

The Role of Elijah Muhammad to Spread Islām in Modern America : an Analysis of his Efforts and Approaches

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Abstract

Based on the available materials and literature, Islām got to America as far back as 1530 when the early African Muslim slaves were taken to the land of America. Elijah Muhammad was one of the Muslim who works and struggled hard on how Islam would be spread and progress in America. Later on, the Muslim Emigrants from various parts of the World also entered America around 19th Century. Hence, it's increasing the population and strengthening the growth of the religion of Islām in the area. The West particularly America known for her secularism, capitalism and extreme individualism with a political ideology not based on the recognition of the creator talk less of monotheism. From all indication, Islām continues to grow from strength to strength despite all odds in its way. Its therefore in the light of the above, the methodology adopted for this paper was historic and descriptive method in order to describe the nature of Islām in America and its practices among the black America and the emigrants during the early days of Islām. The paper concluded that Elijah Muhammad was a great revivalist, preacher and scholars in the spread of Islam in America. Islām equally penetrated in one way and the other into the nook and cranny of America through the peaceful preaching among the Muslim slaves and the people of America.

Keywords: Islām, America, Blackrace, *Muazin*, Church, Slaves, Futa-Toro, Futa Jallon, America, *Jahiliyyah*, Elijah Muhammad, Madinga.

INTRODUCTION

It is not an exaggeration that Muslims have been part of the Americans landscape since pre-Columbus times (Halim, 2010). Early explorers were said to have used maps that were derived from the work of Muslims with their advanced geographical and navigational information of the time. After several years of difficulty faced by early Muslims on the Soil of the West particularly the American soil, after all persecution by the individual and the authority in America Islām still tend to broadened and the impact cum awareness of Islām is in geometrical orders in the words of Daniel Pipes (Nov. 2001) (Bennett, 2013). Muslim Americans have built an available record of socio-economic accomplishment in this Country, have won wide pub//c acceptance of their faith, and have managed to make it particularly difficult for anyone to criticize their religion or customs.

We shall therefore retrace the History of Islām in America in particular and the West in general. The West reaction and treatment meted to the Muslims as well as the present situation of Islām particularly the contemporary America (21st Century). The best approach used by Elijah Muhammad to spread Islām in the America as a best way lay down by the Qur'ān, which read thus: The preacher (Elijah Muhammad) has never force anyone to embrace or accept Islām rather, he used the method that Qur'ān laid down by inviting people into the Religion of Islām (Clegg, 1998).

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Islām is a religion of peace that promotes peaceful coexistence among the peoples' practices (Dinshak & Sesan, 2019). Allah has commanded the prophet Muhammad (SAW) to use wisdom while inviting the people of the book to Islām. This method was used and adopted by Elijah Muhammad who worked tirelessly in the spread of Islām in the America. Despite the fact that Islām was not fully practiced in America, he applied methods and wisdom to promote Islām to be growth and develop in the contemporary America today. This awareness started the scientific rise of Islāmic civilization, and it then embarked upon a scientific journey like none ever seen before that time. Its powerhouse was Baghdad, capital of the Abbasid Empire and the Islāmic world. Scientists, thinkers, researchers, and other scholars from all over the Islāmic world came together in Baghdad's famous Dar al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) to research and investigate the secrets of Allah's universe. This awareness that Muslim scientists acquired by adhering to the Qur'ān's morality enabled history's most rapid leap in scientific progress until that time. Open mindedness, a wisdom Muslims are taught by the Qur'ān, enabled them to analyze and then develop further the scientific achievements of other civilizations without prejudice. Muslim scientific records were full of observations, experiments, calculations, and research on various subjects. In the schools of science, women were entitled to the same education as men and made their own scientific contributions. One of the methods used by Elijah Muhammad was a unity among the black slaves and the America indigene (Abduh, 1972).

Unity requires awareness, devotion, allegiance, and loyalty. God prescribes unity for Muslims and reveals that Satan will attempt to create conflict in order to prevent this unity (Saritoprak, 2008). Muslims are obliged to refrain from hurtful words, anger, disrespect fullness, and all other behavior that could damage this sense of unity when dealing with fellow Muslims. Each Muslim is required to be devoted to others, patient, work for the good of others, and loyal and true. All Muslims must adopt these superior qualities. A good example of this is the relationship between those Muslims who emigrated to Madinah with Prophet (PBUH) and those Muslims who were already settled in the city (Ahmed, 2007). The Muslims who pledged their allegiance to Prophet (PBUH) in Madinah welcomed the Makkah migrants in the cause of God in the nicest possible way and took good care of them. These two different communities, which had no mutual tribal bonds, considered loyalty to Islām to be the only important yardstick. The Muslims of Madinah proved their loyalty by opening their homes, sharing their food, and considering the migrants' needs before their own.

The methods adopted in carrying out this paper are historical, exegetical, descriptive and expository (Vines & Allen, 1987). Historical method enabled the researcher to examine the biography and the work while exegetical method was used for the exposition of various verses used in relation to the key issues addressed in this work (Mahoney, 2004). The descriptive method was used to shed more light on the features of the author's achievement in the spread of Islām in America. The instrument used to obtain relevant information is through library sources, internet as well as field work. The nature of the work necessitated consultation of some experts on the field of Islāmic History in Nigeria and its environs. Efforts were made to consult numerous libraries to enrich this research paper work. It is based on the belief that Elijah Muhammad was such a prolific preacher, whose intellectual output is found on academic discourse in numerous modern and contemporary literatures.

Literature Review

The major theme of this paper which is the role of Elijah Muhammad in the spread and growth of Islām in the contemporary America (Curtis, 2002): An Analysis of his efforts and approaches, necessitates the consultation of various works on Islāmic History and other related disciplines. Thus, different works and learned articles on the emergence of Islām in America were searched in order to accumulate the guiding literatures that are related to the theme of study. The following are reviewed of such a list of related works:

Shari'ah: The Islāmic law authored by Abdur Rahman Doi. This is an important work on the emergence and practices of Islām in America. Shari'ah in the 15th century of Hijrah, problem and prospects are well explained in the book, The book further explained the neo- *ijtihad* which was happened after the second World war, Muslim began to gain independence from colonial masters of Europe, Some new Muslim states declared Islāmic law as their source of legislation. Muslim and non-Muslim Scholars like Dr. Abd al- Razaq al- Sanhuri and Prof. Anderson were invited to advise them in the process. This book is very relevant to this study (Abdur Rahman, 1988).

Another important book being used for this study is a call for an Islāmic Union, written by Haruna Yahya, the author analyses the religion of Islām how it was rapidly grow, spread and continued even until after the Prophet's (may God bless him and grant him peace) death (Yahya, 2004). Within a few decades, Islām spread to the entire World including Africa, and reached Spain in the west and India in the east. The author discusses about the roles of the Arabs, who had been tending their flocks in the desert just a few decades ago, were now the rulers of an empire due to the reason, traditions and awareness and they had acquired through religion of Islām. This was the fastest growing empire increasingly. Within 100 years, the Muslim empire spread over an immense area and firmly established itself in different areas. In this huge geographic area, many different religious denominations existed side by side. Most of them, however, were composed of Christians and Jews. From the above literature review, it's clear that the present study, the researcher intended to have bridge the gap up on it. Therefore, this present study the role of Elijah Muhammad in the spread of Islam in the modern America has critically analyzed in the in this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elijah Muhammad at a glance

Elijah Muhammad was born into the family of Robert Poole in Sandersville Georgia on 7th October, 1897. He was the seventh of thirteen children of William Poole a Baptist preacher and sharecropper. He attended primary, secondary and university, he later works in the sawmills and brickyards in other to support the family. When Elijah was at the age of sixteen, he left home and began working in factories and at the other businesses. He began his *Dawah* activities when he was twenty years of age. He works tirelessly in the preaching and teaching the white men and women in America, Elijah converted several numbers of non-Muslims into the fold of Islam (Gardell, 1996).

Effort of Elijah in America

The Genesis of Islām in American territory dated back to the pre-Columbus time.

According to Fareed H. Numan (1992). The Muslims have made an impact on the evolution of America Society. Historically Muslims have made major contributions e.g. humanities, the Science and Art. They explored North America 300 years before the so-called Discover of the New

World by Christopher Columbus. On this voyage of exploration, the African Muslims, this time have taken the lead due to their thirst for knowledge and discovery as urged by Islām. Fareed H. Numan (1992), has this to say: 'African Muslims (Madinga) arrived in the Gulf of Mexico for exploration of the American interior using the Mississippi River as their assess route. These Muslim explorers were from Mall and other parts of West African

The History of Islām in America started with the Blacks today known as African American Muslims. Islām entered Africa right from the Prophet's Message as far back as 615 when the first Hijrah of the Muslims took refuge in Abyssinia. Historically, the Prophet's Muazin an African, by name Bilal was said to be the first person outside the Prophet's household to accept Islām. Samory Rasheed spoke:

"Black Africans have played a vital role in Islām. *Muazzin* of Islām was Bilal, a black African man. Some writers like mont gamery watt. Argue that Bilal may have been the first person outside Prophet Muhammad's family (peace and blessing of Allāh be upon him) to embrace Islām. The prophet's only adopted son was Zayd bn Harith, a former slave. Islām was practiced in Africa for more than a thousand years before it arrived in America via slavery (Numan, 1992)".

This submission of Samory Rasheed was supported by Fareed H. Numan who confirmed that in 1530, the African slaves arrived in America. In his words, 153 African slaves arrived in America. During the slave trade more than 10 million African were uprooted from their homes and brought to American shores. Many of these slaves were from the Pulas, Futa Jallon, Futta Toro, and Masiona as well as other areas of West African. These areas were governed from their capital "Tumbuku" These slaves were sent to Mexico, Cuba and South America. More than 30 percent of these 10 million slaves were Muslims. They became the backbone of the American economy (Abdus-Salam, 1979). Rashid added that: Muslim slaves hailed from such prominent African ethnic groups as the Huasas, Pulanis, Wolofs, Madingos. Senegambians, as well as Muslims from "Guinea" and those loosely described as either "Moors" or "Turks" Therefore, the history of Islām in the United State cannot be separated from Black Africans.

He went on to prove wrong the WOI (Wave of Immigration) theory which has it that the early African Muslims in the Western territory constitute one-fifth of the entire slaves and that either that they were converted into Christianity or renounced Islām as a result of intense persecution.

Western attitude against Islām

Right from the unset, the Americans developed open hatred for Islām. Sayeed Hossein Nasr (1996) said: This hatred reached its peak with the Renaissance. The writings of such major figures as petrarch, which were central in the formation of the world view of the Renaissance. Show a venom and hatred of Islām and Islāmic learning not to be found in any major medieval authors (Abdus-Salam, 1979). This was the period of humanism in the non-religious sense of the term; anthropomorphism. Opposition to the certitude brought about by faith, individualism based upon rebellion against all higher authority and also Euro-centrism all of which have characterized the Western Worldview ever since. These ideas stood not only against the West religious heritage, but even more against Islām.

Although opposition to Islām in the West (particularly America) begins in the period of Crystallization of Western civilization during the Middle Ages when Islām was the only Other for the West, the seeds of the deep hatred and air of superiority of recent centuries must be traced to the Renaissance and its aftermath to a period of history when the West set upon a path of Secularization, Worldly power and unprecedented commercialisms and cultivated a new image of humanity that was diametrically opposed to all that for which Islām stood and still stand.

The basic reality underlying the relation of Islām and the West is the fact that, in contrast to earlier Western expectations, the Islāmic religion is still fully vibrant and Islāmic civilization is still alive. The religion shows much more vitality today than many others (Abdus-Salam, 1979).

There is no doubt that the West will always come into conflicts with Islām except that one expect it to improve in the near future as Islām gradually engulf the Western (American) society. The reason or the conflict is the very reality of another civilization that wishes to follow its own principles and develop according to its own inner life and dynamic rather than on the bases of externally imposed norms.

Another major conflict or obstacle that affects the whole of the Americans with Islām is the assumption that all civilization must follow the secularizing trajectory of Western history since the Renaissance. Despite all the hatred for Islām and conflicts meted by the Americans and the Western nation in general Islām still remain constant as it is found in the words of Saheed Hossein Nasr:

“The present situation is one in which Islām still sees God as sitting upon His Throne (*al-arsh*) ruling over the universe and Islāmic society as one in which the practice of religion is so intense as to incorporate the whole life, and where the majority of Muslims still perform their daily prayers, fast, and perform other rites promulgated by the Divine law (*Shari‘ah*) (Rashid, 2004)”.

Islām in Contemporary America

Today in America, there are two groups of Muslim such as the indigenous and the Emigrants. Samory Rasheed is of the opinion that African Americans represent the single largest and oldest Muslim nationality in the United States. He added that misleading images of Muslims are often conveyed. He went on

“Several major studies estimate black Muslims to be 30 percent of the estimated total of America Muslim population However, African American scholars like Al-Mazrui offer higher estimates according to him 42 percent of all American Muslims are Black (Rashid, 2004)”.

He contended that the Islām practiced by African Americans today does not by and large, come from immigrants, but rather from traditional of Islām in black America first introduced by enslaved African.

Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islām

Muhammad leader of the black separatist religious movement known as the Nation of Islām (sometimes called Black Muslims) in the United States. The son of sharecroppers and former slaves, Muhammad moved to Detroit in 1923 where, around 1930, he became assistant minister to the founder of the sect, Wallace D. Fard, at Temple No. 1. When Fard disappeared in 1934 Muhammad succeeded him as head of the movement, with the title “Minister of Islām.” Because of dissension within the Detroit temple, he moved to Chicago where he established Temple No. 2. During World War II he advised followers to avoid the draft, as a result of which he was charged with violating the

Selective Service Act and was jailed (1942-46). Muhammad slowly built up the membership of the Black Muslims through assiduous recruitment in the postwar decades. His program called for the establishment of a separate nation for black Americans and the adoption of a religion based on the worship of Allāh and on the belief that blacks are his chosen people. Muhammad became known especially for his flamboyant rhetoric directed at white people, whom he called "blue-eyed devils." In his later years, however, he moderated his anti white tone and stressed self-help among blacks rather than confrontation between the races. Because of Muhammad's separatist views, his most prominent disciple, Malcolm, broke with the group and, before his assassination in 1965, helped to lend an identity to the group (once known as the American Muslim Mission and now part of the worldwide orthodox Muslim community) that split from the Nation of Islām after Muhammad's death in 1975. Another group, retaining both the name and the founding principles of Elijah Muhammad's original Nation of Islām, was established under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan (Muhammad, 2006).

Elijah Muhammad was a factor in the history of Islāmic activities in America the twentieth-century black migration to the urbanized North brought him to be noted with Islām in Sandersville and Gergia others such as Drew Au (North Carolina). These people gave birth to people like Wallace D. Muhammad and Malcolm X, both of whom would later help lead the Mass adoption of Sunni Islām by black Muslims after 1975 (Muhammad, 2006).

The nation of Islām was first of all headed by Wallace Fard who was said to preach Black Nationalism and not the orthodox teachings of the faith. Elijah Muhammad took over the leadership of the nation of Islām during which Black Muslims purchased large areas of land in the deep South, invested in Business venture and had its own paramilitary force. After his release from prison in 1946 after a 4 years jail term for violating the selections service act during the Second World War, he produced for African Nationalism too as his predecessor (Evanzz, 2001). The Nation of Islām later split into two such as; Muslim American Community and Black Muslim. Malcolm X who became more extreme in his views later dropped the idea and later left the Black Muslims to establish his own religious organization (Organization of Afro-American Unity). The son of Elijah Muhammad who rejected his father's teachings of racially-divisive teaching of the Nation of Islām helped lead the community away from the nation to orthodox Islām. Warith Deen Muhammad, as his name was the first Muslim leader ever to give the invocation on the senate floor in 1991 (Evanzz, 2001).

The September 11 Episode and the effect on Islām

The following comments by Emmanuel Choudhury summarized the whole event: "The events of 9/11 can be nominally summarized as an act of terrorism by a handful of militant Muslims that killed slightly more than 3,000 people, destroyed two landmark buildings in New York City damaged another one in Washington (Kassam, 2017). DC, and Crashed a plane in rural Pennsylvania. The building destroyed, the lives taken, and traumas infected are not merely material or psychological facts, but also symbolic and political facts. It was not simply buildings and lives that were attached, but the symbols of power and politics". As part of the reaction by Muslims and non-Muslim in general Emmanuel Choudhury a non-Muslim whose reaction is quoted below to me represents the view of majority of the West (Americans) "In the Post 9/11 World, "Islām" is implicated by default, despite the public denials of leading policy makers and opinion leaders. If Islām has been in jacked, as both Muslim and Western leaders remind their audiences, then Is/am is not at

issue. Yet in most political and expert opinion, there is a creeping diagnosis of Islām as a defective or static religion. Today, Muslims everywhere, at least in their perception, have become a suspect category, much like the way Jews were in nineteenth century.

The above statement revealed to the extent at which Muslims became objects of suspect, ridicule and castigations at the post 9/11 episode. Daniel Pipes (2001), in his own comments quoted the presidents reactions in the wake of National tension that perhaps put the Muslims in difficulty. "In the aftermath of the violence on September 11, American politicians from George W. Bush on down have tripped over themselves to affirm that the vast majority of Muslims living in the United States are just ordinary people, here is how the president put it during a visit to a Mosque on September. 'America counts millions of Muslims among our citizens, and Muslims make incredible valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers, law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads' two days later he added that there are millions of good Americans who practice the Muslim, faith who love their country as much as I love the county. Who salute the flag as strongly as I salute the flag (Rashid, 2004)."

He added that people saw the comment as appropriate due to high national tension and amid reports of mounting bias against Islām. The writer agreed with the president that the militant Islāmic operatives with plans to carry out terrorist attack on the United States are statistically tiny. The September 11 has generated a negative adjective for Muslims in America and perhaps all over the World such name as terrorist there is no doubt that it gave Muslims in this part of the world some steps backward in their intention to Islāmize America.

Mattson a Muslim sister and a leader of one of the Islāmic organization in America comments:

"These days if you say anything nice to or about Muslims, it's as being soft on terrorist, as if all Muslims were terror (Qayyim, 2005)."

On the other side some questions were raised by some Islāmic Scholars and Muslim as per why such actions like a youth giving up his life in suicide attack. Here Seyyed Hossain Nasr has this to say; "many people who keep talking, about Islāmic terrorist threats ever border to ask why a twenty years person should, give up his/her life so easily and so voluntarily. What is lacking that causes such extreme actions. Terrorism of any kind whether committed by Muslims, Christians, or Jews, is heinous and against the teaching of all three religion.²⁰ Some Muslims go dups. beyond the episode as Sayyed Hossein Nasr. When it does occur, it is necessary not only to condemn it, which one must, but also to go behind the immediate event and ask why such acts are being or have been carried out (Qayyim, 2005)". Sayyed Hossein Nasr gave some reasons for such act as follows:

1. Loss of hope
2. Unbearable pressures (often supported directly or indirectly by the West)
3. Desperation before forces that are destroying one's religion and civilization.

According to him "Hatred is a fire that consumes and annihilates, but the fire cannot be put out unless one enquires about its causes. Otherwise, as soon as one fire is put out another is ignited" (Rahim, 1977).

Future Hope/Prospects for Islām in America

It is the hope of every American Muslim and all Muslims World over that America shall by the grace of Allāh Almighty be Islāmized. This is not a day Job. The various Muslim organizations already

on ground should employ peace and mutual respect including the Westerners themselves especially Americans. Sawed Hossein Nasr is of the opinion that: There can only be peace based upon mutual respect on the human being, even there is a need to say, this respect is not given by many Westerners to any Muslims who, rather than, emulating a West lost to an even greater degree in the maze of its own errors, seek to live Islāmically in a serious manners, nor are they given by most Muslims to Westerners with spiritual principles- with the major difference, however, that Islām is not a threat to the Western way of life but only to Western interest within the Islāmīc world itself. Islām should be made available to the West (America) as the prophet did within the *Jahiliyyah* people of Makkah in 610 AD. Majority of those (about 75%) converted was due to the ideal and good conveyance of Islām through his practice of Islām (Rahim, 1977).

A life of *taqwah* (piety) will immediately attract non- Muslims towards Islām the more readily the message of Islām is available, the more converts it is likely to win in making headway in the United State. Islām has largely depended on hands-on contact and personal experience. According to An American based Muslim in his survey, said that over two third of American converts to Islām were motivated by influence of a Muslim friend or acquaintances (Rahim, 1977). On economic ground, the Muslim Americans have already built enviable record of socio-economic accomplishment in the Country, have won wide public acceptance of their faith, and have managed to make it particularly difficult for anyone of criticize their religion or customs (Rahim, 1977).

The bright future of Islām in the American society demands extreme patience dynamism and diplomacy. All is question of time and Allāh is the only helper. The various Islāmīc organizations in the land are already heading towards achieving some of her demands as some will be visible in the near future. Daniel Pipes continued: Islāmists want secular authorities to permit students in public institutions, for example, to recite the *Bismillah* (the formula "in the name of Allāh the merciful, the compassionate) in classroom exercises; they also want the right to broadcast over outdoor loudspeakers the five daily Islāmīc call-to-prayer similarly, they have agitated for publicity maintained pray facilities in such institutions as scholars and airports criminalize activities like drinking and gambling that are offensive to Islām, some of these aims have already been achieved (Rahim, 1977).

The non-violent way world seem to have a brighter future, and it in fact the approach by most Islāmists (in America) Not only it is legal. But allows its enthusiasts to adopt seemingly benign views of United State. A Country they mean to rescue rather than to destroy, and it dictates a strategy of working with America rather than against them a short term goal of (Islāmist) is to introduce Islām in the long term, we must save America society step by step.

There us therefore the need to convert America to Islām and the zeal in doing that must be increased and strategize but through nonviolent method (Moore, 1995). The world shall be expecting, in the 21 century and beyond, the ideology of Islām (must) prevail over the mental horizon of the American people and that is how Islām can attain its rightful place of dominance in the whole World. In Siddiqi is in view, Islāmizing America means Islāmizing the whole World as it is the only rival (Muhammad, 2006).

The gradual process of Islām in changing the society has been part of the religion right from the prophet's time till date. The *Jahiliyyah* society of Makkah has transformed into a monotheistic society. Some could be witnessed in the American society as the Muslims life is gradually transformed. An example is the transformation in the American legal systems attitude towards Islām. In 1811, the New York Supreme court ruled that the "religion of Muhammad" is an impostor

religion, (God forbid) a superstition, and is equally false and unknown, in 1962; on the other hand, the district of Columbia U.S. District Court ruled that Muslims believe in Allāh as a Supreme Being and as the only one true God. It follows, therefore, that the Muslims faith is a religion. It is not an over exaggeration that the end of 21st Century shall be a period of an upliftment for Islām in America due to the high rate of birth, the growing number of converts and the continuing flow of immigration will soon make Islām to be the second largest religious community in the United State.

CONCLUSION

Islām penetrated into America via the Muslim Africa slaves and the waves of immigration into the U.S.A. particularly the Muslim that migrated from various part of the World into America and its environs to strengthen the religion of Islām. The Muslim peaceful struggle in America by individual and organization today, and the various problems encountered as posted by some American majority of which are Judio-Christian ideologically inclined and the aftermath of the September 11(9/11) an Islām in America and the Muslims in general. Effort was also made to discuss the prospects of Islām especially the end of the 21st Century judging from the situation on ground. The Muslims in America today as representing a colorful variety that is unique in the whole World. Such Muslims among African-Americans, South East Asians, North African, Arabs and Europeans, that come together daily in this Country, they are united in faith, with the understanding that all of them are equal before Allāh Almighty. It is only in Unison coped with patience and peaceful dissemination of Islām that the objective of Islāmizing America could be achieved. Allāh almighty is the Bestower of Iman and it is by His wish people accepts Islām. Ours is to struggle and disseminate the message. It is for Allāh to make a change.

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