings and literature research, we became aware of the importance of Islam in the lives of Black American Muslims not only as a religion but also as a family and social lifestyle and as an economic system and ideological thought. We have therefore decided to study the place of this religion in the following aspects:

2.1 The social aspect: the social function of the Muslim religion.

2.2 The socio-economic aspect.

2.3 The ideological aspect: the conception of the Muslim identity by the Black Americans.

The hypotheses related to these three aspects that we wanted to test can be summarized as follows:

- * Islam was a voluntary negation, even rejection, of American (white) identity and society.
- * The adoption of Islam is a dissociation from non-Muslim Black American identity.

Another hypothesis relates to education. Our goal is to explain the following phenomenon: on the one hand, Black American Islam is linked to poverty and low educational attainment. On the other hand, Black American Muslim leaders have always emphasized education as an effective means of emancipation.

Another crucial question that we need to ask is whether Islam is a psychological and social therapy for the problems of Black Americans, namely drugs, prostitution, prison, delinquency, and crime. Would Islamic morality distinguish Muslim American Blacks from other Blacks on the one hand and White Americans on the other? If this hypothesis is valid, it would be legitimate to assume that American society would be more welcoming and favorable to the Black American Muslim ideology. It would be more tolerant of their religious differences as long as they are not a threat to the wellbeing of American society.

According to our historical study, the development of Islam in the United States is deeply connected with nationalist and even separatist philosophy. That suggests that the ideological (nationalistic) dimension is strong today than religious or spiritual devotion. We might infer that the difference between the current movements is rather ideological than theological.

III. Methodology.

We wanted to conduct an empirical study, but working alone, we could not obtain the volume of information and data that would have allowed a computerized and statistical treatment. Therefore, we observed the Black American Muslims closely, and we followed them in their daily activities. We also interviewed them and communicated with them while conserving the necessary distance for any objective research. Many questions arise in this regard: How can one measure the objectivity of the Black American towards the White American culture that has affected his judgments and positions towards himself and the dominant culture?

Sometimes the respondent idealizes or demonizes a cultural, religious, or ideological reference of people or races. Consequently, the researcher is called upon to assume a distrust towards the information collected in this way. We classified the responses into thematic groups to be faithful in reporting the facts, however subjective they may be.

As in any field survey, we didn't know if the population we needed to study is ready to accept us. To our surprise, the community we wanted to investigate was exceptionally predisposed to provide us with as much information and support as possible in our research. The fact that we are of Muslim descent made it easier to connect with the community. However, we could hardly overcome all the obstacles of field investigation.

The approach we had designed before starting our research consisted of two means of investigation:

- 1- Direct interaction with the group.
- 2- Interviews.

3.1 Interaction:

Interaction with the group occurs through dialogue, information exchange, and participation in various group activities. Indeed, our procedure was to approach the Black American Muslim community from two seemingly contradictory but complementary perspectives, namely the "inside" and the "outside." Using this technique, we get closer to the population under study and display a "neutral" attitude through participation in group activities. That is sometimes a prerequisite for building trust. Our interaction with the community lasted eight months and included the areas listed in the table below:

Survey duration.	Eight months.
Survey location.	Baltimore, Maryland.
Practical setting.	-Mosque. -Schools. -Families. -Prison.

3.2 The Mosque is a meeting place for a large number of community members. We visited all the mosques in Baltimore on several occasions.

3.3 Families:

We established a friendly relationship with several Black American Muslim women who invited us into their intimate families.

3.4 The activities of the "Da'awa" propaganda and charity.

3.5 The social activities: parties, religious debates, and conferences.

3.6 The prison.

IV. Interviews:

We met people from various social and professional backgrounds. We then opted for two types of conversations:

4.1 Spontaneous conversations

We mean by spontaneous conversations, conversations not limited by a question-answer format. This type of conversation took place throughout our survey with members of the community with whom we deepened our contact and became friends with a lot of them. The advantage of this type of interview is that it is not limited by time and allows the interviewee to express himself freely.

4.2 The directive interviews

The directive interviews are a type of oral questionnaire practiced especially with people contacted for this purpose. These interviews were recorded and sometimes written down. The difference between spontaneous conversations and interviews is that the latter rarely allow a sequence of questions and answers. The interviewee usually tends to answer a question briefly and then move on to the next question. However, we wanted to ensure that both of the varieties of conversations were centered around the same themes to draw specific conclusions.

Overall, we conducted informal interviews. The interviewees were answering our questions, and we recorded all the conversations on a tape recorder. Our goal was to interfere as little as possible, interrupting the interviewees as little as we could.

Globally speaking, we met with these different people at their homes, sometimes at their workplace, and most often in the Mosques. The majority of the formal interviews took place in a single meeting and ranged in length from 40 minutes to 3 hours, with most lasting no more than 90 minutes. For many of the interviews, we met with only one person at a time; however, in some cases, we were able to speak to several family members, brothers, sisters, or husband and wife.

V. Geography of the research.

The choice to work on the Black American Muslim population in Baltimore, Maryland, was determined by two main reasons:

- 1- First, contact was made easy for us by colleagues and religious leaders in the area.
- 2- The city of Baltimore has a large black American population. 69% of the total population of this city is Black which places it in the sixth position of American cities with a high black concentration. We assumed that there must be, proportionally, a large black American Muslim community in this city. In 1985, 40,000 Black American Muslims lived in the Baltimore-Washington area, with over 15,000 in Baltimore. In 1992, approximately 70,000 Black American Muslims, or 1.4% of the total Muslim population in the United States, lived in Maryland.

1. The religious institution.

Mosques are the most influential religious and social institutions in this study of the socio-religious life of Black Americans. In addition to their classical religious function, Mosques in the United States play a crucial role in bringing together different strains and tendencies and serves as a small society of its own. Its structures and activities are well defined. The mosque is the alternative in American society. It represents a space where the most faithful followers exercise their religious duty and simulates an ideal, exclusively black Muslim Society. This society is characterized by the establishment of boundaries separating the two sexes. It is dominated by submission to the order established by Allah/God and perpetuated by the male members of the Muslim community. In short, the Mosques are a micro-society where the word of God, the Islamic law, reigns, where human beings are equal, where knowledge is power, but where individual freedom is subject to the test of the community.

In our consciousness, the mosques have always had an exclusively religious function. To our surprise, the mosques, among Black American Muslims, have more of an ideological role. The mosques for Black Americans are more like a nation with a leader who transmits a religious and a political message. These communications aim toward transforming the lives of the followers of the leader of the mosques. However, we wondered a lot about the multiplicity of mosques. After visiting several mosques in Baltimore City, we concluded that institution and ideology are inseparable, as each mosque represents an ideological discourse distinguished from that of other mosques. Choosing a mosque as a place of worship is, at the same time, adopting an ideology, even adhering to a worldview, race relations, and inter-cultural relations.

Since the mosque embodies the ideology, the individual's loyalty to another religious institution signifies allegiance to another ideology. In our experience, we have noticed that switching from one mosque/community to another is quite common, but it is not innocent. The "conversion" of a Black American Muslim from one mosque to another is not motivated by a search for religious truth but rather for ideological or political purposes. Moving from one mosque to another is not arbitrary, nor is an individual choice, but rather a submission to the community that seeks to identify with the most powerful, visible, and notable group on the political stage. To convert from the pure Nation of Islam of Elijah Muhammad to the Nation of Islam of Malcolm X, which advocates both fervent nationalism and orthodox Islamism, to the theological orthodoxy but

negativism in the eyes of American black nationalism, and then to a renewal nationalism, that of Louis Farrakhan, is not, in our opinion, a quest for religious identity but the sign of a long search for political identity.

Mosques are not only a religious institution. It is also a source of Islamic education. All mosques have opened Islamic studies programs in Muslim schools to counterbalance the deficiency of the Muslim educational institutions. We have noticed that Islamic schools are an integral part of mosques. Being part of the moral code of the mosques, the Islamic school also promotes education following the fundamental principles of the Muslim religion. This system of learning dissociates itself from both African American culture and American culture itself.

Indeed, education is among the primary functions of mosques. It is not only the informal education imparted through social behavior but also a system of education that conforms to Islamic principles and is radically removed or disassociated from the educational system of American society. The purpose of the Islamic school is not limited to the training of educators but extends to religious guidance and the discipline of Black Muslims.

We additionally noticed that mosques are the source of comfort and solace for broken souls, that it is the last refuge of the poor, the homeless, the addicted, and the marginalized. They find their warmth, material, and moral support but the religious discourse that promises them a better life; that teaching completed by the "Daa'wa" a form of propagation of Islam through charity.

We conclude that mosques are the most influential institution in the religious and social life of Black Americans. In addition to its religious and social duties, the mosque plays a significant role in connecting individuals with the group and developing their identity. Mosques are spiritual spaces that symbolize the separation of the group from the rest of society. It is not only a religious institution but also a cultural and social one. The socialization of the individual within this autonomous institution is more or less a negation of his socialization inside the outside world. First, he submits to a moral code by which he distances himself from the social difficulties that plague the black American community, drugs, crime, and sexual liberalism. He learns to identify himself with the group and be responsible by participating in the daily activities of the mosque. The mosque is also an educational center where the Koran, the principles of Islam, and Arabic classes are taught. The relationships between the members are governed by rules that are different from those of the dominant society. First, family relationships are reinforced to establish an anti-model of the black American family. Gender relations are well defined and limited by Islamic law. The mosque is also an economic institution, self-sufficient, where Black American Muslims are taught how to manage their economy and help their friends not to fall into poverty and financial hardships. They also learn the principle of supporting each other and the neediest in their community. The construction and management of the mosque depend on fundraising and donations from the Black American Muslim community and foreign Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia.

To understand the organization and functions of the mosque among Black Americans, we will present some of the mosques we visited in Baltimore. We will arrange them in the chronological order of our visits and not according to the importance of the mosques.

1.2 The Mosque of "Ummatu Al Wassat":

The word "umma" literally means, in Arabic, a nation, a community of believers. "Al Wassat" means the middle ground, which means that this group identifies itself with the moderate trend of Islam. Indeed, the followers of this group are characterized by the fact that they are moderate religiously and ideologically. From the religious point of view, they follow WarithDeen Mohammed's tendency that does not affiliate with separatist black nationalism.

It is not a mosque building but rather a place of worship annexed to the black American university of Sojourner's Douglass College. It is called Masjid, which means mosque, for its religious function and not for its reference to an architectural space designed to function as a mosque. The followers of this mosque are predominantly males. Women pray in the back row behind men submitting to the Muslim tradition that requires separation of sexes in places of worship. These women told us that Islam does not prevent them from dressing like all American women and integrating into American society; this means that they participate in everyday social life without neglecting the principles of Islam. Their daily contact with the outside world is not limited to interaction with the Muslim community. Islam does not prevent them from participating in the ordinary life of American society. Thus, the followers of "Ummatu Al Wassat" manage to reconcile the American identity they refuse to lose with the Muslim identity.

Ummat al Wassat members generally come from Christian backgrounds, but they do not express hostility or rejection towards their past. On the contrary, Islam strengthens their attachment and loyalty to the family even though it is Christian. Hence, many participate in the cultural and religious activities of their family as Christmas celebrations. In short, they are religiously tolerant and remain socially American. They are much more moderate than the other Black American Muslim groups we contacted. The "Ummat al Wassat" community is composed of relatively young and married members. What is striking about this community is the

presence of young children, starting at age 3. The parents want to familiarize the children with the Muslim environment. The women are also moderate in that they wear the veil/scarf, for example, only within the mosque and are generally well integrated into American society. Unlike other Black American Muslim communities, the members of "Ummat al Wassat" do not practice Islam to the letter. Polygamy, for example, is theoretically acceptable but is not practiced by this group. The disciples meet every Friday for the sermon of their leader and the group activities. The Friday program is as follows:

- The reading of the "Khotba" Friday sermon.
- The prayer.
- Announcements.
- Collecting money for community activities and selling the Muslim newspaper, The Muslim Journal.

It seems that the "Khotba" we attended reflects the trend of this new community. One of its themes was Knowledge and Mind in Islamic Thought. According to the Imam, the Qur'an is the inexhaustible and complete source of knowledge. That is a purely Sunni idea. The other theme of the "Khotba" was education. The message is that all Black Americans Muslims are called upon to instill in their offspring the basics and principles of Islam. The Qur'an, the holy book and ideal behavior to immunize them against "the evil of Society" which manifests itself, according to this leader, in American television and in "Mickey Mouse culture. Finally, the theme of "freedom and oppression" was a leitmotif in the leader's speech which emphasized the awareness of history and identity as well as the power to eradicate the evil rooted in the black American personality and society.

The prayer follows the orthodox Muslim tradition and is carried in Arabic, with a Black American Imam presiding it. The prayer is followed by the "Dou'a" which means Praise to God. After the prayer, the Imam makes announcements at the request of the disciples. These announcements are of different kinds. They announce lots of information, religious meetings, the creation of a business by one of the members offering discounts to the community, and to inform the followers about cultural or social activities.

1.2 "Masjid Al Haqq":

This "Masjid" is a mosque in the true sense of the word. It was founded by Elijah Muhammad, as a temple for the followers of the Nation of Islam. After his death, the mosque, then called the Temple of Islam and located on Wilson Street, was closed for several years. Then, under the impetus of Sunni Muslims, its name Temple of the Nation of Islam was replaced by "Masjid Al Haqq"; and the street name became Islamic Street. It is an independent and distinct religious institution in its structure, organization, and population. The principles of this institution are engraved on the wall at the entrance of the mosque:

Our goal :

to achieve Allah's pleasure

Our mission :

establishment of Islam

Our call :

submit to Allah's command

Our guide :

the Qu'ran, Allah's book

Our methodology;

the way of messenger Mohammed.

From this inscription, it is clear that the community of Masjid Al Haqq is exclusively Sunni.

This mosque includes a prayer hall, an Islamic school, a halal restaurant, a library, and a bookstore. It also contains an entertainment area for children/students and a kindergarten. The people in charge of the institution are the principal, the Imam, the teachers, and the assistants. They spend most of the day in the mosque to supervise the children, inform and orient people and prepare the program for the week. This program is almost identical to that of all other Black American mosques. It includes:

- Friday: A program for boys (Boy Scouts) and the weekly sermon.
- Saturday: A program called "Sister's Taaleem" consists of the education of future mothers. The presentation for gentlemen is called "Brother's Taaleem"; and the performance for girls is called "Girl Scouts".
- Sunday: "Islamic Council". It is an orientation and information class on the theoretical and practical principles of Islam.
- Arabic language courses for adults given by Arab-Muslim immigrants.

Throughout the week, Muslims organize classes to teach the fundamentals of the Muslim religion, reading or reciting the Quran and the "Hadith" sayings of the prophet, games for children, and the "Da'awa" a charity event held every Wednesday.

The members of Masjid Al Haqq are distinguished from other Black Americans by their rigorous practice of Islam. They are of different generations and sexes. They are also almost all married because marriage, according to them, prevents drift and "sin." Therefore, early marriage is common practice in this

community. It complements the religion, as the common expression in the community, "he will complete his religion", used to refer to a candidate for marriage, clearly shows. Marriage is one of the basic principles of this religion.

Unlike the followers of "Ummat al Wassat", who are relatively moderate, Masjid Al Haqq leads a strictly religious life and are less integrated into American society. First, they impose a strict dress code on both men and women. Men are required to wear a beard, fez, and gandoras, a large garment covering their entire body. No man in this community is allowed to wear modern clothes. Similarly, women are obliged to wear garments covering their body from head to toe and wear the veil in and out of the mosques.

In short, Masjid Al Haqq represents a small society of its own with its own civil and religious laws and a population less integrated into American life. The life of this community is entirely framed by religion and centered on the mosque under the leadership of the permanent Imam, "resident Imam" and the visiting Imams. Finally, Sunnis spend almost all their time in the mosque. During one month of Ramadan, the community of Masjid Al Haqq gathers every day to break the fast in the mosque. They hold religious evenings, praying, reading, and explaining the Quran and Hadith until dawn when the fast begins.

1.3 Polygamy:

The women who belong to this group appeared to us less moderate in their social behavior. They told us that they have almost no connection with the outside world. They lead a life strictly governed by Islam, and their social interaction is limited to the Muslim environment. They accept submission to men and Islamic law. According to the testimony of these Sunni women, they told us that they accept polygamy willingly as an integral part of Islam. Polygamy, they tell us, is a fundamental principle of Islam, and since they have embraced Islam, "in the real sense of the word," they must follow its precepts. Therefore, polygamy is a common phenomenon in the lives of the followers of Masjid Al Haqq.

Polygamous marriages are arranged within the mosque. The Imam presides the wedding ceremony that is not recognized by civil laws. The children of those polygamous marriages are, in the eyes of these laws, illegitimate. That represents a real problem for women and their children following divorce or the death of the husband. Children have no right to inheritance or social protection. Despite this, almost all Sunni women we met submit to Islamic laws. Currently, we found in our fieldwork that a small minority of Sunni women are opposed to this practice and are likely to reject Islam and become atheists if they are asked to accept polygamy, as we found in our fieldwork. According to this last category of women, the "Masjid Al Haqq" community holds to a traditional version that is basically opposed to "true Islam." Islam, according to the women; we interviewed, is adaptable to any historical context. Although polygamy is an Islamic principle, the economic and moral reasons that justified it in the times of the prophet are left today. Yet the followers of Masjid Al Haqq continue to practice it, probably because Islam is new to them, and they are keen to follow it literally.

1.4 The "Da'awa" (propaganda):

The "Da'awa" means the propagation of the Word of God, Allah, and that of his prophet, Muhammad. To propagate the religion of Islam; the mosque organizes, every Friday, the Da'awa through charity which has humanitarian and religious purposes. The poor, the homeless, the drug addicts, the prostitutes, and the orphans are invited every Friday night to eat for free and receive clothes. They are informed of the time and place of the charity by a group of young black American Muslims who volunteer to distribute flyers in the poor areas of the city. These young people, all-male, spread the basic principles of Islam and promise the poor and delinquent a clean and healthy life. They also promise them financial and moral support. They have the task of explaining to other blacks all the benefits of this religion, which they believe is the religion of their ancestors. Finally, they use all possible means to convince them to come to the mosque and attend the preaching. They even go so far as to distribute their pamphlets at the exit of black churches and invite Black Christians to join them at the mosque explaining that Christianity is not their original or primary religion.

Members of the Nation of Islam, for example, distribute free food in poor neighborhoods in Chicago. The number of people who attend the "Da'awa" varies and can reach a hundred people. After the meal, the Islamic coordinator gives a speech trying to persuade this audience of the value of Islam, which restores hope and psychological balance to the desperate. He guarantees them a better, healthy, and moral life. According to the information we received from this coordinator, two to three people among those who attend the "Da'awa" convert to Islam every week.

Following our young interviewees, they try to find desperate Blacks, even in hospitals with a Black majority, to help them overcome their suffering (often gunshot wounds, violence). They revealed to us that they seize these moments of extreme moral and physical fragility to inculcate in them the principles of Islam. They describe to them the security and the healthy and stable life that Islam can provide them. They also told us that most blacks contacted in the hospitals attend the sermons at the mosque, and many convert to Islam. In this way, the young preachers tell us, they can turn gang leaders or members into good Muslims, even Da'awa preachers.

According to Da'awa organizers, the great spread of Islam among black Americans takes place in prison. In fact, an Islamic coordinator is in charge of spreading Islam in prison. The Islamic coordinator at the

Baltimore prison is a 48-year-old Black American, knowledgeable in Islam. He spent ten years in Saudi Arabia to study all the branches of Islam and the art of propagating this religion. He has the duty to convince the prisoners and answer all their questions about Islam. When we accompanied him to the prison to perform Da'awa, we were surprised by the tone of his speech which was very harsh. He addressed the black prisoners criticizing the life they were living, urging them to change it. He told them that Islam is the best way to a new identity and a new life. According to him, 80% of black prisoners responded to his call and converted to Islam.

1.5 "Ashahada" (conversion):

The act of converting black Americans takes place within the mosque. It is a significant event in the lives of the converts because it takes place every Friday, an important day for Muslims and within a religious institution. The whole community attends the conversion that takes place after the Friday prayer. Thus, conversion is not only an individual choice but also a responsibility to the group. The new convert repeats the Shahada after the Imam and in front of all the followers. After their conversion and fidelity to Islamic principles and laws, the fresh converts choose an Arab-Muslim name and attend Islamic classes in the Mosque. They also establish contacts with all the members to develop in them the sense of the group. The new convert is immediately taken in charge by one of the persons in charge of the teaching of Islam to take care of his religious education. These supervisors of the new converts have specified that they spend on average one to two months with one person to give him an entire knowledge of Islam. They are also responsible for finding a job for the new converts.

Generally speaking, we visited all the mosques in Baltimore City, including the "Al Inshirah" Mosque, the "Walter Omar" Mosque, the "Al Muminine" Mosque, and the "As-Saffat" Mosque. All these mosques have the same functions:

-A spiritual purpose that consists of practicing the religious duty. The mosque is the space where the individual can exercise his religion freely in a uniform environment. It is the place occupied exclusively by a community of believers who share the same beliefs and worldviews. The mosque is the best center of information about Islam in that it serves as a place of propagation and orientation of the followers. The recognition of a Muslim by the Muslim community begins at the mosque. That is where new converts are called upon to declare, publicly, their adoption and allegiance to Islam.

-A social function: this religious institution regulates and frames the social relations of the community. It dictates a social behavior opposite to that of American society. For example, polygamy, which is forbidden by civil law, is practiced and legalized within the mosque. That would lead us to say that this religious institution prohibits what is socially permitted and allows what is socially prohibited. Moreover, gender relations take on a different dimension and nature in the mosque. The two sexes are separated, and the woman is submissive to the man in a patriarchal and traditional family structure.

-An educational function: a mosque is a place of formal and informal education. The Islamic school is an institution for teaching the different branches of the Islamic religion (Quran, Hadith.) added to the teaching of other subjects recognized by the American educational system. Informal or indirect education consists of teaching children a family and social discipline following the principles of Islam. Numerous Black American Muslim children do not attend public school and attend only Islamic school. In addition, these students have a negative image of public school. Most of the students we met said that they refused to frequent public schools because of the fear of promiscuity, drugs, and violence in these schools. From the information we gathered in the field, many Black American Muslim children who do not attend Islamic school claim that they face difficulties in public school because of their religion. First, their Muslim names, which are often difficult for Americans to pronounce, become the subject of ridicule by other children. Second, the girls told us that they face problems wearing the Islamic headscarf, and for this reason, they feel isolated and have almost no friends in public schools.

An ideological function: as noted above, each mosque differs from other mosques in its interpretation of Islam and its attitude toward American society. The "Ummatu Al-Wassat" mosque, for example, adopts an ideology of compromise and flexibility. The "Masjid-Al Haqq" community, on the other hand, adheres to a Sunni version of Islam and is characterized by the rigorous religious and social behavior of its members. Loyalty to a mosque is an expression of allegiance to its ideological and religious discourse.

-A humanitarian function: the organization of the "Da'awa" confirms that Islam is the religion of the marginalized and the destitute looking for a better life. The purpose of "Da'awa" is not only humanitarian. This activity has another goal: the conversion of the underprivileged classes.

In conclusion, the mosque among Black American Muslims is a religious and socio-cultural framework that institutionalizes their way of life, social behavior, and relationships that do not correspond to American society. In this regard, we can say that this institution is a society in its own right, differentiated by its structure, its own laws, its social relations, and its ideology. It is the most meaningful institution through which Black American Muslims gain acceptance as a religious group and impose a religion that separates them from the outside world.

2. "Al Madrassa Al-Islamiyya", the Islamic school.

2.1 The Black American Muslim Education System:

All Black American Muslim movements emphasize education as an effective means of solving the identity problem and competing with "whites." For historical, sociological, and economic reasons, the educational level of Black Americans is lower than that of whites. Without education, they could not integrate into American society, which led to their marginalization. Black American Muslims realized the vitality of learning in solving their economic, social, and psychological problems. Since Elijah Muhammad, they have consistently spoken of the obligation to educate themselves as a nationalistic duty for every Black American Muslim. The purpose of the "Madrassa Al-Islamiyya" is not limited to formal, ordinary, and conventional education but extends to theological and ethical education. Islamic education is a system that enables people to know the precepts of Islam and conduct all their activities following the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Before we begin a description of the Islamic schools we visited in Baltimore, we offer a brief historical overview of the development of the black American Muslim education system.

Islamic education began with the Nation of Islam to teach the disciples to read and write and expose the "evil nature" of the white man. The goal of the Black Muslims was to disassociate themselves from the white man, his institutions, and his cultural and ideological values. This trend was maintained and reinforced by Elijah Muhammad, who rejected the conventional educational system as "brainwashing" and therefore established his own schools. For him, attending public schools would have diverted blacks from the path to independence and led them into the trap of integration. Thus, the outrageous standards of the black-only public schools were the impetus for his determination to create a new educational system that would develop the intellectual capacity of the black American Muslim community. The black child was often two or three years behind the white child academically. That is due to an amalgam of factors: family conditions, housing problems, and the lack of an environment conducive to an adequate education. To the issue of the level of education in public schools, one must add the problem of drugs (starting in the 1970s), crime, and delinquency in general.

VI. Conclusion

All of these factors prompted Black American Muslims to start their own schools. This system has some similarities with the conventional American system. Black Americans, in Islamic schools, study all the subjects taught in public schools with more emphasis on African American history and culture, the various branches of the Islamic religion, and the Arabic language. The teaching of this language has a nationalistic significance, as Black American Muslims consider it the language of their ancestors and the best way to understand the Quran. Students are encouraged to work hard, be disciplined, and develop their intellectual abilities to reach the highest levels of society. Education in Islamic schools aims at socializing children in a purely Muslim atmosphere as Elijah Muhammad has pointed out:

Islamic education for Muslim children is defined as a comprehensive preparation for the life of a Muslim child. Such an education with an Islamic ideology evolves a set of moral and social values by Islam.

In fact, it was not until 1953 that education among Black American Muslims began to take a definite form. Along with kindergartens, primary and secondary schools were established. In these fifty schools located all over the country, the leaders prepare the young for the job market and adapt them to the white society. Their goal is to transform the negative Black self-image and create a new identity and a moral code for the youth.

The educational system founded by these leaders is based on the precepts of Islam. Girls and boys attended the same schools in separate classes. The purpose of this separation was to remove the child from the overcrowded home environment which, through the mixing of sexes and ages, caused, or contributed to, various forms of delinquency as UdomEssien points out:

Most of the students come from homes...in which more than two or three families are crowded together in the same apartment and where the youngsters had been exposed to all kinds of activity. These over-crowded conditions contribute to juvenile delinquencies, immorality, and early pregnancy at age as slow as twelve in the Negro community.